‘When Tuneful Bards Awak’d the Song Sublime’:

The Bardic Sublime in Romantic Poetry, 1750-1825

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Abstract

This thesis introduces my conception of the "bardic sublime" in the poetry of Thomas Gray, William Blake, William Wordsworth and Felicia Hemans. I present the bardic sublime as a form of poetic rhetoric: one which foregrounds the affective qualities associated with the ancient Welsh bard – a figure revived in Gray's poetry – who is depicted as the prototype of the modern bard or poet in Romantic verse. While nationalistic discourse of the early eighteenth century encouraged interest in antiquarian activity, the emphasis of my thesis is upon *imaginative* engagement with ideas of the bardic, framed in the rhetoric of the sublime, to articulate the wider poetics of each writer upon whom I focus.

My thesis spans the period 1750-1825. The earliest major texts considered are Thomas Gray's "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode" – composed between 1754 and 1757 – which was published in 1757, the same year that Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* appeared in print. The last major texts considered are Hemans' *Welsh Melodies*, published in 1821, and Wordsworth's "Composed among the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales", which was composed in September 1824, the year of Wordsworth's last visit to Wales.

I consider four generations of poetry which engage with the bardic sublime. Chapter One considers the origins of the bardic sublime in the verse of Thomas Gray, affording specific attention to the "The Bard": the text which is most commonly echoed in the writings of Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans, and which thrust the ancient bard to the forefront of the eighteenth-century literary stage. Chapter Two turns to the visual art and poetry of William Blake, exploring how visual responses to Gray's Bard – including Blake's own watercolour illustrations of Gray's poems – served to shape the poetry that followed. I start in the 1790s with Blake's *Songs* before turning to his prophetic books. In Chapter Three, I consider the works of William Wordsworth, emphasising the significance of the natural – as opposed to Blake's psychological – landscape in his model of the bardic sublime. I assess his idea of the bard as an intermediary between human and landscape. Finally, in Chapter Four, I consider a female response to the ostensibly masculine categories of the bardic and the sublime in the work of Felicia Hemans. I demonstrate how Hemans' affinity to the bardic and to the Welsh landscape as depicted in verse is – while in some ways similar to that of Wordsworth's poetry – one which is ultimately predicated upon her own longstanding and personal attachment to Wales and to the figure of the ancient bard.

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This thesis is for my mother, Carol, and for my father, Nigel;

it is dedicated to the memory of his brother,

Michael John Fender (1952-1981)

There is a comfort in the strength of love;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would break the heart

"Michael"
William Wordsworth

Brother and Friend, if verse of mine
Have power to make thy virtues known,
Here let a monumental Stone
Stand--sacred as a Shrine

"Elegiac Stanzas, in Memory of my Brother"
William Wordsworth

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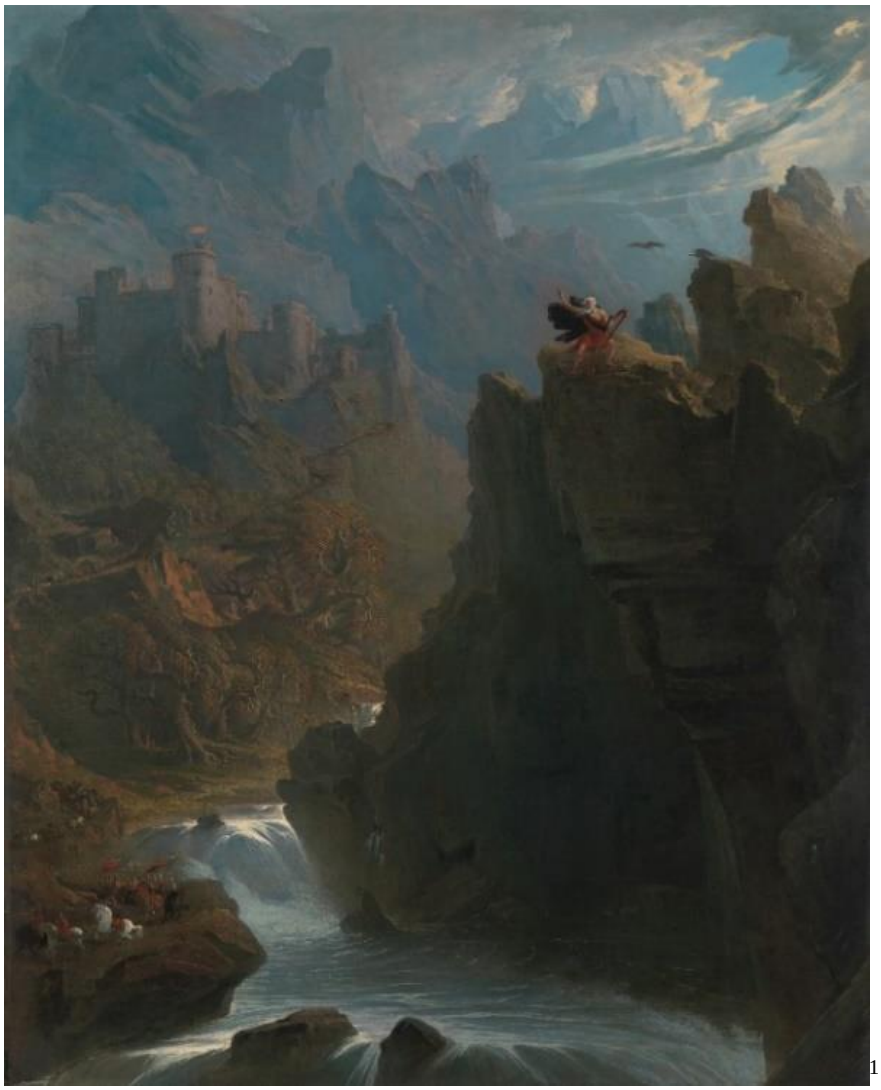
Introduction

To begin to understand the bardic sublime, we must start at the end – with the final scene of Thomas Gray's poem, "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode", published in 1757:

> He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's height
> Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night. [ll. 143-144]

These lines describe the final moments of an ancient figure. He stands and speaks "On a rock, whose haughty brow / Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood" [ll. 15-16] – amidst "solemn scenes on Snowdon's height" [l. 105] – before concluding that "'To triumph, and to die, are mine'" [l. 142], and plunging to the torrents beneath:



[1]

[1] John Martin, "The Bard", (1817). Accessed online at Yale Center for British Art on 01/10/15. Available at: http://deliver.odai.yale.edu/content/id/594cf828-e6b8-4ec4-bf14-cac45880305d/format/3

This is a scene which is recreated time and time again in eighteenth-century art, and one which marks the inception of a new model of rhetoric in the period: a subject which endures into the nineteenth century, as illustrated by the preceding image which was completed in 1817, sixty years after Gray's poem. At the heart of this form, and at the centre of these texts and images, stands the ancient Welsh bard.

The term "bard" was not exclusively reserved for Gray's ancient Welsh poet in the eighteenth century, of course, with David Garrick's poems – which he composed for the 'Shakespeare Jubilee' held at Stratford in September 1769 – popularising the idea of the playwright as the nation's bard.[2] Garrick asserts that "the bard of all bards was a Warwickshire Bard". However, as Robert Crawford points out, it is likely that Garrick was reappropriating the term in eighteenth-century discourse – rather than being responsible for prompting the growing fascination with the idea of a national bard – following the widespread success of Macpherson's Scottish bard, *Ossian*, in the early 1760s:

> …such a designation comes about because Shakespeare is being positioned precisely to match the power of Ossian as what Garrick calls…"our immortal bard". Ossian and the controversy surrounding him permeated English culture. Samuel Johnson travelled north four years later to search for materials to prove Macpherson a fraud. Certainly Garrick, well connected with so many leading English literati, would have been aware of the general controversy over the status of the Ossianic bard. However, he also had a more direct connection with the emergence of Ossian…John Home [,] who was so intimately connected with initial presentation of that British bard...It is inconceivable that Garrick was unaware of the eminence of the British bard Ossian at the very time when he gave such impetus to the custom of calling Shakespeare a "bard".[3]

Macpherson's *The Poems of Ossian* was not just hugely popular in Scotland or, indeed, in Britain; its appeal was pan-European. While the term "bard" had been used in British literature much earlier than the middle of the eighteenth century, the notion of a specifically national bard was one that emerged at this time, in the context of what we would now consider to be devolutionary activities and interests. Scotland, for instance, had witnessed the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745. Not only had the Act of Union in 1707 fostered a need to establish a strong British identity – as a composite nation, it had also prompted a growth in acts and expressions of cultural nationalism from Britain's constituent countries and regions. By presenting

[2] The earliest reference to Shakespeare as a "bard" is almost certainly to be found in Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744), but it was Garrick's later verse which popularised this notion.
[3] Robert Crawford, "The Bard: Ossian, Burns, and the Shaping of Shakespeare", *Shakespeare and Scotland*, eds. Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 129.

Shakespeare as a bard, a familiar figure in Scotland and Wales, Garrick effectively attempted to synthesise Celtic bardic culture into an Anglocentric, national, British literary canon.[4]

While it is crucial to understand the context of British and proto-devolutionary nationalisms in the eighteenth century that gave rise to the emergence of the bardic sublime, it must be stressed at the outset that the focus of this thesis is not a nationalistic one. Indeed, as with Macpherson's *Ossian*, the influence of the bardic sublime extends well beyond British borders, as I discuss through the case study of Hungarian poet, János Arany. My interest in the figure of the ancient bard in eighteenth-century and Romantic verse is an imaginative one. I consider how four poets – Thomas Gray, William Blake, William Wordsworth and Felicia Hemans – responded to the figure of the bard as both muse and mouthpiece in their own verse, claiming the bard as a symbol of emotion and imagination and a precursor to the modern poet.

Much of the scholarly attention to the figure of the bard to date has been conducted in the context of what is generally termed "Four Nations Romanticism." Several works such as Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism* (1997), Linda Colley's *Britons* (1992) and Colin Kidd's *British Identities before Nationalism* (1999) have been instrumental in developing an in-depth understanding of the eighteenth-century nationalisms which played a significant role in whetting the appetite of writers, readers, artists and audiences in the period for the appearance of the ancient bard: a figure who, historically, functioned as a symbol of a nation, as I elucidate later in this Introduction as well as in the first chapter of this thesis.

Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism*, especially, has been a point of departure for my research. While Trumpener focuses upon prose, I explore verse, in conjunction with the visual, the philosophical and, in my final chapter, the musical. Even within the context of scholarship aligned with "Four Nations Romanticism", my thesis foregrounds the Welsh origins of Gray's ancient bard, Gray's attempts to engage with and reproduce Welsh prosody, and his focus on the sublimity of the Welsh landscape, which is shared in the verse of Wordsworth and Hemans.

My emphasis upon the Welsh origins of the bardic sublime caters to a gap in scholarship. Consider the very first line of Trumpener's Preface to *Bardic Nationalism*:

> This book links the literary and intellectual history of England, Scotland, Ireland and Britain's overseas colonies during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

[4] See also Daniel Karlin, *The Figure of the Singer*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 23-24. Karlin shares Crawford's line of argument regarding Garrick's use of "bard" in relation to Shakespeare constituting an – "uneasy" – reappropriating of Macpherson's Ossianic bard in an attempt to provide a national bard for Hanoverian England.

> centuries to redraw our picture of the origins of cultural nationalism, the lineages of the novel, and the early literary history of the English-speaking world.[5]

Where is Wales? From the outset of her Introduction – when presenting the figure of the bard through whom she goes on to define and elucidate eighteenth-century conceptions of cultural nationalism – Trumpener immediately invokes Welsh sources: Evan Evans' poetic representation of the massacre of the Welsh bards by Edward I; Edward Jones' 1784 text outlining the bardic role and responsibility to protect and to prompt engagement with national memory. After this point, when the ancient Welsh bard has served his purpose in Trumpener's introduction to the bardic, reference to Wales and to the Welsh aspects of the eighteenth-century bardic tradition fade into the background.

My thesis resurrects the figure of the ancient Welsh bard. Focusing on the poetry composed by Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans between 1750 and 1825, I consider four generations of verse engaging with the bardic sublime: Gray's "Bard" of the 1750s; Blake's bardic works, starting in the 1790s with his *Songs* and culminating in his later prophetic books; selected poems by Wordsworth, some of which were informed by his walking tours with Robert Jones through Wales in the 1790s – a source of inspiration until and beyond his last visit to Wales in 1824; Hemans' lifelong fascination with the bardic and the Welsh, as exemplified in her *Welsh Melodies* of 1821. All four poets were writing verse that articulated affective concerns with liberty and imaginative community through images of Welsh – or bardic – sublimity. In my analysis of their poetry, I reconcile the emphasis on the emotional, imaginative and poetic authority attributed to the ancient Welsh bard with Burke's focus on terror and, specifically, the obscure in his treatise entitled *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, which appeared in print in 1757: the very same year that Gray's ode, "The Bard", was published – and in which the bardic sublime began.

My methodology is predicated upon contextualised close readings. My thesis is strongly informed by the visual arts, while having also demanded substantial historical research in order to clearly explicate the context in which theories of nationalism evolved and converged with eighteenth-century aesthetic theories. I consider how such convergence was expressed poetically through a sublime rhetoric of communal spirit and feeling, often rooted in landscape. Archival research has also been important, especially for my close reading of Gray's "Bard",

[5] Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. xi.

which engages with both Welsh mythology and prosody, as detailed in his Commonplace Book, to which I was kindly afforded access at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge.

The four writers I address in the subsequent chapters represent a Romantic (in Gray's case, proto-Romantic) genealogy. They are all in dialogue with one another, engaged with similar themes and, often, poetic forms. Gray's poetic depiction of the ancient Welsh bard haunts those thereafter. Having responded visually to Gray's bard, Blake goes on to present the bard as a key character – and hero – in his own prophetic books. References to Welsh landscape, some of which can be found in Gray's poems, constitute key motifs of the bardic sublime in Wordsworth's verse; I interrogate the way in which they induce a centripetal retreat into personal memory through cultural memory for Wordsworth – in contrast to Blake's centrifugal conception of imagination and the latter's construction of a mental landscape. Hemans explicitly acknowledges her affinity to Wordsworth – yet her relationship with both the landscape and the bardic history of Wales is very much a personal one.

My primary objective is to elucidate key aspects of the Welsh bardic tradition through verse, tracing the various manifestations of the ancient Welsh bard in eighteenth-century poetry so as to establish how and why Romantic poets adopted the bard as a symbol, as poetic precursor, as prophet, as a figure to be imitated, emulated and even ventriloquised if possible. I contend that the dominant representation of the eighteenth-century British bard was Gray's poetic depiction of the Welsh one. To illustrate this, I consider not only literary, but visual and musical responses to Gray's poem and to ideas of the bardic in general. I argue that it is the duality of – and energetic interaction between – bardic text and image throughout the eighteenth century that thrusts the bard to the forefront of the Romantic mental landscape: one which welcomed anything spectral, evocative, revolutionary, obscure and, thus, rich in sublime potential.

***

My thesis is indebted to existing scholarship on the sublime to a great extent. In particular, the terminology of several key critical works is particularly pertinent and, indeed, helpful to my own research on the bardic sublime. The task of clearly defining the bardic sublime presents various challenges, in that it is a form (or, rather, field) of rhetoric which draws upon several different eighteenth-century discourses. Not only does the bardic sublime emerge from earlier instances of and investigations into the sublime, but it is also heavily reliant upon two other forms of discourse which are specific to their eighteenth-century historical

context. I will outline these composite discourses briefly below before interrogating the term "discourse" itself in more detail shortly thereafter.

The first of these discourses relates to eighteenth-century antiquarianism: the literary texts and projects through which interested parties endeavoured to recover an authentic history of the bard.[6] These antiquarian activities were often, although not always, undertaken in an attempt to convey and to assert a distinct national identity as part of a particular nationalist project. The question of to what extent the bardic sublime was, or could be, used as part of a nationalist project is one that I shall address in more depth shortly. However, it is worth emphasising that, as stated earlier in this Introduction, a nationalist agenda is by no means the only one for which the rhetoric of the bardic sublime may be, or was, employed. The second of these categories of discourse relates to those which prioritise imaginative rather than historical engagement with the figure of the bard and any associated images within the category of the bardic sublime. For example, associated images may include those of Druids, minstrels, monoliths and megaliths. This form of discourse runs concurrently with the first one, and similarly emerges from – and has a role in shaping – what may be described as proto-devolutionary forms of eighteenth-century British nationalisms.

Writers who engage with and employ key tropes associated with the bardic sublime draw upon all of the discourses described above: discourses relating to the sublime, to antiquarianism, and to imagined history. My use of "trope" is quite deliberate here in accordance with a key assertion made in the introduction to Cian Duffy and Peter Howell's *Cultures of the Sublime: Selected Readings, 1750-1830* (2011). Duffy and Howell state at the very outset of their volume that:

> The sublime should not be understood, we contend, as an isolated or abstract philosophical concept, but rather as embedded in the cultural practice of the late eighteenth century and romantic period. It was as a ubiquitous trope rather than as a philosophical category that the sublime rose to its eminence in the cultural history of the romantic period.[7]

This study is built on a similar principle. Like them, I see the bardic sublime as a "ubiquitous trope" throughout the long eighteenth century. The very power of the trope stems from its

[6] The term "interested" is one that has been used very deliberately, here. I will shortly return to it in order to offer a full explanation of its use in this context and, more broadly, in this thesis.
[7] Cian Duffy and Peter Howell (eds), *Cultures of the Sublime: Selected Readings, 1750-1830*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 1.

cultural, Welsh origins – though, as we shall see, its effects are by no means confined to a Welsh context.

Each writer explored in this thesis relies upon the three aforementioned fields of discourse – those of the sublime, of antiquarianism, and of imagined history – to differing extents. Furthermore, even within the course of their own literary careers, Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans prioritise different composite discourses at different times. As such, it is important to note that the bardic sublime is not a fixed category of rhetoric. It is never exactly the same for any two writers and, moreover, it is a form which has the fluidity to change over the course of a single author's literary career. The bardic sublime eludes fixity. This is, in part, the source of its power. The bard, the protagonist at the heart of this model, is at once bound to specific historical moments while rejecting temporal limitations. His song affords posterity. He is at once very much indebted to Welsh landscape, culture and history, and yet this Welsh-ness specifically is both depoliticised (in terms of nationalistic agenda) and aestheticised in the various examples of the bardic sublime explored in this thesis by English language writers. The bard always remains political in the sense that he is a mouthpiece for, and a symbol of, liberty. In nationalist terms, though, the power of the bard – and of the bardic sublime – is not limited to Wales alone.

By way of outlining and illustrating how these different composite discourses intersect and, in so doing, how they give rise to the rhetoric of the bardic sublime, I employ the helpful and precise terminology used by Peter de Bolla in *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (1989). De Bolla's study seeks to show how the modern, autonomous subject is the product of the combination of two particular discourses during the period of the Seven Years War, 1756-1763. Specifically, de Bolla focuses upon the discourse on debt and the discourse on the sublime, and asserts that "the modern subject…is the result or product of a particular discursive network not uniquely present to the years 1756-63, but largely initiated and substantiated during this period".[8] My thesis shares one main aim with de Bolla's study. I, too, seek to explain how a particular form of discourse, which is itself reliant on a number of pre-existing discourses, was both produced by a particular context and, in turn, produced a new form of rhetoric which afforded writers with an effective way of engaging with various eighteenth- and nineteenth-century events and preoccupations, predominantly – but not exclusively – during the period 1750-1825. Of course, in trying to discuss so many forms of

[8] Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: History, Aesthetics and the Subject*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), p. 6.

composite discourse in a single study – which itself aims to investigate one particular form of discourse – one must acknowledge that the potential for confusion and the need for specificity are both substantial. As such, in the interests of clarity, I will now employ and explain two key terms from de Bolla's study for the purposes of introducing the bardic sublime, its composite discourses, and its critical and historical contexts. I have adopted two key terms from de Bolla's study: one is the "discourse on the sublime" while the other is the "discourse of the sublime".

De Bolla describes a discourse on something as being "a discrete discourse, a discourse which is to be read in a highly specific way, within a very well defined context."[9] With regard to the discourse on the sublime, he asserts that it is "specific to a particular time and place, eighteenth-century Britain".[10] A discrete discourse "signals its detachment from neighbouring discourses, and is founded upon its own sense of itself as a discrete form".[11] In addition, a discrete discourse, such as the discourse on the sublime, belongs to a "discursive network" or "node". This means that each discrete discourse, like the discourse on the sublime, is part of what de Bolla describes as a "complicated knot" of "discrete discourses, which interact, sometimes without hostility, at others with considerable violence, with each other…This network is historically specific, but it may change, in whole or in part, with great frequency".[12] In short, the discourse on the sublime includes texts which investigate "the forms, causes and effects of the sublime".[13]

In contrast, the discourse of the sublime is one which "itself is, or produces, or inhabits, or exhibits the sublime."[14] De Bolla explains that "the discourse of something may well subsume a large number of discrete discourses".[15] In accordance with De Bolla's definitions, this thesis constitutes the discourse on the bardic sublime, which in turn subsumes discourses of the bardic sublime. These discourses of the bardic sublime do indeed, in turn, subsume various discrete discourses. One might in fact go as far as to say that the discourses on and of i) the sublime ii) the antiquarian and iii) imagined history all play a role in the discursive network or node of the bardic sublime that is explored in this study.

One of the functions of this Introduction is to present the key discourses on the sublime to which I am indebted. In terms of outlining the conditions of the sublime, the primary text

[9] De Bolla, p. 9.
[10] *Ibid*, p. 28.
[11] *Ibid*, p. 9.
[12] *Ibid*, p. 7.
[13] *Ibid*, p. 30.
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] *Ibid*, p. 10.

with which my research is most closely aligned is Burke's 1757 *Enquiry*. My own critical language is heavily indebted to Burke's discourse on the sublime. However, there are several others which have shaped my formulation and understanding of the bardic sublime. Works by Longinus, Thomas Burnet, John Dennis, Robert Lowth and Thomas Stackhouse have afforded the primary critical context against which I have considered Burke's own reflections.

Thomas Weiskel's 1976 study of *The Romantic Sublime* affords far more credence to Kant's philosophical writing on the sublime than to that of Burke. Weiskel goes as far as to state that Burke's "own explanation of how terror produces delight is cumbersome, not to say silly, and depends on antiquated physiology", damningly asserting that Burke is "not a good critic of the arts".[16] And yet, he acknowledges that Burke is key to understanding the "Romantic Sublime", as Weiskel terms it, in that it was Burke "who first insisted upon the centrality of terror in the sublime moment"[17]. Moreover, Weiskel himself acknowledges that Burke's study set a "major precedent", that it exhibited "novelty" and that "we find in Burke signs of a deeper explanation and a presentment of terror and delight with extraordinary latent features".[18] He ultimately concedes that:

> Burke's treatise seemed for a while to be isolated from contemporary discussions, but his later influence upon Romantic sensibilities – and even, in the case of Wordsworth, upon the affective diction with which the sensations were classified – has often been noted and is still being documented.[19]

Thus, regardless of whether or not one *agrees* with Burke's methodology, assertions and conclusions, there is no escaping the fact that his *Enquiry*, and the ideas therein, were greatly influential upon the writers and artists of the long eighteenth century – not least those for whom notions of the sublime of terror engendered both fascination and engagement with the bardic sublime. The bard is a persecuted figure; the associated figures of the Druids are agents of fear. As Weiskel himself says, "the transcendence of the sublime is intimately and genetically related to anxiety"[20], for the "power of anything is ultimately 'its ability to hurt'".[21] That being

[16] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence,* (Baltimore, Maryland; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 86-88.
[17] *Ibid,* p. 85.
[18] *Ibid,* pp. 84-88.
[19] *Ibid,* p. 86.
[20] *Ibid,* p. 83.
[21] *Ibid,* p. 93.

so, it is impossible to explore and explicate the bardic sublime fully without drawing upon Burke's own writings on the sublime of terror – to which the bardic sublime is so indebted.

To return to my use of the term "interested" earlier on in this Introduction, this is a very important term with regard to the cultures, histories and landscapes upon which Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans drew in their verse. In his 2013 study, *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700-1830: Classic Ground,* Cian Duffy contends that:

> …the encounter with the 'natural sublime' in the cultural history of the eighteenth century and Romantic period – by explorers, by natural philosophers, by tourists, by artists, by antiquarians and by those who were all of these to a greater or lesser extent – was quintessentially *interested.*[22]

Duffy is making a case for the importance of context, whether that of the observer, the site, or the historical context. Key to Duffy's argument is the assertion that an individual's encounter with the ostensibly "natural sublime" is, in fact, anything but natural. It is, rather, predicated on a pre-existing or emergent "range of culturally determined and topographically specific associations."[23] This is a critical model with which the bardic sublime resonates strongly. Cultural and topographical conditions are central to the discourses of the sublime which are employed by Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans. These poets do not only respond in different ways to one another, but their own discourse shifts over time. The bard, nor the Druid, nor the minstrel, nor the landscape ever mean exactly the same thing to any individual.

It is particularly fruitful to consider Hemans' works in relation to Duffy's study: as a female, as a poet who actually inhabits the Welsh landscape, and a non-native advocate of Welsh culture, landscape, lore, and the imaginative possibilities that they present, especially when combined. My chapter on Hemans is indebted to Duffy's studies in this way, too, for *The Landscapes of the Sublime* reflects upon contemporary constructions of the relationship between gender and the sublime in ways that have informed my thinking about Hemans' engagement with the category of the sublime. Duffy's work has been influenced in turn by the scholarship of critics such as Anne Mellor and Barbara Freeman, and he highlights the "criticisms by Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley of what would now be called a 'Romanticism' dominated by the valorisation of masculine idealism" in shaping contemporary

[22] Cian Duffy, *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700-1830: Classic Ground,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 8.
[23] *Ibid*, p. 10.

discussions of gender in relation to the sublime. [24] Gender is yet another factor which affects how individuals engage with the sublime at given points in time.

The fact that the sublime is imbued with great rhetorical and, therefore, political power is one that is most helpfully articulated in another, earlier area of Duffy's research: his 2005 study on *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime.* Shelley is, of course, an exemplar Romantic poet upon whom to focus such a study, given his famous assertion in *A Defence of Poetry* that "[p]oets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World".[25] Duffy specifically links the imagination, and the sublime, with the notion of "enthusiasm": a concept which is understood as "a source of revolution or…as a source of reaction", and is predicated upon the long-established connection between imagination and "primitivism and political reaction".[26]

The Song which Lives On: The Case Study of János Arany

Such connections between the bardic sublime, political enthusiasm, imagined history, and the significance of cultural context are exemplified by a nineteenth-century text, "A Walesi Bárdok" or "The Bards of Wales" by Hungarian poet, János Arany. Arany's poem was published in 1857: one hundred years after the publication of Gray's ode, to which it is so clearly indebted.[27] As Joshua Davies states in his newly-published volume on cultural memory, "it is hard to overestimate the cultural influence of Gray's poem, in Britain and beyond".[28] Moreover, the very existence of Arany's poem – as well as the fact that it is still well-known in Hungary and is taught to Hungarian schoolchildren across the country to this day – testifies to the rhetorical power of the bardic sublime in cultural contexts both in and beyond Wales.

In 1854, Franz Joseph I – the Austrian emperor – visited Hungary, which was then under Austrian rule, for the first time. A search had been conducted by those in power for Hungarian writers who would be willing to pen panegyric poems in honour of Franz Joseph's visit, but to no avail. Only Arany acknowledged the visit in verse. As Bernard Adams explains:

[24] Duffy, p. 121.
[25] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry", (1840), *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition,* eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York; London: Norton, 2002), p. 535.
[26] Cian Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 8.
[27] A most helpful discussion of Arany's source material may be found in Bernard Adams, "János Arany and the Bards of Wales", *The Slavonic and East European Review,* Vol. 77, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 727-728. Another, even more detailed, discussion on the same subject may be found in Neville Masterman, "The Massacre of the Bards", *Welsh Review,* (7, 1948), pp. 58-66.
[28] Joshua Davies, *Visions and Ruins: Cultural Memory and the Untimely Middle Ages,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

> …the authorities endeavoured to stimulate popular enthusiasm for the event by commissioning a number of poets to write commemorative works. None, however, was prepared to accept such a commission, despite the fees and other advantages that it would have brought. None in fact wrote anything at all on the subject of the royal visit – except for Arany…[29]

Arany's poem, however, could hardly be seen as a celebratory work. Hungary had been subject to occupation of one form or another for several centuries; the Austrian and Hungarian states would not become legally equal entities until 1867 when the Austro-Hungarian Compromise was reached – and, even then, the terms of the agreement were regarded by many Hungarians as being unfavourable and disempowering.[30] At the time of Franz Joseph's visit in 1854, Hungarian discontent was palpable – not only with Austrian rule, but with Franz Joseph specifically:

> Franz Josef personally campaigned with his armies to put down the revolution in Hungary, and he viewed the army as the major support of his rule. With the help of Russian military intervention, Franz Josef defeated the Hungarian revolutionary army…By 1850 he ruled as an absolute monarch, and the next ten years were known as the era of neo-absolutism. In reaction, János Libényi attempted to assassinate the emperor in February of 1853.[31]

Following the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and the attempted assassination of Franz Joseph in 1853, the instability of Hungary was all too apparent. Under the rule of Austria, subjugated, the Hungarian people felt deeply resentful toward Austria – and to Franz Joseph. As such, it is unsurprising that Arany should have chosen to employ the theme of the legendary Welsh bardicide, at the hands of English invaders, as a fitting resource for his own political allegory.

Arany would have known that there was no historical evidence to attest to the legendary bardicide of 1282. As Bernard Adams emphatically states, "Arany was reputed to be a punctilious researcher of his historical material" and was consequently "careful to insist that the tale of the massacre of the bards is traditional rather than historically sound".[32] Indeed, Adams goes as far as to suggest that the dubious historical accuracy of the Welsh bardicide

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[29] Bernard Adams, "János Arany and the Bards of Wales", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), p. 727. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4212961, accessed on 11/7/18.
[30] For further details of the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise and its effects, refer to Leslie C. Tihany, "The Austro-Hungarian Compromise, 1867-1918: A Half Century of Diagnoses; Fifty Years of Post-Mortem", *Central European History*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1969), pp. 114-138. Available online at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4545523, accessed on 12/07/18.
[31] Spencer C. Tucker (ed.), *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*, (New York: Abingdon, 2013), p. 270.
[32] Adams, p. 728

may have appealed to Arany for the purposes of staging an allegorical critique of the authorities in verse in that it offered "a means of defence, designed to forestall possible complaints of political incorrectness".[33] Yet, in providing an explicit disclaimer regarding the reliability of his source material, Arany simultaneously makes something else very explicit: the power, and potential, for a bard – or, in other words, a poet – to incite political rebellion through their verse:

> It is doubted by historians but strongly held in the oral tradition that King Edward I of England executed five hundred bards after the conquest of Wales (1277) lest they should incite the Welsh youth to rebellion by reminding them in their songs of their nation's glorious past.[34]

Interestingly, Arany specifies that it is the Welsh "youth" who may be moved to rebel by bardic song. The first bard who speaks in Arany's text in response to King Edward's public demand for a "loyal toast" [l. 40] is, in contrast, an "ancient bard", an "old man", who is "white as snow" [ll. 55-56]. He is the only individual who volunteers to respond to Edward's demand – the remainder of those present "look askance with a furtive glance" [l. 49] – but his words incur the wrath of Edward. Instead of praise, the bard delivers damning verbal retribution to Edward as "the guilty one" [l. 64]: murderer. Consequently, the angry Edward declares that the elderly bard should be sent "to the stake" [l. 69], and commands a second "young and courtly bard" [l.72] to sing "a softer air" [l. 71]. But, like his predecessor, the young bard sings of the sorrow, brought about by Edward's invasion: "wailing woes of doomed widows / And mournful maidens' cries" [ll. 75-76]. Finally, a third bard steps forward – following the "royal nod" [l.79] which also sent the second bard to the stake – and, once again, reminds Edward of his wrongdoings. He too, one of five hundred bards, "went singing to die" [l. 105].

Arany's thirty-one stanza poem bears several hallmarks of Gray's ode, "The Bard". While one could not associate Arany's text with the rhetoric of the sublime *per se* – the poem does not exhibit the conventional long-eighteenth-century language, setting and images of sublimity which are identified in Burke's *Enquiry* and other discourses of, and on, the sublime – it is the status, spirit and symbol of the bardic, and of the figure of the bard, that is, in essence, *sublime*. Having been responsible for sending five hundred "martyred bards" [l. 124] to their

[33] Adams, p. 728.
[34] János Arany, "The Bards of Wales", (1857), trans. Peter Zollman, (Szentendrén: Vincze László és Fiai, 2006). Accessed at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, on 19/05/18. Loose leaves of plates in cover. MMS ID: 99296569102419.

deaths, Edward confesses that the song of the spectral bards "haunts" him "evermore" [l. 120]. In the same way that Gray's ode, as discussed in-depth in the following chapter, is predicated upon "Cambria's curse…Cambria's tears", the three bards who speak in Arany's ballad detail how the Welsh "dead are plenty" [l. 65], how the Welsh "weep" [l. 67], how the breeze carries the "wailing woes of doomed widows" and "mournful maidens' cries" [ll. 75-76], and – crucially – how Edwards bears "the curse and even worse / Of Welsh bards everywhere" [ll.91-92]. Thus, while the bard – or, in this case, multiple bards – of Arany's ballad is not framed by a palpable rhetoric of the sublime, nor foregrounded against the quintessentially sublime backdrop of "Snowdon's shaggy side", the at once spectral, heroic, prophetic and powerful associations with the figure of the ancient Welsh bard may still be discerned. Edward is tormented by the song of the dead bards; Arany uses the language of haunting and of magic, the bards' "spell" [l. 115], to describe the extent of Edward's possession. Even above the sounds of drums, fifes, trumpets and "soldiers' hails" [ll. 117-118; ll. 121-122], the words of the bards torture Edward. The king says that though "Gone is the din; without, within / They all silently creep" [ll. 113-114]. The bards, for Edward, haunt both landscape and his thoughts.

One might argue that, by the time of Arany's composition, discourses of the bardic sublime were established to such an extent over the course of the previous century that one could invoke the tropes with which the bardic sublime is associated, and upon which it is so reliant, without necessarily needing to render the sublime potential of, and connections with, such images as explicitly as Gray does in his authoritative ode. As Marilyn Butler asserts, such was the popularity of Gray's ode, that "Until Byron's corsair, no other image of a poet by a poet had anything like the glamour of Gray's bard."[35] As Gray's ode had been "endlessly reissued and illustrated", situating one's own text in the broader framework of Gray's bardic sublime through use of the same myth, use of some of the same literary devices and engagement with the same spirit of national resistance – all channelled through bardic voice and, in turn, the voice of a modern poet – would have imbued a text with at the very least strong undertones if not resounding echoes of Gray's own discourse of the bardic sublime.[36]

In 2011, Welsh musician Sir Karl Jenkins – on invitation from Concert Masters International Budapest (CMI) – premiered a large-scale cantata of "Beirdd Cymru" ("The Bards of Wales") which he had composed, using Arany's original words and which has since been performed in Welsh, Hungarian and English. The mood of the music is not one of elegy;

[35] Marilyn Butler, *Mapping Mythologies: Countercurrents in Eighteenth-Century British Poetry and Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 85.
[36] *Ibid.*

it is dramatic, furious, defiant, making the listener more uneasy and unnerved than sorrowful. Jenkins has identified and foregrounded the terror of the tale in his rendition: the terror of the Welsh, the terrible punishments inflicted upon them by Edward, and the terror of Edward himself at the power of the bards – of their voices and their curses which persist to haunt him.

In terms of the poem itself, Arany employs the form of a ballad – rather than that of an ode as Gray had done – with which to articulate his own tale of the Welsh bards. In many ways, Arany's choice of form is a more fitting one: a ballad, after all, connects dramatic, narrative content with oral tradition. Like Gray, though, Arany relies upon internal rhyme at various points of the poem, often in the third line of a quatrain, in a manner which not only reminds the reader or listener of the mnemonic devices so often associated with, among others, ancient, oral and Welsh poetic forms, but also draws quatrains and even individual lines in upon themselves. These structural elements perhaps mirror how Edward, in seeking to puncture Welsh land, culture, and song with his victorious invasion, ends up being swallowed up himself by the very culture which he has sought to subjugate:

> He may be gone, but his songs live on
> The toast is: King beware!
> You bear the curse and even worse
> Of Welsh bards everywhere." [ll. 89-92]

The first line of this quatrain is notably hypermetrical. Like the bards' songs, of which Edward believed he had freed himself, the words last longer than they ought; the caesura serves to foreground the quick but curt "but" [l. 89] that scuppers Edward's neat resolution to the problem of the "wretched Welsh" [l. 9]. The rhymes resound within and across lines. The verb "**gone**" resounds in its very antithesis, "live **on**" [l. 89]; the exclamatory warning of the bard to Edward, "be**ware**!" [l. 90] in the second line is echoed in the next, "**bear**" [l. 91, as well as the final word of the final line, "every**where**" [l. 92]. The burden of the bards is one that Edward alone must bear, and which he cannot escape. The internal rhyme of "**curse**" and "**worse**" [l. 91] in the third line cautions Edward that the terror and suffering that he will endure, as a result of that which he has himself inflicted upon others, is unquantifiable; he has now put himself in great, perpetual and unknown peril.

Arany's poem, while composed later than the texts which will be explored in this thesis, nonetheless helps to foreshadow a number of facets of the bardic sublime. As well as introducing the most influential discourse of the bardic sublime – Gray's ode, which is discussed in depth in Chapter One – the way in which Arany's speaker contrasts the voluntary

speech of an ancient bard against that demanded of a youthful poet, on Edward's command, offers a helpful way into thinking about Blake's verse, in which the wisdom of the young is frequently contrasted with that of their forebears. Indeed, the impetuses of Blake's "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" and Wordsworth's "We Are Seven", in Chapter Two and Chapter Three respectively – like many of the other poems explored in this study – are very much dependent upon these connections between past and present, old and young, living and dead. It is, perhaps unsurprising that Arany's poem became part of the Hungarian school curriculum in the twentieth century; it is said to be comparable in significance to the country's national anthem.[37]

Thus, regardless of whether or not a writer employing the discourse of the bardic sublime has nationalist intent, the rhetoric itself is nonetheless inextricably bound to particular cultural and historical conditions, not least, the "Welshness" of the discourse's source material. One may reasonably wonder whether the use of bardic forms and Welsh prosody, lore and landscape in this way constitutes an act of cultural violence when used in English language verse by, often, English writers. However, entrenched within the model of the bardic sublime is a constant reminder of acts of defiant Welsh cultural assertion. Whether it is in the use of Welsh prosodic forms like *cynghanedd*, as in Gray's works, or a poet ventriloquising the bard in order to speak of liberty, as in Blake's works, the Welshness – that *interestedness*, in Duffy's terms – always remains. The power of the bardic sublime stems in no small way from that one very specific moment in Welsh legend: the bard, standing alone on a clifftop above the River Conwy, depicted in the painting at the beginning of this Introduction.

This is not to say that it is solely Welsh landscapes, or figures, that we will encounter as we consider the poetry of Gray, Blake, Wordsworth, Hemans and some of their contemporaries. Indeed, even in the verse of a poet like Wordsworth, for whom temporal and geographical specificity often seems to be crucial, we witness interesting amalgamations or appropriations of different British landscapes. So, too, do we find the Celtic and the classical being drawn upon as complementary imaginative resources rather than necessarily competing ones. The Welshness of the bardic sublime nonetheless remains at the heart of the discourse, for the affective power of the bard remains rooted in a particular historical moment – one which, counter-intuitively, affords the ancient Welsh bard with power in perpetuity.

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[37] There has been considerable media attention afforded to this subject in recent years. See, for example, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-mid-wales-39136034 and https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/hungarian-tale-500-slaughtered-welsh-1809705 (both accessed online on 05/07/18).

Four historians of the sublime have shaped my exploration of aesthetic theories on sublimity: Samuel Holt Monk's (1960), Andrew Ashfield's and Peter de Bolla's (1996), Philip Shaw's (2006) and Simon Morley's (2010). Equally, I have primarily relied upon five key secondary texts on eighteenth-century nationalism in order to gain an understanding of the dual nationalistic and aesthetic contexts from which the Romantic bardic sublime emerged: Linda Colley's *Britons* (1992), Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism* (1997), Jason Whittaker's *William Blake and the Myths of Britain* (1999), Colin Kidd's *British Identities before Nationalism* (1999) and Richard Gravil's *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation, 1787-1842* (2003).

Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla's polemic introduction to their 1996 volume is a valuable starting place for finding a foothold in the rich but also dense and complex literary landscape of critical studies of the sublime. It is helpful in not only explaining how the sublime as we know it was shaped by the cultural conditions of the eighteenth century, and the accompanying studies into aesthetics, but also in highlighting the fundamentally ethical concerns which are so essential to the sublime as a category of discourse, rhetoric, and aesthetics – informed, as I will argue, by the experiential.

It would be prudent, here, to offer a word of note about my use of the term "aesthetic" in this thesis. As Ashfield and de Bolla helpfully explain in the Introduction, the term "aesthetic" is troubled in its relation to eighteenth-century studies; its meaning is complex, especially with regard to how we would understand the term today in relation to both artworks and literary texts. As Ashfield and de Bolla explain:

> …the eighteenth century…has no theory of 'aesthetics' in the modern sense, which is not to say that it had no views upon or theories about artworks. But what the period said and thought about artworks is bound up with what it thought and said about the nature of human experience generally…for the period in question the aesthetic is not *primarily* about art but about how we are formed as subjects, and how *as subjects* we go about making sense of our experience. 'What is it that moves me?' is, therefore, a question centrally posed to human nature…This question, the problematic of the aesthetic, was known to the period in a number of ways but it is most fully explored under the rubric of the sublime…[38]

The preoccupations of aesthetic discourse in the eighteenth century as outlined above are necessarily as invested in the *experiential* as much as they are interested in form or rhetoric. Eighteenth-century aesthetic theory is as concerned with the viewing subject as it is with the

[38] Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (eds), *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.2.

object itself. As Duffy's study of the "natural sublime" makes clear, a principle which is essential to an aesthetic model such as that of the sublime – including the bardic sublime – is "the amalgamation of physical and imaginative geography".[39] As this thesis illustrates, landscapes, monoliths, megaliths, Druids, minstrels and, of course, bards are all – albeit in different permutations – necessary components of the constellation of images from which the bardic sublime, or bardic sublime**s**, are constructed. These images recur across texts and images by various artists in the period, but never in exactly the same form. The significance of particular motifs and, especially, landscapes at any given point depends entirely on when, and where, and why each writer is using them. Furthermore, Duffy problematises the distinction drawn, and previously discussed, by de Bolla, whereby discourses *of* the sublime and discourses *on* the sublime constitute two neatly divisible forms of discourse. Rather, as Duffy says, "the boundary between those two discourses is not always, perhaps, so easy to discern" for "[o]utside the context of philosophical aesthetics, published enquiries into the 'natural sublime'…can also generate sublime effect in the reader of that account".[40]

As such, the potential for the experiential lies not only in discourses of the sublime, but also in discourses on the sublime. Such fluidity is essential to the bardic sublime. The contours of the form are not definitive – nationally, in terms of its affective potential beyond Wales, nor in literary terms, as we see in Hemans' works when we encounter a sublime, female bard. Only the constellation of key images, figures and settings remain constant or "fixed". Meaning is not only determined by the mode of expression itself, but by the artistic agent, as well as by the readerly recipient. All subjects have a stake in the object's significance – they are necessarily, inescapably, unavoidably *interested*, to borrow Duffy's terminology. Ashfield and de Bolla corroborate such a reading in the introduction to their reader when they state that:

> …in the British tradition there is a consistent refusal to relinquish the interconnections between aesthetic judgements and ethical conduct…While in some instances this might look like the production of the autonomous subject, or the transcendent form of experience which is 'disinterested', in the most careful of the British theorists this is not so… Thus the aesthetic realm for British writers of the period presents a set of difficulties which must be solved in terms of both a convincing empirical account of the subject's affective experience and a social and ethical account of conduct. Art, as such, is therefore only one aspect of the aesthetic.[41]

[39] Duffy, p. 12.
[40] *Ibid*, p. 14.
[41] Ashfield and de Bolla, pp. 3-4.

Thinking about the bardic sublime in this way – as "a convincing empirical account of the subject's affective experience and a social and ethical account of conduct" – is key to understanding the poetry and poetics of Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans as explored in this thesis. Individual voice, experience and subjective utterance and expression of *a* version of the bardic sublime are major principles in the work of all four poets – but so, too, are preoccupations with society, with community, with relationships with others, and with ethics. Ashfield and de Bolla claim that the "discourse on the sublime, then, should be seen as a technical discourse on the subject: it bridges the incommensurable gap between aesthetic pleasure and ethical action".[42] Like Duffy, though, I think that Ashfield and de Bolla's text perhaps suggests a false dichotomy between discourses on and of the sublime. For, in the works explored in this thesis, particular ethical values certainly come across clearly from each poet's words and works. Indeed, concern for the human condition, and society, is foremost. Intertextuality, too, is important to understanding each writer's rhetoric. Not only are the poets indebted to established myths of bards, Druids, and tales tied to landscape, but they are also influenced by the art and writings of, if not each other directly, other artists from the period.

Moreover, as Robert Doran has pointed out, distinctions between rhetoric, the aesthetic, and the experiential are perhaps unnecessary in relation to discourses of and on the sublime. Many studies of the sublime have distinguished between various conceptions of sublimity – those I introduced at the beginning of this piece, for instance – as though they are, in some way, disparate or, at the very least, separate schools of thought. Doran points out, for example, that Monk's legacy is ambiguous, for "on the one hand, he endowed the discourse of sublimity with a certain coherence; but, on the other, he endorsed or established the division that has been the greatest obstacle to a unified conception of sublimity".[43] The main distinction with which Doran seems to take issue is the one that has traditionally been drawn by academics between "the so-called rhetorical sublime and the aesthetic sublime".[44] Can a sublime discourse not be both?

Ashfield and de Bolla themselves confidently assert that "the sublime begins in ethics and rhetoric, and that the history of the discourse on it describes the complex set of relations which pertain between the three overlapping domains of ethics, rhetoric and aesthetics".[45] Given that Gray's, Blake's, Wordsworth's and Hemans' poetry is as indebted to their own lived

[42] Ashfield and de Bolla, p. 6.
[43] Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 2.
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] Ashfield and de Bolla, p. 11.

experience, cultural and historical circumstances, and their *interestedness* in engaging with the bardic sublime as it is upon the key images, language and tropes associated with the mode itself, I would suggest that "interestedness" warrants a place as the fourth domain in Ashfield and de Bolla's list. There is no getting away from the fact that the experiential – lived experience on behalf of the individual, affective experience on behalf of the reader, viewer or, indeed, writer, imagined historical experience, and contemporary cultural experience – is just as essential to the construction of the bardic sublime as a mode of discourse as anything else.

The rest of this Introduction is composed of six main sections, each of which will outline a key context or facet of my conception of the bardic sublime. Firstly, I offer a critical overview of pre-Romantic conceptions of the sublime as a spiritual, moral, ethical and religious form of rhetoric with which to represent the beauty of nature. I will draw primarily upon the philosophical theories and poetics of Burnet and Dennis, concluding this first section with an introduction to the Miltonic Sublime in order to segue into my second section on the explicit politicisation of the sublime by Burke. Burke clearly identifies the druidic (and, by proxy, the bardic) as a resource for the obscure and, thus, for his conception of sublimity. The third section will then introduce the historical context of eighteenth-century nationalism, highlighting the significance of notions of imagined history which emerged from this context and, in turn, facilitated the emergence of the bardic sublime. In the fourth section, I offer a brief introduction to the bardic sublime, focusing on both elegy and prophecy as key associations with the category. Next, I explicate the significance of prophecy specifically in relation to the Welsh bardic tradition, presenting the idea of prophecy as that which distinguishes the Welsh poetic tradition from other forms of bardic verse. Finally, I briefly outline the gendered associations with the categories of both the bardic and the sublime, before describing how I will challenge these notions in my final chapter on Hemans.

The Spiritual Sublime: Motions and Emotions

In order to comprehend fully the ways in which the bardic sublime constituted an eighteenth-century poetic innovation that reached its full development in the Romantic age, it is firstly necessary to explore the existing conceptions of sublimity upon which Gray, Blake, Wordsworth, Hemans and their eighteenth-century contemporaries would have drawn. I seek to ascertain how the poets reconcile the spiritual, affective and political facets of sublimity; in

order to do so, we must consider the theories of sublimity which shaped their poetics. Conflicting and competing ideas – the struggle between limitation and transcendence; the human, mortal, finite versus the eternal – are central in the verse of Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans. I posit that the imagination, for them, represents a mode through which these seemingly binary ideas may be reconciled; or at least lends a certain power – an imaginative agency – to the human in the face of mortal limitations. Power is what ultimately distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful.

It was not until the eighteenth century that the idea of the sublime truly came to widespread philosophical attention, in a culture increasingly preoccupied with sentiment and courtesy. Longinus' *Peri Hupsos* or *On Sublimity* is generally regarded as the earliest philosophical treatise on the sublime. Focusing upon affect, courtesy, nobility and morality, as emphasised in William Smith's 1739 translation from the Greek, Longinus presents sublimity as "a boldness and grandeur in the thoughts", the "gifts of nature" as well a mode of rhetoric representing that which is innately sublime, evoking or tapping into a recollection of engagement with the sublime which one has already experienced or can at least imagine: "a noble and graceful manner of expression" of "dignity and grandeur". These are the two "genuine constituents of the sublime" that Longinus describes: the first, things, objects, ideas which are sublime, in and of themselves; the second, a rhetoric of particular skill and sentimental style - namely, an ability to evoke, to excite and even agitate the passions "to a violent and even enthusiastic degree".[46] Sublime things inspire art; art can inspire one to imagine or reimagine that which is sublime.

English theologian Thomas Burnet is of particular note for his daring, sublime expressions of reverence for supposed deformities of the earth like mountains, which his contemporaries disparaged as ostensible faults of form inflicted on the earth by the Biblical flood: "Seventeenth-century nature poetry celebrated the serene, charming, and lovely rather than the majestic, wild, and irregular".[47] Indeed, Burnet's sentiments are proto-Romantic, discernible in his awe-struck accounts of crossing the Alps in 1671 – prefiguring both Gray's and Wordsworth's wonder at the same site during the next century:[48]

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[46] Longinus, *Dionysius Longinus in the Sublime: translated from the Greek, with notes and observations, and some account of the life, writings, and character of the author*, (Dublin: printed by S. Powell for G. Risk et al., 1740), p. 12. Available at Eighteenth Century Collections Online: http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW3322061491&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE, accessed on 16/04/13.

[47] Philip Shaw, *The Sublime*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 29.

[48] Gray saw the Alps in 1739 when he crossed them as part of his Grand Tour with Horace Walpole. Wordsworth had crossed the Alps with his Welsh friend – who he had met at Cambridge – Robert Jones, in 1790.

> There is nothing doth more awaken our thoughts, or excite our minds to enquire into the causes of such things, than the actual View of them; as I have had experience my self, when it was my Fortune to cross the Alps and Apennine Mountains; for the Sight of those wild, vast, indigested heaps of Stones and Earth did so deeply stir my fancy, that I was not easy till I could give my self some tolerable account how that confusion came in Nature.[49]

Though Burnet's words privilege the literal objects of sublimity over the more visionary, imaginative power intrinsic to the Wordsworthian or Romantic sublime, they do nonetheless attest to how nature may "awaken our thoughts", "excite our minds" and "so deeply stir...[one's] fancy".

In conflict with seventeenth-century ideas of beauty as that which is ordered, well-proportioned, constrained where necessary, Burnet foregrounded the vast, the grand, the overpowering, as a signifier of the divine:

> The greatest Objects of Nature are...the most pleasing to behold...next to the Great Concave of the Heavens...those boundless Regions where the Stars inhabit... there is nothing that I look upon with more Pleasure than the wide Sea and the Mountains of the Earth...something august and stately in the Air of these things...inspires the Mind with great Thoughts and Passions; we...think of God and his Greatness...whatsoever hath but the Shadow and Appearance of [the] INFINITE...they fill and over-bear the Mind with their Excess, and cast it into a pleasing kind of Stupor and Admiration.[50]

Shaw, too, implicitly identifies Burnet's prose as a prototype for Wordsworthian articulations of sublimity – in terms of both content and style. Burnet's work foregrounds the contraries, struggles and will to power which are integral to the sublime, highlighting the problem that:

> ...a reasoned commitment to beauty...conflicts with an emotional drive to sublimity. Though the conceptual distinction between the sublime and the beautiful awaits the publication of Burke's Enquiry...the idea of the sublime as a mode of divine excess, disclosed only at the point where the orders of beauty collapse, is already in place...order vies with chaos, the regular with the irregular, the small with the vast, and the rational with the imaginative.[51]

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[49] Norman Cohn, *Noah's Flood: the Genesis Story in Western Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 49.

[50] Thomas Burnet, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, (London: Printed for T. Osborn, 1759), p. 172. Available at Eighteenth Century Collections Online: http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW3320871266&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE, accessed on 17/04/13.

[51] Shaw, p. 30.

Stylistically, the affinity between Wordsworth's overt reliance on connectives and Burnet's prose is striking:

> It is no small irony that the struggle to reconcile these conflicts leads Burnet to increasing flights of rhetorical sublimity. The rhapsodic cadences of Burnet's style, generated by the doubling of noun formations and the multiplication of connectives ('and...and'), are thus themselves an instance of the sublime.[52]

Think of the syntactical structure of Wordsworth's verse: the syndetic listing in poems like "A slumber did my spirit seal" ("With rocks and stones and trees") combined with the pervasiveness of prepositions and reliance on parallelism. Rhetorically, it is not difficult to discern the similarities between Wordsworth's and Burnet's writing in Shaw's terms:

> I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.[53]

This extract from "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798" at once conveys conflicting ideas of sublime excess and proportion, balance and equilibrium, as described by Burnet. The struggle between fear and elation so integral to the sublime is epitomised here: "A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts." Parallelism – "a motion and a spirit" – reinforces the duality of mind and body, and of the spiritual resonance in the ordinary and everyday, chiming with the Blakean conception that "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God."[54] The mind of man is, itself, identified as a source of intrinsic sublimity, on equal terms with the wonders of nature, through paralleled noun phrases bound together by the co-ordinating conjunction "and": "And the round ocean, and the living air / And the blue sky, and in the mind of man". As such, the

[52] Shaw, p. 30.
[53] Wordsworth, "*Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798",* ll. 94-103.
[54] William Blake, "There is No Natural Religion", *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1988), p. 3.

twofold understanding initially presented by Longinus of the sublime as both that which we perceive as well as that which we create (or represent through art and language) is upheld by Burnet and, later, the Romantics. Parallelism, conjunctions and prepositions all point toward some kind of dialectic or interplay between subject and object, real and perceived object versus imagined sublime vision, and material artistic representation and internal emotion:

> Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth; of all the mighty world
> Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
> In nature and the language of the sense,
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.[55]

The sublime must always be understood as twofold: "In nature and the language of the sense", perceived and produced. "Sense" is itself an ideal word to relate to the sublime given its various associations. It describes the bodily organs by which the internal perceives the external as well as an instinctive "faculty of perception" in more general terms: the capability for feeling both physically and mentally; "natural understanding" and intelligence; perception or "judgement of what is [morally] right"; "emotional consciousness"; the meaning or signification of a thing according to context or subject; wisdom.[56] Whether found in mountains or made in the mind, sublimity always serves to effect the purification of the soul and the senses.

Marjorie Hope Nicolson's *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: the Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959) has been a seminal contribution to discourses on the sublime. As well as expounding Burnet's theories of the sublime, one of Nicolson's main contributions is her own critical engagement with the twofold understanding of the sublime described above. Nicolson focuses upon two main discourses of the sublime: the rhetorical sublime and the natural sublime. She defines the former using Ronald Crane's earlier definition: "that quality, difficult to determine, but easily detectable to sensitive minds…which gives distinction to works of literature and plastic art".[57] The natural sublime, meanwhile, is

[55] Wordsworth, *op. cit*, ll. 103-112.
[56] As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary.
Available online at: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175954?rskey=jD3RJ5&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid, accessed on 23/03/13.
[57] Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 29.

to be understood as "the Sublime in external Nature".[58] Exploring the relationship and distinctions between these two modes of the sublime, Nicolson expresses frustration at the critical convention to "give priority, chronologically and qualitatively, to a rhetorical Sublime."[59] She explains that such prioritising occurs due to the fact that critics typically regard the natural sublime to be "'a degraded form of Longinianism', following upon the rhetorical theory, but debasing it, 'showing itself in an excessive emotion for natural objects in the external world".[60] In response, Nicolson declares that many critics:

> …have their cart before their horse. In England…the "natural Sublime" was earlier than the "rhetorical Sublime" and, far from being merely a "debased" Longinianism, was deeply sincere and religious in origin. Longinus did little else for the "natural Sublime" than to offer some assistance in vocabulary.[61]

Throughout her study, Nicolson explores the interaction between these two modes of sublimity – the natural and the rhetorical – and illustrates how the two are able not only to co-exist but to be mutually constitutive components of a powerful discourse of the sublime. In an interesting example, Nicolson enthuses that:

> It was not necessary to travel to the Alps in order to see the world through Burnet spectacles. Men and women, exchanging one literary tradition for another, were quite capable of exaggerating British hills into Burnet mountains. Samuel Bowden, describing the Cheddar cliffs and Mendip hills, was impressed by the contrast between sunny spots of greenery and bleak hills. "The nodding arches big with ruin show [/] And prominent still frown with ponderous woe".[62]

Through the lens of the natural sublime, British people were able to discern qualities – in this case, contrasts in lighting across the hilly landscape – which may be seen to induce the sublime but were not necessarily the most powerful or obvious catalysts for sublimity. In turn, they could then employ the vocabulary of the rhetorical sublime to exaggerate and to bolster the sublimity of the scene, using their own individual, imaginative capabilities in order to do so. The natural sublime and the rhetorical sublime are by no means exclusive categories of discourse; on the contrary, and as we shall see in the verse of Wordsworth and Hemans in

[58] Nicolson, p. 30.
[59] *Ibid*, p. 29.
[60] *Ibid*, p. 30.
[61] *Ibid*, pp. 29-30n.
[62] *Ibid*, p. 227.

particular, the bardic sublime is all the more powerful when the bard dwells amidst a rugged, sublime landscape. Nicolson highlights Burnet's contribution in elevating the natural sublime.

Burnet's sentiments on the sublime were ones which were reiterated by a number of eighteenth-century writers prior to Burke. Discerning the dialectical implications of the sublime, John Dennis' *The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism* (1704) suggest that it is only by acknowledging the interaction and interdependence of mind and object that one may truly begin to understand the sublime – not as two separate aspects of sublimity, but as the two necessary and mutually constitutive elements of it. While, on the one hand, Dennis articulates a belief in order and proportion as integral to beauty – nature is "nothing but that Rule and Order of Harmony, which we find in the visible Creation"[63] – he also expresses, as Nicolson helpfully phrases it:

> enthusiasm for the vast and irregular...whilst the 'prospect of Hills or Valleys, or flowry Meads, and murmuring Streams' produced 'a delight...consistent with Reason', it was the 'Extravagancies' of nature that provided an intimation of the divine.[64]

This idea of "enthusiasm" raised in Dennis' work is key to the sublime in general and is one that Dennis elucidates further in *The Grounds of Criticism*. Dennis firstly explains that:

> a poet must every where excite great passion: but in some branches of the greater poetry, it is impossible for a poet every where to excite in a very great degree, that which we vulgarly call passion: as in the ode, for example, and in the narration of the epic poem. It follows then, that there must be two sorts of passion: first, that which we call vulgar passion; and secondly, enthusiasm.[65]

Dennis, in identifying "[vulgar] passion" and "enthusiasm" as two aspects of sublimity, offers the first theory of the sublime to explicitly explore the complex interaction of subject and object which gives rise to sublime experience. The primary shortcoming of Longinus' treatise was,

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[63] John Dennis, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, (London: Printed for Rich. Parker, 1701), image 15. Available at Eighteenth Century Collections Online: http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW3312599116&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE, accessed on 18/04/13.

[64] Nicolson, p. 278.

[65] Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, (London: Printed for G. Strahan and B. Lintott, 1704), p. 15. Available at Eighteenth Century Collections Online: http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW3311965029&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE, accessed on 17/04/13.

in Dennis' words, that he "does not directly tell us what the sublime is...[though] he takes a great deal of pains to set before us the effects which it produces in the minds of men..."[66]

According to Dennis, the sublimity integral to certain objects taps into vulgar passion (which may simply be known as "passion"). It is:

> that which is moved by the objects themselves, or by the ideas in the ordinary course of life...that common society which we find in the world...for example, anger is moved by an affront that is offered us in our presence, or by the relation of one; pity by the sight of a mournful object, or the relation of one; admiration or wonder, (the common passion, I mean; for there is an enthusiastic admiration, as we shall find anon) by the sight of a strange object, or the relation of one.[67]

Passion for Dennis is thus an immediate emotional response to an object, a situation, a person, a "thing".

As for "enthusiasm" or "enthusiastic passion", this constitutes the second stage of sublime experience – the cognitive, meditative process that follows the perception or imagination of a sublime object, experience or thing, and precedes the affective reaction to the sublime catalyst:

> [E]nthusiasm...is a passion which is moved by the ideas in contemplation, or the meditation of things that belong not to common life...our thoughts in meditation are naturally attended with some sort and some degree of passion...[which], if it is strong, I call enthusiasm...the enthusiastic passions are chiefly six, admiration, terror, horror, joy, sadness, desire, caused by ideas occurring to us in meditation, and producing the same passions that the objects of those ideas would raise in us, if they were set before us in the same light that those ideas give us of them.[68]

Dennis offers us the example of one perceiving the sun to illustrate these two different responses to an object. In ordinary conversation, the sun prompts the idea "of a round flat shining body, of about two foot diameter"; in meditation, the idea is evoked of "a vast and glorious body, and at the top of all visible creation, and the brightest material image of the divinity".[69]

It is important to note that Dennis identifies an association with the divine and spiritual as that which fundamentally distinguishes anything as sublime. "Enthusiasm" is, after all, like "motion", understood as religious emotion: "Possession by a god, supernatural inspiration,

[66] Dennis, 1701, pp. 46-47.
[67] Dennis 1704, *op. cit.*
[68] *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.
[69] *Ibid*, p. 17.

prophetic or poetic frenzy; an occasion or manifestation of these".[70] Other theological thinkers of the eighteenth century like Thomas Stackhouse and Robert Lowth were to offer more detailed explorations of the theological dimensions of sublimity. Stackhouse, like Dennis, claims that the main problem with Longinus' treatise is that it focuses on the effects rather than the sources of the sublime. Stackhouse, attempting to address this theoretical gap, asserts that:

> What we call the sublime then I take to be nothing else, but a lively and perfect imitation either of nature, or of what surpasses it. The imitation of nature is the sublime of orators, the imitation of what is above nature the sublime of poets; and I shall hereafter have occasion to show, why poetry requires something divine and supernatural in it.[71]

What is "above nature" is, of course, the godly, which Stackhouse regards as "the sublime of poets":

> ...an excellent Picture even of the most common things...will always touch and ravish the Soul...God is wonderful in all things, and the least of his Works cannot be attentively beheld without astonishment, nor does the Sublime of things ordinary and extraordinary in Nature differ, but in the Degree of being more or less so.[72]

Stackhouse identifies imitation – the representation of a thing or object (innately sublime) through poetry or art in general – as key to true sublimity.

Lowth takes Stackhouse's theory one step further, arguing that poetry does not represent the sublime, but actually facilitates and is predominantly responsible for the happening of the sublime:

> I speak not merely of that sublimity, which exhibits great objects with a magnificent display of imagery and diction; but that force of composition, whatever it be, which strikes and overpowers the mind, which excites the passions, and which expresses ideas at once with perspicuity and elevation; not solicitous whether the language be plain or ornamented; refined or familiar...[73]

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[70] As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary.
Available online at: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62879?redirectedFrom=enthusiasm#eid, accessed on 25/03/13.

[71] Thomas Stackhouse, *Reflections on the nature and property of languages,* (London: Printed for J. Batley, 1731), pp. 134-135. Available at Eighteenth Century Collections Online:
http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW3315417727&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE, accessed on 17/04/13.

[72] Stackhouse, pp. 135-136.

[73]Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, (London: J. Johnston, 1787), p. 307. Available at Eighteenth Century Collections Online:
http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T

If all objects are innately sublime – made by God and therefore in some way denotative if not connotative of divinity – it is only logical that what distinguishes an object as especially moving (spiritually and emotionally) as "sublime" is a system with which the sublime may be framed, foregrounded and evoked for the religious enrichment of the subject: through language. Thus, the Bible arguably constitutes the ultimate source of sublimity for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers like Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans. Through simple language – which may not rhyme but is cadenced nonetheless – lofty, grand, sublime ideas are conveyed by humble man: *humilis et sublimis*, integral to the Christian tradition.[74] The publication of Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757 teases out the facets of "scriptural sublimity"[75] such as the interplay between darkness and light, as evident in Genesis, the Book of Job and Revelation.

There is one key figure who warrants particular mention, both embodying and exemplifying the reconciliation of these various facets of the sublime through poetry: John Milton. Between December 1711 and May 1712, a series of essays were published which were to redefine, and reignite discussions of, the category of the sublime for the modern age. Joseph Addison's "Criticism on Milton's *Paradise Lost*", published in *The Spectator* magazine which he had co-founded in March 1711, was seminal in establishing Milton's epic as the paradigmatic instance of sublimity that poets of the Romantic age sought to imitate, equal or even endeavour to surpass. Following the precedent set by Addison's essays – and subsequent criticism including Burke's influential 1757 treatise – of equating the sublime with the Miltonic, Coleridge asserted that sublimity was the pre-eminent characteristic of Milton's poem.[76] Wordsworth revered Milton himself, man and poet, as the at-once righteous and revolutionary muse and spirit needed in the tumultuous years of the 1790s and their aftermath:

001&docId=CW3318347181&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE, accessed on 17/04/13.

[74] Shaw, p. 20.

[75] David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 272.

[76] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, Vol. 5, Part 2, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 427-428. Coleridge asserts that: "Sublimity is the pre-eminent characteristic of the Paradise Lost…There is a greatness arising from images of effort and daring, and also from those of moral endurance; in Milton, both are united. The fallen angels are human passions, invested with a dramatic reality…In the Paradise Lost the sublimest parts are the revelations of Milton's own mind, producing itself and evolving its own greatness…" It is not known precisely when these comments were delivered by Coleridge. As Foakes explains on p. 425: "The notes on *Paradise Lost* reprinted below were first published by HNC [Henry Nelson Coleridge] in *LR*…in which they form the later part of the notes he associated with Lect 10 of the 1818 series. The first part of these notes in now known to belong to Lect 4 of the 1819 series, but there is no reason to connect the rest with this lecture or with the 1818 series …HNC seems to have cobbled together unrelated notes as if they formed a coherent unity".

"Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour: / England hath need of thee …"[77] Byron, meanwhile, simply and pithily stated that "the word Miltonic mean[s] Sublime".[78] Addison's notion that the sublime was Miltonic in essence, that Milton's "chief Talent, and indeed his distinguishing Excellence...[was] in the Sublimity of his Thoughts"[79], was one that undoubtedly dominated thereafter – to the extent that Mary Wollstonecraft declared herself to be "sick of hearing of the sublimity of Milton" by the end of the century.[80]

The poet most palpably influenced by Milton's epic and its associations with sublimity was Blake. His epic, *Milton*, is renowned as "the single most detailed and extensive treatment of Milton (as cultural symbol, as authority figure, and as exemplar of creativity) produced by any Romantic writers."[81] What distinguished Milton's sublimity from that which had gone before were the explicitly moral and spiritual concerns of his epic poem. "Sublime", from the seventeenth century onward, was used to describe those who were deemed to be "intellectually or spiritually elevated".[82] Milton's ability to adapt the classical epic form to Christian concerns and a political agenda, and to humanise the heavenly, won him an almost prophetic poetic status.

It is, consequently, unsurprising that Blake should invoke Milton as his prophetic role model and counterpart in his visionary verse. One only has to think of Urizen dwelling in chaos as a figure of tyranny – yet one who also evokes pathos comparable to Milton's antihero, Satan – to conjure sublime images juxtaposing darkness against light, obscurity underpinned by an acute anxiety about the material, which frame the "Mental Fight" [*Milton*, l. 13] for spiritual and imaginative liberty that binds Blake's vision to Milton's spirit. This notion of a spiritual, imaginative and affective bond between the living and the dead is one that I wish to explore in detail in my thesis: how affective attachment to those from the past, stimulated by shared landscapes, histories, myths, beliefs or values, prompts the imaginative construction of cultural memory. Memory, recall, is subordinate to creativity for Blake. As Newlyn points out:

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[77] Wordsworth, "London" (1802), l1. 1-2.
[78] Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, eds T. G. Steffan, E. Steffan and W. W. Pratt, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 43.
[79] Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, vol. 2, ed. Donald Bond, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 587.
[80] Mary Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters", *Works*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 4, (London: Pickering, 1989), p. 21.
[81] Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 9.
[82] Corroborated by Oxford English Dictionary, available online at:
http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192766?rskey=vCoOWr&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid.
Accessed on 06/12/12.

> Blake comes down heavily in favour of originality, genius, and imagination (Hebrew poetry) as distinct from memory and imitation (Greek poetry); but he sees in Milton too great a deference to the classical tradition which he ought by rights to have repudiated.[83]

Milton does not only represent the classical for Blake, though. As Ronald Hutton highlights, Milton himself had also displayed an "early affection for Druids"[84] and for the bardic in his poetic works: a mode of allusion which offered an alternative to – and could also complement – the classical. Consider, for instance, Milton's 1637 elegy, "Lycidas", wherein he employs bardic and druidic imagery to elegise the death of his young Cambridge friend, Edward King:

> Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
> Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
> For neither were ye playing on the steep
> Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
> Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
> Nor yet where Deva spreads her wisard stream.
> Ay me, I fondly dream![85]

The classical is sidelined for the bardic in this passage. For while Milton refers to classical figures and ideas through allusions to "Nymphs" and "Lycidas" (a shepherd in Theocritus, Idyll VII and Virgil, Eclogue IX, here representing King), he foregrounds the bardic. Milton conflates the bardic and the druidic syntactically – "your old bards, the famous Druids" – which remained a feature of poetry thereafter.[86] The Nymphs are absent (Where were ye...?) whilst the spirits of the bards and the Druids persist ("lie"); "steep" is, according to B. A. Wright, an allusion to Penmaenmawr in north Wales or the mountain Kerig-y-Druidion in Denbighshire, the ancient burying-place of the Druids.[87] "Mona" refers to the Isle of Anglesey, a centre of Druidism, bolstered by the magical connotations of "Wisard" used to describe the river Dee ("Deva").

Here, we see ideas of elegy and sublimity bound together by images of the bardic and druidic, prompting and representing acts of cultural memory. "Cultural memory" is a term that

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[83] Newlyn, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
[84] Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain,* (Padstow: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 113.
[85] John Milton, *Milton: Complete Shorter Poems,* ed. John Carey, 2nd edn, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), pp. 246-247, ll. 50-56.
[86] Hutton, p. 85.
[87] B. A. Wright, *Shorter Poems of John Milton,* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1948), p. 175.

Hutton, too, employs[88] – referring to the process by which a nation may imaginatively reconstruct the past through allusion and myth. The Druid was, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, to be claimed as an important bardic, poetic motif in the eighteenth century: one which could fruitfully invoke sublime images of terror, mystery and landscape. Whoever used the image of the Druid gestured towards ideas of the bardic – and it is these images of obscurity surrounding the bard that I turn to now, in order to explore the complex dynamic between memory and creativity in the verse of Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans – especially in terms of Milton's legacy. Cultural memory, myths of nationhood, and what I term the "bardic sublime" are, consequently, what I posit to be the constitutive elements of Blake's visionary mode, which arguably afford his sublime model supremacy over – or at least equality with – Milton's in terms of originality.

The Burkean Sublime of Terror

Not only was Milton widely revered as one who represented originality, spiritual purity, literary prowess and intellectualism, but he was also increasingly valorised as a political figure towards the end of the eighteenth century. Milton was seen as a spirit of revolution. As Crawford points out, Milton had stated in his 1642 pamphlet, *The Reason of Church Government,* that he intended to write a national epic founded on the Homeric epics, the poems of Virgil and Tasso, and the Book of Job. But it was not, of course, the great national epic he delivered; it was a biblical one:

> Perhaps the intervening years of civil war had lessened Milton's faith in the redemptive power of heroic violence; perhaps, disgusted with his nation's willingness to welcome back its kings, he no longer felt that British history was any fit place to look for 'the pattern of a Christian hero'. Whatever the cause, Milton's decision to write on a Biblical rather than a historical subject meant that Britain entered the eighteenth century in the strange situation of both having and not having a national epic.[89]

[88] Hutton, p. 146.
[89] Joseph Crawford, *Raising Milton's Ghost: John Milton and the Sublime of Terror in the Early Romantic Period,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), pp. 101-102.

Milton's great poem undoubtedly offered an exemplary sublime model in verse to the British nation, but *Paradise Lost* did not, in itself, constitute a national sublime in the nationalist sense Milton had pledged for his epic. The poem, according to Joseph Crawford, was:

> an epic poem in English, certainly...from Addison onwards the eighteenth-century critics fell over one another to heap it with praise. But it was not an epic about Britain, in the way that the *Aenead* was an epic about Rome: its themes were not national, but cosmic. Hayley worshipped Milton, but he could not find material in his epic with which to stir up the young men of Britain as he imagined that Homer had stirred up the young men of Greece.[90]

So, while clear that poets and writers in general would have to find alternative aesthetic resources for articulating ideas of a national sublime, what exactly could Milton's epic lend to conceptions of the sublime for eighteenth-century writers like Burke?

The main appeal of Milton's verse – and of ideas of the bardic – for Burke relates to the obscure. In accordance with Burke's assertion that it is when "all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible...[that it is] sublime to the last degree", that which is obscure demands a higher level of imaginative engagement, given that the object of perception cannot be rationally recognised with any clarity: "To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary."[91] In the revolutionary climate of the 1790s, and in response to the growth of devolutionary activity in Britain in the years leading up to the turbulent final decade of the century, it is hardly surprising that writers would begin to reappropriate the sublime – linked with both ideas of moral righteousness and, for Burke, terror (implicit in the violence of revolutionary activity) – in the name of nationalism. Cultural nationalism expressed through a rhetoric of the sublime represented a pacifistic alternative to militancy of the period while offering a new way in which one could articulate the communal, affective and imaginative spirit of the people.

It is important to remember, of course, that Burke himself in no way supported the French Revolution. While Burke generally held revolutionary spirit in high esteem, his famous manifesto, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), condemns the Revolution as that which is *not* sublime, but rather simply contemptible:

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[90] Crawford, p. 102.

[91] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* eds. Paul Langford, T.O.McLoughlin and James T. Boulton, volume 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 231.

> All circumstances taken together, the French revolution is the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world. The most wonderful things are brought about in many instances by means the most absurd and ridiculous; in the most ridiculous modes; and apparently, by the most contemptible instruments. Every thing seems out of nature in this strange chaos of levity and ferocity, and of all sorts of crimes jumbled together with all sorts of follies.[92]

This is not to say that Burke objects to revolution per se; the Glorious Revolution of 1688, for instance, Burke supports. In fact, Burke had initially indicated support for the French Revolution in theory, stating in a letter of 9 August 1789:

> England gazing with astonishment at a French struggle for Liberty and not knowing whether to blame or to applaud! The thing indeed, though I thought I saw something like it in progress for several years, has still something in it paradoxical and Mysterious. The spirit it is impossible not to admire; but the old Parisian ferocity has broken out in a shocking manner.[93]

It was the ferocity and violence of the Revolution that prompted Burke to retract any earlier suggestion of his support – but revolutionary spirit, and its "Mysterious" attributes, he held in esteem.

But there is a less overt way in which Burke's treatise politicises the sublime. According to Longinus, one is simply either in possession of the sensibility to appreciate sublimity or one is not. Burke, however, asserts that the sublime is open to all, felt by all, experienced by all, and as such starts his *Enquiry* with a statement that "We do and we must suppose, that as the conformation of their organs are nearly, or altogether the same in all men, so the manner of perceiving external objects is in all men the same, or with little difference."[94] In a similarly democratic vein, Burke claims that we all have equal imaginative capacities:

> ...besides the pain or pleasure arising from the properties of the natural object, a pleasure is perceived from the resemblance, which the imitation has to the original; the imagination...can have no pleasure but what results from one or other of these causes...[which] operate pretty uniformly upon all men, because they operate by

[92] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* (1790), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* eds. Paul Lanford and L.G.Mitchell, volume 8, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 60..
[93] J. C. D. Clark, *Edmund Burke: Reflections on the Revolution in France: a Critical Edition,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 61.
[94] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op. cit.*, p. 198.

> principles in nature...which are not derived from any particular habits or advantages.[95]

Burke's claims of egalitarian, universal access to sublimity were progressive for the period, given eighteenth-century aesthetic debates surrounding questions of taste and sensibility. Writers were very much preoccupied with establishing a "standard of taste". Hume, for instance – in a work published the same year as Burke's *Enquiry* – claims that "men of delicate taste be rare."[96] Hume asserts that "the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing" and that, as a consequence, it is necessary for a "man of learning", a critic, to set the precedent for aesthetic judgement; to determine a standard of taste.[97] Burke, to some extent, displays a similar preoccupation with questions of judgement as an aspect – the third – of what constitutes "taste":

> ...many of the works of imagination are not confined to the representation of sensible objects, nor to efforts upon the passions, but extend themselves to the manners, the characters, the actions, and designs of men, their relations, their virtues and vices, they come within the province of the judgment, which is improved by attention and by the habit of reasoning. All these...are considered as the objects of Taste...[98]

Yet exemplary "taste" in the sense of courtesy is not a prerequisite of engagement with the sublime for Burke. While judgement is undoubtedly integral to his understanding of taste, taste itself is a thorny aesthetic matter; all of us, according to Burke, have taste: it just differs in degrees from person to person. Can one not, after all, appreciate the sublimity of a mountain, purely on sight of its awesome size – which overwhelms us in inducing emotions and ideas of the spiritual and divine – regardless of whether or not one has cultivated taste? If objects like mountains are innately sublime, who has the authority to decide who can and cannot appreciate their sublimity?

This is where a distinction between sublimity and beauty becomes necessary, I would argue, for beauty represents a value judgement where the sublime, though linked to beauty and therefore sometimes comparable in terms of judgement, is more accurately seen as simultaneously (or even alternatively) an aesthetic-affective experience. Some instances of

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[95] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op. cit.,* p.201.
[96] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste", (1757), *Selected Essays,* eds. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 149..
[97] *Ibid*, p. 248.
[98] *Ibid*, p. 206.

sublimity, of course – like Burke's theories on revolution – require a heightened, more developed sense of taste in terms of morality and judgement; Burke's conflicting opinions regarding the Glorious Revolution versus the French Revolution are a case in point, stemming from reasoned, conscience-based assessment of the motives behind revolutionary activity and the ways in which it was exercised. But, fundamentally, while there are some individuals of exquisite taste, the potential to appreciate and engage with the sublime is, for Burke, open to all:

> ...Taste, in its most general acceptation, is not a simple idea, but is partly made up of a perception of the primary pleasures of sense, of the secondary pleasures of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty, concerning the various relations of these, and concerning the human passions, manners and actions. All this is requisite to form Taste, and the ground-work of all these is the same in the human mind; for as the senses are the great originals of all our ideas, and consequently of all our pleasures, if they are not uncertain and arbitrary, the whole ground-work of Taste is common to all...[99]

Imagination and the senses are identified as integral to the ideas that emotionally move us to experience the sublime; the obscure is, therefore – by virtue of shifting the onus of "perception" onto the visionary imagination due to an object's hindered physical clarity – an obvious source of sublimity.

Ideas and images of the bardic sublime cater generously to the category of the obscure in the eighteenth century, as Burke himself recognised:

> To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary...the druids performed all their ceremonies in the bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks. No person seems better to have understood the secret of heightening, or of setting terrible things...in their strongest light by the force of a judicious obscurity, than Milton.[100]

For Burke, Milton's description of Death as but a shape in *Paradise Lost* offers a paradigm of sublime obscurity in that it demonstrates how:

> It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it *affecting* to the imagination...the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give, raises a very obscure and imperfect *idea* of such objects...In reality a great clearness helps but

[99] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op.cit.,* p. 206.
[100] *Ibid,* p.231.

> little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever.[101]

The distinction that Burke draws here between making an idea "clear" and making an idea "affecting" is one that is echoed later in his *Enquiry*: Section V of Part V, in which he focus upon the power of words, and poetry specifically, to induce sublime experience in an individual. Burke asserts in the first section of this part of his *Enquiry* that words "seem to me to affect us in a manner very different from that in which we are affected by natural objects, or by painting or architecture".[102] Indeed, Burke goes as far as to assert the supremacy of words as a catalyst for the sublime, stating that "words have as considerable a share in exciting ideas of beauty and of the sublime as any of those [natural objects, painting or architecture], and sometimes a much greater than any of them".[103] The final part of Burke's *Enquiry* is, strikingly, entirely devoted to the significance of rhetoric – and poetry – in relation to the sublime.

In focusing upon language, Burke identifies three main types of words. Firstly, he defines "aggregate words": those which "represent many simple ideas *united by nature* to form some one determinate composition, as man, horse, tree, castle, &c."[104] Secondly, Burke describes "simple abstract words": those which "stand for one simple idea of such compositions and no more; as red, blue round, square, and the like".[105] Finally, Burke refers to "compounded abstract words": those which are "formed by an union, an *arbitrary* union of both the others, and of the various relations between them, in greater or lesser degrees of complexity; as virtue, honour, persuasion, magistrate, and the like".[106] Burke displays a particular interest in this third category of words, "compounded abstract words", declaring that:

> Of these I am convinced, that whatever power they may have on the passions…they are not real essences, and hardly cause, I think, any real ideas…Such words are in reality but mere sounds; but they are sounds, which being used on particular occasions, wherein we receive some good, or suffer some evil, or see others affected with good or evil; or which we hear applied to other interesting things or events; and being applied in such a variety of cases that we know readily by habit to what things they belong, they produce in the mind, whenever they are afterwards mentioned, effects similar to those of their occasions.[107]

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[101] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op.cit.,* pp.232-233.
[102] *Ibid,* p. 309.
[103] *Ibid.*
[104] *Ibid.*
[105] *Ibid.*
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] *Ibid,* pp. 310.

Introducing the rhetorical notion of the sublime, Burke makes it clear in this final part of his *Enquiry* – very explicitly in Section VI – that poetry ought not to be considered strictly as "an art of imitation".[108] Rather, Burke insists that "words undoubtedly have no sort of resemblance to the ideas for which they stand", and are therefore "much more capable of making deep and lively impressions than any other arts, and even than nature itself in very many cases".[109] Words induce sympathy, rather than representing efforts toward imitation, for Burke. Through words, one may "take an extraordinary part in the passions of others"; we are "easily affected and brought into sympathy".[110] The fact that words are not used to capture reality actually affords them with more power, for they consequently have "an opportunity of making a deep impression and taking root in the mind, whilst the idea of the reality was transient".[111]

It is worth considering Burke's stance on imitation and the sublime in relation to Stackhouse's through the lens of Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759). Seemingly sharing Burke's sentiments on the limitations of imitation, Young asserts that:

> The mind of a man of genius is a fertile and pleasant field…it enjoys a perpetual spring…originals are the fairest flowers: imitations are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom. Imitations are of two kinds; one of nature, one of authors: the first we call originals, and confine the term imitation to the second.[112]

For Young, the power of imagination exceeds that of textually-imitative art. However, words which seek to imitate – or to represent – nature are held in higher esteem than those which imitate other authors. Not only is Young describing the power of authors, here, but of poets – and poetry – specifically. Young enthuses that there is "something in poetry beyond prose-reason; there are mysteries in it not to be explained, but admired; which render mere prose-men infidels to their divinity".[113] Poetry is the revered mode of writing for Young, as for Burke, especially when it seeks to emulate the beauty of nature rather than literary forebears.

As such, the bardic sublime – a mode of discourse which emerges from myth, the realm of imagination, spectral bards and Druids, and sites of mystery like Stonehenge – relies upon

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[108] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op.cit.,* p.317.
[109] *Ibid.*
[110] *Ibid.*
[111] *Ibid,* p. 318.
[112] Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition,* (1759), in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory,* eds. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 113.
[113] *Ibid,* p. 115.

fantasy and not reality for its power. This is not to say, however, that it is a form of rhetoric without real-world impact – for the values of liberty and stoicism that are recurrently promoted through such discourse are used by Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans to real political, national, social and emotional effect. Images of Romantic Britain – ruins of castles, megaliths and monoliths beneath dark clouds, representative of otherness – and of the ancient bards and Druids of secrecy, conform to Burke's conditions for sublimity and obscurity. However, this is not to say that the bardic sublime does not invoke ideas beyond the strictly worldly. As Charles Gildon argues in *The Complete Art of Poetry* (1718), the rhetoric of the sublime is both a source of enthusiasm and imbued with a certain religious or spiritual quality; poetry affords divine insights as the "Mother of all Learning".[114] I contend that the bardic sublime offers a rhetoric of sublimity for all, free from ideological constraint: at once sublime in both the rhetorical sense – drawing on an accessible national allegory of bardic images and allusions, as well as upon representations of the deeply sublime Welsh and Scottish landscapes – and in the psychological, spiritual and affective sense, invoking imaginative engagement with cultural memory. It is spiritual without being burdened by ideology in an institutionally religious sense; affectively moving without being burdened by the socio-economic exclusivity demanded by elitist aesthetic claims to privileged sensibility and "taste"; driven by a sense of community and mythohistorical nationalism without promoting or enacting the physical violence and ferocity of the French Revolution. Furthermore, it is a form of sublimity which prizes imagination as the ultimate source of sublimity: that which stirs the mind, the senses, the soul and the spirit of the British people, especially those facing any kind of oppression.

Imagined History

While my conception of the bardic sublime focuses upon emotional and imaginative engagement with the figure of the ancient bard and associated ideas and images, the origins of interest in the bard in the eighteenth century were initially nationalistic. Two kinds of nationalism existed at this time: "a cultural nationalism...[and] a nationalism of more clearly articulated political, perhaps even revolutionary, goals..."[115] The resurgence of British

[114] Charles Gildon, *The complete art of poetry. In six parts. ... By Charles Gildon, Gent. ...* Vol. 1, printed for Charles Rivington, 1718. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2119/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&docLevel=FASCIMILE&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW3313925438&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0. Quotation cited taken from the Preface to Gildon's text. Accessed online on 02/07/18.
[115] Trumpener, p. 10.

nationalism in the late eighteenth century has been readily attributed to the international climate of turbulence that defines the closing years of the period. Colley, for example, states that: "...we can plausibly regard Great Britain as an invented nation...an invention forged above all by war."[116] With the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Revolution (1789-1799) constituting mandates for other regions to establish or to petition for [more] autonomous national identities, it seems logical to attribute the antiquarian activities, Celtic revival and various patriotic political movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries almost wholly to transnational pursuits for national liberty of the Romantic period. France and America had already demonstrated how effective militant nationalist activity could be; a precedent had been set for Britain's devolved regions to claim independence.

But a straightforwardly causal interpretation of this nature will not suffice. Firstly, in the face of instability abroad, one may have reasonably anticipated both the consolidation of a unified British national identity and the fragmentation of it. Secondly, forms of cultural nationalism predated the militant nationalism that was characteristic of the 1790s. While the eighteenth century may be regarded as the epoch of specifically British nationalism, with performances of "God Save the King" and "Rule, Britannia!" commencing in 1745, what may be described as a civic spirit of localised patriotism was discernibly burgeoning in British culture simultaneously, indeed, far earlier than the late-eighteenth century when revolutionary activity was rife. Paul-Yves Pezron, a Breton, published the influential *L'Antiquité de la langue et de la nation des Celtes* in 1703, wherein he asserts the Celts – having survived as the Welsh and the Bretons – to be a purer race than the Anglo-Saxons: an implicit, defiant affirmation that the Celts were of greater authority and pedigree than the English.[117] Translated into English in 1706 as *The Antiquities of Nations*, the text greatly influenced Edward Lhuyd, a Welshman whose contribution to *Archaeologia Britannia* was published in 1707, signalling his interests in ancient manuscripts, materials and folklore, as well as his particular penchant for presenting Welsh, Irish, Scottish, Cornish and Breton cultures as Celtic ones.

Literature itself had a crucial role to play in the construction of national identities. As Marion Löffler notes, "For all these would-be nations, their histories, languages and literatures, together with those who had cultivated them, played a powerful part in the development of

[116] Colley, p. 5.
[117] Barry Cunliffe, *The Celts: A Very Short Introduction,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 113.

their national cause, whether it was ultimately successful or not."[118] As early as 1757, with the publication of Thomas Gray's poem "The Bard" (staging a union of Welsh and English culture through a poetic account of Tudor history), swiftly followed by James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* (1760-1765, describing the decline of ancient, heroic Scotland), Celtic inflections on an English language – and very much Anglocentric – canon of English literature had come to the fore through the invocation of Celtic images, mythologies and vocabularies rather than via the use of ancient languages themselves. The factors prompting the increased production of and attention to Celtic revival writing in the mid-eighteenth century – namely, the implicit co-dependence of literature (comprising poetry and creative prose) and history as "genres", rather than disciplines, informed by and influential upon religious and political developments – were of as much impact as international revolutions (if not more so) in the late eighteenth century.[119]

Ideas of imaginative, affective and spiritual nationhood displaced the historical. The role of history in relation to nationalism at this time is problematised, as Matthew Adams explicates, by a seeming tension between the transhistorical cultural "truth" of affect and contingent authoritative historical "truths". That is to say, verifying the authenticity of context and authorship surrounding national epics like Macpherson's *Fingal* was prioritised over attributing literary merit purely on the basis of national feeling evoked by such a text in the eighteenth century. To borrow Benedict Anderson's terminology, Adams contends that the "imagined community" of the nation is one that must be conceptualised as being emotionally authentic and culturally, imaginatively rooted as well as factually fraudulent.[120]

Accordingly, the controversy surrounding the authenticity of Macpherson's *Ossian* poems in the late-eighteenth century is of little consequence to Adams' argument – though it was obviously of great concern at the time of publication in an age characterised by preoccupations with authenticity and sincerity of sentiment. Whether or not the text constitutes a true remnant of third-century verse is but a subsidiary concern in the wider context of assessing its contribution to the formation of nationhood. The eminent Hugh Blair wholly supported the Ossian project, for it "had come to symbolize...Scottish literary respectability".[121] Blair's discourse on the text even illustrates how *Ossian*, as a work of Celtic nationalism,

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[118] Marion Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg 1826-1926,* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 3.

[119] Matthew Adams, "*Imagining Britain : the Formation of British National Identity During the Eighteenth Century"*, Thesis (Ph.D.) - University of Warwick, (2002), p. 27. Available online at: http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/3975/1/WRAP_THESIS_Adams_2002.pdf, accessed on 12/02/14.

[120] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1983)

[121] Harold F. Harding, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1783); repr. ed. Harold F. Harding (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. xxxii.

provided a literary template for English Romanticists like Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans to tap into – not necessarily through assertions of historical truth (though Blair did promote the text as authentic), but through imaginative representation – through its rhetoric of the sublime:

> The works of Ossian...abound with examples of the Sublime...He possesses all the plain and venerable manner of the ancient times. He deals in no superfluous or gaudy ornaments; but throws forth his images with a rapid conciseness, which enables them to strike the mind with the greatest force...amidst the rude scenes of nature and of society, such as Ossian describes; amidst rocks, and torrents, and whirlwinds, and battles, dwells the Sublime; and naturally associates itself with that grave and solemn spirit which distinguishes the Author of Fingal. [122]

Ossian offers what we may term a sublime structure of feeling: a means, a model, a rhetoric by which the individual may assert nationhood and subjectivity through an imaginative representation of one's culture and history. As Adams clearly states, an innovation of the eighteenth century was a newfound emphasis on the active, participative, imaginative reader of history:

> This was, quite definitely, history written to involve its reader. Not only did it seek to convince the reader of its arguments, it sought to implicate the reader in the writing of those arguments...in the construction of the historical narratives from which its lessons were to be learnt...History must thus be understood as involved in a project of developing the growing reading public into an informed and critical public...[123]

The reader is in no way disempowered by the possibility that their sense of nationhood is premised on fiction if they acknowledge that its fraudulence does not compromise its affective qualities; rather, one is afforded the agency to direct "an imaginative attempt to link the individual human life to a wider history" as Adams advocates.[124] Even historical criticism, premised on empirical evidence, nonetheless remains interpretative and fundamentally subjective, after all. I contend that the "truths" of empirical history assert themselves as authoritative, and yet cultural nationalism – rooted in affect and spiritualism – is not

[122] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1783); repr. ed. Harold F. Harding (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), pp. 35-36.
[123] Adams, pp. 38-39.
[124] *Ibid,* p. 44.

accountable to empirical verification in the same way, and thus cannot be disproven or undermined.

So, in a similar sense to the Ossian controversies, London Welshman, poet and nationalist Iolo Morganwg's (real name, Edward Williams, 1747-1826) claim to be a descendant of the 'Ancient British Bards' in 1789 – the same year that Blake's "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" was published in *Songs of Innocence* – represented a force for nationhood, regardless of either faith or doubt in Morganwg's "authenticity".[125] At this time, Scotland and Ireland, as well as Wales, were exploiting and creating cultural opportunities to assert nationhood. Trumpener notes how the *eidisfodd* Morganwg staged on London's Primrose Hill in 1792, "reassembling a small group of London Welshmen as the druidical court of the 'Bards of the Isle of Britain'", was an idea which Morganwg had derived from the Highland festivals already established in Scotland.[126] In turn, the *eidisfodd* itself set a precedent for the 1792 Belfast harpists' festival, held around Bastille Day:[127] an indication that international revolution facilitated – but was not the primary cause of – efforts to assert proto-devolutionary British nationalism[s]. The Highland games of Scotland had been an ancient practice that had already had to survive acute English oppression and occupation following the failed, second Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. As Colley states:

> The wearing of tartan was banned on pain of imprisonment...Episcopalian clergymen, often proponents of Jacobitism in the past, were required to take new oaths of allegiance...[to] the Hanoverian royal family...the Heritable Jurisdictions Act of 1747 substituted royal jurisdiction for the private jurisdictions previously exercised by clan chieftains...to 'carry off the King into every part of the United Kingdom'. These were the sticks designed to beat down Highland autonomy.[128]

Morganwg was making a stand for Celtic practices as whole. What is particularly interesting to note is the fact that Morganwg exported Welsh culture to the English capital; his means of resisting Anglocentrism was to effectively invade England with Welsh culture.

This jars somewhat with Newman's conception of nationalism as being strictly internalised nationhood, contrasting with patriotism, characterised by a centrifugal perspective:

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[125] Jon Mee, "'Images of Truth New Born': Iolo, William Blake and the Literary Radicalism of the 1790s", *A Rattleskull Genuis,* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), p. 173.
[126] Trumpener, p. 295.
[127] *Ibid,* p. 10.
[128] Colley, p. 119.

> Patriotism...is an old and familiar phenomenon, while nationalism...[is] attached to ideals of internal solidarity under an egalitarian moral discipline. Patriotism focuses outward, while nationalism takes *all the nation's affairs*, internal as well as external, into its compass. Nationalism is thus considered a *modern* phenomenon...a powerful emotion that has dominated the political thought and actions of most peoples since the time of the French Revolution. It is not a natural, but an historic phenomenon, that has emerged as a response to *specific political, economic, and social conditions*."[129]

Again, this represents an instance of nationalism being causally identified as a post-Revolution invention. What Newman's definition fails to take into account, though, is the fact that, while nationalistic campaigns by the constituent nations of Britain were bolstered as a movement by the international revolutionary activities of the late-eighteenth century, as well as by the English-Celtic conflicts earlier in the century, the Welsh national tradition is itself premised upon a latent, imaginative and prophetic belief (expressed through *canu brud* or "prophetic poetry") in the inevitability of future autonomy for the nation: one which manifests itself in the figure of the bard. The articulation of national feeling through an individual figure, such as a bard, is integral to Newman's distinction between nationalism and patriotism, for:

> ...patriotism...[is] a group-oriented feeling or psychological predisposition which exists *universally*...whereas nationalism...is a product of modern thought, '*a comprehensive doctrine*' particularly distinguished by its 'anthropological and metaphysical ideas' and by its 'distinctive style of politics'.[130]

Newman goes on to define the distinctive politics of nationalism as a "complex idea of *national solidarity* in peace as well as war", as opposed to the militant associations with patriotism. A bardic figure can, accordingly, bind together a nation across eras, class, and political and religious change through shared affect in times of war or peace, not only via unity in conflict.

[129] Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), p. 54.
[130] Newman, p. 52.

An Introduction to the Bardic Sublime

Central to my conception of the bardic sublime is the figure of the ancient Welsh bard: one who was invoked and represented over and over again in verse of the eighteenth century. As well as signalling the poetic, the bard embodies and evokes twofold sentiments of elegy and the tradition of optimistic prophecy that uniquely characterise the Welsh bardic tradition within the context of proto-devolutionary British literatures. I argue that it is the latter specifically – prophecy – which distinguishes the Welsh bardic tradition from other, inherently elegiac, forms of bardic verse.

Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* exemplifies the elegiac aspect of bardic writing. The Scottish epic was regarded as sublime by Blair, among others, for foregrounding solemn elegiac sentiment against a backdrop of savage nature; the national sublime serves as a poetic nexus upon which the living, the dead and the elemental are spiritually and imaginatively bound together in feeling. The text's echoes of scriptural sublimity – not only through biblically sublime images of awesome nature, but also in terms of style – hint at the possibility of transcendence afforded by bardic endeavours. Nature is not merely an object or emanation of the divine. The landscape itself is, like the protagonists, in perpetual mourning. An almost Blakean duality, or Wordsworthian dialectic, between the human and the natural is at play; it is difficult to distinguish between landscape personified and man rendered elemental at times: "He answered, like a wave on a rock...Rocks fell from their place; and rivulets, changing their course, fled murmuring from our strife."[131]

However, while Macpherson's *Ossian* undeniably constituted one of the most widely influential stylistic models for foregrounding notions of archipelagic national spirit and feeling in the period, I contend that it is in fact the Welsh-English depictions of the bardic – that is to say, English language poetic representations of Welsh forms, figures, landscapes and histories – which most directly influenced the forms of the bardic sublime articulated in the verse of Romantic poets like Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans.

As Sarah Prescott points out, "even as the bard sings about the end of poetry, he and his poem attest its survival."[132] The bard – the poet – is a unifying force, reconciling the past,

[131] James Macpherson, "Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem", *The Poems of Ossian and related works*, ed. Howard Gaskill and Fiona Stafford, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), Book I, p. 55.
[132] Sarah Prescott, "'Gray's Pale Spectre': Evan Evans, Thomas Gray, and the Rise of Welsh Bardic Nationalism", *Modern Philology*, Vol. 104, No. 1 (August 2006), p. 81. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/510263, accessed on 21/01/13.

present and future: that which the bardic sublime – in inducing the reimagining of cultural memory in the present, with a prophetic confidence in cultural resurgence – also serves to effect. For Romantics, such prophetic confidence extends to a spiritual and affective belief that the fragmented, broken state of Modernity can be healed by active artistic engagement with ideas of cultural memory. Not only does the bardic sublime offer a literary form, a discourse, for articulating radical revolutionary ideas in the national sense in light of the international influence of revolutions in France and America at the end of the century, it also promotes a cultural revolution, acting as a consolatory catalyst through which the individual may reconnect and bolster bonds with the universal imaginative community, as willed in Blake's holistic vision. This is effected through imaginative and creative acts. It is important to understand that cultural nationalism, as represented through the bardic sublime, is not strictly "national" in the political, geographically-specific sense of the term. The bardic sublime is predicated upon Welsh forms, images, myths, motifs, but its effects are by no means restricted to Wales, as demonstrated both by the fact that the image of the bard is so heavily relied upon by English poets and by the popularity of *Ossian* as a comparable example of bardic sublimity, which was as revered on the Continent as it was in Britain and Scotland in particular. The bard at the heart of the bardic sublime is the transhistorical symbol of both elegy and power – posterity and prophecy offered through verse – that drives this Romantic vision.

Thomas Gray's "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode" (1755-1757) is the most well-known eighteenth-century depiction of the Welsh bard. The poem, adhering to the formalistic expectations of a Pindaric ode in its celebration of – via elegiac reverence for – the figure of the bard, as well as through its pervasive language of song and its triadic structure of a strophe, antistrophe and epode, nonetheless offered Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans a thematically innovative model for acutely evocative verse premised upon imagined history. Gray did, after all, share their "keen interest in Celtic mythology, with special reference to its use in English poetry",[133] as illustrated by his notes on Welsh poetry in his Commonplace Book.[134]

Together with a shared commitment to Miltonic allusions – Milton having set the precedent for a national epic – Gray's articulation of Welsh mythology as history appealed to Romantic poets in serving to demonstrate how the voice of the Welsh bard could be ventriloquised in the English tongue to imaginative and evocative effect. For Blake, Gray's

[133] Edward D. Snyder, "Thomas Gray's Interest in Celtic", *Modern Philology,* Vol. 11, No. 4 (April 1914), p. 5. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/432845, accessed on 13/04/13.
[134] Corroborated by Roger Lonsdale, *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith,* (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 182.

poem exemplified how one may foreground Britain's diasporic foundations through art so as to promote a wider, holistic vision of a world which should never have been divided. For Wordsworth, Gray's verse illustrated how one may tap into the collective community of cultural mourning and elegy – in lamenting the loss of the bards – to invoke imaginative activity from and catharsis for the individual. Whether writing of real or fictitious loss, Wordsworth privileges the evocative capacity of elegiac verse: its ability to prompt what Emma Mason describes as "the domestic and shared experience of mourning",[135] which enables the reader to participate in a collective emotional experience that liberates them from the otherwise private paralysis of feeling. In Hemans' verse, too, the bard is presented as a role model to the reader – in relation to how one should engage with the external world, with landscape as well as with humans, with one's community. The bardic is important to all three poets not least because it reifies the poetic as prophetic, rendering the poetic vision of each supremely authoritative.

Prophecy and the Welsh Bardic Tradition

From the Middle Ages onward, "prophecy [has] held a particularly important place in Welsh tradition."[136] Expressed orally as well as constituting a literary genre, prophecy was heavily reliant upon imagery and symbolism to foretell either religious or political events. Scholarly studies of prophecy as a genre only commenced in the twentieth century with Rupert Taylor's *The Political Prophecy in England* (1911), which argues that: "the obscure language of prophecy was an esoteric code or puzzle that was only decipherable by the initiated, by those who had the intellectual tools to decipher it."[137]

Morgan Kay asserts that the majority of scholarship in the field focuses upon the prevalence of prophecy in Britain. The British monopoly on prophetic writings is, he argues, "almost entirely" attributable to the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth:

> Geoffrey wrote his *Historia Regum Britanniae* in the 1130s, claiming that he translated it from a British (i.e. Welsh) book...this work...brought the Celtic mystic Merlin to the attention of the Latin-reading public, and made the prophecies of

[135] Emma Mason, *The Cambridge Introduction to William Wordsworth,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 58.
[136] Morgan Kay, "Prophecy in Welsh Manuscripts", *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium,* vol. 26/27, (2006/2007), p. 73. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40732052, accessed on 07/04/13.
[137] *Ibid,* p. 74.

> Merlin a favo[u]rite topic of literature and history for centuries to come. The existence of Geoffrey's British book is tantalizing though doubtful, but it is clear that the prophecies he attributes to Merlin, a composite character he concocted from various strands of Celtic lore, are based on Welsh tradition.[138]

The influence of Geoffrey's work on prophetic writings in England and on the Continent was vast. So, what exactly is this "Welsh tradition" that Kay speaks of?

Thematically, the Welsh literary tradition focuses upon "a hero who will return to reunite the island of Britain under Welsh rule...a source of hope in Wales throughout history, even to the present day."[139] "Briton", after all, originally referred to the Welsh, to the Brittonic-speaking peoples who originally inhabited Britain, to the Celts and the Cornish; "Wales" and "Welsh" derive from the Germanic *Wälsch* meaning "stranger" or the Anglo-Saxon *Wealh* meaning "foreigner".[140] Central to articulating such prophecies is "the role of the bards in Welsh society and the associations of poetry with prophecy".[141] Most prophecies are, after all, written in poetic form.[142] Kay describes how:

> From the sixth to the twelfth centuries, as the Britons were increasingly pushed to the western edge of their island and marginalized as 'Welsh', prophecy played an important role in giving them hope about their future. During this period, the characteristic form of Welsh vaticination developed: the expectation of a deliverer, a hero of old who has not died, but lies in wait somewhere and will be revived to lead the people and unite the island of Britain under Welsh rule.[143]

The heroes envisaged through Welsh literary history were typically Welsh rulers like Owain Glyndŵr or Henry Tudor, and often Arthur and Cadwaladr in earlier texts like Geoffrey's. Responsible for invoking past – and advising present – monarchs of Wales were the bards.

What are the national implications of prophecy in this specifically Welsh sense, then? Kay contends that "nationalism – or, if that term is anachronistic for this period, native cultural pride – played a large role in these prophecies."[144] It is important to note, however, that a prophetic rhetoric does not solely lend itself to nationalist causes:

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[138] Kay, p. 76.
[139] *Ibid,* pp. 77-78.
[140] *Ibid,* p. 79.
[141] *Ibid,* p. 78.
[142] *Ibid,* p. 85.
[143] *Ibid,* p. 79.
[144] *Ibid,* p. 80.

> Prophecies are often included among what can be called wisdom literature: astrology, medicine, proverbs, and other texts intended to provide practical advice and guidelines. The fact that Latin and English prophecies are included in these manuscripts of wisdom literature indicates that collecting useful lore may have been a larger motive than Welsh nationalism for including prophecies in their manuscripts.[145]

According to Elissa R. Henken, though, there is a "growing interest in the hero's relation to nationalist concerns" in scholarship.[146] I contend that the bard is, for Romantic writers, such a hero, as defined by Henken:

> The redeemer-hero, who appears in many places in Europe, is of particular significance in Wales, where he is part of the mythology of Welsh consciousness, inextricably linked with the theme of the loss of Britain and with the hope of regaining 'the crown of London'.[147]

It is easy to see why poets like Blake would have found the Welsh prophetic and bardic tradition to be an ideal rhetorical resource for articulating his own revolutionary vision. Blake envisages the paradise to be regained as an imaginative state which is intrinsically spiritual but is not based upon religious or institutional dogma; it is based on humanitarian feeling. This chimes remarkably with Kay's definition of Welsh prophecy – political, spiritual, but not religious in nature:

> English and European prophecies often appeal to Biblical or religious authority, such as a Biblical prophet. Welsh prophecies, on the other hand, never do so: they all invoke the authority of poets and legendary characters such as Myrddin and Taliesin, or the Roman Sibyl. This is one of the reasons Welsh prophecies are considered political prophecies: they are not based on the authority of a religious figure. However, Welsh prophecies are not entirely devoid of religious concerns: many of them invoke God and use Christian imagery.[148]

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[145] Kay, p. 92.
[146] Elissa R. Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 20.
[147] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[148] Kay, p. 87.

While it is, typically, one of eight major, usually monarchical Welsh figures – Hiriell, Cynan, Cadwaladr (Geoffrey's Cadwallader), Arthur, Owain, Owain Lawgoch, Owain Glyndwr, and Henry Tudor[149] – who constitute the heroic protagonist of Welsh prophecies, I argue that, by the eighteenth century, it is the bard himself who fulfils this role, both inside and outside Wales.

The bard or poet was, even in medieval Welsh society, a hero of sorts – both an oracle and a warrior:

> ...panegyrists...credited with divinatory powers, they were also seers...guardians of knowledge...trained not only in such matters as metre and alliteration but also in traditional lore such as genealogy, history, mythology and legendry...though the overt purpose of the poems may be praise, the praise is conveyed through reference to events, both immediate and past, to notable figures and to legendry...the poets' praise of a king reaffirmed his right to rule and at the same time reiterated society's values, reminding both king and people...[They] were active members of the court, sometimes themselves warriors, but always attentive to political and social needs.[150]

As the *canu darogan* or vaticinations were consciously constructed as political propaganda, it was imperative that they were widely accessible to the Welsh people. Because of the courtly environment to which bards belonged, it may seem that prophetic works were aristocratic. In reality, though, the poetry "must nevertheless have relied on commonly held lore and beliefs because it also served as part of the structure which bound the people and the ruler together". The poetry of the bards engendered a sense of communality in Welsh culture: in "reiterating the values of the culture and laying out the present's foundations in the past, the poets posited a shared worldview necessary for maintaining society's fabric."[151]

The bond between poetry and prophecy, upheld by the figure of the bard, cannot be emphasised enough. Nor can the fundamentally spiritual foundation of political prophecies, signalling a way in which the Welsh tradition of prophecy offered an ideal mode of rhetoric with which Blake could articulate his own revolutionary, spiritual, imaginative vision in his prophetic books. As Kay argues:

> Prophecy, being a primarily poetic genre, is frequently found alongside other poetry...often accompanied by Triads, a bardic mnemonic device...prophecy was considered part of the poet's repertoire, and...there is much evidence to show that court bards and poets were expected to be able to prophesy. Prophecies were not

[149] Kay, p. 79.
[150] Henken, p. 8.
[151] *Ibid*, p. 9.

> seen as entirely secular, despite the modern label of "political" that is attached to them, because they were frequently found alongside religious texts. In fact, Welsh prophecies often appear in manuscripts that must have been written in a clerical setting, judging from the occurrence of Latin texts alongside them.[152]

One must differentiate between the Blakean conception of the bard as a prophet of eternal truth and the traditional view of the bard as a witness to empiricism in the form of historical events, relayed from memory. Blake is, of course, suspicious of memory – given its emphasis on empiricism and reproduction rather than creativity and originality – and so he ought to be opposed to the bard in light of what the latter represents: the personification of documented history, which he relates orally or in verse. However, the bard is, while a motif for the past, an obscure one: little is known of the bards and the Druids historically though they remain prominent in cultural memory. Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter Two, Blake's understanding of the role of the prophet is rather different from the conventional one. Thus, in thinking of the bards and what they represent, one is forced to imagine – rather than recall facts about – them. In this sense, the figure of the bard represents the duality of imagination and cultural memory, rather than suggesting that the two modes of thought are antithetical, as Blake critics have often suggested. As Northrop Frye says:

> Creative repetition is...one of the central principles of all criticism, which has held for many centuries that poetry presents a kind of controlled hallucination: something in the past, normally accessible only to the memory, is brought into the present by the imagination. Hence...the Greek tradition that the mother of the muses is Mnemosyne, memory. This conception of the creative function of memory is violently attacked by William Blake, who insists that "imagination has nothing to do with memory", and yet Blake is really expounding a different aspect of the same principle. For Blake the imagination brings to life the spectres of the dead...who inhabit the memory, creation thus being to memory what resurrection is to death.[153]

Blake himself repeatedly asserts that memory is but a transient state in contrast with imagination as the eternal, divine domain of existence itself, as exemplified in the second book of *Milton*:

> The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself
> Affection or Love becomes a State, when divided from Imagination
> The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State

[152] Kay, p. 92.
[153] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture and Other Writing on Critical Theory, 1976-1991*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, Press, 2006), p. 114.

> Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created
> Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot
> The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife
> But their Forms Eternal Exist, For-ever. Amen Halle[l]ujah[154]

These lines illustrate how Blake relies upon a rhetoric of the bardic in order to articulate his poetic vision. The reference to the "Oak" groves of the Druids is bolstered by the sacrificial image of the lamb falling by the knife, an image which foregrounds the pagan power of the Druids over the Christian ideology represented by the lamb. The bardic seems – by reference to the oak and to sacrifice – to be affiliated with "State[s] / Created to be Annihilated": that which is ephemeral. However, the form of creativity that these images represent "Eternal Exist, For-ever". The form of creativity to which Blake refers, here, is cultural memory.

The imagining of mysterious and obscure bardic figures of the past that cultural memory demands offers an ideal creative mode and resource for the poet. As Frye explains:

> The notion of a world of pure memory, where everything forever continues to be as it has been, is the core of the religious conception of hell, which is why Blake dislikes it. But of course nobody's memory is like this: all memory is selective, and the fact that it is selective is the starting point of creation.[155]

To engage with the bardic as an aspect of the past which one has never personally or directly experienced, the imagination must be afforded centre stage. It is in this sense that the figure of the bard stands at the crux of the bardic sublime: the inspiration behind and agent of creative acts of engagement with British cultural memory.

Gray's poem was, though, by no means the only eighteenth-century poem to foreground the bardic. For instance, Welsh poet and antiquary, Evan Evans – described by Hutton as the "most learned scholar" in the London-Welsh network of writers – published *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards* in 1764, featuring "A Paraphrase of the 137th Psalm, Alluding to the Captivity and Treatment of the Welsh Bards by King Edward I".[156] Evans' poem does not, of course, stand apart from Gray's; the final lines of Evans' text not only echo the opening of Gray's Ode, they also invoke him as a bardic prophet:

> On Conway's banks, and Menai's streams

[154] Blake, *Milton*, plate 32, ll. 32-38.
[155] Frye, p. 114.
[156] Hutton, p. 149.

The solitary bittern screams;
And, where was erst Llewelyn's court,
Ill-omened birds and wolves resort.
There oft at midnight's silent hour,
Near yon ivy-mantled tower,
By the glow-worm's twinkling fire,
Tuning his romantic lyre,
Gray's pale spectre seems to sing,
'Ruin seize thee, ruthless King.'[157]

However, Evans' use of Gray's opening line stirs pathos for the defeated rather than fervent, militant resistance against Anglocentrism from the reader. No longer in the exclamatory mood, Evans' iteration of Gray's line is preceded by the weak spectre of Gray's ghost, as emphasised by the pre-modifying adjective "pale" and the deserted, haunted setting of Llewellyn's former court.

Evans' poem parallels the Welsh and the Israelites as "victims of enforced diaspora...both God's chosen people."[158] As Trumpener explains, the nationalist cause thus becomes overtly imbued with religiosity:

> Evans's adaptation of David's psalm becomes a manifesto for a new nationalist literature, as it links a latter-day cultural nationalism to a sanctified biblical precedent, to invest the Welsh with the Israelites' self-confidence as a chosen people and to raise cultural self-preservation to the status of religious duty.[159]

The Welsh bardic tradition is one wherein notions of national identity are closely intertwined with – and shaped and perpetuated by – those of suffering, spirituality and language. The bards put a human face to this tradition, as depicted by Evans, drawing heavily on the earlier words of Gray. By using the term "spirituality" in this thesis, I mean those sources of hope and faith that may gesture at the otherworldly but do not rely upon any kind of institutional organisation in any way.

The massacre of the bards on instruction of Edward I upon the conquest of Wales in 1282 constitutes the main act of national betrayal in Welsh cultural memory. The legendary event is, as such, the richest resource in the composition of bardic verse, and its popularity

[157] Evan Evans, "A Paraphrase of the 137th Psalm, Alluding to the Captivity and Treatment of the Welsh Bards by King Edward I", *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards*, (Llanidloes: J. Pryse, 1862), ll. 65-74. Available online at: ftp://ibiblio.org/pub/docs/books/gutenberg/3/2/7/6/32767/32767-h/32767-h.htm, accessed on 18/04/13.
[158] Prescott, p. 90.
[159] Trumpener, p. 4.

grew as the eighteenth century progressed. In 1772, Evans published another patriotic poem, "The Love of Our Country", in which he "lauds the Tudors for taking away 'the English galling yoke' and restoring liberty to the British people", praising the "prophetic Bards" and lamenting the loss of them.[160] The theme was a prominent one in eighteenth-century art as well as literature, and Gray's poem came to define eighteenth-century conceptions of the figure of the bard, as Thomas Jones' 1774 painting, "The Bard", illustrates. Jones' painting foregrounds the despairing figure of the last bard, clutching his harp and about to jump to his death, the corpses of his fellow bards and the stone circle of the Druids visible in the background. The bard is a solitary figure of pathos, bearing the druidic white beard signalling wisdom and antiquity:

[161]

The bard here bears remarkable resemblance to Blake's portrayals of Urizen that follow in the 1790s: a bearded, wretched, solitary figure. Though Blake's portrayal of the bardic-druidic Urizen is more nuanced as figure of both pathos and tyranny, Blake's indebtedness to bardic reconstructions of the eighteenth century is nonetheless undeniable.

Throughout this thesis, we shall encounter many bards, Druids and minstrels, as well as a number of monoliths and megaliths. All of these images are constituents of the bardic sublime. However, no two iterations of the bardic sublime are ever identical. Different writers use the rhetoric of the bardic sublime in different ways, even if their motivation, or the effects, are very similar. Even within the course of an individual writer's literary career, the way in

[160] Prescott, p. 86.

[161] Thomas Jones, "The Bard", (1774). Available online at The National Museum of Wales website: http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/art/online/?action=show_item&item=1154. Accessed on 28/01/13.

which he or she depicts a bard, or a Druid, or a minstrel, can change drastically – and sometimes the boundaries between these figures themselves are blurred or accentuated by a writer or artist depending on the particular literary or artistic context in which they are invoked. There are as many different versions of the bardic sublime as there are individuals who employ its form of rhetoric. As an aesthetic category, the bardic sublime is variegated and multifaceted in nature. This fluidity is, indeed, a source of its strength and power as a form of rhetoric, for it may be used in a wide variety of contexts by many different individuals. While bards, Druids, minstrels, monoliths and megaliths are recurrent images, there is no single form of the bardic sublime.

As such, it is difficult to present a fixed series of definitions for these key figures and images. As we see within and across the subsequent chapters of this thesis, the connotations and depictions of bards, Druids and minstrels are varied, changeable, and sometimes conflated. For example, in Chapter One, Gray's bard is depicted as a solitary character, the last of his kind, who is at once associated with pathos and stoicism. Rather than adhering to the historical role of the medieval bard as a panegyrist, Gray's bard is himself a hero. In Blake's poetry, however, the bard appears not only as a hero – in the prophetic books, for example – but is also conflated with the ostensibly cruel figures of the Druids; Blake's own illustrations for the bard of *Songs* and the tyrannical protagonist of *Urizen* bear a remarkable physical resemblance. In the two final chapters on Wordsworth and Hemans, we see how – rather than being seen as a performative musician in the historical sense of the term – "minstrels" became conflated with the prophetic bards; there is a suggestion that they may be seen as successors to the lost bards.

The Bardic Sublime: A Man's World?

A key consideration of my thesis is the gendering of the categories of both the bardic and the sublime as masculine ones. Scholars like Eva Stehle have offered comprehensive accounts of how, even in ancient Greece and Rome, the bardic was solely the domain of the masculine. She insists that

> Bards' use of patriarchy as a form of authorization must be connected with the pattern that Ann Bergren has pointed out, which associates truth (and deception) with female figures, from whom male figures wrest it. Bergren links women's possession of truth with their knowing who the father of the baby is. The bards' truth-telling is therefore not correlated just with an elevated or synoptic viewpoint but also with overriding and neutralizing women's secret knowledge. Its appeal to

> the men in the audience lies in constructing an antidote to their culturally induced suspicion.[162]

Stehle's claim, then, is that bardic verse and practice is fundamentally predicated upon a sexist agenda. Women, in line with this theory, are cunning, duplicitous, immoral, and disloyal. Moreover, they are seemingly excluded from being in the audience of bardic verse.

Gray, as I explore in Chapter One, similarly argues that the realm of the bardic is unavailable to women, though for different reasons. Rather than foregrounding the cunning of women, he emphasises their lack of learning – the implication being that women are simply unable to comprehend or to reproduce bardic verse because of their lack of education. Likewise, the sublime is the forbidden fruit of the female. As Barbara Claire Freeman usefully phrases it:

> Burke's distinction between the sublime and the beautiful rests upon an understanding of sexual difference in which the "masculine" passions of self-preservation, which stem from ideas of terror, pain, and danger, are linked to the sublime, while the "feminine" emotions of sympathy, tenderness, affection, and imitation are the preserve of the beautiful. The sublime amalgamates such conventionally masculine qualities as power, size, ambition, awe, and majesty; the beautiful collects the equally conventional feminine traits of softness, smallness, weakness, docility, delicacy, and timidity. The former always includes intimations of power, majesty, and brute male force…while the latter connotes smallness, delicacy, and serenity: "it is the flowery species," such as, perhaps, a lily, "so remarkable for its weakness and momentary duration, that gives us the liveliest idea of beauty, and elegance".[163]

Freeman highlights Burke's emphasis on a gendered dichotomy between the sublime and the beautiful. However, in the same way that I destabilise the idea that the bardic must be masculine, I contest the notion that the bardic sublime ought to be gendered at all.

Chapter Four of my thesis focuses upon Hemans as a case study for a female writer who excels in the mode of the bardic sublime. If anything, she has perhaps a stronger claim than Gray, Blake or Wordsworth in using the rhetoric and images – and invoking the landscape – with which the category of the bardic sublime is so intimately associated.

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[162] Eva Stehle, *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece: Nondramatic Poetry in its Setting,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) p. 188.
[163] Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction,* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1997), p. 48.

In subsequent chapters, I shall investigate what makes the forms of the bardic sublime used by Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans – though with similar aims – distinct from one another stylistically, as well as from models of national sublimity provided by poets such as Gray, Macpherson, Evans and Stukeley before them. How did Blake render the Ossianic model of the national sublime - which had been staged externally, on and amidst landscape - an internalised, mental one? How does this compare with Wordsworth's engagement with landscape as an affective catalyst: that which prompts a centripetal retreat into consciousness and Ossianic acts of cultural memory? How does Hemans, as a female writer, engage with the bardic sublime, given that the categories of both the bardic and the sublime have conventionally been understood as intrinsically masculine ones? Can one argue that the bardic sublime induces what is, in fact, an intensely creative act of cultural memory – rather than one of recall – by which the individual may enter the divine community of imagination Blake envisions?

The poetics of Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans are united by a reverence for emotional "truth" implicit in national myth: they privilege transhistorical sentiments of elegy for a lost community – and a shared desire for active imaginative engagement on the part of the individual – over a need for empirical, verifiable history to be uncovered. But while all three poets utilise the rhetoric of the bardic sublime to express their wider poetic agendas, their preoccupations are – while overlapping – ultimately different. Blake relies predominantly upon the bardic sublime as a mode which engenders creative acts of cultural memory and, as such, offers an appropriate rhetoric with which to promote his vision of the divine imaginative community. For Wordsworth, the agenda is an affective and tutelary one; the bardic sublime, in its reliance on elegy, highlights the cathartic and consolatory potential of cultural mourning as an at once spiritual and affective act, while also offering various bardic narrators or characters who teach the reader how to engage with landscape, with others, and with their own imaginations. Hemans, having herself lived in Wales for most of her life, has perhaps the greatest authority in utilising a rhetoric of the bardic sublime. While Hemans, too, displays reverence for and imaginative engagement with the wild Welsh landscape and with the figure of the ancient Welsh bard, she also renders bardic verse a subject that is at once worthy of discussion and performance in the context of polite society; her *Welsh Melodies* of 1821 were marketed as enjoyable piano music suitable for the domestic space, as discussed in the fourth chapter of the thesis, as much as the content of her verse celebrates bardic associations with the majesty and sublimity of the Welsh landscape with which the ancient bard is connected.

In summary, while the origins of the bardic sublime are indebted to national history and eighteenth-century nationalistic objectives, the form and its effects are ones which transcend

the solely national. That is not to say that the bard cannot have a social or political role, however, which becomes especially clear in the third chapter on Wordsworth's verse. While Trumpener helpfully delineates the differences between the bardic interests of antiquarians and those of poets, my thesis disproves some of the binaries that she presents in the following lines:

> For nationalist antiquaries, the bard is the mouthpiece for a whole society, articulating its values, chronicling its history, and mourning the inconsolable tragedy of its collapse. English poets, in contrast, imagine the bard (and the minstrel after him) as an inspired, isolated, and peripatetic figure. Nationalist antiquaries read bardic poetry for its content and its historical information; their analyses help to crystallize a new nationalist model of literary history. The English poets are primarily interested in the bard himself, for he represents poetry as a dislocated art, standing apart from and transcending its particular time and place…English writers insist…on literature's social and political autonomy.[164]

Part of the evocative power of Gray's Ode is generated by the sympathy that we feel for the bard who stands solitary, alone, the last of his kind on the precipice of Snowdon; he is, in this way, an isolated figure as Trumpener claims. He is, though, also a deeply political one, who is very much engaged with social problems – as we see in Wordsworth's *Salisbury Plain* text in the third chapter, for instance. The bard is revered as a solitary figure of the landscape but – as we see in Hemans' *Welsh Melodies* of 1821 – he is also suitable for the domestic space, for communal acts of song and performance, away from the isolated areas of landscape. Blake, too, privileges the acts of inspiration and imagination enjoyed by an individual – but these are also ones which he encourages as a way of engaging with the benevolent imaginative community.

Furthermore, bardic song evokes the past, speaks to the present, and predicts the future through acts of prophecy; the bard does indeed transcend a "particular time and place", as Trumpener claims, in this regard. Bardic song is, though, often rooted to particular spots of time and to specific locations within landscape. For example, Wordsworth often links his bardic verse to special moments in time and sites in which he is emotionally invested. The contours of the bardic sublime are presented by recurrent sites – Snowdon, stone ruins, seas or torrents beneath, druidic relics. Moreover, these sites, images and allusions do not have to be viewed in a nationalistic context to be evocative to the reader or listener – but doing so certainly does not diminish their affective capacity; if anything, tapping into national memory enriches them.

[164] Trumpener, p. 6.

The first and more recurrent spot of time within the model of the bardic sublime is that which we saw at the start of this Introduction: the song of the last bard from the heights of Snowdon. The next chapter introduces Thomas Gray, his poetic developments, and how he came to formulate "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode" – the poem which, in turn, was to shape the models of the bardic sublime articulated in the verse of Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans thereafter.

Chapter One: "Dear lost companions of my tuneful art…"

Thomas Gray

Why, I felt myself the bard…[165]

Much has been written to date on the extent of Gray's indebtedness to various literary predecessors: predominantly, his imitations of Dryden, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. The focus of this chapter, though, will not be upon Gray's role and writings as a recipient of other writers' works but, rather, upon his own place as an influential figure within a different literary genealogy. With a dual focus on the aural and the visual, and on the twinned significance of the figure of the ancient bard with Welsh landscape, this chapter introduces Gray as the first eighteenth-century writer to draw on the rhetoric of both the sublime and the bardic to offer a new, emotive mode of versification. Gray's poetic engagement with both the aesthetic and musical associations with the category of the bardic, framed by the language and the images conventionally associated with what we now term "the Burkean sublime", inspired Romantic writers such as Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans to explore the artistic and imaginative possibilities of embracing the bardic sublime as a mode of poetic expression.

I explore the emergence of Gray's mode of the bardic sublime as the first of its kind in eighteenth-century thought and literature. While other eighteenth-century writers such as Cowper and Thomson also invoke the figure of the bard in their verse, Gray's engagement with the bardic is distinctive in its foregrounding of the bard against a specifically sublime landscape. Gray highlights the power and the transcendence of the bardic voice, positioning the ancient bard as not only a solitary individual worthy of pathos – the last of his kind – but, also, a stoic hero, a figure to be revered: he who gives voice to communities, past, present and future. The ancient bard as depicted by Gray is, as such, a prototype for politically-engaged Romantic poets – for writers like Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans.

The structure of this chapter is chronological. In the first section, I begin by challenging the notion that Gray is to be seen solely as a poet of the sentimental. I explore his interest in, and use of language associated with, the sublime in early works such as in "Lines Spoken by

[165] Thomas Gray, "Reminiscences of Gray" by the Reverend Norton Nicholls (18th November, 1805), published in *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray and the Reverend Norton Nicholls with Other Pieces Hitherto Unpublished,* ed. the Reverend John Mitford, (London: William Pickering, 1843), p. 34.

the Ghost of John Dennis at the Devil Tavern" and "Translation from Propertius, *Elegies* III v. 1-2, 19-48". Then, I turn to "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode", in order to investigate how the sublime and the bardic become explicitly linked as aesthetic categories for the first time in Gray's poetic corpus and, more broadly, in eighteenth-century literature. Composed during the few years preceding the publication of Edmund Burke's *Enquiry* into the sublime in 1757 – and a few decades before Romantic articulations and depictions of the bard were to appear more frequently in both visual and poetic creations – "The Bard" illustrates many of the fundamental notions associated with the sublime which Burke articulates clearly, and influentially, in his philosophical treatise. In doing so, I consider how, and why, the bardic and the sublime – specifically in relation to the obscure – become mutually constitutive aesthetic fields.

Next, I turn to the matter of the visual specifically – early illustrations of Gray's poems by Bentley – thereby highlighting how image is as integral as sound to the category of bardic verse in the long eighteenth century. Finally, I consider how the idea of the bardic sublime represented by Gray in "The Bard" resounds in some of his later works, namely, "The Triumphs of Owen", "The Death of Hoel", "Caradoc" and "Conan". Having also considered the role of music in particular in relation to Gray's bardic sublime, supported by analysis of "Ode for Music", I conclude by suggesting that the bard, as Gray depicts him, is not merely confined to the panegyric role of the medieval age, singing of heroes. The ancient bard, for Gray, is a hero; the bard may be regarded as a prototype for the modern poet: morally upright; emotionally driven; divinely inspired; musically gifted; rooted in the landscape but endowed with a power, and posterity, which transcends historical ages and physical boundaries.

Furthermore, channelling the voice of the ancient bard as a modern poet is a practice which imbues the poet's words with the authority of the past while promoting acts of imagination, embodying both empirical history and imagined history. In addition, personal reflections and moral truths, though articulated through the voice of an individual – the ancient bard – displace the need for a poet to render himself the subject if he wishes to produce powerful verse. Being the bard, as a vocation, is a vessel for poetic self-assertion without self-exposition of one's personal life. It seems that, for Gray – ever reluctant to publish his works for the public – this would have been an appealing prospect. Moreover, catharsis and consolation can be afforded by the model of the bardic sublime in a way that cannot when a poet writes from a purely subjective standpoint. The emotion, the suffering, the drama of the scenes associated with the bardic – mediated through verse – is but fiction; it is moving without

being upsetting, intriguing and mysterious while not being incomprehensible; there is suffering but there is also consolation in the posterity of the bard.

Gray and the Sublime

Often lauded as an eighteenth-century poet of sentiment and sensibility – especially in relation to his infamous "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" – Gray and his poetic works will be explored in the first section of this chapter in a somewhat different light. Rather than affiliating Gray with the eighteenth-century vogue for sentimental literature, I highlight how some of Gray's works – even his earlier ones, those whose dates of composition precede publication of Burke's 1757 *Enquiry* – indicate a taste for wild landscape, for the obscure and for the dramatic, which one typically associates with Romantic writers such as Blake later in the eighteenth century. I contend that what we might term Gray's "sublime sensibilities", and his thirst for the obscure, not only justify the consideration of his works alongside those who succeeded him – Romantic writers such as Blake, Wordsworth, and Hemans, who revere the sublime similarly in verse – but also play a crucial role in shaping the aesthetic framework of Gray's verse in which he later came to foreground a figure who embodies the qualities of the sublime: the ancient Welsh bard.

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Gray never saw Snowdon. The sublime "scenes on Snowdon's height" [l. 105] that Gray invokes in "the Bard" are ones which are wholly imagined – in terms of both the landscape in which they are set and with regard to the narrative which unfolds over the course of the ode. Yet, Gray had a longstanding affinity to mountainous sites like Snowdon. He had crossed the Alps in 1739 with Horace Walpole as part of their Grand Tour; after writing, "The Bard", he had visited Scotland in both 1764 and 1765; he had seen the Lake District in 1767, and returned there in 1769. The "Journal of his Tour in the Lake District", composed in 1769, is a text which Wordsworth would go on to read in conjunction with *The Poems of Mr Gray,* edited by William Mason (York: 1775), between 1779-1787. As well as wild, rugged landscapes, Gray was, similarly, intrigued by the imaginative possibilities afforded by sites of ruin. In October 1764, Gray made a visit to Stonehenge; in the summer of 1770, he explored Tintern Abbey. All of these locations, both ruinous and mountainous, are sites which one might

easily mistake for a list of those visited by figures such as Coleridge, Southey or Wordsworth a few decades later.

Gray is not generally known for being a poet of landscape, nor of the sublime. There is, though, evidence of his fascination with the sublime to be found in even his earliest extant poetic work – "Lines Spoken by the Ghost of John Dennis at the Devil Tavern" (composed 1734) – which, if not focused upon the landscape associated with the sublime at this stage in his poetic career, certainly displays the rhetoric that would come to define the sublime according to Burke's mid-century *Enquiry*. The subject of the poem, John Dennis, was, of course, the literary critic and dramatist who – as already discussed in the Introduction – was responsible for offering the first theory of the sublime to explicitly explore the complex interaction of subject and object as that which gives rise to sublime experience, in works such as *The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism* (1704).

Robert Mack has suggested that Gray's poem mocks Dennis with the same spirit of "satiric animosity" that Pope had demonstrated, simply because of Gray's reverence for the latter: "Gray, who was at an age when anything from the pen of the popular Pope invariably attracted his attention and admiration…was thus repeating in his attitude towards Dennis the received opinions of the master".[166] While the tone of the poem is undoubtedly intended to be humorous and parodic, there is one group of words which seem fitting to be used in relation to Dennis: those evoking terror and horror, two of the six "enthusiastic passions" which Dennis himself outlined as being integral to understanding the category of the sublime when he foregrounded the importance of it, and its associated concepts, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought and art. Phrases such as "vast and deep", "Betwixt the confines of the light and dark", "shadows in disguise", "groves embowered and more sequestered shades / Frequented by the ghosts of ancient maids", "gloomy haunts" and "twilight walks between" echo the evocative and atmospheric descriptions offered by Gray's great literary predecessors, Dryden and Milton; the former uses the phrase "Betwixt the Confines of the Night and Day" while the latter writes of "arched walks of twilight groves", "echoing walks between" and a "shadier Bower / More sacred and sequestered". Gray is clearly emulating both poets, here.

What is the significance of such allusions? Ironically, in the process of seeking to write a poem belittling Dennis for comic effect – to honour Pope, and to amuse Walpole, whom he greatly admired – and in utilising a rhetoric of the sublime, Gray actually gestures toward shared sensibilities between poet and subject. In these words and phrases, Gray anticipates a

[166] Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 158.

number of the key ideas upon which Burke was to expand in his *Enquiry* on the sublime just over twenty years later; it was a treatise on the very subject that Dennis was responsible for bringing to the attention of society at the end of the seventeenth century and the start of the eighteenth: the sublime. Burke constantly writes of "dark", "shade",[167] "transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light"[168], singling Milton out as the most able person to "understand the secret of heightening, or of setting terrible things…in their strongest light by the force of a judicious obscurity".[169]

Gray's purpose with regard to this poem is twofold. On the one hand, he wishes to offer a witty and humorous response to a "diverting" letter from Walpole, which had been composed in verse. In order to do so, though – and to justify his deprecating depiction of Dennis as a comedic literary device on account of the fact that he was, as Mack phrases it, "distressingly incapable of applying the theoretical principles of his classical models in his own dramatic work"– Gray must prove his own literary merits.[170] The text is certainly not a "sentimental" one. The tone of it is completely different from the one of musing melancholy we hear in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", for instance, partly because of the palpably hyperbolic content and bathetic phrasing of the words attributed to Dennis at various points:

> My soul...
> First most devoutly having said its prayers,
> It tumbled down a thousand pair [*sic*] of stairs… [ll. 14; 17-18].

Descriptive passages in the poem are, however, often lyrically composed. Gray's learning is always evident – not only in imitative allusions to writers such as Milton and Dryden, as we have already seen, but in the very genre of the poem itself: lines spoken by the dead. English texts like Thomas Brown's parodic *Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1702) and Elizabeth Rowe's sincere *Friendship in Death, in Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728) had followed French texts such as Fontenelle's *Dialogues des Morts* (1683), which was itself an imitation of Lucian of Samosata's *Mortuorum Dialogi* (or *Dialogues of the Dead*): a work composed of "short and grimly ironic conversations between famous characters in the

[167] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op.cit.,* p. 231.
[168] *Ibid,* p. 248.
[169] *Ibid,* p. 231.
[170] Mack, p. 158.

underworld".[171] Situating himself within this literary tradition was more than just an exercise of wit for Gray. It was a way in which he could display the extent of his own talent and learning. The language of the sublime, and voices of the spectral – though used in the context of a parodic text, in this instance – prove to be powerful affective devices for Gray in his later bardic works.

The figure of an ancient bard appears in Gray's poetic works on several occasions prior to the publication of "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode" in 1757. In his "Translation from Propertius, *Elegies* III v. 1-2, 19-48", dated December 1738 in his Commonplace Book, Gray seems to conflate the speaking subject, denoted by the first-person object pronoun "me", with the third-person reference to the "bard":

> Love, gentle power, to peace was e'er a friend:
> Before the goddess' shrine we too, love's votaries, bend.
> Still may his bard in softer fights engage:
> Wars hand to hand with Cynthia let me wage. [ll. 1-4]

Gray's speaker shifts from the third-person to first-person swiftly, bolstered by allusions to poetic figures and sites in the succeeding lines. Cynthia – or Artemis, goddess of the moon in Greek mythology – is just one of the figures who Gray invokes from classical mythology in the poem. Bacchus, or Dionysus – the god who inspires creativity in music and poetry – is also named, as is Jove (god of victory and religion, associated with thunder and lightning). Castalia, the sacred spring of Apollo (brother of Cynthia, god of music, poetic inspiration and prophecy) and the Muses, and Aganippe – a fountain, dedicated to the Muses, considered to be a source of poetic inspiration in Greek mythology – are named as sites at which the poet longs to linger. The language of Gray's poetry, once again, takes on the rhetoric of the sublime. In reference to Pindus, the poet asks:

> Why does yon orb, so exquisitely bright,
> Obscure his radiance in a short-lived night… [ll. 37-38]

Once more, Gray is almost directly anticipating Burke's words on the sublime. It is worth remembering, of course, that the language or discourse of the sublime is one which predates Burke's *Enquiry*. Burke cites a line from Milton's *Paradise Lost* as an example of the sublime:

[171] Roger Lonsdale, *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, (London and Harlow: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1969), p. 13.

> …a light which by its very excess is converted into a species of darkness,
>
> Dark *with excessive* light *thy skirts appear,*
>
> Here is an idea not only poetical in an high degree, but strictly and philosophically just. Extreme light, by overcoming the organs of sight, obliterates all objects, so as in its effect exactly to resemble darkness.[172]

In Gray's translation, the language becomes increasingly sublime from this point. The speaker describes "torments", "Pangs without respite", "fires that ever glow", "Earth's monster-brood", "hissing terrors", a "bulk confined", "scares", "shadowy", "All angry heaven inflicts", "whirling", "fears", "scenes that hurt", "pictured horror" and "poetic woes". One of the images endowed with the most sublime associations in these lines is located in line 50: "Ixion's whirling wheel". Ixion, a king, was pinned to a fiery wheel by Zeus – the supreme God in Greek mythology – as punishment for attempting to seduce Zeus' wife, Hera; the wheel revolves unceasingly and eternally through the underworld.

But Ixion does have one moment of respite from his plight. Temporary consolation is afforded by the power of a bard, by the poet Orpheus, who was able to entrance wild beasts, such was the beauty of his singing and lyre playing. Having travelled to the underworld to rescue his wife, Eurydice, Orpheus charmed all – the Furies, Persephone, Hades – with his song and with his music, forcing the fiery wheel to cease in its revolutions, and thereby offering Ixion momentary respite from his suffering. Power, consolation and artistry are early connections that Gray draws with the figure of the poet or bard: a sublime power that can compete with a divine one, able to wage war "hand to hand" with a god, as well as one that can induce deep feeling and consolation.

Gray's Studies of Welsh and the Bardic

In May 1757, a blind Welsh harper named John Parry ("Parry Ddall") gave a concert at Cambridge that was to thrust the figure of the ancient Welsh bard into the forefront of Gray's imagination and, consequently, into the spotlight of the literary and artistic arena of the eighteenth century. Gray had started to compose "The Bard" in 1754, and had completed the first two sections by the late summer of 1755.[173] Having set it aside by 1756, though, Gray

[172] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op.cit.,* p.249.
[173] Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 471.

only returned to complete the poem in May 1757, inspired by Parry's performance given that same month.

In a letter to William Mason, sent from Cambridge in May 1757, Gray writes:

> …Mr. Parry has been here, and scratched out such ravishing blind harmony, such tunes of a thousand years old, with names enough to choak you, as have set all this learned body a dancing, and inspired them with due reverence for my old Bard, his countryman, whenever he shall appear. Mr. Parry, you must know, has put my Ode in motion again, and has brought it at last to a conclusion. 'Tis to him, therefore, that you owe the treat which I send you inclosed; namely, the breast and merry-thought, and rump too of the chicken which I have been chewing so long, that I would give the world for neck-beef or cow-heel.[174]

Gray's humorous chicken metaphor for his bardic composition – upon which he had been "chewing" for so long – indicates just how laborious the process of penning "The Bard" had been. Initially, Gray's motivation for composing the ode stemmed from two volumes of Thomas Carte's *History of England.* Carte was a historian, who had first proposed plans for a historical project on the English in 1738. The study took the form of four volumes but, due to the withdrawal of some of the financial support for his project – owing to controversy surrounding Carte's decision to favourably depict the practice of touching for the king's evil[175] – the publication process was a protracted one, with the volumes appearing in 1747, 1750, 1752 and 1755. The first of these volumes (1747) included an exploration of Druidism and a guide to Welsh poetry – which served as a foundation for Gray's own essay, "Cambri", in his Commonplace Book – while the second volume of Carte's work (1750) offers an account of Edward I and his subjugation of Wales, specifically referencing his order to massacre the Welsh Bards, the legend upon which Gray's ode is predicated.[176]

Carte's account of the bardicide is both inaccurate and unsubstantiated, as Robert L. Mack has noted: "it is more than likely that Gray was aware even as he read this description of

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[174]Thomas Gray and William Mason, Letter XXV: Mr. Gray to Mr. Mason - Cambridge, May, 1757, *The Poems and Letters of Thomas Gray with Memoirs of his Life and Writings*, (London: R. Priestley and W. Clarke, 1820), p. 243.

[175] The practice of a monarch laying their hands upon their sickly subjects in a belief that it would cure the "king's evil" – scrofula, a swelling of the lymph nodes caused by tuberculosis – was one that began with King Edward the Confessor in England (1003/4-1066) and Philip I (1052-1108) in France, and ceased in Britain following the death of Queen Anne in 1714. Carte's *History* included a tale of how a Bristol labourer, Christopher Lovell, had been cured of the king's evil by James Stuart, the "Old Pretender" – though it was later reported that the scrofula had returned. Carte's support for notion of the divine right of kings and for the Jacobite cause led to a loss of financial support for Carte in London. Publications such as the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported the fraudulence of Lovell's "cure".

[176] Edward D. Snyder, "Thomas Gray's Interest in Celtic", *Modern Philology*, Volume 11, No. 4, (April 1914), p. 561. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/432845, accessed on 26/06/14.

Edward's persecution of the bards that Carte's account was not only unsubstantiated, but very close to fictional".[177] Carte claims that the bards and the bardic tradition had been entirely eradicated as a result of Edward's rule:

> The onely set of men among the *Welsh*, that had reason to complain of *Edward*'s severity were the *Bards*, who used to put those remains of the antient *Britains* in mind of the valiant deeds of their ancestors: he ordered them all to be hanged, as inciters of the people to sedition. Politicks in this point got the better of the king's natural lenity: and those, who were afterwards entrusted with the government of the country, following his example, the profession becoming dangerous, gradually declined, and, in a little time, that sort of men was utterly destroyed.[178]

The finality of this claim is, of course, problematic, given that the bardic tradition was still very much being drawn upon – as well as actively re-engaged with in a performative sense – in the eighteenth century, with late eighteenth-century figures like Iolo Morganwg exemplifying this bardic renaissance of sorts. Antiquarian Thomas Percy, for example, expresses concerns about the authenticity of this legend in a letter to Welsh scholar Evan Evans in 1761:

> I am told you are acquainted with Mr. Gray, the poet. Pray has he any foundation for what he has asserted in his Ode on the British Bards, viz. that there is a tradition among the inhabitants of Wales, that our Edward the First destroyed all the British Bards that fell into his hands? The existence of such a tradition has been doubted.[179]

Satoko Ito-Morino has argued that Carte's inaccurate depiction of events can be attributed to the fact that his account is based on that of another – Sir John Wynn, whose seventeenth-century paper, *The History of the Gwedir Family*, was not published until 1770, but had nonetheless been consulted by Carte, as acknowledged in the introduction to Wynn's work when it was made available as a publication:[180]

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[177] Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 470.

[178] Thomas Carte, *History of England*, volume II, (London: 1747), p. 196. Available online at: http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW103149092&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE, accessed on 06/10/16.

[179] Thomas Percy to Evan Evans, (21 July 1761), in Evan Evans, *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards*, (Llandidloes: John Pryse, 1764). Available online at: http://archive.org/stream/somespecimensoft32767gut/32767-0.txt, accessed on 29/06/14.

[180] Satoko Ito-Morino, "Orality versus Literacy: A Consideration of Eighteenth-Century Welsh Cultural Nationalism", *Studies in Informatics, Shizuoka University*, volume 15, (March 2010), p. 5. Available online at: http://ir.lib.shizuoka.ac.jp/bitstream/10297/4831/1/100401001.pdf, accessed on 27/06/14.

> The MS. hath, for above a century, been so prized in North Wales, that many in those parts have thought it worth while to make fair and complete transcripts of it. One of these Carte had consulted, and he refers to it as his authority for the Welsh Bards having been massacred by Edward the First.[181]

Indeed, it is interesting that Wynn confidently asserts Edward's responsibility for the eradication of Welsh bardic culture while acknowledging that the same claim, made for Scotland, has been rightfully disproven:

> Edward the First hath been also accused of having destroyed all the ancient records and writings in Scotland, after his conquest of that kingdom. See this however very ably refuted by Sir David Dalrymple, in his *Examination into the supposed antiquity of the Regiam Majestatem…*[182]

Ito-Morino convincingly attributes this distinction, drawn by Wynn, to the fact that he was one of the most prominent gentry in North Wales, owner of the Gwydir estate in the vales of Conwy, whose endeavour to compose a family chronicle was predicated on a desire to "boast the antiquity and glory of his pedigree […] he claimed to be descended from Owain Gwynedd (c. 1100-1170), king of Gwynedd". According to Ito-Morino's reasoning, then, Wynn's fictitious depiction of the bardicide fundamentally constitutes a personal effort to "justify the lack of old bardic poems dedicated to such a great family as the Wynn[s]".

For Gray, demonstrating an awareness of historical accuracy was as important as creative inspiration in considerations and representations of the bardic. As Powell Jones has noted of Gray's response to Carte's *History*, "In this instance, as in many others…Gray showed plainly that he was both historian and poet."[183] Moreover, this was true of Parry as well: a harper and a historian. Parry's influence on Gray was twofold. Parry "treated both his instrument and the music that constituted its legacy with the seriousness of the scholar and the historian".[184] While his performances in London in April 1746 had been met by great acclaim, he had – prior to that – also established himself as a scholar of sorts, a bardic authority,

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[181] Daines Barrington, *The History of the Gwedir Family,* (London: B. White, 1770), pp. v-vi. Available online at Eighteenth Century Collections Online: http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=CW103140507&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE, accessed on 27/06/14.
[182] John Wynn, *ibid,* p. 62.
[183] William Powell Jones, *Thomas Gray, Scholar: The True Tragedy of an Eighteenth-Century Gentleman,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), p. 96.
[184] Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life,* p. 471.

collaborating with Evan Evans on a collection, *Antient British Music*, in 1742, which then led to two subsequent collections on the same theme.

How did Gray's scholarly appreciation of the bardic manifest itself? The answer lies primarily in the three volumes of Gray's Commonplace Book – all of which make reference to bards in offering both historical and poetic accounts of them. Gray's Commonplace Book has been described as the "single most important repository of Gray's autograph verse and prose"[185], and – especially where Gray's engagement with the bardic tradition is concerned – this is with good reason.

In the first volume of Gray's Commonplace Book, he introduces the reader to bards in the context of Druidism. Within this category, Gray discerns three main sub-groups: Druids themselves, defined as "religious men" and a "holy Race", as well as bards and vates:

> Strabo...mentions two other Orders of Men in great reverence (beside the Druids) the Bardic, & the Vates. the first were their Poets who sung the deeds of their Heroes to the Lyre, mention'd likewise by Deodorus, Marcellinus, Festus Pompeius, Posidonius ap: Athenoeum, Lucan &c.: the others, whom Marcellinus calls Eubages, studied & taught Metaphysicks, Natural Philosophy, & the Sublime Sciences. Caesar seems to have included them all under the name of Druids.[186]

The bards, the poets, are heralded as specifically Welsh in the second volume of Gray's Commonplace Book, which also contains a seventeen-page section called "Cambri" wherein Welsh verse forms are explored in great detail. As Mack outlines,

> Gray's interest in the origins of rhyme in English poetry…had led him deeper and deeper into the study of Welsh poetry and language. Throughout the early and mid-1750s, he became increasingly convinced that the measures of English poetry 'not improbably might have been borrowed from the Britons, as I am apt to believe, the rise of Rhyme itself was'.[187]

Kelsey Jackson Williams has also noted in a recent study that, despite his excursus into Septentrional linguistics, Gray eventually concluded:

> …subsequent to a complex plan of reading and communication with Welsh scholars which has yet to be fully unravelled, that Welsh was the ultimate source

[185] Margaret M. Smith, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts, Volume III, 1700-1800, Part 2*, (London: Mansell, 1989), p. 73.
[186] Thomas Gray, *Thomas Gray's Commonplace Book*, Vol. I, p. 310. Accessed at Pembroke College Library, University of Cambridge, on 14/08/15.
[187] Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 470.

> for English rhyme and filled the remainder of his notes for the projected history of English poetry with discussions of Welsh metre, bardic customs, and the authenticity, or lack thereof, of Geoffrey of Monmouth.[188]

Rhyme and metre emerge as key concerns in Gray's "Cambri" pages, which is unsurprising given the intrinsic link between (cultural) memory and verse that define the bardic tradition, and that Gray so reveres:

> The Inhabitants of Wales, removing their cattle & habitations from place to place…[ensured] that, if any one line in a stanza be remember'd, all the rest must of course be call'd to mind, & it is almost impracticable to forget, or mistake in any. The British Poetry, as well as the Language, hath a peculiarity, w^ch no other Language perhaps in the world hath: so that the British Poets in all ages, & to this day call their art Cyfrinach y Beirdd, or the Secret of the Poets. knowing this Art of the Poets, it is impossible, that any one word of the Language, w^ch is to be found in Poetry should be pronounced in any other man[n]er than is there used.[189]

Gray foregrounds the power of bardic memory in the Welsh tradition. Welsh poetic forms are, as such, seen as the impetus of true British verse. At a time when Welshness, and Celtic-ness, were under siege from Anglocentric efforts to subjugate them under the banner of Britishness, Gray's studies served to highlight facets of an independent and, indeed, pre-existing literary and cultural mode of writing – that of the original "Britons" of Britain:

> The proper & peculiar name of y^e Britains being call'd (as the Welsh their genuine remains call themselves at this day) Cumero, Cymro, & Cumeri. like – as a British or Welch – Womain Kumerae, & the tongue itself Kymraeg… In the ancientest of the British Poets, & others, it appears, that they constantly called themselves Prydhain, & their country Inis – Prydhain, the Isle of Britain. (Carte's History, V. 1, p. 5).[190]

Gray makes his reliance on Carte's *History* explicit, here. More than that, Gray makes his interest in engaging with and even reproducing forms of Welsh prosody very apparent. Specifically, Edward D. Snyder speculated many years ago that "it was perhaps from Parry that

[188] Kelsey Jackson Williams, "Thomas Gray and the Goths: Philology, Poetry, and the Uses of the Norse Past in Eighteenth-Century England", *Review of English Studies* (March 2014). Available online at: http://res.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2014/03/28/res.hgu024.full.pdf+html, accessed on 27/06/14.
[189] Thomas Gray, *Thomas Gray's Commonplace Book,* Vol. 2, p. 799. Accessed at Pembroke College Library, University of Cambridge, on 14/08/15.
[190] *Ibid.*

Gray came to understand something of the Welsh system of *cynghanedd*, which he occasionally reproduces in *The Bard*."[191]

"The Bard": A Pindaric Ode

Despite Gray's obvious fascination with Welsh prosody, its role in his verse has not been as important to scholars of his verse as it might have been. Although Snyder's study affords attention to Gray's use of Welsh sound patterning, his research dates from the 1920s; there has been little critical work conducted on the subject since. Gray's "The Bard" merits particular attention, not least because of the way in which it relies upon Welsh mythology, prosody and images in its presentation of the bardic. Snyder claims that, while imperfect, Gray's use of *cynghanedd* is integral to the poem. Snyder comments:

> An examination of Gray's poems shows that he used alliteration much more freely in *The Bard* than elsewhere, and it seems clear that by the use of these peculiar consonantal harmonies he was seeking to suggest a metrical system foreign to English poetry. Many Welshmen have attempted to use *cynghanedd* in English verse, but few have succeeded in producing poems of any dignity which conform strictly to the rules. The English language is so completely lacking in anything corresponding to the Welsh systems of inflection, initial mutation and *sandhi*, that the result is almost unattainable. Had Gray reproduced the effect more perfectly, *The Bard* would necessarily have been a less successful poem.[192]

Snyder's assertion here that Gray almost inevitably fails to accurately reproduce the effects and structures of *cynghanedd* is one that I would like to challenge.

The poem, adhering to the formal expectations of a Pindaric ode in its celebration of – via elegiac reverence for – the figure of the bard, as well as through its pervasive language of song and its triadic structure of a strophe, antistrophe and epode, nonetheless offered a thematically innovative model for acutely evocative verse premised upon imagined history. This is, specifically, due to the fact that Gray's ode is inflected by instances of *cynghanedd*: sound-patterning that is reliant upon a combination of alliteration, assonance and tight metrical structures. As Mererid Hopwood explains, *cynghanedd* is:

[191] Edward D. Snyder, *The Celtic Revival in English Literature 1760-1800,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923, p. 39.
[192] Snyder, p. 39.

> a term that is translated into English by a rather ugly phrase: 'Welsh strict metre'. But *cynghanedd* is a word that, in its essence, quite simply means 'harmony'...[which] takes us to the field of music.[193]

Gerard Manley Hopkins was, similarly, later to define *cynghanedd* as the "chiming of consonants", a form which he found to be "very rich in sound and imagery".[194] Implicit in the form are ideas of restriction and conformity, because of the strict rules which determine *cynghanedd* in its various forms; its alternative name of *canu caeth* literally translates as "the 'captive' or 'confined' song."[195]

Gray's poem itself gestures toward oppression or at the very least conformity of some kind at the outset through its form; an ode must adhere to a rhyme scheme as well as the wider triadic structure typical of the style. The first stanza, for instance, constitutes a sonnet of sorts. It is composed of the typical fourteen lines of a sonnet, while the rhythm generally oscillates between iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter, and concludes with an (albeit hypermetrical) heroic couplet:

I. I

"Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!
Confusion on thy banners wait,
Tho' fann'd by Conquest's crimson wing
They mock the air with idle state.
Helm, nor Hauberk's twisted mail,
Nor even thy virtues, Tyrant, shall avail
To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,
From Cambria's curse, from Cambria's tears!"
Such were the sounds, that o'er the crested pride
Of the first Edward scatter'd wild dismay,
As down the steep of Snowdon's shaggy side
He wound with toilsome march his long array.
Stout Glo'ster stood aghast in speechless trance:
"To arms!" cried Mortimer, and couch'd his quiv'ring lance.

[ll. 1-14]

In addition to the tight rhyme scheme (ababccddefefgg, reproduced in the second, fourth, fifth, seventh and eighth stanzas), the poem is internally ordered by instances of not just alliteration, but the more complex forms of *cynghanedd*. The closing heroic couplet of this stanza illustrates

[193] Mererid Hopwood, *Singing in Chains: Listening to Welsh Verse*, (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2004), pp. 1-2.
[194] Gerard Manley Hopkins, (3 April 1877), *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 38.
[195] Hopwood, p. xi.

adaptations and the merging of two main forms of *cynghanedd* – *cynghanedd groes* ("The Criss-Cross Harmony") and *cynghanedd sain* ("The Sonorous Harmony")[196]:

Stout Glo'ster | stood aghast | in speechless trance:
"To arms!" cried | Mortimer, and couch'd | his quiv'ring lance.

Cynghanedd groes is characterised by the parallelism of consonants across two feet while *cynghanedd sain* is notable for its alternative three feet or bars, the first two bound by rhyme and the last two bound by alliteration. Here, one may discern the echoing of consonants across two feet (common to both *cynghanedd groes* and *cynghanedd sain*), as well as the three-foot structure and internal rhyme specific to *cynghanedd sain*. Assonance pervades the poem as a whole, extending across lines ("Confusion on thy **ban**ners wait, / Tho' **fann**'d by Conquest's crimson wing"), and there are even arguably instances of another Welsh form tied with *cynghanedd* – *englyn*: lines of internal rhyme and half-rhyme, arranged in sets of three or four lines (depending on which of the twenty-four measures are used) which are composed, in total, of approximately thirty syllables:

On a rock, whose haughty brow	a
Frowns **o'e**r **o**ld Conway's f**oa**ming flood,	b
R**o**bed in the sable garb of w**oe**,	a
With haggard eyes the P**oe**t stood;	b

In the *englyn cyrch*, the last pair of lines are bound by an internal rhyme between the end of the third line and the middle of the fourth line; in the *englyn proest cadwynog*, lines one and three are full rhymes, as are lines two and four, but the two pairs of full rhymes form a half rhyme or *proest* with one another. Both forms of *englyn* are evident, mainly reliant upon the long "o" vowel sound connotative of lament. Gray trains the reader or listener's ear to hear the "o" sounds of "w**oe**" and "p**oe**t" – that fulfil the requirements of the *englyn cyrch* form – by the earlier instances of the sound in "**o**'er", "**o**ld", "f**oa**ming" and "r**o**bed". These forms of echoing – through alliteration, assonance, rhyme, syntactical parallelism and stanzaic structure – aurally reflect both the Bard's recurrent instruction to "Weave the warp, and weave the woof, / The winding-sheet of Edward's race" in the fourth and seventh stanzas, affording the poem with an internally rigid, web-like structure, as well as to draw attention to notions of cultural

[196] See Hopwood, pp. 31-47, for further details.

memory "re-eccho[ing]"; the Bard's song "repairs the golden flood, / And warms the nations with redoubled ray."

The reader is obliged to become an imaginative participant in the making of song, for, as Hopwood states:

> *cynghanedd* understood as 'harmony' suggests that a line of poetry, like a line of harmonized music, can move in two directions...The meaning of the line, and the end-rhyme, for there is almost always an end-rhyme, draws the listener from its beginning to end. (Note that your target audience is imagined primarily as a 'listener' not a 'reader'.) But the internal harmony between the words as they co-exist in varied, but highly organised, patterns of rhyme, assonance, alliteration and consonance, demands that the listener hears in other directions too.[197]

Engaging with *cynghanedd* is, as such, an exercise in active imagining as much as receptive, passive listening. Even Snyder acknowledges Gray's talent for the form when identifying line 49 ("Weave the warp, and weave the woof") as "an absolutely perfect example of *cynghanedd draws acennog*".[198] This form of *cynghanedd* is described by Hopwood as "The Bridging Harmony" – *acennog*, meanwhile, refers to an "accented" form – which is characterised by displaying two bars: the comma, as caesura, together with the co-ordinating conjunction "and", separates the two. While there is a slight variation in the consonants of each bar (w, v, t, w, r, p / w, v, t, w, f), the line consists of the typical seven beats associated with a line of *cynghanedd*. Moreover, the emphasis is on the sole stressed word of each bar – "weave" – with stress constituting the "most important characteristic of all" when one considers the various forms of *cynghanedd*, as outlined by Hopwood.[199]

One discerns Welsh contours through imagery in Gray's verse, too. Welsh locations are described – Cambria, Snowdon, Conway, Plinlimmon, Arvon, and the Severn as a site of English-Welsh contestation – while ancient Welsh characters appear (Cadwallo, Arthur, Elizabeth I of the historically Welsh Tudor family, Taliessin) in contrast to the English characters of oppression depicted such as Edward I, and Glo'ster and Mortimer: "Marcher Lords" for the King who were responsible for guarding the border and subjugating the Welsh.

The theme of the poem itself bears testament to the Welsh poetic tradition of vaticination: as Wilson has observed, Gray's Bard is granted "the prophetic voice, cursing the

[197] Hopwood, pp. 2-3.
[198] Snyder, p, 39.
[199] Hopwood, p. 24.

line of Edward and presaging various future miseries, all couched in the obscure and symbolic language characteristic of such prophecies"[200]:

> Gray's use of the prophetic voice is praised by George Campbell...as an excellent application of the obscure: 'It is all darkness to one who knows nothing of the English history, posterior to the reign of Edward the first, and all light to one who is well acquainted with that history'. However, by containing the prophecy within an already concluded period of history, Gray avoids any danger that it might acquire a continuing active influence. He calls upon the excitement of the sublimity of the prophet, without accepting the responsibility of the seer.[201]

Given that the poem is not written in the first-person voice of the Bard throughout, as well as the fact that Gray himself uses *cynghanedd* in composing his bardic verse, Wilson's assertion that Gray does not assume the responsibility of the seer is a problematic one. It is not only the lines sung by the ancient Welsh bard which use the sound patterning of *cynghanedd*. The extract from lines 15-18 which I analysed earlier in this chapter, for example, also implement the rhymes and alliteration of *cynghanedd.*

Some contemporary critics of Gray's work praised the poem's obscurity of setting, too. The *Monthly Review* of August 1757 claimed that:

> The circumstances of grief and horror in which the Bard is represented, those of terror in the preparation of the votive web, and the mystic obscurity with which the prophecies are delivered, will give as much pleasure to those who relish this species of composition, as anything that has hitherto appeared in our language, the Odes of Dryden himself not excepted.[202]

Obscurity is a key facet of Gray's works, though it was not always well-received by readers and critics. Some, including Walpole, urged Gray to provide some explanatory notes to accompany his poems. Walpole stated in 1757 that although "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard" were undoubtedly "two amazing odes…they are sublime – consequently I fear a little obscure".[203] Gray, however, refused, lest it compromise the quality of his works, asserting: "I

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[200]James A. J. Wilson, "The Orator, The Prophet, and the Bard: Three Eighteenth-Century Prophetic Voices", (British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies conference paper, 2005), pgh 9. Available online at: http://users.ox.ac.uk/~lady1262/BSECSpaper2005.html, accessed on 23/04/12.

[201] *Ibid.*

[202] *Monthly Review*, XVII (August, 1757), p. 242, as cited in W. Powell Jones' "The Contemporary Reception of Gray's 'Odes'", *Modern Philology*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Aug., 1930), p. 73. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/433234, accessed on 23/04/12.

[203] Horace Walpole writing in a letter to Sir Horace Mann, 4 August 1757, *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Oxford,* (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), p. 309.

do not love notes…They are signs of weakness…If a thing cannot be understood without them, it had better be not understood at all".[204] Of particular note is Gray's assertion that his works would seem particularly obscure and inaccessible to female readers: a troubling claim, especially when considering Felicia Hemans' depiction of and intense engagement with the bardic. Gray insisted that:

> …one thing I must say, (but this is sacred; & under the seal of confession) there is no Woman, that can take pleasure in this kind of composition. [I]f Parts only & Imagination & Sensibility were required, one might (I doubt not) find them in that Sex full as easily as in our own: but there is a certain measure of learning necessary, & a long acquaintance with the good Writers ancient & modern, w^{ch} by our injustice is denied to them. [A]nd without this they can only catch here & there a florid expression, or a musical rhyme, while the Whole appears to them a wild obscure unedifying jumble.[205]

It seems ironic that Gray should make such a claim, given that one of Samuel Johnson's many criticisms of "The Bard" was that he objected to the very notion that a bard would ever weave a winding sheet: an idea which, Johnson claimed, could only originate from and was "very properly the work of female powers, as the act of spinning the thread of life in another mythology".[206]

In the end, Gray relented slightly, and agreed to provide an introductory Advertisement and four brief notes for "The Bard", but did so reluctantly. As the Reverend John Mitford remarked in his critical essay on Gray's works:

> It is well known, that this poem had been accused of obscurity; to obviate which, Gray found it necessary to add some explanatory notes…But…it is to be considered that some degree of obscurity must always attend the *prophetic poem*; that he who wishes it otherwise, does not demand a prophecy, but a direct narrative.[207]

[204] Thomas Gray writing in a letter to Horace Walpole, 11 July 1757, *The Letters of Thomas Gray, Chronologically Arranged from the Walpole and Mason Collections*, volume 1, (London, 1827), p. 15.
[205]Thomas Gray, *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, volume 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 478.
[206]Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. John H. Middendorf, volume XXIII, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 1469.
[207]The Reverend John Mitford, *The Poems of Thomas Gray with Critical Notes, a Life of the Author, and An Essay on His Poetry, by the Reverend John Mitford*, (London: White, Cochrane, and Co., 1814), p. cliv.

Gray's readers still struggled with the obscure content of the poem, though. Consequently, in 1768, a complete set of historical notes were supplied by Gray for his readers, although he defiantly stated that

> as to the notes I do it out of spite, because the Publick did not understand the two odes (w^{ch} I have call'd Pindaric) tho' the first was not very dark, & the second alluded to a few common facts to be found in any six-penny History of England by way of question & answer for the use of children…[208]

It is difficult when reading these lines not to associate them with a similarly defiant declaration made just thirty years later by Gray's most immediate bardic successor, William Blake: "That which can be made explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care".[209] For both poets, the richness, obscurity and, thus, sublimity of the imagery of the poems was to be, if anything, revered.

Richard Bentley's Illustrations to Accompany Gray's Verse

It is important not to see Gray's "The Bard" in isolation from his other poems – nor, indeed, from the artwork which was inspired by it. "The Bard" was printed alongside another Pindaric ode: "The Progress of Poesy", composed between 1751 and 1754, and originally entitled "Ode in the Greek Manner" until 1756, when Gray changed the title to the "Powers of Poetry" – before, finally, settling on its final title of "The Progress of Poesy" in 1768. As we shall see in the next chapter, Blake – in his watercolour illustrations of Gray's poetry – was keen to emphasise that the two texts ought to be read in dialogue with one another.

Though set in the world of the classical rather than the realm of the Celtic, it is not difficult to see how "The Progress of Poesy" constitutes an ideal poetic counterpart to "The Bard". Opening with an invocation, an apostrophe to the Aeolian lyre, the former is similarly rich in musical references, the sublimity of the "rich stream of music" evident throughout – "Deep, majestic…strong", it makes the "rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar"; where "shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains roam / The Muse has broke the twilight-gloom". Mountains, catalysts for sublime experience, are referenced frequently. Helicon, a sacred mount of the Muses, is cited as the source of inspiration which will stimulate the "lyre divine".

[208] Gray, *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, volume 3, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 1002.
[209] William Blake, in a letter to the Reverend Dr Trussler, 23 August 1799, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1965), p. 702.

The speaker tells how "each old poetic mountain / Inspiration breathed around". Once again, intensity of light prompts sublime darkness:

> He saw; but blasted with excess of light,
> Closed his eyes in endless night. [ll. 101-102]

There is more than a hint of these lines to be found in "The Bard", too:

> He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's height
> Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night. [ll. 143-144]

In the first couplet, it is the speaker's sight which is lost to endless night; in the second, it is the bard himself. It is always his voice, however, that lives on: the poetry, or the song, of the bard.

Imagery – and the importance of, if not the visual, then the visionary – is foregrounded by both Gray and his literary successors as being of equal importance to the aural when representing the bardic. While his comments on Gray's two Pindaric odes were, as we have already seen, far from favourable, Johnson was nonetheless impressed by Gray's use of imagery in his poems. The Bard, Johnson says, is "well described", and the imagery associated with Welsh poetry is "preserved, perhaps often improved".[210] One particular image has dominated visual adaptations of the poem, and it is the moment we have just seen described: the bard, in his last moments, plunging with his harp from the mountain's height to the torrents – the "endless night" – beneath.

The first illustration to respond to Gray's poem, and to this specific moment, was Richard Bentley's, which appeared as a tailpiece to "The Bard" when it was printed by James Dodsley for the fifth edition of *Designs* in 1766. Bentley had also produced several sketches for the poem[211]. However, the latter were considered to be a great disappointment by Walpole, who had commissioned Bentley to produce the images so that they could accompany the texts of the two Pindaric odes when he published them at his own Strawberry Hill Press. When Walpole printed the texts between 16 July and 8 August 1957, he did so without including illustrations to accompany them. The image below – the one that Dodsley printed – was produced slightly later, in the mid-1760s, when Bentley had left Walpole and Strawberry Hill:

[210] Johnson, 1469-1470.
[211] These images are discussed further in Chapter Two in the wider context of visual representations of the bard.

[212]

Rather than standing upon the cliff edge, about to jump – as in many subsequent images – the bard, clutching his harp, is in the act of falling or, rather, jumping; his stance is one of defiance, his right arm thrust upward to the sky, cloak billowing, while he himself plummets downward. The contours of the bard's cloak, emphasised through its darker shading, mirrors the outline of the harp which the bard holds; figure and object are presented as inextricable, even at the end. Unlike Bentley's earlier illustrations to "The Bard", there is far less emphasis on the scenery

[212] Richard Bentley, tailpiece illustration to "The Bard", *Designs by Mr. R. Bentley, for Six Poems by Mr. T. Gray,* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, in Pall Mall, 1766), p. 55.

here; instead, the figure of the bard dominates at least a third of the image. We are only given as much of the landscape as we require in order to be able to place the scene, above the torrents. As Loftus Jestin has remarked,

> The design succeeds where the others fail; it shows an engagement on Bentley's part which it seems he lacked for the earlier illustration. Grasping his harp, the bard raises his right arm in defiance as he leaps from a black and clearly defined promontory to his death in a roaring cataract.[213]

The bard is foregrounded, here, in a way that he is not in Bentley's previous illustrations. F. I. McCarthy claims that, like Gray, Bentley had never seen Snowdon[214]. Perhaps this is why Bentley steers clear of trying to depict it in this image, thereby avoiding the "surprisingly flat" and "poorly integrated landscape" that Jestin has noted in Bentley's earliest depictions of the poem.[215] Whether this is the reason or not, though, it is certainly fitting that the bard himself is foregrounded or, at the very least, afforded equal dominance in the image to the landscape, for the sublimity of the scenes that Gray depicts in his bardic poems are vested in the power and transcendence associated with the figure of the bard himself as much as – even more than in – the dramatic landscape.

"The Triumphs of Owen" and Gray's Other Welsh Poems

Just over a decade after "The Bard" was published, in 1768, Gray was to release another poem inspired by the bardic: "The Triumphs of Owen. A Fragment". Gray's poem, begun in 1764, is widely believed by scholars to have been based upon a translation of an original Welsh poem – "Arwyrein Owen Gwynedd" by Gwalchmai ap Meilyr – by his Welsh contemporary and scholar, Evan Evans. An English translation of the original poem was offered, by Evans, in *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards* in 1764. However, as Arthur Johnston notes, a Latin version would have been available to Gray since 1758, when Gray received a copy of "Arwyrein Owen Gwynedd" and two other Welsh poems from Daines Barrington, the very same antiquarian who was to provide the introduction to Sir John Wynn's

[213] Loftus Jestin, *The Answer to the Lyre: Richard Bentley's Illustrations for Thomas Gray's Poems,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 220.
[214] F. I. McCarthy, "*The Bard* of Thomas Gray, its Composition and its Use by Painters", in *National Library of Wales Journal,* volume xiv, no. 1, (Summer, 1965), p. 109.
[215] Jestin, p. 218.

The History of the Gwedir Family in 1770, which had stirred up both Carte's and – by proxy – Gray's interest in the medieval bardicide of 1282.[216]

Gray's poem, like the ode upon which it is based, offers a poetic response to the military victories of Welsh Prince (later King) Owain Gwynedd in the latter half of the twelfth century, when Henry II invaded Gwynedd with three fleets of ships.[217] The original Welsh poem was, itself, regarded as inherently sublime by Gray's contemporaries. Welsh poet Goronwy Owen admired the emphasis on dramatic and sublime effect rather than accuracy integral to the original poem, commenting that:

> Gwalchmai gives you no definite number of any thing, but only of the three fleets which came combined for the ruin of one principality[…]he does not tell you who killed who, or how many were killed of the enemy, but you may guess at the slaughter of that day by the ebb-tide not being discoverable at Menai, the ebbing of the water being supplied by a torrent of blood. Tho it is an hyperbole…it is a sublime and beautiful one.[218]

Thomas Percy, meanwhile, commented that:

> It contains a large portion of the sublime. The images are very bold and animated: and poured forth with such rapidity, as argues an uncommon warmth of imagination in the bard. Whose mind seems to have been so filled with his subject, and the several scenes of the War appear to have so crowded in upon him, that he has not leisure to mark the transitions, with that cool accuracy which a feebler Genius would have been careful to have done. It is one continued fiery torrent of poetic flame.[219]

However, unlike the original poem – which offers "little that is pictorial in the Welsh, no simile or metaphor"[220] – Gray's rendition not only, like "The Bard", engages with the distinctly Welsh emphasis upon stress and sophisticated alliteration and other forms of sound-patterning, but also offers a rich visual poetic landscape.

The opening stanza, for instance, offers the seven-syllable line characteristic of *cynghanedd* while introducing Owen as the hero of the poem:

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[216] Arthur Johnston, "The Triumphs of Owen", *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 43 (August 1960), p. 276. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/510420, accessed on 17/06/14.
[217] Johnston, p. 276.
[218] Goronwy Owen to William Morris, (21st May 1754), *The Letters of Goronwy Owen*, ed. J. H. Davies, (Cardiff, 1924), pp. 110-113.
[219] Thomas Percy, *The Correspondence of Thomas Percy and Evan Evans*, ed. A. Lewis, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), pp. 13-14.
[220] Johnston, p. 280.

Owen's praise demands my song,
Owen swift, and Owen strong;
Fairest flower of Roderic's stem,
Gwyneth's shield and Britain's gem.
He nor heaps his brooded stores,
Nor on all profusely pours;
Lord of every regal art,
Liberal hand and open heart. [1-8]

These panegyric opening lines consist of rhyming couplets, celebrating Owen's character, which imitate the Welsh form:

Arddwyreaf hael o hil Rodri,
Ardwyad gorwlad, gwerlin teithi. [1-2]

Johnston suggests that Gray would not have had an opportunity to consult Evans' English prose translation at this point in composition; his interpretations of the Welsh would have been predominantly visual, for example, discerning the couplet structure in the Welsh version, usually ending in an "i".[221] The opening stanza must, as such, be seen as a combination of influence – the metre and rhyme of the Welsh text, and the content of the Latin one, for:

> …Gray can hardly have had Evans's English version 'neither hoardeth nor coveteth riches' before him when he wrote 'Nor on all profusely pours'. This would seem to be an interpretation of 'cumulat' that implies the omission of 'in omnes', an interpretation that Gray seems to have considered permissible with a gloss that clearly required some expansion. Gray's view of Owen's liberality is based on Aristotle's definition of the liberal man as one who 'will give for the sake of the noble, and rightly; for he will give to the right people, the right amounts, and at the right time'.[222]

As Johnston points out, Gray "chose the heptasyllabic couplet, influenced probably by the knowledge that it was a common Welsh metre".[223] Further, the trochaic rhythm:

> …with its incantatory effect and speed of movement, together with the strong break which comes between the rhyme word and the accented opening of each line, reproduces part of the characteristic line-by-line movement of the Welsh.[224]

[221] Johnston, p. 279.
[222] *Ibid,* p. 281.
[223] *Ibid,* p. 280.
[224] *Ibid.*

While Gray attempts to reproduce alliterative patterns, here, in accordance with the complex phonological and syntactical patterns of *cynghanedd*, we are provided with more basic instances than those evident in "The Bard". We note the parallelism and ready alliteration of "Owen swift, and Owen strong" [2], for example, or the effusive fricatives found in noun phrases like "Fairest flower" [3], for instance.

It is only after the first stanza that we truly discern the extent to which the bardic and the sublime are conflated in Gray's poem. Such a link becomes manifest in the second section of the poem, in which Gray adapts the reference to the three fleets in the original Welsh version of the poem "from bare statement to vivid picture"[225]:

> Black and huge along they sweep,
> Burdens of the angry deep. [ll. 17-18]

The tone is ominous, and the sounds are heavy. Composed of primarily monosyllabic words, these lines signpost imminent peril, partly through the alliteration and syntactically paralleled use of the hard "b" bilabial sound. The phrase "proudly riding" in line 12 is an exact echo of line 72 in "The Bard" ("While proudly riding o'er the azure realm / In gallant trim the gilded Vessel goes), describing the fleet, which is more than matched by the bravery of the protagonist: "Dauntless on his native sands / The dragon-son of Mona stands" [19-20]. The first half of this couplet is one that Gray himself invents, rather than translates, in order to bring, as Johnston says,

> …into the context of the poem the sympathy with Owen as defender of his territory against massive invasion which Gwalchmai, writing for Owen's court, could take for granted…Gray has prepared the way for the battle scene, by providing a centre from which to describe it – before and around Owen the confusion rages…In the Welsh the battle scene is not described, but conveyed in a rapid series of images that, coupled with the imitative sounds in the Welsh, create the impression of confused and violent conflict.[226]

We are, indeed, then confronted by a set of violent images, as reinforced by the strength of the syntactical parallelism:

> There the thundering strokes begin,
> There the press and there the din;

[225] Johnston, p. 281.
[226] *Ibid*, p. 282.

Talymalfra's rocky shore
Echoing to the battle's roar…[ll. 23-26]

…There Confusion, Terror's child,
Conflict fierce, and ruin wild,
Agony that pants for breath,
Despair and honourable death. [ll. 37-40]

"Thundering", "din", "battle's roar", "Confusion", "Terror's child", "Conflict fierce", "ruin wild", "Agony", "Despair", "death" – all of these words come together to form a language of the sublime. The personification of abstractions like "Agony" is an interesting stylistic choice on Gray's part. Johnston attributes it to Gray's desire to translate Gwalchmai's abstractions "into figures swiftly visualized by an eighteenth-century reader" – a difficult endeavour, given his wish to "re-create the animation and 'fire' of his original, while varying his method of heightening the expression and ornamenting his style."[227] Personification was, in light of this, an ideal technique for Gray to adopt. As Johnston says,

> The use of personification was a recognized means of heightening the style and in particular of producing sublimity. Gray's figures are what Addison termed 'Poetical Phrases', 'just shown without being engaged in any Series of Action'. They achieve conciseness, suggesting the battle 'only by its Adjuncts and Effects' and by the force of suggestion – impelling 'the imagination to build upon the merest hints' – achieve sublimity. The force of their appeal was explained by Joseph Trapp: 'the Mind of Man does not love to have too minute a Detail of Particulars; but takes a Pleasure in having Room for Imagination, and in forming a Judgment of what is not express'd from what is'.[228]

This "force of suggestion" is, of course, true of the form of the poem as well as the content. Having been informed at the poem's outset that it is but a "fragment", the reader or listener is immediately encouraged to engage with, and imaginatively fill in, the interpretative gaps which the poem presents. As Johnston says, it is "difficult to believe that Gray deliberately published it unfinished".[229] What seems more likely is that Gray wanted to encourage a mode of collective authorship, as reflected by his decision against listing the author of the original poem, thereby presenting the poem as a communal cultural inheritance, and gesturing at the oral culture from which it emerged.

[227] Johnston, p. 283.
[228] *Ibid.*
[229] *Ibid,*p. 284.

It is not only oral culture that Gray's depiction of the bard signposts, but also the traditional role of the bard as a panegyrist. As with "The Triumphs of Owen", Gray produced three other Welsh lays in praise of heroes from Welsh history: "The Death of Hoel", "Caradoc" and "Conan". All three texts were printed by William Mason in 1775. While the original source for the poems was the sixth-century *Gododdin* of Aneurin, a bard, Gray was reliant upon Evan Evans' translations into English; Gray did not understand Welsh well enough to be able to translate from the original Welsh texts.

It seems unsurprising that Gray's final image from "The Bard" – "headlong from the mountain's height / Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night" – should have proven to be depicted and replicated in visual artworks and verse numerous times over the course of the long eighteenth century, given that Gray himself keeps echoing these lines across his texts. The opening lines of "The Death of Hoel", for instance, almost seem to start where "The Bard" concludes:

> Had I but the torrent's might
> With headlong rage and wild affright [ll. 1-2]

The end-rhymes match those of "the Bard", the setting is the same, there is shared imagery of "the roaring tide" and "the torrent", and the word "headlong" resurfaces in almost exactly the same syntactical position. This seems fitting, in light of the fact that the power of the bard lies in the transcendence of his song; his voice, his verse, carries across historical periods, different landscapes, and reverberates across different texts, even when regarding a number of varied protagonists. In "The Death of Hoel", the bard laments the loss of Hoël: a figure of such virtue, that – when asking Madoc if he could marry his daughter, "the lovely maid" – he "asked no heaps of hoarded gold" for she was "Alone in nature's wealth arrayed". The final couplet is a reflection, by the bard, on his vocation; having sung of Hoel's death, as well as the death of "twice two hundred warriors", he says that "I, the meanest of them all, / That live to weep and sing their fall." The bard is a figure of affect, an agent of catharsis, a voice who affords posterity, relaying past events to those in the present, and even foretelling events of the future.

Wild, natural imagery dominates these poems, as it does in "The Bard". In "Caradoc", the eponymous protagonist is compared with a "tusky boar", or a "bull, with sullen roar", who advances on his enemies. In "Conan", the hero's military prowess is compared with "the flame's devouring force", "the whirlwind in its course" and "the thunder's fiery stroke". The height of praise that can be afforded by the bard in these poems is comparison – or conflation – with the forces of nature. The style of these poems is, in this way, comparable to that of

Ossian, Macpherson's supposed translations of ancient Scots poetry, which "[f]rom the moment Gray first encountered [them]…his enthusiasm and interest – and very possibly his suspicions regarding their authenticity – were raised".[230] Samuel Johnson had praised Gray as a "great antiquarian"[231], and this is certainly corroborated by the detailed notes and research on Welsh prosody, history and, on occasion, language that can be found in the three volumes of his Commonplace Book.

Nevertheless, it is not only the sublime imagery which unites Gray's bardic poems but their musicality: the explicit reminders that we are to hear these poems, as much as we are to read them and to imagine the scenes visually invoked through his use of imagery. In "Ode for Music", composed between February and April 1769, the poem is divided into sections through the use of musical terminology: "Air", "Chorus", "Recitative", "Quartetto" and "Grand Chorus". Again, this supports the notion of collective bardic song: the reader, or the audience, should be active participants in the verse. It is notable that overt reference to the figure of the bard in this poem falls under one of the "Recitative" sections. In opera, this indicates a moment in song where the singer is allowed to replicate the rhythms of ordinary speech, and is associated with moments of storytelling. Thus, while "the sainted sage, the bard divine" is linked with language indicative of the heavenly or otherworldly in this section – "empyrean", "divine", "genius", "shine", "celestial", "high", "bless", "soul", "choral", "sublime" – we are simultaneously reminded that the bard is but an ordinary man, a figure who walks among us, who is at once very human and emotional as well as powerful and prophetic; he speaks as, and to, common man, but the quality of his verse, his speech and his song transcends the ordinary.

This is perhaps where the appeal of the bardic voice lies for Gray. In depicting and ventriloquising the bard, Gray himself is able to compose verse which is at once emotional, imaginative and sanctified by the weight of bardic history and authority, this last notion bolstered by dramatic landscapes, allusions to the forces of nature and the rhetoric of the sublime. As Gray himself stated in reference to composition of "The Bard", part of the appeal of producing it as a text was that "I felt myself the bard".[232] Gray's reluctance to publish his works has been well-documented, and it seems entirely possible that speaking as "a bard" – rather than writing in the voice of Gray personally – would have been preferable to the poet. As Johnston ruminates:

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[230] Mack, p. 514.
[231] Johnson, p. 480.
[232] Thomas Gray, "Reminiscences of Gray" by the Reverend Norton Nicholls (18 November, 1805), published in *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray and the Reverend Norton Nicholls with Other Pieces Hitherto Unpublished,* ed. the Reverend John Mitford, (London: William Pickering, 1843), p. 34.

> before *The Progress of Poesy* he had been mainly concerned with his own experiences as a suffering and thinking human being. His poems record his coming to terms with his own temperament and difficulties. The significance they have…derives from the reader's sense of the validity of the personal experience underlying them. In *The Bard* Gray is using historical material unrelated to his own experience, and conceived purely in imaginative terms…He shows a poet accepting the facts of his situation, lamenting but triumphing, deriving comfort from his imaginative and prophetic power to understand the nature of existence.[233]

There is a consolation implicit in the posterity of the bard – through his verse, his song, and his rootedness in cultural memory and in landscape – which is not available to Gray personally. The consolation to be found in bardic verse is, as such, personal as much as it is national or communal; the bard is represented as a solitary figure, but always sings of and to others, his song carrying across landscapes, ages and communities, which any poet may seek to emulate. His song lives on in cultural memory, in oral tradition, and in communities. Poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were, of course, not composing bardic verse in isolation; various writers were toying with similar mythologies, as proven by Gray's correspondence with James Beattie in July 1770, wherein he offers the Scottish poet advice on how to complete his composition of *The Minstrel*: a poem which, unlike Gray's "Bard", Samuel Johnson was to publically laud on its publication in 1771, and which Wordsworth also praised. The bard, as an individual, also acts as an agent of co-operation, choral collaboration and community in the context of the bardic mode, and of the bardic sublime. He is a figure at the centre of a shared discourse, and a shared history: a history which is obscure enough that it affords a rich resource for creative imaginings and re-imaginings to many different individuals.

Despite Gray's evident learning, illustrated most clearly by the detail and extent of his research into Welsh history and prosody in his Commonplace Book, his engagement with the ancient Welsh bard and with the category of the bardic is primarily imaginative, rather than historical; it is based on association – on what the figure of the ancient bard represents or symbolises – and creative depictions of the bard and the landscape that he, according to tradition, inhabits: Snowdon, the rugged, sublime Welsh landscape. While keen to display and assert his historical knowledge, he ultimately always embraces the imagined rather than the documented. In "The Bard", for instance, Johnston argues that the names

> Hoel and Llewellyn in the Antistrophe, are chosen for their soundingness, not because they were in fact late thirteenth-century poets…Gray is offering this poem

[233] Johnston, pp. 15-16.

> as an historical and mythical construct, not as personal experience. *His* Bard he sees as sufficiently primitive to be allowed to think of the magical properties of verse, as the Greeks had thought of the verse of Orpheus…The Bard's lament merges with sublime description as the scenery around suggests to him the images of his verse.[234]

Imagery – in terms of thinking about the bard as an image or symbol, as well as of the visionary qualities associated with the ancient bard, and of the sublime landscape with which he is associated – is of equal importance to song in bardic verse, and this is a facet of the bardic sublime which will be explored in more depth in the next chapter which illustrates how, for Blake, as for many other artists and poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Gray's depiction of the ancient Welsh bard – while it met mixed reviews on its initial publication – went on to be a phenomenally influential one for visual and literary artists alike, especially those in the Romantic period. The bard was a prototype for such poets.

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What is clear, then, is that Gray's Bard had a significant impact on his eighteenth-century audience. Not only did Gray succeed in romanticising and reinvoking the ostensible foreignness of Welsh poetic forms through the medium of the English language; he also served to effect a response that was more than just nationalistic, more than just political: it was aesthetic, embracing the musical, the lyrical and the visual, drawing on the associations with obscurity and horror that characterise both representations of the bardic, and of the sublime. Gray increasingly and consciously affiliates his poetic role with the vocation of the bard: a voice of authority, power, prophecy, consolation, both political and affective, human and spiritual. It is, as such, not difficult to see why the ancient bard would similarly appeal to Blake as a visionary artist, poet and thinker of the Romantic period; in the next chapter, I will start by considering how Gray's words inspired Blake's bardic images and, in turn, how the figure of the bard – the poet – becomes progressively foregrounded and revered in Blake's poetry.

[234] Johnston, p. 12.

Chapter Two: "Hear the voice of the Bard! / Who Present, Past & Future sees"

William Blake

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees
Whose ears have heard,
The Holy Word,
That walk'd among the ancient trees.[235]

Four main questions shape this chapter. First: where does Blake's interest in the figure of the bard emerge from? Secondly, what does the bardic mean to Blake? What, thirdly, does the bard represent? Finally, how does Blake engage with notions of the bardic? That is to say, how does the bard figure in his poetic vision? These questions will, to some extent, overlap with one another throughout, and so they will not be addressed sequentially. Rather, I will start by introducing the bard's arrival to Blake's eighteenth-century world and works by outlining a key existing critical response to Blake's bardic sublime: that of Vincent De Luca. Then, I consider the medium that propelled and inflected Blake's poetry: that of the visual arts. Finally, I turn to Blake's poetic corpus, examining his use of the bardic sublime in order to illustrate how integral the figure of the bard, and a rhetoric of the bardic, prove to be in articulating his vision of the divine imaginative community in both the textual and the visual.

An Introduction to Blake's Bardic Sublime

Blake's bardic sublime in many ways eludes fixed meaning and neat definition. The figure of Blake's bard, wandering from the early pastoral works of *Songs* across to the later prophetic books, is one who at once embodies flux – a malleable motif of pathos, power, prophecy at different points – and also transcends temporal divisions: a voice of past, present and future. Presented early on as a benevolent shepherd-like guide to the reader, he is later visually invoked as a druidic God in the figure of Urizen: the visual depiction of the bard of *Songs* is conflated with the tyrannous textual protagonist of *Urizen* in the plates' images. By *Milton* and

[235] William Blake, 'Introduction', *Songs of Experience*, (1794), as published in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, (New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House Inc., 1988), p. 18, ll. 1-5.

Jersualem, however, the bard is explicitly presented as the poetic hero. He signals prophecy, futurity, and consolation, as well as being a figure within the poems themselves. He acts as a signifier of Blake as narrator and as a means of foregrounding the role of the reader as imaginative agent. Blake's engagement with the bardic is, in this way, analogous to his conception of the holistic divine community: as all are one in the divine body, Jesus (or, in Blake's poetics, Jerusalem), so are all united imaginatively through the figure of the bard – a symbol, and vehicle, of imaginative autonomy.

Vincent Arthur De Luca's *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (1991) offers an interesting starting point when considering how the rhetoric of the bardic and the aesthetics of the sublime intersect, and to what effect, in Blake's poetic corpus. While overlapping with De Luca's interest in temporality, flux, sound, syntax and metamorphosis, I will – throughout this chapter – take his scholarship on "The Bardic Style" as my point of departure, rather than as the framework of my argument. In particular, I will be focusing on De Luca's emphasis on continuity and discontinuity in Blake's verse. Rather than following De Luca's analysis of Blake's bardic sublime in relation to the theories of Lowth and Burke, and attempting to ascertain to which of these models the Blakean bardic sublime bears strongest resemblance, I concentrate instead on the manifestations and roles of the bardic in Blake's poetry, as well as how these are used to sublime effect. As such, it seems fitting to outline what I consider to be De Luca's main observations on the bardic and the figure of the bard in Blake's poetry – together with my responses to these – before turning to focus and expand upon my own conceptions of Blake's bard and his sublime bardic style.

How, then, does De Luca understand Blake's sublime "bardic style"? The first point to note is that De Luca posits Blake's bardic style with, and against, another: his "iconic style", defined as a "passage of verse that presents an image of totality, of an 'all' concentrated within formal bounds".[236] De Luca insists that, in Blake's verse, there is an

> …interplay of the two sublime modes [which] reconstitutes itself on the stylistic level, giving rise to what I call a "bardic" style and an "iconic" style. The first is characterized by devices appropriate to temporal chronicle and to the achievement of effects of flux, boundlessness, and indefinite extension. The second, which is hieratic, incantatory, and self-enclosed, tends, in contrast, to arrest narrative and to collapse temporality into a hard-edged "now" of intellectual intensity.[237]

[236] Vincent Arthur De Luca, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 80.
[237] *Ibid,* p. 6.

Blake's contribution to eighteenth-century sublime discourse is placed alongside that of Gray and Macpherson by De Luca. He emphasises how Blake self-consciously engages with such discourse, drawing heavily on existing literature and debates. De Luca contends that: "Blake…holds a special place in this movement, even if it went unrecognized by his contemporaries; he is the authentic strong Bard of the eighteenth-century sublime."[238] Furthermore, De Luca praises Blake for conjuring a bardic voice, inflected and described through a sublime rhetoric: an endeavour that had eluded his contemporaries, desperate though they had been to capture it. As De Luca phrases it:

> Gray and Collins yearned for such a figure to succeed the giants of the past and despaired of his arrival; Macpherson and Chatterton needed this Bard so desperately that they took to manufacturing him; in Blake this desired figure is realized, and his career represents the first flowering of the sublime aesthetic into major poetry.[239]

The reason that Blake's bard finds a voice in the way that others' do not, I argue, is because he is not merely invoked as a motif; he is an at once human and super-human voice, narrator, character, human, poet, sage, seer - and an imaginative role model to the reader. The only comparable bardic figure is Ossian, though the tone of the Ossianic writings is distinctly more elegiac than that of Blake's works featuring the bard, which is at times elegiac, at times stubbornly defiant, and almost always confidently prophetic.

While De Luca suggests that there are two different styles integral to the Blakean sublime, "bardic" and "iconic", I contend that what De Luca terms as the iconic can, in fact, be seen as a facet of the category of Blake's bardic sublime. De Luca defines the "excess" of iconic style as "of an altogether contrary sort, involving a clearly marked outer form and an astonishingly compressed inclusiveness within". This contrasts with his depiction of the bardic as "presenting a vision of diffusion, blurred edges, instability of central focus, and forms in excessive flux."[240] Furthermore, De Luca outlines a number of other characteristics unique to the iconic, rather than bardic, sublime models he presents. The former is distinguished by, for example, Blake's use of the sublime of the Bible; syntactic or what Lowth labels "Antithetic parallelism"[241]; the use of catachresis, "a figure of 'violence' or 'dissonance' frequently expressing matters under the sign of contraries or incompatibles".[242] Most significantly of all,

[238] De Luca, p. 8.
[239] *Ibid.*
[240] *Ibid,* p. 98.
[241] *Ibid,* p. 93.
[242] *Ibid,* p. 99.

De Luca compares the "bardic task of surveying the phenomena of temporal experience"[243] with the iconic style's emphasis on the present. My conception of Blake's bardic sublime, however, illustrates how all of these apparent distinctions in fact constitute companionable contraries in Blake's poetry, poetics and art.

The bard is, for Blake, a figure who at once transcends temporal divisions – a voice of past, present and future – as well as a revolutionary figure of the *now*. De Luca repeatedly refers to the "bardic vision of transformation"[244]; I propose that the role of the bard goes further than this in Blake's works, acting as an evocative figure of loss but, more than that, as a leader and figure of revolution and intervention. De Luca notes that "Everyone acquainted with Blake knows of the bardic voice and its self-proclaimed powers".[245] Moreover, De Luca acknowledges that:

> The Bard's authority comes from a divine sanction that enables him to see into the passing epochs of earthly time; the importance accorded to his "voice" comes from a more personal source. "Voice" marks the presence of individuated utterance and thus draws our attention to the Bard's participation in the events chronicled in his own song. Hence, the power of the passions that the song expresses derives in part from their source in the Bard's personal experience; in ancient days he was *there*. The Bard is thus a kind of visionary poet whose comprehensive vision is never wholly separable from an expression of personal concern, even personal crisis.[246]

Not only is the bard a trope in Blake's poetry; he is also an agent invoking change. He was not only *there* in the past; he is *here* in the present:

> Hear the voice of the Bard!
> Who Present, Past, & Future sees

Note the tense: it is very much focused on the present, with an opening imperative arresting the reader. Blake inverts the typical chronological ordering of the three main tenses – past, present and future – which serves to foreground the current moment. Blake emphasises the sensory – engagement with one's immediate surroundings – through his foregrounded use of "Hear" as well as his positioning of "sees" at the end of the line. The exclamatory mood suggests a crusading spirit of power, authority, and revolution.

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[243] De Luca, p. 68.
[244] *Ibid,* p. 99.
[245] *Ibid,* p. 62.
[246] *Ibid,* pp. 62-63.

My conception of the role of Blake's bard thus comes into conflict with De Luca's version. De Luca claims that:

> All modes of the sublime are risky, of course, and court embarrassment…The bardic sublime, however, risks less than the iconic, even though the Bard often presents himself in a posture of loss. Since bardic vision renders corporeal space and time, even if in attenuated, magnified, or accepted guises, it detaches the reader less radically from the familiar and the expected. Second, because bardic vision presents the vast, the dark, the changing, and the dire mainly as the *content* of the text, as an affair of the hypothetical or fictional signified, it allows the reader safe disturbances, frissons at one remove from actual reality. The iconic style, on the other hand, shifts the source of disturbance chiefly to the signifier, so that the reader is accosted and shaken in the immediate reality of the encounter with the text.[247]

In the lines quoted a moment ago from the "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience*, the reader is undeniably arrested, "accosted", in a manner that De Luca claims to be unique to the iconic style of the sublime he discerns in Blake's works. I argue differently. The voice of the bard – together with the poet's, Blake's, instructions to listen to it, and to share the figure's vision – are the most arresting moments of his verse. Think, for instance, of the bard's refrain in *Milton*: "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation". The bard is a voice of the present – revered for his wisdom, afforded by his knowledge of the past and the future, but a prophet and figure of now, the present, nonetheless.

As Geoffrey Keynes writes:

> It is certain that Blake was…intensely interested in the aspect of Gray's Bard-figure as the mythical poet-prophet of ancient times as well as being the prototype of his own position in the poetic world…[referring to the second plate for *The Bard*] the dead bodies of the three other Bards [represent] the Present, Past and Future of Blake's "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience*. The Present, a young man with bright hair, lies with his face buried in the grass of the present vegetable world; the Past is a gigantic figure with a streaming white beard lying on his back and the Future is also on his back.[248]

The bard – and the poet, Blake – of the present are dismayed by the "Vegetable World" (*Milton*, plate 21, l. 12, p. 115) in which they find themselves. Indeed, such is the bard's dismay that in *America: A Prophecy* we are told of how, for a time, the Bard "Hid in his caves…felt the enormous plagues" (*America*, plate 15, l. 16, p. 57); he stops singing:

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[247] De Luca, p. 101.
[248] Geoffrey Keynes, *William Blake's Water-Colour Designs for the Poems of Thomas Gray*, (London: Trianon Press and William Blake Trust, 1971), p. 56.

[The stern Bard ceas'd, asham'd of his own song; enrag'd he
Swung
His harp aloft sounding, then dash'd its shining frame against
A ruin'd pillar in glittering fragments; silent he turn'd away,
And wander'd down the vales of Kent in sick & drear lamentings.]

The bard's role in Blake's mythology is to stage an intervention; he must wake the world to imaginative life. As David Annwn has noted: "This Bard is the epitome of newness. The Bardic Blake, like the twelfth century Taliesins, is felt as an awakener."[249] Annwn foregrounds the importance of the aforementioned "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience* in highlighting Blake's reverence for the *relevance* of the ancient bard in the modern age:

> If the poet was both singer and prophet, he also stood in the place of the Bards. If he was a speaker, he was also a listener and *seer*, in both senses of that word. But, as Robert Duncan noticed, with this poem the poet's sense of his primordial inspiration, his co-existence in the original time with spiritual beings, appears in his actual life itself. 'He does not write poems as ways into the mythological; he writes poems from the realm of that reality.' However ironic the Bard's iteration of the Holy Word, the fact is that he is its coeval.[250]

I contend, consequently, that the protagonist of Blake's bardic sublime – the ancient bard himself – reigns over both the bardic *and* the iconic style of the sublime De Luca outlines:

> Inasmuch as the principle of continuity makes possible coherent narrative and the depiction of passing linear time, Blake must bow to the principle when he attempts such things – yet without unduly sacrificing the disjunctive effects required for the achievement of the sublime. The abrupt, artless mode of chronicle practiced by the ancient, primitive bards is apparently Blake's chief model in these attempts, and for this reason I have designated this stylistic pole "bardic". The opposite pole – that aimed at achieving an effect of radical discontinuity and self-referentiality – I call "iconic", for in this mode…the text is foregrounded as text and *is* what it says, and is *seen* for what it is. So long as one recognizes that Blake's individual poems are to be situated on a continuum between these stylistic poles, and that they frequently contain mixtures of the opposing modes, these categories should prove useful to a clearer understanding of his sublime style.[251]

As a figure of continuity, transcending temporal divides through the fluidity of his song and his insights into both past and future worlds, the bard also ruptures the continuity of the linear.

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[249]David Annwn, "'*Hear the Voice of the Bard!, / Who Present, Past, & Future Sees' – Three Cores of Bardic Attention: the Early Bards, William Blake & Robert Duncan,* (Hay-on-Wye: West House Books, 1995), p. 21.
[250] *Ibid.*
[251] De Luca, p. 62.

Lamenting the state of the present, he interrupts it with his words – as with his recurrent refrain in *Milton* – to insist upon change, upon the reawakening of imaginative life so as to return to a healed state of spiritual life. Contrary to De Luca's insistence that the bardic and the biblical belong to separate styles of the sublime, I argue, throughout this chapter, that Blake's privileging of the bardic is not only compatible with his conception of a healthy spiritual community; it is a prerequisite of achieving it. The Bible, like the bardic, serves as a mode of discourse and a rhetorical resource with which Blake can articulate his vision of the divine imaginative community of Golgonooza. To quote Annwn's reading of the "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience* one last time:

> There are three tenses in this opening stanza with Present dominant, and three senses: hearing, speaking and seeing – a fitting triad. And Blake echoes and re-echoes auditory emphasis: 'Hear', 'ear', 'heard'. Here is the Bard at the crossing of time with the timeless – at the intersection of senses with hearing used as conductive medium.[252]

It is the intersection of senses – or, rather, disciplines – to which I turn now. The next section of this chapter focuses on Blake's visual response to Gray's bardic poem, and how this – together with illustrations by other artists of the period which were also inspired by Gray's bard – lead to the emergence of Blake's bardic sublime in poetry.

The Bard on the Canvas

As Peter Ackroyd acknowledges in his biography of Blake, the poet "agreed with Gray's belief in the Celtic or bardic origins of poetry, and Gray's ode 'The Bard' was to inspire two separate paintings by him."[253] Gray's bard, as such, became a protagonist of Blake's poetic vision. In approximately 1797-1798, shortly before writing both *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, and soon after *The First Book of Urizen* had been printed, Blake produced a special illustrated edition of Gray's poems (including "The Bard", 1755-1757) for the wife of sculptor John Flaxman. Blake had displayed a fascination with Celtic mythology for some time prior to this. His watercolour of "The Bard" was featured at a Royal Academy exhibition in 1785, and it was an interest that continued to inspire his works of the nineteenth century – his (now missing) depiction of "The

[252] Annwn, p. 21.
[253] Peter Ackroyd, *Blake*, (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 210. Blake's emphasis on the Druids is similarly emphasised in a more recent biography: Tobias Churton, *Jerusalem: The Real Life of William Blake*, (London: Watkins Media Limited, 2015), though Churton overlooks the significance of the figure of the bard specifically.

Ancient Britons" for the *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809, for instance. Gray undoubtedly constituted a key aesthetic authority for Blake's mythology in the long term; he produced as many as one hundred and seventeen illustrations to Gray's poems during his lifetime.[254] In the accompanying notes to "The Ancient Britons", Blake explicitly acknowledges his affinity to Gray's bardic vision; he testifies to the living presence of lost ancestors, "those naked Heroes, in the Welch Mountains; they are there now, Gray saw them in the person of his bard on Snowdon", and asserts that "happy is he who can see and converse with them above the shadows of generation and death".[255] So what was it about the bardic and, especially, Gray's conception of the bard, that appealed to Blake's imagination?

The answer, I argue, lies in the richly sublime potential of the enigmatic and yet very human figure depicted in Gray's 1757 ode. Blake's works were, after all, neither the first nor the only visual depictions of the bard in the period. Some of the best known paintings include those by Richard Bentley (1757), Paul Sandby (1760), Thomas Jones (1774), Philippe Jacques de Loutherboug (1774), Blake (1774), Benjamin West (1778), Henry Fuseli (1800), and John Martin (1817).[256] Originally illustrating the historical, nationalistic context of Welsh bards, threatened and eradicated by the English, later works such as Blake's probe the mysterious, enigmatic, even mystical interpretative possibilities of the bard: the bard's sublime potential. As Simon J. White remarks:

> The nature of his power is enigmatic and impenetrable. Gray's poem inspired many writers and artists during the second half of the eighteenth century. In early illustrations such as Richard Bentley's "The Bard" (1757), the bard remains rooted in the historical context of the conflict with Edward I. The sublime potential of the theme was gradually realized, however, in paintings like Thomas Jones's "The Bard" (1774) which…concentrates on the bard and his sublimely primitive domain as opposed to his haranguing of Edward I and his army…In later pictorial representations of Gray's poem such as…John Martin's "The Bard" (1817), the bard becomes even more mysterious and his link with the sublime landscape greater. Sam Smiles remarks of Martin's painting: 'The bard is now a creature of the mountains, the genius loci of that wild, untamed landscape which stands in opposition to the urban lowland culture bent on subduing it' (57).[257]

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[254] Joseph Viscomi, "Illuminated Printing", *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake,* ed. Morris Eaves, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 39.
[255] "A Descriptive Catalogue", Number V. The Ancient Britons, p. 543.
[256] All of these images – with the exception of Sandby's, which is regrettably unavailable – are reproduced in the subsequent pages of this chapter.
[257] Simon J. White, *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community,* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), p. 108.

Bentley, as one of Gray's close friends, meant for his illustrations "not so much to provide corrective or supplementary images to Gray's texts, as they were to stand as graceful and deferential graphic complements."[258] His images were intended to work "carefully and in harmony with Gray's lines to further, not to occlude or displace, the original language and imagery of the poet himself."[259] Bentley's illustrations depict the bard in the throes of conflict with the English; they function as snapshots of the bard's fear, suffering and defiance (note his raised arm, indicating that the English army ought to keep a distance, as they approach him).

[258] Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 433.
[259] *Ibid.*

[260]

[260] Top: Richard Bentley, "The Bard"; bottom: Bentley, "The Bard and Edward I". Both images are reproductions from Loftus Jestin, *The Answer to the Lyre: Richard Bentley's Illustrations for Thomas Gray's Poems,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990)

[261]

Thomas Jones' painting of the bard, exhibited at the Society of Artists, London, in 1774, marks a turn toward the more mystical aspects of the bard – partly due to a conflation of bard and Druid, as Oliver Fairclough notes:

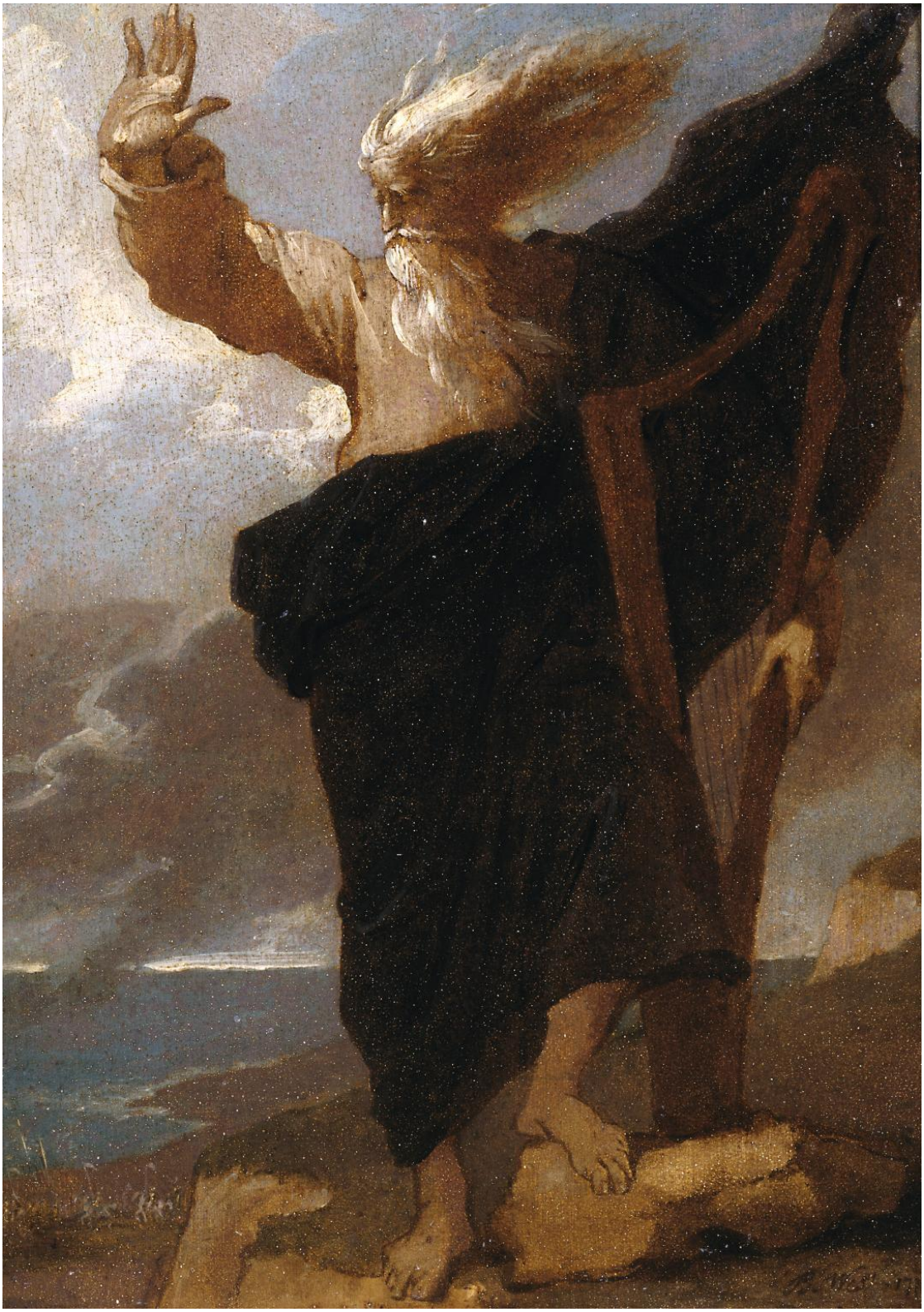
> This was one of his most successful early works ("I think one of the best I ever painted"). It places the gaunt, bearded bard in a windswept mountain landscape among the *cromlechi* and stone circles of a much more ancient, and indeed, pre-Celtic past. By linking the medieval bard with the much more ancient figure of the druid, Jones divorced it from its true historical context, the Edwardian conquest of Wales.[262]

Already, then, we can see the sublime staging of the bard's last moments, as described in Gray's poem; the focus is on this final moment, with the bard on the precipice of a cliff, here depicted as a figure of pathos with nowhere left to run.

The portrayal of the same moment by Benjamin West in 1778 depicts a somewhat calmer bard, commanding an almost divine, mystical presence – seemingly challenging, or

[261] Thomas Jones, "The Bard", (1774). Accessed online at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales – on 01/10/15. Available at: http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/media/6610/nmwa85.jpg
[262] Oliver Fairclough, *Cambria's Curse: Images of the Bard 1750-1850*, exhibition pamphlet, (National Museum Wales, 2001).

channelling, natural forces. His expression, while solemn, is also quietly determined; his pose, and stature, convey strength, a protective left arm around his harp.



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[263] Benjamin West, "The Bard", (1778). Accessed online at the Tate on 01/10/15. Available at: http://www.tate.org.uk/art/images/work/T/T01/T01900_10.jpg

Philippe de Loutherbourg's etching of 1794 similarly foregrounds the strength of the bard, even in his last moments; the emphasis of his piece focuses on the physical strength of the bard: a tall, muscular – albeit elderly – gladiator of sorts.

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[264] Philippe de Loutherbourg, "The Last Bard", (1784). Accessed online at the British Museum on 01/10/15. Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/collectionimages/AN01029/AN01029570_001_1.jpg

Blake's own illustrations of the bard were somewhat different from these. It is not so much physical strength as majesty that is foregrounded in Blake's depictions of a God-like Druid-like bard. Comparing Bentley's illustrations of Gray's verse with Blake's, Mack comments:

> William Blake, who would be drawn to his predecessor's lifelong depiction of the painful confrontation between innocence and experience in the narrative of human history, and who would likewise evince a deep sympathy for Gray's eventual interest in the bardic origins of English poetry, was himself, later in the century, to undertake a unique series of illustrations for Gray's poems. His innovative technical interpretation would be to place copies of the printed text of Gray's verses in the centre of the folio sheets, and then surround the language of the earlier poet by the often stunning colour of his own watercolour images.[265]

Irene Tayler suggests that Blake's intention in illustrating Gray's works was "on the one hand to correct by pictorial emphasis what he felt to be a rather morbid turn in the poet – his pallid caution, his melancholy, his retreat from life – and on the other hand pay homage to his very great if sometimes latent poetic power."[266]

The poetic power of the bard is implicit from the very first of Blake's illustrations to Gray's poem. The last page ("A Muse") of the preceding poem, "The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode", depicts a muse reaching out toward the bard on the following page, thrusting her lyre toward him:

[265] Mack, p. 433.
[266] Irene Tayler, "Two Eighteenth-Century Illustrators of Gray: Richard Bentley and William Blake", *Fearful Joy: Papers from the Thomas Gray Bicentenary Conference at Carleton University,* eds. James Downey and Ben Jones, (Montreal, London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), p. 122.

[267]

The contrast between the two images is an interesting one, given that the muse is presented as a feminine figure of the air, while the bard is depicted as the masculine earthly expression of poetic inspiration, standing steadfast and grounded on the shore. The bard hangs on tightly to his harp whereas the muse purposefully thrusts her lyre into the air. Both are united by their devotion to music. Where the pose of the muse is almost submissive, however, the bard's demeanour is that of one who is about to enter battle. The figure Blake portrays is in this way reminiscent of the bardic figures depicted by Benjamin West and Philippe de Loutherbourg, who stand amidst the landscape – mighty and strong – shielding their harps behind them while facing their enemies. The backdrop of the paintings is itself indicative of differences in mood. The muse's surroundings are clear and tranquil; the bard stands beneath ominously dark clouds, connoting conflict as well as linking the bard with the elemental: sky, sand, seas and winds. The stoic presentation of the bard in this image marks a clear contrast to the docile expression of the muse, yet the figures are nonetheless strongly visually linked by the mirroring of their respective instruments, facing toward each other.

The image of the bard on the title page also illustrates one of the recurrent motifs in Blake's mythology: stars. In line 112 of "The Bard", Gray describes how "Ye unborn Ages"

[267] On the left: William Blake, *A Muse* (from "The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode"), *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, (c. 1797-1798). Accessed online at the William Blake Archive on 01/10/15. Available at: http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=but335.1.wc.52&java=no
On the right: Blake, *A Welch Bard* (from "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode"), *The Poems of Thomas Gray* (c. 1797-1798). Accessed online at the William Blake Archive on 01/10/15.
Available at: http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=but335,1,wc,53&java=no

[l. 108], "ye genuine Kings, Britannia's Issue" [l. 110] descend, "Sublime their starry fronts they rear" [l. 112]. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the use of "starry" carries different significance in Blake's work when compared with Gray's. For Gray, it signifies prestige; for Blake, it signals both terror and majesty.

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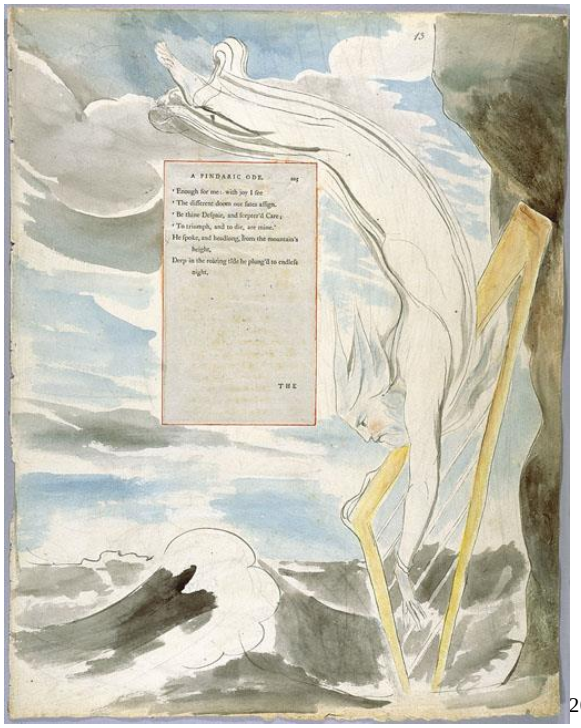
[268] William Blake, *A Welch Bard* (from "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode"), *The Poems of Thomas Gray* (c. 1797-1798). Accessed online at the William Blake Archive on 01/10/15. Available at: http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=but335,1,wc,53&java=no

In *Songs of Experience* (1794), the "Introduction" – "Hear the voice of the Bard!" – is followed by a poem named "Earth's Answer", which almost paints the scene that we see a few years later in the title page of Blake's watercolour, and again adopts the adjective "Starry":

> 'Prison'd on wat'ry shore,
> Starry Jealousy does keep my den:
> Cold and hoar,
> Weeping o'er
> I hear the father of the ancient men. [ll. 6-10]

The figure of Gray's bard painted by Blake is, indeed, one whose "locks [are] cover'd with grey despair" [5], who stands upon the shore – an earthly counterpart to the ethereal muse who precedes him – attired in a robe adorned with stars. Linking the bard with the stars in this way contributes to the portrayal of the figure as otherworldly in his timelessness. The presence of a divinely-inspired bard on earth is a source of consolation in Blakean mythology, given that Urizen's division of the world into categories, countries, objects means that "Eternity stood wide apart, / As the stars are apart from the earth" [*Urizen*, plate 5, l. 41 and plate 6, l. 1]. In *Urizen*, the very fact that these lines are divided across plates emphasises the division or separation of inspiration from the human under Urizen's tyrannous rule. The fact that the earthly bard's robe, in a sense, bears the stars reminds the reader that acts of creativity – like the production of sound, poetry and music – are at once prophetically, almost divinely, inspired and yet also humanly accessible. This encourages the individual to engage with the inspiration within oneself, rather than seeking it from an abstract "other", from a god.

We are encouraged to read "The Bard" alongside "The Progress of Poesy" not only because they were originally published as a pair, but because of the visual mirroring of the poems' protagonists. As we have already seen from the title page of "The Bard" and the preceding page from "The Progress of Poesy" as illustrated by Gray, the figures of the muse and the bard are presented as contrary creative forces: the feminine and ethereal as opposed to the masculine and earthly. When comparing this image of the muse with the last watercolour of "The Bard", it is again apparent that the figures are to be taken as contraries: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While the muse ascends, having "broke the twilight gloom, /To cheer the shiv'ring native's dull abode" ("The Progress of Poesy", ll. 56-57), the bard "headlong, from the mountain's height / Deep in the roaring tide…plung'd to endless night" ("The Bard", ll. 143-144). Viewed together, the images are suggestive of duality, as well as the cyclical, due to the circular motion the two figures form. Motion and regeneration – reimagining – are key to Blake's mythology; fixity is where sorrow lies: "If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic Character, the Philosophic and Experimental would soon be at the Ratio of all things; and stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again." [*There is No Natural Religion,* ll. 15-18].

The poetic, and prophetic, power of the bard is certainly highlighted in Blake's illustrations; the cover design of "The Bard" we have seen above, Design 53, affords even more space to the bard's harp than to the figure himself. The mystical qualities of the bard are, as we have witnessed, hinted at through his star-decorated robe and swirling clouds, contraries of light and darkness that surround him. Blake identified with such a figure, with Mack remarking that:

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269 On the left: William Blake, *A Muse* (from "The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode"), *The Poems of Thomas Gray,* (c. 1797-1798). Accessed online at the William Blake Archive on 01/10/15. Available at http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=but335,1,wc,52&java=no
On the right: Blake, *Headlong from the Mountains height / Deep in the roaring tide he plungd to endless night* (from "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode"), *The Poems of Thomas Gray, ibid.* Accessed online at the William Blake Archive on 01/10/15.
Available at: http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=but335.1.wc.65&java=no

> Blake had known his [Gray's] work since boyhood and acknowledged it as a source of inspiration by exhibiting in the Royal Academy in 1785 a watercolour entitled "The Bard, from Gray". "The Bard" is the poem by Gray to which Blake responded most whole-heartedly as illustrator. Mythical bards, singing poetic prophecies and smiting their harp-strings to accompany visionary messages of revolution, had a political as well as a personal appeal to Blake, himself an ignored prophetic bard in a stricken country.[270]

Keynes corroborates such a reading, stating that "Blake was…intensely interested in the aspect of Gray's Bard-figure as the mythical poet-prophet of ancient times as well as being the prototype of his own position in the poetic world." Blake was, of course, also deeply interested and artistically invested in prophets from the Old Testament.[271] However, a key distinction between the Hebrew prophet and the bard as poet-prophet is that, while the Hebrew prophet channels inspiration from God – signalled in Blake's drawings by the prophet casting one hand to the heavens while the other grasps a scroll of teachings – the bard is instead innately inspired. The power of the bard is not channelled from an external source as it is for the Hebrew prophet. For the bard, power lies within, in the human imagination. As Keynes explains:

> It was the function of the poet-prophet to know the future and to tell the truth about past and present; also to divine the unconscious emotions of other men and to be the intermediary between the material world and the visionary world of the imagination. Blake saw in Gray's splendid Ode many opportunities for clothing these ideas with visible shapes and so producing a more intimate marriage between Gray's mind and his own than is to be found anywhere else in this book…The Bard's message was one of revenge and revolution, and it is likely that the symbolism in some of the designs with historical implications can be related to Blake's feelings about the political situation in England at the time when he was working on this series.[272]

The Blakean bard that Keynes describes is one who has insights into human emotion and imagination as much as into the secrets of the future and of a world beyond the material. In this way, the bard seems to be depicted as not only a prophet but as an empath: an individual who possesses the ability to perceive, to understand, and to share in the feelings of others. It seems timely to turn to Blake's famous annotations on Bishop Watson's *An Apology for the*

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[270] Michael Davis, *William Blake: A New Kind of Man,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 80.
[271] See "An Old Prophet Testament Prophet" drawings by Blake.
[272] Geoffrey Keynes, *William Blake's Water-Colour Designs for the Poems of Thomas Gray*, (London: Trianon Press and William Blake Trust, 1971), p. 56.

Bible (1796), in which he presents the prophet as a very human figure rather than as a teller of fortunes:

> Prophets in the modern sense of the word have never existed Jonah was no prophet in the modern sense for his prophecy of Nineveh failed Every honest man is a Prophet he utters his opinion both of private & public matters / Thus / If you go on So / the result is So / He never says such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. A Prophet is a Seer not an Arbitrary Dictator.[273]

The role of the prophet in Blake's view is one that every man and woman may claim. The prophet may assess, analyse and caution against particular courses of action, but is not one who possesses the power to predict the future. Blake's reference to "public and private matters" suggests that he believes that the role of the prophet should be an everyday one, a democratic one, and a social one.

This marks a departure from previous depictions of the role of the prophet. As well as predicting the future, of course, the role of the bard historically was to narrate events of the past and present. This is a role fulfilled in *Ossian* – "The trembling harps of joy are strung. Bards sing the battle of heroes…"[274] – as well as in Blake's watercolour illustrations for another of Gray's poems, "The Triumphs of Owen":

[273] William Blake, "On Watson", *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, p. 616.
[274] James Macpherson, "Fingal Book III", *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. Howard Gaskill, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 73.

[275]

Gray's poem begins: "Owen's praise demands my song, / Owen swift, and Owen strong; / Fairest flower of Roderic's stem, / Gwyneth's shield, and Britain's gem" [ll. 1-2]. Rhyme and

[275] William Blake, *The Bard singing Owens praise* (from "The Triumphs of Owen: A Fragment"), *The Poems of Thomas Gray,* (c. 1797-1798). Accessed online at the William Blake Archive on 01/10/15. Available at: http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=but335.1.wc.89&java=no

alliteration, here, emphasise the musicality of the bard's role, while the content foregrounds the often panegyric function of the bard. The political, the prophetic and the poetic are, thus, the three most obvious thematic associations with Blake's bard at this time.

The prophetic links with the bard, in particular, come to the fore in Fuseli's 1800 depiction of the figure. Portraying "a heroic figure well in control of the elements and of Edward", Fuseli's bard is a force to be reckoned with; a source of awe and terror, he personifies the bardic sublime.

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[276] Henry Fuseli, "The bard looks down from a cliff of Mount Snowdon to the army of Edward I and curses the King", (c. 1799). Image kindly provided by the Museum Oskar Reinhart, Winterthur, Switzerland – 04/08/15.

As Frank A. Vaughan explains:

> Clearly Fuseli's Bard has become a conduit through which the wrath of God will be visited on Edward. Most other designs make the Bard into a victim, a pathetic character with little power and much sadness. By the mid-nineteenth century he became part of the scenic landscape, a small figure buried in the natural world.[277]

The human dominates the natural, here. Fuseli's depiction of the bard is, as such, a very Blakean one: the human is an inherently spiritual figure – greater than nature while also a part of it – and the bard acts as intermediary, a role model, in reminding all of the divine powers and strength of the imagination in the face of the world; he facilitates the rediscovery of such a world through his art and verse.

Thus, perhaps the lasting Romantic image of the bardic figure is John Martin's of 1817. While, as Vaughan comments, landscape is breathtakingly detailed, the bard a small figure by comparison, he is not a weak figure; once more, arm thrust to the skies above the roaring waves of the Conwy beneath, the bard appears to be commanding skies and sea.

[277] Frank A. Vaughan, *Again to the Life of Eternity: William Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Thomas Gray,* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1996), p. 120.

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The heroic stance of the bard is not unlike that shown in Caspar David Friedrich's famous *Wanderer Above* the *Sea of Fog* (1818) just the following year. The bard is visually portrayed here as victor rather than victim. Blake's verse presents the bardic figure as both a figure of pathos as well as a stoic hero.

[278] John Martin, "The Bard", (1817). Accessed online at Yale Center for British Art on 01/10/15. Available at: http://deliver.odai.yale.edu/content/id/594cf828-e6b8-4ec4-bf14-cac45880305d/format/3

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[279] William Blake, The Bard weaving Edwards fate (from "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode"), *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, (c. 1797-1798). Accessed online at the William Blake Archive on 01/10/15. Available at: http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=but335.1.wc.55&java=no

[280]

[280] William Blake, "The Bard, from Gray", (c. 1809). Accessed online at the Tate on 01/10/15. Available at: http://www.tate.org.uk/art/images/work/N/N03/N03551_10.jpg

As we have seen, the visual arts played no small role in Blake's imaginative process of conceptualising the bard and what he stands for. The ideas here, portrayed by numerous artists, are ones that we shall keep coming back to in the remainder of this chapter; now, I will focus on Blake's literary bardic figure, ever framed by the visual.

The Bard in Verse

When does the bard start to appear in Blake's literary works? Blake and Iolo Morganwg – a London Welshman, poet and Welsh nationalist – moved in the same radical London circles of the 1790s, sharing a publisher, Joseph Johnson, who "puffed...the Welsh bardic rather than English pastoral aspect" of Morganwg's collection in the *Analytical Review.*[281] Their verse shares preoccupations with innocence, liberty and oppression, often framed in a millenarian rhetoric of terrible sublimity, as I shall shortly discuss in Blake's verse. We witness "a darkening away from the pastoral"[282] in the later poetry of both, the figure of the Druid-bard increasingly present, evermore explicitly invoked. The pastoral, lyrical juvenilia of Morganwg and the ostensibly idyllic *Songs* of Blake are a far cry from the terrifying power of the bard invoked in Blake's prophetic books, though there are even hints of the emergent revolutionary sublime[283] in Morganwg's *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral*:

> Dear BRITAIN! let me sing to thee,
> Thou through the world for BEAUTY fam'd,
> Sublime thy Muse, thy Genius free,
> Thy sons to slav'ry never tam'd;...
>
> Thus, tuning high prophetic strains,
> Of *Heav'n* obey'd from pole to pole,
> Whilst through my song the transport reigns,
> Be this no dream to cheat my soul
> Throng'd in my breast what wishes burn!
> O! days of INNOCENCE! Return!
>
> No more in vain let Nature call.[284]

[281] Mee, p. 176.
[282] *Ibid*, p. 183.
[283] By using the terms "revolutionary sublime" or "republican sublime", I am referring to a discourse of the sublime which palpably calls for political change of a republican form, or otherwise clearly promotes republican ideals. Patrick Cheney, Cian Duffy, Andrew Hadfield and Philip Shaw have all written on this subject in some detail.
[284] Iolo Morganwg, "Escape from London", *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral,* Volume 2, (London: Joseph Johnson, 1794)

Liberty, fortitude (this poem is, after all, followed by another entitled "Fortitude"), patriotism – ideas integral to the republican sublime – are qualities emphasised through combined lexical sets of sublimity ("Sublime", "Genius", "Nature") and defiance ("never tam'd", "reigns", "Be this no dream", "No more in vain"). Imperatives, exclamatories, the allusion to "Nature": all serve to foreground the power of the bard. Morganwg's invocation of innocence ("O! days of INNOCENCE! Return! / No more in vain let Nature call"), foregrounded by utterance of the desperate exclamatory interjection "O!", prophetically hails and heralds the return of the lost bardic song. The emphasis on innocence is crucial in that it also signals the supreme integrity, spiritual truth, with which Morganwg and Blake associate the bard – Morganwg even claims that "bard" in its original Cimbric form means "priest":

> Song, or poesy, was in the hands of the *Bardic Tradition,* and well guarded by it from *falsehood* and *fiction,* which the *Bards* would by no means admit or authorize in the least; and the public would never countenance what their much-esteemed *Bards* rejected. It was in vain to attempt the propagation of *falsehood* in *Verse*...They [Bards] were *Sons of Truth* and *Liberty,* and of course offensive to that age of tyranny and superstition; but the Welsh would not suffer them to be exterminated.[285]

Morganwg alludes, here, to the revolutionary American patriots or "Sons of Liberty". His insistence on bardic integrity may seem somewhat ironic in light of his reputation as a literary forger, comparable in some respects to that of other eighteenth-century writers such as Macpherson or Chatterton, yet there was a readiness among readers of the 1790s to accept these works as genuine; it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that Morganwg's poetic impersonations of Dafydd ap Gwilym were disregarded as forgeries. The bard as figure and symbol of mythic history was an ingenious one to invoke because it offered both Blake and Morganwg a motif imbued with national feeling, memory and connotations of transhistorical power and feeling which was at once of universal symbolic value as well as impossible to disprove or undermine through exposure as forgery or invention, having no empirical, verifiable history or claim to one. The bard of mythic history promotes a powerful form of national feeling: imagined, cultural memory.

While the bardic figure is an ambiguous one for Blake – associated with oppressive religious institutions (as in the form of Urizen, signifying adherence to scripture) as well as being central to his emancipatory world vision wherein one recognises that the perfect pre-

[285] Morganwg, *ibid,* pp. 222-223.

Creation, pre-Christian world was also a bardic one ("I recollect an old Prophecy in Eden recorded in gold; and oft / Sung to the harp", *Milton*, plate 23, lines 35-36) – the bard represents innocence and salvation, and is a benevolent prophet for Morganwg. Contrast, for instance, Morganwg's presentation of the bard in his 1848 posthumous collection of manuscripts with Blake's depiction of the protagonist in *Urizen*:

> Bards bear no naked weapon against, nor in the presence, of any one; and no one is permitted to do so in their presence; for a bard is the minister of peace, refuge, and justice...No production or circumstance, whether it be a song, tradition, instruction, notice, or anything else, shall be deemed of legal importance of constitute any authority, unless ratified by...the bards of Britain...bardism originally emanated from poets...to inculcate godliness, wisdom, and good morals.[286]

Morganwg highlights the political power and authority of the bards from a different perspective to that which we have witnessed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts hitherto in this study. We have seen bards embraced as symbols, if not active figures of, revolution, as well as keepers of a culture and as protectors of a nation. Here, Morganwg emphasises the peace-keeping capacity of bards, not only as figures who will not use weaponry themselves, but as deterrents of cruelty and violence for others. Moreover, Morganwg stipulates that bards have legislative authority. For Blake, though, Urizen is the cruel figure of authority: an individual who is always depicted as a druidic character. In *The Book of Ahania*, "Urizen...sat on his dark rooted Oak" (plate 3, 15-16): the oak grove being a key motif for Druidism. Further, the druidic-Urizen hints at the bardic-prophetic; he is referred to as "The Eternal Prophet" (*Ahania*, plate 4, 27), while Blake's illustrations of Urizen bear strong resemblance to those of his bard in the *Songs*.

[286] Iolo Morganwg, *A Selection of Ancient Welsh Manuscripts*, ed. Taliesin Williams, (Llandovery: W. Rees, 1848), pp. 432-437.

[287]

Oak groves are, due to the recurrent conflation of bards and Druids in the eighteenth century – evident in James Thomson's reference to "The Bard, a little Druid-Wight" [l. 289] in *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), for example – also strongly associated with the bards.

Morganwg's sympathetic depiction of the bard is blackened by the terrors of Blake's Urizen:

> 6. His cold horrors silent, dark Urizen
> Prepar'd; his ten thousands of thunders
> Rang'd in gloom'd array stretch out across
> The dread world, & the rolling of wheels
> As of swelling seas, sound in his clouds,
> In his hills of stor'd snows, in his mountains
> Of hail and ice; voices of terror
> Are heard, like thunders of autumn
> When the cloud blazes over the harvests...

[287] William Blake, "The Voice of the Ancient Bard", *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy Z object 54, (1826: Library of Congress) – electronic edition object 54 (Bentley 54, Erdman 54, Keynes 54). Available online at: http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=songsie.z.illbk.54&java=no, accessed on 07/10/16.

The apocalyptic imagery of Blake's verse firmly binds Urizen to the category of the sublime of terror, setting his druidic-bard in opposition to Morganwg's benevolent bard of peace and refuge while adhering to the associations with "the secrets of wisdom" and "Laws of peace, of love, of unity" expected of a bard. Blake's millennial language, similes comparing man and nature ("voices of terror / Are heard, like thunders of autumn / When the cloud blazes over the harvests"), and references to armies, metal and conflict, exemplify Hugh Blair's interest in the sublime as a form of rhetoric which, like *Ossian*, may bolster sentiments of national feeling:

> "As autumn's dark storms pour from two echoing hills, so toward each other approached the heroes. As two dark streams from high rocks meet and mix, and roar on the plain; loud, rough, and dark, in battle, met Lochlin and Inisfail...As the troubled noise of the ocean when roll the waves on high; as the last peal of the thunder of heaven; such is the noise of battle. The groan of the people spread over the hills. It was like the thunder of night, when the cloud bursts on Cona, and a thousand ghosts shriek at once on the hollow wind." Never were images of more awful Sublimity employed to heighten the terror of battle.[288]

The evocation of terror does not, however, define the bardic sublime. Rather, terror acts in these works as the catalyst to induce elegiac, imaginative cultural remembrance – the envisaging of past struggle – which, in invoking a sense of communion between the dead and the living, bolstered by a prophecy of Welsh national resurgence, offers consolation in the present. The bard is the embodiment of this tripartite temporal model: an ancient figure of power and prophecy who speaks to the present moment as poet. Thus, solace and salvation, for Blake and Morganwg, may be found in specifically bardic verse.

As we have already seen, Blake's allusions to and representations of the bardic, the Celtic and the druidic in verse and visual art are not unconventional within the context of wider eighteenth-century literature. As Punter illustrates, Blake's fixation with the myths of Britain mark him as "eccentric but nonetheless firmly of his time", for his artworks – particularly his Prophetic Books – tap into a contemporaneous "search for authentication...predicated throughout on the inauthentic and the forged."[289] Following the precedent set by poets such as James Macpherson, Thomas Gray and Iolo Morganwg, Blake's verse offers an imaginative rendition of British history. Despite posing a radical, ahistorical challenge to ideas in circulation that archaeological pursuits of verifiable ancient sources offered the primary

[288] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1783); repr. ed. Harold F. Harding (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 36.
[289] David Punter, "Blake and Gwendolen: territory, periphery and the proper name", *English Romanticism and the Celtic World,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 55.

premise of national identity – advocated by antiquarians of the period – the practice of reimagining history was deeply evocative in Romantic period circles. Blake's vision of British national history is one authenticated affectively by its reliance upon the emotional engagement of the poem's individual speaker or reader with the landscape, predicated upon attachment to place, and thereby spiritual, elegiac communion with those of the locality already lost. Intertextual engagement with Blake's literary predecessors is necessary in order to understand his specific contribution to bolstering an eighteenth-century vogue for Celtic re-imaginings; Blake's works, in turn, gives rise to a dialectical engagement with national ancestors and ideas of cultural memory.

It is not only national ancestry, but literary ancestry, that is key to Blake's bardic works. Gray's sublime descriptions of how "headlong from the mountain's height / Deep in the roaring tide he [the Bard] plung'd to endless night" echo *Paradise Lost* (Book I, 44-49). The adjective "starry" – used pervasively in Blake's prophetic books – carries different connotations for each poet. For Gray, it seems to signal the prestige of Tudor ancestors, glorifying their history as figures who reconcile English and Welsh histories. For Blake, however, the "starry" is always indicative of the sublime in the sense of terror – it conveys "majesty" too (*Milton,* plate 15, 25), but it is mainly integral to descriptions of the harness of slaves (plate 21) and to the "voids of night" (plate 27). Nonetheless, staged amidst the mountains, between the darkness of the sea as against the "starry" and the sublime intensity of light generated by sun and fire, the bearded bard of both poems is a sublime figure, to a degree only rivalled by Macpherson's Ossianic characters and, later, by Blake's tyrannic and druidic figure of Urizen. As Johnston argues:

> His [Gray's] hyperboles, personifications and imagery were all sublime, in the way in which his contemporaries regarded sublimity. So also was the attitude of his Bard, alone, defying the might of Edward, exhibiting a spiritual power which tyranny cannot destroy, and superior in the end to Death. The barbarity, the details of violence, the supernatural chorus of ghosts and their prophetic powers, the dark and difficult style, the sentiments, are all sublime.[290]

Gray's Bard offers a form of spiritual resistance that is significantly distinct from the consolation offered by religion. The poem was in some regards unexpected for an eighteenth-century reader: namely, the final image of the Bard committing suicide. Nonetheless, it

[290] Arthur Johnston, *Selected Poems of Thomas Gray and William Collins,* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1967), p. 76.

conformed to aesthetic expectations in exemplifying all key features of the sublime, and for this it was praised:

> Almost everything the eighteenth century regarded as sublime – the Heroic, the Savage, the Noble, the Wild – are to be found here, in terms more accessible to contemporary sensibility than the actual products of the distant past. Here is the sort of excitement that the awful, the great, and the magnificent produced, the raising of the mind to admiration and astonishment. To achieve this effect Gray used a prosody that was highly sophisticated and a language extremely ornate.[291]

It is the combination of sublime imagery as a conduit to cultural remembrance, Welsh mythology and subtle yet acute attentiveness to prosody that, I argue, offers the most insightful poetic model for understanding Macpherson's national epic and, in turn, Blake's rendition of the bardic sublime.

However, reconciling the obscure and the sublime would, for Blake, be illogical. Burke's assertion that it is when "all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible...[that it is] sublime to the last degree", for "To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary"[292], stands in absolute contradiction to Blake's equally confident response that "Obscurity is Neither the Source of the Sublime nor of any Thing Else"[293]. Yet, as Crawford observes, "Blake himself was a formidably obscure writer...[and] the obscurity of his works was not accidental".[294] Blake stated in a letter to Reverend Dr Trusler just one year afterwards that "The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act."[295] Burke, too, invokes the "Ancients" in defence of his treatise in the form of the Druids – as well as Milton:

> ...the druids performed all their ceremonies in the bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks. No person seems better to have understood the secret of heightening, or of setting terrible things, if I may use the expression, in their strongest light by the force of a judicious obscurity, than Milton.[296]

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[291] Johnston, *Selected Poems of Thomas Gray and William Collins,* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1967), p. 76.
[292] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op.cit.,* p.231.
[293] William Blake, Annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1798), *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake,* Discourse VII, p. 658.
[294] Crawford,p. 190.
[295] Letter of 23 August 1799, sent by William Blake to Reverend Dr Trusler. Available online at: http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/erdman.xq?id=b15.5; accessed on 01/10/15.
[296] Burke, *op. cit.,* p. 231.

For Burke, Milton's description of Death as but a shape in *Paradise Lost* offers a paradigm of sublime obscurity in that it demonstrates how:

> It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it *affecting* to the imagination...the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give, raises a very obscure and imperfect *idea* of such objects...In reality a great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever.[297]

Images of Romantic Wales – obscure, representative of otherness – and of the ancient bards and Druids of secrecy, conform to Burke's conditions for sublimity and obscurity: those which Blake relies upon for the sublime rhetoric of his prophetic books.

Urizen, Milton, Jerusalem: Blake's Prophetic Books

An entanglement of Gothic spectres and sublime images of terror, rooted in descriptions of nation[s] and landscape as well as the bond between worlds of the living and dead - which induces spiritual anxiety and, in turn, heights of sublime, imaginative ecstasy - binds Macpherson's Ossian poems to Blake's prophetic books. The Gothic represents an application of the Burkean sublime of terror to cultural landscapes. Blake engages with the Gothic in the twofold sense of the term: in reference to both the people and culture of the dark ages, and to the literary genre characterised by horror, terror and the spectral. According to Roberts, in the eighteenth century, "one of the central literary modes to evolve in relation to the discourse of the sublime was that of the Gothic."[298] As Roberts explains, it is unsurprising that the two should conflate, given that:

> The Gothic dwells on feelings of psychological terror, physical horror, incarceration, disgust, obsession and superstition, and attempts to evoke these in its reader...Blake had no special interest in writing Gothic literature, nor did Wordsworth, yet both of their juvenilia contain examples of experiments in the mode...Blake lays aside this sort of ghost story in his later career, but the language, mood and imagery of Gothic continue to inform his mature works, such as Urizen...[and] is also visible in some of the images of torment that occur in Blake's later work, such as plate 25 of *Jerusalem*.[299]

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[297] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* (1757), *op.cit.,* pp.232-233.
[298] Jonathan Roberts, *William Blake's Poetry,* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), p. 29.
[299] *Ibid,* pp. 29-30.

One only has to think of Orc, abandoned by Enitharmon and Los to the spectre of the druidic protagonist, his "deathful shadow", and chained to a rock in *Urizen (*having already been cast into the abyss in a similarly cruel fashion in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) for evidence of Gothic terror in Blake's verse. Both Urizen and Orc are spectres of sorts, "The dead heard the voice of the child [Orc]/ And began to awake from sleep", while Urizen acts as abstract, Godlike agent or deity of material, tangible constriction and, thus, oppression. This episode is, like so many others in Blake, framed by a rhetoric of the sublime, by "forsaken mountains" in a world of "vast enormities / Frightening: Faithless; fawning...Dread terrors!", the tripled alliteration of the fervent fricative "f" indicative of a need to exercise feeling by exorcising terror. The practice of feeling through the mode of inherently spiritual, imaginative acts is, for Blake, the remedy for a broken world and for a broken collective imagination.

Macpherson's collection would have captivated Blake. Situated on a stylistic frontier between verse and prose, Macpherson's compositions were palpably resistant to the formal demands of sonnets or odes or other poetic forms. Discerning the twofold Gothic-Sublime aesthetic resources to be found in Macpherson's words for Blake, Stafford comments:

> Ossian was a herald of the Romantic Movement. For readers who were not...satisfied by the prevailing attitudes of the Enlightenment, Macpherson offered emotional and imaginative release. His Celtic world was remote yet mysterious, its heroes ideal, magnificent and yet intangible. The dark scenery and the supernatural elements appealed strongly to Gothic tastes, as well as to those readers seeking the Sublime. Ossian's poetry burst straight from the overpowering emotions of the ancient bard and was lost in the 'sublime' landscape of mountains and storms...it offered an exciting alternative to the familiar classical models, and...became a symbol for the literature of the North.[300]

The pre-Christian world presented in Macpherson's texts - wherein the "spirits of the hill"[301], of lost loved ones and lost histories are revered and elegised, instead of being subjugated to an "other" in the form of God, the Church or an imperial nation being advocated – is conveyed through recurrent references to stones, rivers, trees and stormy skies, a palpable instance of the Gothic (in both senses - ancient and terrible) meeting the sublime. It is a poetic mode which offers autonomy to the imaginative reader - for one must imagine a national history that simply cannot be verified as "authentic", but may nonetheless induce and evoke the practice of feeling:

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[300] Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p. 178.

[301] James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and related works*, "Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem", (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), ed. Howard Gaskill, Book VI, p. 96.

> Within Gothic art and literature, religion is often treated not as a positive force but as an agent of cruelty, tyranny and torment...Blake, like many other writers of the period, portrays druidism as a savage, pre-Christian, naturalistic religion of sacrifice and bloodshed.[302]

Yet the pre-Creation, pre-Christian realm of Ossian signifies the kind of raw, savage, authentically sentimental state of being which Blake envisions as the preferable binary to the Urizenic post-Creation world of codified law, order, institutional sovereignty and, thus, the repression of feeling as well as imaginative and individual autonomy through artistic activity.

Interpersonal bonds of feeling rather than the oppressive binds of institutionalism, as exemplified in the works of Ossian, are key to Blake's vision as well as to the wider, burgeoning philosophical and humanitarian climate of the late eighteenth century:

> ...Macpherson's vision...accorded well with the ideals of Rousseau and his followers. In Ossian's age of heroes, men were free from the burden of property and unrepressed by Church or State. There were no class barriers: Fingal was a leader through merit rather than privilege, while his army was tied by bonds of affection rather than by self interest or obligation. For readers with radical sympathies, such as William Blake, the appeal of *Ossian* was not merely stylistic...the free style of the verse seemed a reflection of the free society of Ancient Britain.[303]

Freedom from institutional oppression is at the heart of Macpherson's notion of a free society, as Stafford details above. These ideas are discernable, too, in wider Romantic verse. The notion that sympathy, empathy, charity and kindness should be demonstrated to others as a result of a spiritual, humanitarian, organic and authentic state of affective and imaginative being predicated on communal love is, for example, at the heart of Wordsworth's verse, with poems like "The Old Cumberland Beggar" promoting a similarly holistic, spiritual community of compassion. For both Blake and Wordsworth, Macpherson's texts – whether or not one believed them to genuinely be the words of Ossian as an ancient bard – offered a comforting sense of permanence and a perpetual, transcendental spiritual community of feeling:

> ...The melancholy preoccupations of the Celtic bard himself attracted the sympathy of an eighteenth-century audience, but he still retained the stature of an Ancient. The combination of the subjective poet and the sage prophet was perfect for the Romantic Period, where the image of the poet as an isolated genius emerged...As

[302] Roberts, p. 30.
[303] Stafford, *ibid,* p. 178.

> sole survivor of a greater world, Ossian commanded the perennial fascination with the exiled hero and the loss of paradise.[304]

Sympathy is an integral aspect of Ossian's influence upon Blake and Wordsworth; even the landscape consistently sympathises with the plights of the Ossianic protagonists. The intimate bond between human and landscape – a shared sympathy – is apparent in lines which imbue the landscape with human emotions, and the human with the forces of nature, as exemplified by this simile: "I sighed as the wind in the chink of a rock".[305] The pulsating rhythm – an iamb, and three anapests – imbues the declarative with a palpable aural heartbeat, the stress falling on the active verb "sighed" and the nouns "wind" and "rock" denoting the elemental and the landscape; the distinctions between human and habitat are distorted in the way that Blake promotes through his holistic vision wherein subject-object divides are, ultimately, redundant: "To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination"[306]. It is for this reason that the figure of Urizen proves to be so deeply problematic for Blake: because he is an agent of division, rendering the intangible material and the free - in form and spirit - oppressed.

The Dawn of Blake's Druid: "The Voice of the Ancient Bard"

While the druidic figure of Urizen is not named and portrayed at length or in detail until Blake's later prophetic works, there is a prior appearance to be found in "The Voice of the Ancient Bard", which has oscillated between the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience.* Originally published among *Songs of Innocence* in 1794, and then transferred to *Songs of Experience* – yet still appearing in the former as late as 1815 – the poem's problematic categorisation is perhaps attributable to the fact that it at once underlines and undermines notions of linear progression in terms of the development of society and, equally, the idea of the ostensible wisdom of the ancients as that from which we are becoming evermore removed in an increasingly industrialised society.

The bard is, of course, conventionally a symbol of wisdom: a prophet-poet of ancient Britain, associated with the Druids, comparable to the shepherd of *Innocence.*[307] But at this point in Blake's mythology, the druidic-Urizenic figure depicted on the poem's plate (playing

[304] Stafford.
[305] Macpherson, Book II, p. 69.
[306] Blake, in a letter to the Rev. Dr Trusler, 23 August 1799, Peter Kitson's *Romantic Criticism 1800-1825,* (London: B.T.Batsford Ltd, 1989), p. 37.
[307] Morris Eaves, *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 273.

a harp) is in no way associated with the oppression, terror and cruelty that he later comes to inflict. For Urizen as a fourfold figure of God, Reason, Druid, Tyrant is, in Blake's later works, always a deeply ambivalent one. As Punter remarks: "the Druids in Blake, it would seem, know not what they do[...]they are capable of uttering a greater truth, of acting as a 'receptacle or base' for that which goes on in...spite of all their condemnable ritualistic activity."[308]

The tone of the speaker in "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" appears to be one of paternal, benevolent prophecy. Such a tone echoes that of the patriotic minstrel in the final scene of Blake's earlier play "King Edward the Third", in which the minstrel relays past victories and foretells future triumph. The "Voice of the Ancient Bard" is, in typical Blakean form, riddled with contraries, binaries, dualities - "morn" / "night"; "Ancient" / "Youth"; "truth" / "folly" - compounded by syntactical and rhythmical parallelism, alliteration, and an entangled rhyme scheme (abbccddefef) complicated further by internal chiming and assonance:

> Doubt is fled & clouds of reason.
> Dark disputes & artful teazing. [4-5]

The steady meter of trochaic tetrameter – four units in rhythmical anticipation of Blake's fourfold myth of a perpetual struggle between creativity, reason, passion and the heart[309] – anticipates Urizen's later destructive act of division in the form of Creation: "Times on times he divided, & measur'd / Space by space in his ninefold darkness".[310] The present participle "teazing" gestures toward a destructive or, at the very least, deconstructive act committed under the guise of a creative one, signified by the pre-modifier "artful", an adjective which also connotes cunning and deceit. These lines are echoed later in *Milton*: "Urizen lay in darkness & solitude...Among Indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning" [plate 3, 6-8]. The poem's form signals a world in a broken state: all things seem constricted, taut, compressed and contracted upon themselves, reinforced by a generally sporadic meter, internal rhymes and the fact that the poem resembles a broken sonnet: the rhyme scheme is tangled, and the length falls short by three lines of the conventional fourteen, with the meter never quite reaching the necessary ten syllables until the final line where the beats spill over, mirroring Blake's warning that some go too far in asserting a position of wisdom "And wish to lead others when they should be led" [11]. Urizen is one such figure: the image in line 9 (significant numerically,

[308] Punter, p. 59.
[309] Roberts, p. 73.
[310] William Blake, "The First Book of Urizen" (1794), lines 15-16.

together with the reference to "night", in gesturing toward the "ninefold darkness" he induces in *The First Book of Urizen*) of how all stumble "all night over bones of the dead"[311] suggests that bones, artefacts, supposedly absolute and authentic testaments to history are dangerous in their ability to obscure feeling; documented history lies in tension, even contrary, to the fact that all "feel they know not what but care". We return once again to the ideas of sympathy and care that Rousseau and other eighteenth-century philosophers advocated and which shaped the humanitarian social premise of Romantic verse. So how may nationhood – as a signifier of the division for which Blake berates Urizen as Creator – be reconciled with the spiritual and affective comfort evoked by Blake's vision and rhetoric of the bardic sublime?

Nation as Emanation

Blake's prophetic books, particularly *Milton* and *Jerusalem,* are pervaded by references to the national. Blake relies heavily upon specifically Welsh bardic imagery – of Druids, tabernacles (indicative of spirituality in the form of Nonconformity), monoliths, megaliths, oak groves – framed by a rhetoric of the sublime in order to attest to the sacrilegious fragmentation of the world (exemplified by the jolting syntax and recurrent caesuras of "Shutting the sun. & moon. & stars. & trees. & clouds. & waters." in *Milton,* plate 28, 33), as well as to transcend such divisions, boundaries and tensions through the transhistorical, ancient and prophetic figure of the bard: a voice of wisdom, associated with song, itself fluid and transcendental in its ability to evoke feeling across ages.

If Blake's emanation may be understood as the feminine aspect of and testament to broken, fallen divided man (composed of the emanation, the shadow and the spectre), then the spiritual topography mapped by Blake's general and particular descriptions of continents, countries and cities may be said to simultaneously stand for man divided:

> We are not Individuals but States: Combinations of Individuals
> We were Angels of the Divine Presence: & were Druids in Annandale
> Compelld to combine into Form by Satan, the Spectre of Albion,
> Who made himself a God &, destroyed the Human Form Divine.
> But the Divine Humanity & Mercy gave us a Human Form
> Because we were combind in Freedom & holy Brotherhood.
>
> [*Milton*, plate 32, 10-15]

[311] This also echoes Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead.", p. 35, line 2.

The Spectre invoked here, Albion, is also described as the "Druid Albion" [plate 37, line 34]. The Druid Albion may be understood as the pre-fallen divine human state of imagination Blake envisages, wherein nothing was divided, liberty of thought and feeling flourished, and all were intertwined by eternal bonds of emotional attachment and fraternity. Bardic Albion is at once a motif for emancipation and the sublime:

> A Bards prophetic Song! for sitting at eternal tables,
> Terrific among the Songs of Albion in chorus solemn & loud
> A Bard broke forth! all sat attentive to the awful man.
>
> [*Milton*, plate 2, 22-24]

A Burkean sublime of terror bears obvious influence, here; the Bard is "Terrific", "awful", in possession of prophetic power incomprehensible to mere mortal man. The bard is imbued with a quasi-religious redemptive power, signalled in the refrain that appears no fewer than eight times in *Milton*: "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation".[312]

The idea of national redemption, and of a national epic as prophetic in foretelling and, even, facilitating the resurgence of a lost or dying culture, affiliates Blake's bardic sublime with the specifically *Welsh* - rather than generally Celtic - literary tradition. While Ossian as a Scottish national epic is predominantly elegiac in mourning a lost and irrecoverable national culture - epitomised by the fact that in Macpherson's work "The future of poetry hardly seems secure, and the reader is left with the words of the modern narrator, describing the death of the heroic Bard" (which we also witness in Gray's *The Bard*, who eventually plunges to a violent death)[313] - the bard, in the Welsh tradition, is an immortal figure: one to whom death can never come, for he finds posterity in song and verse. Though by the latter half of the 1770s an emergent Irish cultural nationalism had started to adopt a similarly optimistic tone, it seems more than likely that it was Gray's depiction of the last Welsh bard to which Blake was directly responding. As Luke Gibbons describes it, Ireland was witnessing "the transition from the image of the bard as an elegiac figure…to being a source of regeneration in a newly awakened nation".[314] Though Wales in the long eighteenth century shared this nationalistic pride and emotional attachment to the figure of the bard, it is my contention that the bardic figure

[312] See *Milton*: Plate 2, line 25; plate 3, line 5; plate 4, lines 20 and 26; plate 7, lines 16 and 48; plate 9, line 7; plate 11, line 31.
[313] Stafford, p. 145.
[314] Luke Gibbons, "From Ossian to O'Carolan, *From Gaelic to Romantic Ossianic Translations,* ed. Fiona Stafford and Howard Gaskill, (Amsterdam: Atlanta, GA, 1998), p. 231.

embraced by Blake was the last of the Welsh bards as portrayed by Gray but also – beyond that – one in whom more than solely the eighteenth-century Welsh invested imaginatively.

Hence, the bard is embraced by Blake as the conduit of eternal spiritual, national (or rather, perhaps, communal), imaginative feeling:

> ...All consider'd and a loud resounding murmur
> Continu'd round the Halls; and much they question'd the immortal
> Loud voicd Bard. and many condemn'd the high tone'd Song
> Saying Pity and Love are too venerable for the imputation
> Of Guilt. Others said. If it is true! if the acts have been perform'd
> Let the Bard himself witness. Where hadst thou this terrible Song
>
> The Bard replied. I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing
> According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
> Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
> To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen
>
> [*Milton*, plates 13-14, 45-51; 1-9.]

The present participle "resounding", the adjectives "immortal", "eternal", "all-protecting", and the fact that the lines are not even end-stopped, reinforce the role of the bard as agent of perpetual feeling. A living poet and emblem of cultural nostalgia ("nostos" etymologically connotes ideas of home and locality) and prophecy, the bard fulfils the expected, morally and affectively instructive role of the bards as outlined by Morganwg.

It is interesting to note, however, that the audience's initial reaction to the words of the bard is not a particularly positive or welcoming one. The verbs "question'd" and "condemn'd" connote hostility and distrust. Similarly, the noun "murmur" suggests that members of the assembled crowd are all exchanging subdued grumblings of discontent, anger or irritation in response to the bard's arrival and declarations. Indeed, the bard is directly challenged by his audience to prove that his "acts have been perform'd"; the tone is accusatory when the crowd asks, "Where hadst thou this terrible Song [?]"

In this way, the bard is presented to us by Blake through a Christological lens. Like the Bard, Jesus, too, is asked – even commanded – to prove himself to be the Son of God on numerous occasions in the Bible. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus refuses to perform a miraculous act of transfiguration in order just to satisfy the demands of the Devil:

> 1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
> 2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

> 3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.
> 4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
>
> (Matthew, 4: 1-5)

Instead, Jesus asserts that Man must live by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". It is, counterintuitively, by word and not by deed that Jesus wishes to be accepted as the Saviour. He refuses to perform acts on demand so as to "prove" himself as the Son of God – even to the extent that he refuses to do so during the brutal, final human act of being crucified:

> 39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,
> 40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.
> 41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said,
> 42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.
> 43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.
>
> (Matthew, 27: 39-44)

In a comparable manner, the bard refuses to acknowledge the crowd's demand to perform "acts" or to prove himself somehow by way of placating them. Instead, he cites and invokes "Poetic Genius" as his authority: "the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity / To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen". The final line of this extract is, again, a clear biblical echo of the Lord's Prayer: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." [Matthew, 6: 13]. The bard, like Christ, is a figure who is at once inspired, persecuted, and of divine insight.

The Blakean bard is the embodiment of the living, spiritual imagination: the divine body or "Human Form Divine" described in *Milton*, of which all individuals are merely components. "States" and "Druids" are paralleled in Blake's prophetic books; the world in its true and righteous form (or, rather, state) would be a holistic one, imagination and community synonymous:

> He [Blake] was a patriot of the inner worlds, of the England of the Imagination whose 'golden builders' he saw everywhere at work in the creation of Golgonooza, the city within the brain (*golgos*, skull), 'the spiritual fourfold London eternal'. He saw his nation 'sunk in deadly sleep', victim of the 'deadly dreams' of a materialism whose effects in all aspects of national life were destructive and

> sorrowful, wars, exploitation of human labour, sexual hypocrisy, a 'cruel' morality of condemnation and punitive laws, the denial and oppression of the soul's winged life.[315]

In *Urizen*, the dead, the sleeping, are awoken by the voice of Orc: the figure of revolution in Blake's mythology, child of Los (the creative, artistic figure) and Enitharmon, and ostracised victim of Urizen's tyranny. This may seem to problematise the conflation of Druid-Bard Urizen with ideas of national spirit, but not if one remembers that Urizen is not innately bad – he signals an unbalanced state of being, wherein a preoccupation with the empirical, the rigid, the material, the verifiable, has come to dominate at the expense of passion, feeling and imagining. The image on the title page of *Urizen* exemplifies the way in which the protagonist is at once portrayed as tyrant and victim:

[316]

[315]Kathleen Raine, *Golgonooza – City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake*, (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1991), pp. 4-5.

[316] Image taken from title page of *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, held at the Library of Congress. Available online at: http://www.blakearchive.org/blake/images/urizen.g.p1.100.jpg, accessed on 01/10/15.

Urizen's eyes are downcast, his expression dejected; he has restricted his own vision – and his own capacity to feel and to imagine – by relying so heavily upon scripture, and upon the approved and orthodox modes of thought it represents, such as the institution of the Christian church. Rather than engaging creatively with the world and with others around him, Urizen appears to be simply copying the content of the book upon which he crouches. Even his body language – compressed, hunched, downward-looking – conveys the extent of his repression: limitations he imposes upon himself as much as upon others. Imaginative and emotional liberation is to be found in Golgoonoza, Blake's vision of Jerusalem: the holy city depicted through the emblematic model city of London.

In *Jerusalem,* the rhetoric of the bardic sublime functions to foreground Golgoonoza as a model of the spiritual and eternal state of imagination Blake reveres. The bardic sublime and, within that category, the timeless or transhistorical figure of the bard, is as much a model for a mode of being as Golgoonoza is as the "city" of imagination; the communal, spiritual, affective pre-Creation state of the world, which has subsequently and mistakenly been rendered tangible, solidified, divided and fixed:

> There is a Void, outside of Existence, which is enterd into
> Englobes itself & becomes a Womb, such was Albions Couch
> A pleasant Shadow of Repose calld Albions lovely Land
>
> His Sublime & Pathos become Two Rocks fixd in the Earth
> His Reason his Spectrous Power, covers them above
> Jerusalem his Emanation is a Stone laying beneath
> O [*Albion behold Pitying*] behold the Vision of Albion
> [*Jerusalem,* plate 1, 1-7]

Urizen is the spectral figure of Reason, cloaking all with his darkness. Salvation, emanation, lies in the "Stone laying beneath" – the skeleton of Albion's island, sporadically referenced through allusions to stone, rock and the serpentine throughout Blake's works, in the form of "Druid Temples" [plate 17, 14], "Serpent Temples" [plate 80, 48], monoliths and megaliths. As Jon Mee argues:

> The druidic connotations of the 'ancient temple serpent-form'd' [*Europe*, plate 10, line 2] are quite specific and can be traced to the theories of the antiquarian William Stukeley. In his *Stonehenge* (1740) and *Abury* (1743) Stukeley had put forward the influential idea that the various stone circles around Britain had their origins in the hieroglyphic language of the druids. Stonehenge was the main metropolitan

> temple of the druids and so was built in a circle...to signify the omnipotence of the godhead...Abury's serpent shape was a hieroglyphic of Christ.[317]

Erdman's suggestion that Blake refers to the serpentine temple at Avebury[318] seems likely, given that it constitutes a convenient motif – like the "Stone of Night" [*Europe,* plate 10, 26], as a site of obscure druidic practices – through which Blake may critique religions like Druidism. *The Poems of Ossian* collection also contains similar references to stones such as the "stone of power" in Fingal Book III[319], which would have almost certainly have influenced Blake. The Druid is invoked by Blake in reverence for its bardic associations, but also in condemnation of its tyrannical, institutional and oppressive ones, for as he states in his early tractate *There is no Natural Religion* (1788): "If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. / the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things / & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over / again."[320] Some kind of flux, or change, or motion is essential for Blake; it is when things become "fixed" that they become tyrannical. Imaginative and creative acts afford opportunities for perpetual "newness" and for individual expression, which ensure that both liberty and spiritual community are preserved.

Hence, it becomes necessary for Blake's reader to distinguish between bard and Druid. When Albion speaks in the first chapter of *Jerusalem,* it is in lamentation for the shackles of time and the material – those which manacle the individual and imagination – which man has forged for himself:

> O Jerusalem Jerusalem I have forsaken thy Courts
> Thy Pillars of ivory & gold: thy Curtains of silk & fine
> Linen: thy Pavements of precious stones: thy Walls of pearls
> And gold, thy Gates of Thanksgiving thy Windows of Praise:
> Thy Clouds of Blessing; thy Cherubims of Tender-mercy
> Stretching their Wings sublime over the Little-ones of Albion
> O Human Imagination O Divine Body I have Crucified
> I have turned my back upon thee into the Wastes of Moral Law...
>
> [plate 24, 17-24]

Urizen represents this fallen man: one obsessed with the empirical, inherently good, with druidic and bardic potential given his learning, power and religiosity, but one who has become

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[317] Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 92.
[318] Erdman, p. 904.
[319] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian, ibid,* p. 73.
[320] Erdman, p. 3.

cruel and lost his way. While Hebraic, these lines lament loss of bardic sanctity ("Human Imagination") for druidic sacrifice ("Wastes of Moral Law"). Albion's anguish is acute, reinforced by recurrent use of the interjection "O" – itself a hieroglyph of sorts, as a symbol of eternity, as an image which is visually hollowed, and immediately precedes three reverential noun phrases for Albion of "O Jerusalem Jerusalem", "O Human Imagination", "O Divine Body". Druidic monuments like the serpent temple, as material testament to archaeological history, exemplify that which Albion and Blake despise as the shackles of time:

> We reared mighty Stones: we danced naked around them:
> Thinking to bring Love into light of day, to Jerusalems shame... [4-5]

The Druids, associated with the contingent and with historical and temporal specificity in their preoccupation with rules and sacrificial acts of human life perpetrated in oak groves, signify mortality and fixed false wisdom; the bard, by contrast, is supratemporal: an at once ancient and prophetic figure who can reconjure feeling and reawaken the sleeping Albion through verse.

Urizen, as druidic protagonist of Blake's prophetic books, constitutes a fourfold symbol: of oppressive institutionalism to be critiqued; of religiosity and the prophetic; a signifier of the Welsh bardic tradition; a motif of the transcendental, of how feeling supersedes temporal divides, given the Druid's enigmatic position within mythic rather than verifiable history. Consequently, Urizen foregrounds the organic, the spiritual, the affective and the literary: ideas which are bound together by and eternally bind all individuals in the divine body of imagination to which, Blake claims, all belong:

> The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself
> Affection or Love becomes a State, when divided from Imagination
> The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State
> Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created
> Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot
> The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife
> But their Forms Eternal Exist, For-ever. Amen Halle[l]ujah
>
> [*Milton*, plate 32, 32-38]

Druidic and Christian symbols are syntactically paralleled in the penultimate line: the "oak", holy tree of Druids, and the "Lamb", conventional symbol of Christ. Both things, as material

objects, may be destroyed by manmade weaponry: the "Ax" and the "Knife". However, their "Forms" or, rather, what they represent – faith or spiritual solace more generally – live on because they cannot be fixed. They are, in this way, comparable to "Imagination" or "Human Existence itself" for Blake – both of which are dependent upon the spiritual imaginative community. "Memory", in contrast – to be understood as the powers of empirical recall – is but a fixed "State", as is any other thing which has been separated from one's imaginative capabilities.

Acknowledging Blake's invocation of the historical-mythological Welsh figure of Arthur, described as a "hard cold constrictive Spectre" in plate 54 of *Jerusalem* [25], as a manifestation of his decision to subvert the assumed authority of history in the context of national feeling is pivotal to understanding his bardic sublime in that:

> ...it might seem that Blake is here putting things the wrong way round because the historical Arthur is 'real' and the Giant Albion 'imaginary'. But Blake was neither ignorant of history nor simple-minded...the Giant Albion has the enduring reality of the collective identity and continuing life of the soul of the nation; whereas Arthur was only one individual in whom that soul once expressed itself and around whom the enduring reality of the national life crystallized...[321]

The national life is one that must be sustained by ideas of the bardic and of Albion – those which require active and continual imagining – for moral and spiritual truths may themselves only be realised through perpetual acts of the imagination for Blake: premised upon the integrity of feeling, founded on affective affinity to place, and advocated through verse framed in a rhetoric of the bardic sublime.

For Blake, the bardic sublime is both a centrifugal and centripetal visionary mode by which the individual spiritually enters into the collective state of imagination, through an act of cultural memory prompted by affective engagement with – if not landscape – myths, figures and ruins of the past. While drawing upon the bardic images of Gray's poetry, itself inflected by Welsh prosody, as well as those of Macpherson and Morganwg, Blake's bardic sublime is distinctive in its prophetic optimism, personified by the bard: a figure who testifies to the endurance, posterity and inevitable resurgence and survival of collective or community spirit.

It is this notion of community spirit in relation to the bardic which we shall explore further in the next chapter, focusing on the poetry of Wordsworth. Having considered the

[321] Raine, pp. 168-169.

mental landscape and rich mythology of Blake's poetry, we shall turn to consider Wordsworth's fascination with mythology rooted in and evoked *by* the landscape. In contrast with this chapter's overview of Blake's imaginative community, I shall outline what I refer to as Wordsworth's "community of feeling", examining how Wordsworth invokes the bards as "Prophets of Nature" [*The Prelude,* Book Thirteen, l. 442]: the tutelary national intermediaries between man and landscape; spiritual figures of prophecy; affective resources for pathos, elegy and terror (and, thus, sublime experience); and forefathers of poets.

Chapter Three: "Prophets of Nature"

William Wordsworth

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason and by truth: what we have loved
Others will love; and we may teach them how,
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells…[322]

Wordsworth's fascination with bards and minstrels – and in the imaginative possibilities that could be explored by writing about, or even in the first-person as, such figures – was an enduring one throughout his literary career. It was, moreover, one of his earliest interests. The role of the ancient bard or minstrel is explicitly highlighted within the verse of the teenage Wordsworth at Cambridge, and allusions to other writers such as Thomas Chatterton, Thomas Gray and Thomas Percy in such early works indicate that he was interested in both reading and writing bardic verse.

Richard Gravil's *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation, 1787-1842* is a rich and immeasurably helpful introduction to Wordsworth's bardic verse and to the connections he forges between the bardic, landscape and community, starting with close readings of *Salisbury Plain*: the bardic-druidic site of Stonehenge which Wordsworth had visited in 1793. There is, however, a stage missing to Wordsworth's bardic development in his study. Though Gravil acknowledges that "the 'Sacred Bards and wise Druides', as Drayton called them, appear in Wordsworth's work at regular intervals from 1787 to 1842", he does not conduct close reading which specifically focuses upon the poet's works which were composed during these first five years of 1787-1792 in his study.[325]

As such, my approach to Wordsworth's bardic development will start by addressing these formative years in some detail. Then, I turn to *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, reading it

[322] Wordsworth, Book XIII, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark Reed, volume 2, (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 324, ll. 442-448. Please note that all quotations from Wordsworth's texts are from the Cornell series – see bibliography.
[325] Gravil, p. 20.

in relation to the theme of landscape and imagination in Wordsworth's verse, highlighting its centrality to his model of the bardic sublime. Next, I consider Wordsworth's affinity to the landscape of Wales, including Snowdon, but also focusing on his attachment to South Wales, before exploring the significance of Scottish poetry and landscape to Wordsworth's own verse. This section will also include analysis of *The Excursion*. Finally, I turn to consider two of Wordsworth's texts from the 1820s in order to demonstrate how Wordsworth's fascination with bards, Druids and imaginative responses to landscape endured and developed throughout his career. To do so, I concentrate on his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* and, then, "Composed among the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales", offering summative comments about the importance of posterity and the accessibility of sublime experience which are so integral to Wordsworth's model of the "bardic sublime" in verse.

Minstrelsy: A Mode of Mourning

In order to understand the connections – and distinctions – between bards and minstrels in relation to Wordsworth's poetry and poetics, it is most helpful to consult one of Wordsworth's own textual sources: Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Percy presents minstrels as the natural successors to the role once played by the ancient bards:

> Although by "Minstrel" was properly understood, in English, one who sung to the harp…confined to the Musician only…the Minstrels in many respects bore a strong resemblance both to the British bards and to the Danish Scalds…[326]

Percy continues:

> The Minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient Bards…who under different names were admired and revered, from the earliest ages…by almost all the first inhabitants of Europe…the poet and the Minstrel early with us became two persons…Poetry was cultivated by men of letters indiscriminately; and many of the most popular rhimes were composed amidst the leisure and retirement of monasteries. But the Minstrels continued a distinct order of men for many ages after the Norman conquest…singing verses to the harp at the houses of the great…and retained many of the honours shown to their predecessors the Bards…[327]

[326] Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets, together with Some Few of Later Date,* volume 1, (London: Edward Moxon, 1844), pp. lvi-lvii.
[327] Thomas Percy, "An Essay on the Ancient Minstrels in England", *ibid,* pp. xxi-xxiii.

For Percy, the minstrel succeeds the bard as revered heir to the harp – now perhaps comparable to the role of a profound poet for the privileged, rather than just a mere musician or entertainer.

In January 1788, the seventeen-year old Wordsworth began to revise "Dirge – Sung by a Minstrel" which he had begun to compose in late 1787, shaped by and overlapping with "Death a Dirge" which dates from the same months of composition. The two texts share words and phrases, as well as – most notably – an indebtedness to Thomas Chatterton's *Ælla*.[328] Chatteron's poem, a tragedy, is composed of the songs of three different minstrels who are charged with bringing consolation to Birtha: the wife of Ælla – hero of the "Tragycal Enterlude", keeper of Bristol Castle – who has been summoned to fight the Danes. Wordsworth's dirges, as songs commemorating the dead, echo the elegiac words and melancholic tones of Chatterton's minstrels and are doubly poignant in light of the fact that Wordsworth had started to pen his bardic verse at the very same age at which Chatterton himself had died. The consolation which Egwina seeks for Birtha in asking the minstrels to sing could only be said to be provided cathartically through their song of fictitious sorrow. Indeed, Wordsworth reproduces a mournful refrain from Chatterton's Ælla in an early version of "Dirge – Sung by a Minstrel"[329] – which, in turn, echoes Desdemona's song of lament in Shakespeare's *Othello*:[330]

> The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
> Sing all a green willow:
> Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
> Sing willow, willow, willow:
> The fresh streams ran by her, and murmur'd her moans;
> Sing willow, willow, willow;
> Her salt tears fell from her, and soften'd the stones;
> Lay by these:—
> Sing willow, willow, willow…
>
> [Shakespeare, *Othello*, Act IV, Scene 3, ll. 3062-3071]

> Mie love ys dedde,
> Gon[ne] to hys death-bedde,
> Al[le] under[re] the wyllowe tree.
>
> [Chatterton, "Mynstrelles Songe", *Ælla*, ll. 5-7; 12-14; 19-21; 26-28; 33-35; 40-42; 47-49; 54-56]

[328] Thomas Chatterton, *Rowley Poems*, ed. Maurice Evan Hare, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911)
[329] William Wordsworth, *Early Poems and Fragments, 1785-1797*, ed. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis, (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 566.
[330] William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare, based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2008)

Mie love is dedde
Gone to her death bedde
Al under the wyllowe tree

[Wordsworth, "Dirge – Sung by a Minstrel", 9a-11a]

The role of the minstrel or the bard in Chatterton's verse, as in Wordsworth's dirge, is a deeply evocative and elegiac one. The willow is invoked in both texts: a familiar symbol of sorrow, mourning, loss. Thomas Percy, too, had included a song of lament associated with forsaken love, "grief and willow-tree",[331] in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Percy's *Reliques* is a collection with which Wordsworth seems to have been familiar, given his allusion to another of Percy's texts in these lines – focused upon the chiming of a "death-bell" – from "Death a Dirge":[332]

Three times, all in the dead of night,
A bell was heard to ring; [Percy, "Lucy and Colin", ll. 17-18]

Nine times the death-bell's sprite,
Sullen for a virgin cried
And they say – at dead of night
Before its time the taper died. [Wordsworth, ll. 5-8]

The mood is sombre, the tone one of lament and finality, reinforced by the use of the verb "cried" together with the ominous terms "death-bell", "dead" and "night". There is almost an atmosphere of the Gothic created in Wordsworth's lines; the end-stopped line "Before its time the taper died" suggests a candle that has been suddenly – inexplicably – snuffed out. The pronounced caesura before the prepositional phrase "at dead of night", and after the conspiratorial, "And they say", acts as a pause generating dramatic suspense, and conveys a tone of mystery – of rumoured greater forces at hand – and, perhaps, of fear as a result. The sound of the death-bell tolling is echoed through the "i" of "Nine", "times", "sprite", "cried", "night", "time" and "died" – they are all stressed syllables, gesturing toward the nine chimes of the tolling bell, marking the solemnity of the occasion. This is a poem in which the bardic is very much associated with loss and lament rather than one in which the elegiac tone is tempered by images and assurances of prophecy and revival, as it was in Gray's "The Bard"

[331] "The Willow Tree: A Pastoral Dialogue", *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry,* p. 135, l. 30.
[332] William Wordsworth, *op. cit.,* p. 564.

and Blake's poetry. The minstrel himself is an orator, a sombre narrator, a moving songster. Drawing upon earlier works of minstrelsy from the eighteenth century, Wordsworth invokes the affective power of the bardic voice without – at least at this stage in his poetic corpus – focusing upon landscape or upon sublimity.

While some of the lines in Wordsworth's "Death a Dirge" and "Dirge – Sung by a Minstrel" all but replicate those of Percy's *Reliques*, it is interesting that the "he" of Percy's poem is instead a "she" in Wordsworth's composition:

> Ah! no, he is dead and laid in his grave,
> For ever to remain.[333]
>
> [Percy, "The Friar of Orders Gray", ll. 59-60]

> But now she is dead
> And laid in her grave
> For ever to remain.
>
> [Wordsworth, "Death a Dirge", ll. 17-19]

This is perhaps a change that Wordsworth implemented in order for the speaker, "a Minstrel", to be presented as the male lover of the deceased, thereby adhering to the conventionally masculine framework of the bardic genre: one which, as we shall see in the next chapter on Hemans' conception of the bardic sublime, goes on to be challenged in the nineteenth century. Wordsworth was to write several poems a few years after these two dirges which tell of another dead female – texts now known as the "Lucy Poems" – which, similarly, reflect upon the death of a female and the effects that this has upon the poetic speaker:[334]

> She *liv'd* unknown, and few could know
> When Lucy ceas'd to be;
> But she is in her Grave, and oh!
> The difference to me. [Wordsworth, "Song", ll. 9-12]

The extract above shares the mournful tone to be found in the dirges – intense pain is expressed through the interjection "Oh!", the parentheses and punctuation end-stopping these lines being indicative of breathlessness, such is the depth of the speaker's sadness. This interjection is a sorrowful echo of the stressed syllables from the adjective "unknown" and the verb "know"

[333] Thomas Percy, vol. 1, p. 248.
[334] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, eds. James Butler and Karen Green, (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 164.

two lines beforehand: words which are chimed, through internal rhyme, and themselves simultaneously suggest the (albeit) unspoken utterance of a devastated, homophonic "no" on the part of the speaker. The notion of words that are too painful to utter is a notable one – Lucy is only named once in the entire poem. She is, instead, described euphemistically through the third-person pronoun "she" or through use of the impersonal noun phrase "A maid"; it is as though the grieving speaker can hardly bring themselves to utter Lucy's name. Similarly, what is clearly an elegy to a lost beloved is, instead, simply named "Song". Euphemistic references to Lucy's death are exemplified by Wordsworth's use of the phrase "Lucy ceas'd to be". Lucy, for the grief-stricken speaker, did not die, or pass on; she simply stopped being, stopped living.

Use of the prefix "un" instead of the adverb "not" conveys the extent of difficulty that the speaker experiences in trying to come to terms with Lucy's death. To *un*do something is to reverse it; Lucy has not been lost, she has simply returned to a state of *un*being – to the earth, in the biblical sense: "…till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art,* and unto dust thou shalt return".[335] The speaker's use of "unknown", as with the instance of "untrodden" in the poem's opening line, serves to suggest that Lucy was a figure of purity, mystery and innocence. She was childlike, as of yet untainted by the world, perhaps not only unknown but herself unknow*ing*. Lucy seems to have been "Half-hidden" to all but the "very few" who loved and knew her, just like the "Violet by a mossy stone": her grave.

Furthermore, Wordsworth's use of the trisyllabic noun "difference" is striking in a primarily monosyllabic text; it constitutes no fewer than half of the total beats in the poem's final line. Indeed, the patterning of stresses itself serves to augment the speaker's anguish at Lucy's death – through the gaping chasm in the word itself, the stressed first and third syllables polarised by the unstressed beat that divides them. However, in other "Lucy Poems", a certain consolation seems to be found by the speaker in the affiliation between nature and Lucy, even in death:

> No motion has she now, no force;
> She neither hears nor sees;
> Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course
> With rocks and stones and trees! [336]
>
> [Wordsworth, "A slumber did my spirit seal", ll. 5-8]

[335] Genesis, 3: 19.
[336] *Ibid,* p. 164.

The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her, for her the willow bend,
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the storm
A beauty that shall mould her form
By silent sympathy.[337]

["Three years she grew in sun and shower", ll. 19-24]

While Lucy no longer possesses "motion" or "force", the verb "Roll'd" and the pre-modifier "diurnal" suggest a reassuringly cyclical course from life into death into nature for Lucy. The preposition "With", foregrounded, signals that she is not alone. The syndetic listing of the final line, "rocks **and** stones **and** trees" – combined with the neatly alternating rhyme scheme – suggests a world, a natural order, that is in balance. "Motion" and "force" – Lucy's inner spirit" – may be lost, but she remains an earthly being by virtue of her affinity to nature. Though now passively "Roll'd round", Lucy's body remains of the earth; she has herself become part of the landscape. A similar sentiment is suggested in "Three years she grew in sun and shower", wherein nature claims Lucy to be "A Lady of my own" [l. 5]. In contrast to Blake's verse – which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, focuses upon the individual's projection of a mental landscape – in this poem, the speaker narrates how nature and the natural world have raised, shaped and ultimately claimed Lucy for, and as part of, the landscape. Her surroundings display human emotions of attachment to and sympathy for her: the "floating clouds their state shall lend / To her"; the "stars of midnight shall be dear / To her; when she listens to "rivulets dance their wayward round…beauty born of murmuring sound / Shall pass into her face". Nature takes it upon herself to "rear" [l. 32] Lucy: "This Child I to myself will take / She shall be mine" [l. 4-5]. The sorrowful symbol of the willow appears again: "for her the willow bend" [l. 20]. Nature claims Lucy as a kindred spirit:[338]

Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell. [ll. 34-36]

[337] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800,* eds. James Butler and Karen Green, (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 164..
[338] *Ibid,* p. 222.

For the speaker, consolation is to be found in the beauty of the landscape with which Lucy was so strongly affiliated – and in the poignant memory of her being at one time a friend to, and now of, it:

> She died and left to me
> This heath, this calm and quiet scene,
> The memory of what has been,
> And never more will be. ––– [ll. 39-42][339]

Place and memory are inextricably linked in these poems, and Lucy's grave is a "calm and quiet scene". Her grave is a "happy dell" [l. 36].

Despite the similarity in theme, the difference between the Lucy poems – composed between late 1798 and early 1799 – and the dirges, which Wordsworth composed just over a decade earlier, is striking. Death in the dirges is depicted as a darker fate. The deceased female's eye-brow is "mouldering", her eye is "soft-dissolving", and "each worm with trembling hears / And stops for joy his dreadful trade". These are not images of serenity as we see in the Lucy poems but, rather, images of debasement and almost Gothic decomposition. There is little consolation. The disbelieving "no" of Percy's text is replaced by the adverbial "now", signalling resignation, in Wordsworth's lines. These predominantly monosyllabic lines contrast starkly with those of the preceding two stanzas, as well as with the four stanzas which follow these shorter, emphatic three lines. The rhythm of iambic tetrameter is, here, replaced by two lines composed of an iamb and an anapaest before a slower, final, end-stopped one of iambic trimeter. The only possible respite for the reader is to be found in the posterity afforded by the minstrel's, or poet's, song; it is the only testament to her memory.

Wordsworth's initial engagement with literary minstrels was one preoccupied with their role in relaying elegiac, moving song, shaped by earlier texts of the eighteenth century. Duncan Wu has noted that, in the late 1780s, Wordsworth was encouraged to read Percy's *Reliques* – together with Beattie's *Minstrel*, Burns' *Poems* and the verse of Charlotte Smith – by Thomas Bowman: his headmaster at Hawkshead Grammar School from 1786 until Wordsworth left to commence studies at St John's College, Cambridge, the following year.[340] Wordsworth's introduction to the bardic was, as such, through books, and through schooling – mediated

[339] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800,* eds. James Butler and Karen Green, (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 222.
[340] Further details of Wordsworth's reading at Hawkshead can be found in Duncan Wu (ed.), *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799,* vol. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 162-163.

through and directed by the words and reading of others – but he nonetheless took it upon himself to start to not only imitate, but also to compose bardic verse himself at this early stage. What marks the shift from the dirges, as early compositions, to Wordsworth's subsequent bardic works is the increasing significance of place, of landscape, of community in his verse. Even just a decade later, Wordsworth's Lucy poems signal Wordsworth's ever-growing interest in the significance of landscape, the natural world and one's personal affinity to specific places as conduits of individual and collective memory and, in conjunction with this, as catalysts of consolation.

Lyrics of Landscape and the Sublimity of the Sea

Wordsworth's "Storm Fragments", composed in the summer of 1788, similarly reinforce the poet's early fascination with the connections between poetry, landscape and consolation. Voices and spirits of the landscape, documented by the speaking poet, dominate these fragments. Echoes of Gray's "Bard" and "Ossian" are clear. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis claim that, in "Fragment I", "Wordsworth's 'spirit of the mountain' in its stormy context appears to come direct from Ossian".[341] Indeed, the elegiac associations with the bardic which we have already witnessed in "Dirge – Sung by a Minstrel" and "Death a Dirge", and which persist throughout Wordsworth's "Storm Fragments", find full expression in descriptions of the natural world in a way that bears strong resemblance to the bardic elegy, shared by the voices of landscapes in lamentation, in *Ossian*:

> We sat, that night, in Selma round the strength of the shell. The wind was abroad, in the oaks; the spirit of the mountain shrieked. The blast came rustling through the hall, and gently touched my harp. The sound was mournful and low, like the song of the tomb. Fingal heard it first, and the crowded sighs of his bosom rose. – Some of my heroes are low, said the gray-haired king of Morven. I hear the sound of death on the harp of my son. Ossian, touch the sounding string; bid the sorrow rise; that their spirits may rise with joy to Morven's woody hills.[342]

Wordsworth seems to have been particularly struck by the notion of a "spirit of the mountain" – he uses this exact phrase in the first of his "Storm Fragments", as well as in the seventh:[343]

[341] William Wordsworth, *Early Poems and Fragments, 1785-1797,* ed. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis, (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 590.
[342] James Macpherson, "Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem", *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works,* ed. Howard Gaskill, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 145.
[343] One of Macpherson's footnotes indicates that "By the spirit of the mountain is meant that deep and melancholy sound which precedes a storm; well known to those who live in a high country" [*ibid,* p. 145].

Wave over wave ascending steep and high
And hoarser murmurings run along the wood
[?round] hollow rocks with darkened floods
Dry is the crash that from the forest breaks
An[d] loud the Spirit of the mountain shrieks
["Storm Fragment I", ll. 1-5]

The description oscillates back and forth between sea and woodlands – from waves to woods, from rocks to forest – before culminating in a loud shriek from the mountaintop: a noise that knows no end, with no punctuation to curtail or to contain it. Sounds, sights and specific words from this fragment are echoed in the seventh:

The Storm was up at Eve; and now at night
Stretching his wings that sweep the hollow vale
As grim he fastens on the mountain top
Wails like an Eagle cow'ring o'er his prey;
Then hollow strokes are heard; and all night long
The sullen spirit of the mountain shrieks –
On terror's listening ear
["Storm Fragment VII", ll. 1-7]

The mountain shrieks once more, on "terror's listening ear" [ll. 6-7]. This fragment is set in the darkness of night [l. 1; l. 5], a darkness which shrouds a "hollow vale" [l. 2] wherein "hollow strokes are heard" [5] – an echo of the reference to the "hollow rocks" of the first fragment. All is bleak, "grim" [l. 3], obscured. The rhetoric of the sublime dominates both poems. Not only are the descriptions of darkness and terror affiliated with the category of the sublime, but also connected are the intense noises which are emphasised through use of the verb "shrieks", the noun "crash" and the adjective "loud". Burke's *Enquiry* details how it is not only darkness, shadow, obscurity, and contrasts or oscillation between light and darkness that can evoke sublimity; sound, and loudness, are equally effective catalysts of intense awe, terror and sublime experience:

> The eye is not the only organ of sensation, by which a sublime passion may be produced. Sounds have a great power in these as in most other passions…Excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror. The noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and aweful sensation in the mind, though we can observe no nicety or artifice in those sorts of music. The shouting of multitudes has a similar effect; and by the sole strength of the sound, so amazes and confounds the imagination, that…the best established tempers can scarcely forbear being

> borne down, and joining in the common cry, and common resolution of the crowd.[344]

It is "terror's listening ear" that Wordsworth foregrounds in "Storm Fragment VII"; the "wails", "hollow strokes", and crashing and shrieking sounds ensure that the setting is one of fearful anticipation and powerlessness in the face of nature's rage for the speaker.

There are not only echoes of *Ossian* in these fragments, but of Gray, too. As we saw in the previous chapter, Blake revered Gray not least for his appreciations of the spirits of the bards in the mountains, of

> those naked Heroes, in the Welch Mountains; they are there now, Gray saw them in the person of his bard on Snowdon; there they dwell in naked simplicity; happy is he who can see and converse with them above the shadows of generation and death.[345]

Not only can we trace a similar sentiment in Wordsworth's "Storm Fragments" – a reverence for the voices and spectres of the mountains, of the poet's ability to discern its ghosts and its "hoarser murmurings" – but the imagery of the eagle, conflated with the "sullen spirit of the mountain", constitutes an echo of the "famished eagle [who] screams and passes by" in "The Bard" [l. 38] as well as Gray's description of the eagle of Jove in the "Progress of Poesy":

> Perching on the sceptered hand
> Of Jove, thy magic lulls the feathered king
> With ruffled plumes and flagging wing:
> Quenched in dark clouds of slumber lie
> The terror of his beak and lightnings of his eye.
>
> [Gray, "The Progress of Poesy", ll. 20-24]

The "dark clouds of slumber" all around, combined with the "terror" of the eagle's beak and the "lightnings" of his eye immediately situate Jove's eagle within the category of the sublime. "Jove" does, of course, refer to Jupiter, otherwise known as Zeus: a sky god associated with thunder and lightning, terrifying and awe-inspiring in equal measure by virtue of his power.[346] He is, as such, an appropriate figure – or force, even – to invoke in relation to a stormy scene.

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[344] Burke, "Section XVII: Sound and Loudness", pp. 75-76.
[345] William Blake, "A Descriptive Catalogue", Number V. The Ancient Britons, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. David V. Erdman, (New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House Inc., 1988), p. 543.
[346] Elizabeth Knowles (ed.), "Jupiter", *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 375.

Another image which recurs in the poetry associated with the models of the bardic sublime offered by Gray, Blake and Hemans – as well as Wordsworth – is that of the sea. In "The Bard", Gray describes the poet as standing on the precipice of land and sea:

> On a rock, whose haughty brow
> Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
> Robed in the sable garb of woe,
> With haggard eyes the poet stood…[Gray, "The Bard", ll. 15-18]

Much in the same way that Wordsworth's earliest of the "Storm Fragments" oscillates between water and woodland, Gray's bard represents – and dominates – the liminal space upon the rock: between the sky and the earth, between the land and the sea, as well as between the past and the future, standing in and speaking to the present. This is echoed in Blake's verse, most notably in the refrain: "All things begin & end in Albions ancient Druid rocky shore".[347] As foregrounded in the previous chapter, almost all depictions of the figure of the ancient bard in visual art focused upon one particular moment in Gray's poem – the moment at the very end of the Ode, when the bard is about to jump to his death, to the rushing torrents beneath:

> He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's height
> Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night.
>
> [Gray, "The Bard", ll. 143-144]

The prepositional phrase "to endless night" emphasises the darkness that is a condition of sublimity, as well as another sub-category of the Burkean sublime: infinity. As Burke explains:

> Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime. There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses that are really, and in their own nature infinite. But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so.[348]

[347] See, for example, *Milton*, Book 1, plate 6, line 25, or *Jerusalem*, Book 2, plate 46, line 15, in the Erdman edition.
[348] Burke, "Section VIII: Infinity", p. 67.

The speaker's attention to "Wave over wave ascending steep and high" ["Storm Fragment I, l. 1] is echoed in "Storm Fragment IX" in which the speaker documents how a figure contemplates the way in which

> …many a torrent white
> Burst on his view and fill'd his shuddering ear
> With hollow moanings…
> ["Storm Fragment IX", ll. 3-5]

Wordsworth embraces the discourse of the bardic as well as the discourse of the sublime in these lines.

Such attention to the sea was by no means unusual in literature of the period. As Alain Corbin asserts:

> The Romantics did not discover the sea. Well before the end of the eighteenth century, the ocean shores had been places of contemplation and delight. Climbing up a dune in search of a view, striding along the top of a cliff, drinking in the sublime sight of a storm, or watching for a perfectly framed seascape in a panorama were already commonplace activities…The Romantics themselves borrowed from previous models. As most of them were heirs of Ossianism, they often found themselves interpreting the picturesque value of a scene like ordinary tourists. In 1828, Dorothy Wordsworth made a thorough visit of the Isle of Man, and followed every detail, one after another, of a ritual of the seaside holiday that had long since been codified.[349]

Reverence for the evocative and contemplative resource represented by stormy seas and lapping waves was already well documented by the time that Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans were composing verse. What distinguishes Romantic conceptions of the sea from those which had come before is a fascination with what one might term the "sublime vacancy" of the sea: the idea that the darkness of the depths – and the sensory stimulation provided by the waves lapping and the water crashing – may in fact induce deep introspection and acts of intense imagining in the self, thereby affording the individual access to heights of self-knowledge and understanding:

> The Romantic made the sea-shore the favourite spot for self-knowledge. Within the perspective of the aesthetics of the sublime…standing on the shore stirred the

[349] Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside 1750-1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1994), p. 163.

> self in a special way; this stirring arose from the exalting experience of confrontation with the elements. The sea-shore offered a stage on which…the actual spectacle of the confrontation between air, water, and land contributed to fostering daydreams about merging with the elemental forces and fantasies of being swallowed up, as it unfolded the mirages of what Ruskin was to call the pathetic fallacy. The ocean's vastness became a metaphor for the individual's fate, and made of the beach a fine line marked by the rhythms of the water, which were in turn driven by the lunar cycle; treading this line became an invitation to reassess one's life periodically.[350]

For Wordsworth, sublimity could be found in the depths of the sea as much as it could at the height of a mountain. Given his final defiant stance – documented again and again, in verse and in art, upon the edge of a cliff, between sky and sea, mountain top and ocean depths – it is unsurprising that the bard, functioning as a human and poetic axis or nexus for all of these sites, exemplifies the revered Romantic connections between human and landscape. In "Storm Fragment IX", the pine trees waving back and forth in the stormy winds, the sight of the torrents beneath, and the sounds of "hollow moanings" cause the unnamed individual to pause [l. 1] in "solemn horror" [l. 2]. Such sensations prompt "Fancy" [l. 5], the individual's imagination, to – personified – think that perhaps "She walk'd through haunted ground" [l. 6]. The storm, the sea, the landscape, the sights and the sounds all converge to induce intense imaginings. The language of this fragment is heavily indebted to "The Bard", with the description of the bard in Wordsworth's scene bearing remarkable resemblance to Gray's, who watches the armies of Edward the First climbing "Snowdon's shaggy side" [Gray, "The Bard", l. 11] towards him:

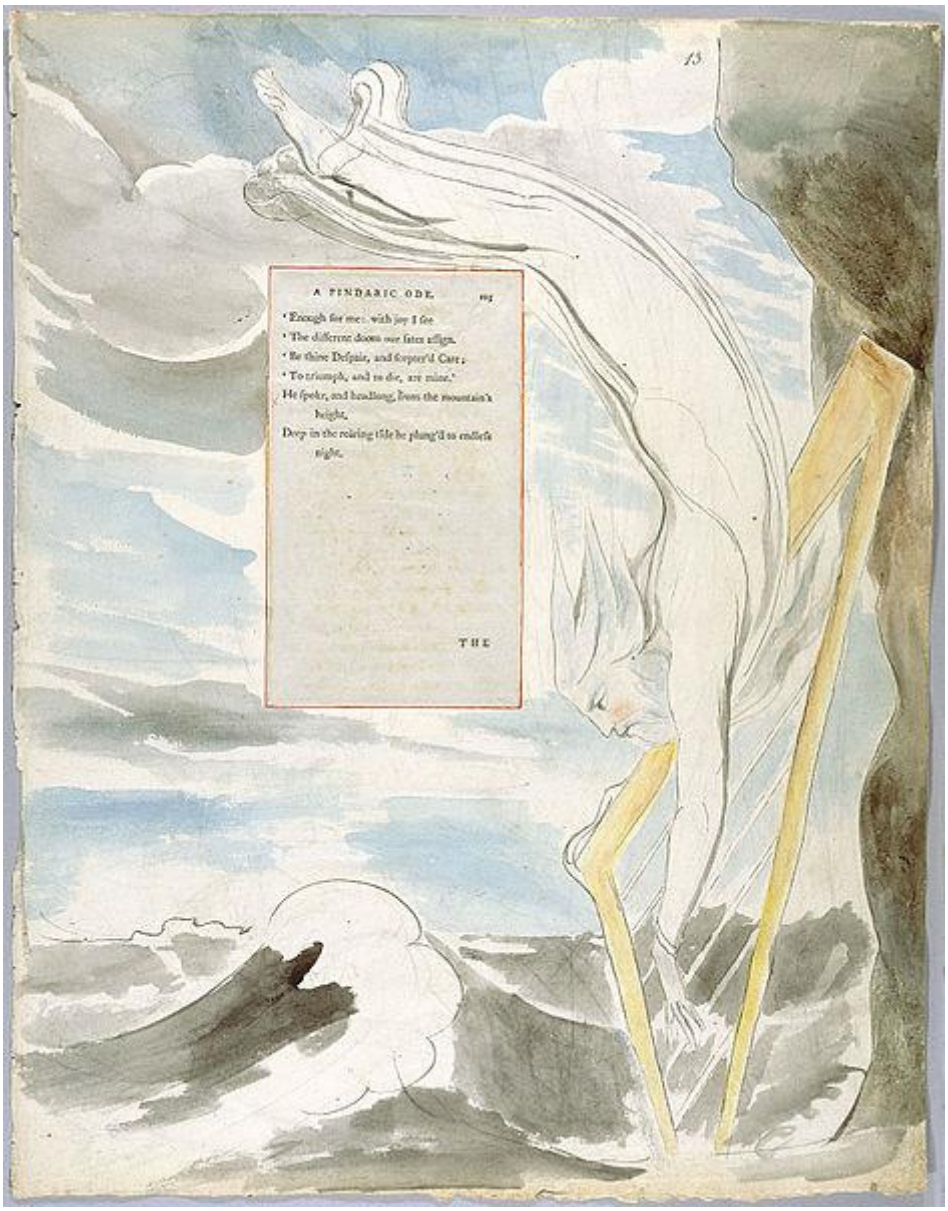
> Each on his shaggy cliff the white robe[d] bard[s]
> Struck the deep sorrows of their Lyres.
>
> ["Storm Fragment IX", ll. 8-9]

> And, with a master's hand and prophet's fire,
> Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.
>
> [Gray, "The Bard", ll. 21-22]

It is interesting that Wordsworth details the fact that the bard[s] he mentions wear[s] a "white robe" [l. 8], given that this marks a palpable departure from Gray's text in which the protagonist actually wears "the sable garb of woe" [l. 17]. All of the visual representations of the ancient bard in the previous chapter depict the bard wearing dark clothing, apart from one: the last of

[350] Corbin, p. 164.

Blake's watercolours, in which the bard, and his harp, plunge into the "endless night" of the seas below:



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Wordsworth's "Storms Fragments" were, of course, composed almost a decade prior to the creation of Blake's watercolours; Blake's images could not have directly influenced these texts. However, it is intriguing that both poets should settle on white attire for their bards. The decision to do so visually links the figure of the ancient bard directly with imagery which is conventionally associated with the Druids: white robes were known as the iconic attire of the

[351] William Blake, *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, Design 65, "The Bard", (c. 1797-1798).

Druids.[352] Moreover, conflating the identities of bards and Druids in this way served to reflect Romantic interests, for the Druids had long been considered to be "priests of nature";[353] depicting a Druid-bard afforded the figure of the ancient bard with, not only the power of prophecy attributed to the Druids, but also with an unsurpassable understanding of landscape. Landscape was the most revered stimulus to acts of the imagination for Wordsworth. Like the figure of the ancient bard, landscape was a transhistorical keeper of memories, whether personal or collective, as well as an affectively rich source of inspiration from which one could forge new memories. The image of Gray's bard wilfully plunging into the depths of the sea from the heights of Snowdon mirror the movement from landscape to imagination that Wordsworth, similarly, promotes: an echo, too, of the conflation of human and landscape in Macpherson's *Ossian,* as Corbin explains:

> The sight of the boundless sea's emptiness creates a sensation without an object that encourages the imagination to plunge into the waters…What paved the way for this…was the unreality of the Ossianic landscape and the undetermined character of the 'Celtic twilight'. Along sandy beaches, there are few ascending symbols; symbols suggesting falling, or more specifically, diving, are easier to find. Black water and the fatal sea of darkness, a blatant analogy with blood, evoke death. In the Romantic's impatient soul, this stimulates nostalgia for primeval times. The power of the imagination to undertake a journey from which no one returns helps to explain the impact of the seashore on the collective consciousness of the times.[354]

While the stoicism and fixity of sites like Snowdon and monoliths and megaliths like Stonehenge and Avebury are integral to Wordsworth's bardic sublime in terms of acting as markers of, and catalysts for, creative acts of cultural memory, the imagery of the sea – and, more broadly, of rivers and streams in Wordsworth's poetry – complement these images of fixity and posterity by tempering them with reminders of a need for fluidity: for the freedom of imagining, for the unbounded space of creativity that the sea represents and to which it affords access through the sensory stimulation that its sights and sounds offer to the individual. While rivers and streams may be regarded as belonging to the aesthetic category of the beautiful

[352] The notion of druidic attire being white is one which dates back to Pliny the Elder's account of the druids of Gaul from 1CE. It is one which persisted throughout the Romantic period and beyond, with a Victorian writer, Ella Rodman Church, claiming: "The priestly dress of Druidism was a white robe, which represented truth and holiness, as well as the solar light." See Ella Rodman Church, "Footprints of the Druids", *The Aldine,* Volume 8, Number 3 (1876), p. 90. Available online at http://www.jstor.org/stable/20637237, accessed on 25/09/16.
[353] For more information on this, see Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: the History of the Druids in Britain,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 112.
[354] Corbin, p. 167.

rather than that of the sublime – as eighteenth-century writers such as Sir Uvedale Price argued in works like his *Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1794) – I contend that, like the sea, or the ocean, rivers and streams similarly qualify as sublime "depths", to use Albert O. Wlecke's term, in accordance with the discourse and aesthetics of the bardic sublime.[355] In the final book of *The Prelude,* Wordsworth himself links all bodies of water, describing "the roar of waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice" [ll. 59-60]. In the particular instance of the bardic sublime, rivers – as part of the landscape, and especially in relation to the importance of the River Conway in Gray's 1757 ode – belong in the category of the sublime. The "endless night" [l. 144] to which Gray's bard plunges is, after all, to be reached in the depths of the river rather than in those of the sea.

Furthermore, Wordsworth's ever more pronounced attention to landscape in his verse correlates with a burgeoning fascination with how landscape, and the bard – the ancient bard of cultural memory and prophetic power, as well as the people's poet of the everyday and of communities – function as mutually important catalysts in stirring the "*civic* spirit" within individuals, stemming from the "reverential memory of their elder ancestors".[356] Wordsworth defines civic spirit as "a spirit of resistance"[357] which is to be honoured and respected, for the things "with which we are primarily and mainly concerned…are inward passions; and not outward [political] arrangements", as proven by "the manners and hearts of North and South Britons, of Englishmen and Welshmen…continued through hundreds of years…[and impossible] to efface".[358] Describing Spanish resistance to French tyranny between 1808 and 1809 in *The Convention of Cintra* (1809), Wordsworth indicates that, as Emma Mason describes, civic spirit is "driven by a freedom rooted in…the imagination".[359] Wordsworth's portrayal of Portugal as an oppressed principality in *Cintra*, along with this insistence that liberty must be reasserted imaginatively, foregrounds the consolation to be found in poetic representations of sublime experience. I now turn to a poem which exemplifies the connections between the bardic, aesthetics, memory and landscape which provide the thematic framework for Wordsworth's bardic sublime, set in – rather than the rugged Welsh and Scottish landscapes

[355] Albert O. Wlecke, *The Sublime,* eds. Harold Bloom and Blake Hobby, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2010), p. 174.
[356] William Wordsworth, "The Convention of Cintra" (1809), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen, (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 234.
[357] *Ibid,* p. 309.
[358] *Ibid*, pp. 319-320.
[359] Emma Mason, *The Cambridge Introduction to William Wordsworth,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 36.

that will be considered later in this chapter – an ancient English one: *Adventures on Salisbury Plain.*

Adventures on Salisbury Plain

In August 1793, Wordsworth walked alone across Salisbury Plain. The weather was terrible, the political climate was turbulent – the two travellers had only recently witnessed the English fleet preparing to set sail for war with France on the coast of the Isle of Wight – and this particular excursion had not been a planned one. The poet had been travelling in a horse-drawn carriage with his school friend, William Calvert, who had invited Wordsworth to join him on a tour of the West Country. While travelling onward to Wales, the carriage had fallen foul of a ditch and smashed. Calvert and Wordsworth decided to separate: Calvert would ride the horse home to Keswick, while Wordsworth would set off on his own, and on foot, across the Plain.

Salisbury Plain – and, more specifically, its most famous landmark, Stonehenge – had already been discussed at some length in eighteenth-century literature by antiquarians. Ancient British monoliths, megaliths and monuments had been identified in the seventeenth century by individuals such as Walter Charleton and Inigo Jones, although neither of them believed that Stonehenge had been constructed by the ancient Britons; the former heralded the Danes as the architects, while the latter contended that a site of such technological mastery must have been the handiwork of the Romans. It was not, however, until the composition of John Aubrey's essay "Templa Druidum" and his treatise "Monumenta Britannica" in the late seventeenth century – later corroborated by the publication of William Stukeley's *Stonehenge, a Temple Restor'd to the British Druids* in 1740, having joined the Society of Antiquaries in 1718 and following his first visit to the site in 1719 – that Stonehenge was specifically attributed to the ancient Britons: to the Druids.[360]

Burke presents Druids as exemplars of the sublime in his 1757 *Enquiry*.[361] As such, it is unsurprising that, in this poem, the speaker describes how the Sailor experiences, firstly, a sight of horror against the eerie backdrop of Salisbury Plain:[362]

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[360] Two excellent resources on eighteenth-century antiquarianism and, in particular, on Stonehenge are Rosemary Sweet's *Antiquaries: the Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain,* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004) and Ronald Hutton's *Blood and Mistletoe: the History of the Druids in Britain,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).
[361] Burke, p. 55.
[362] William Wordsworth, *The Salisbury Plain Poems,* ed. Stephen Gill, (Ithaca, NY; Hassocks: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 126.

It was a spectacle which none might view
In spot so savage but with shuddering pain
Nor only did for him at once renew
All he had feared from man, but rouzed a train
Of the mind's phantoms, horrible as vain.
The stones, as if to sweep him from the day,
Roll'd at his back along the living plain;
He fell and without sense or motion lay,
And when the trance was gone, feebly pursued his way. [ll. 118-126]

The Sailor sees, "on a bare gibbet night / A human body that in irons swang" [ll. 114-115]. It is clear that the Sailor fears what he imagines, "the mind's phantoms", more than what he actually sees, for it is a "spectacle which none might view". The Sailor is, as such, isolated by such fearful phantoms of the mind, as highlighted by use of the prepositional phrase "for him", indicating that it is the Sailor specifically, and solely, who is troubled by this particular fear. The adverb "feebly" signals the Sailor's physical powerlessness in contrast to the violent force of his mind's eye; he is without "sense", both rational and physiological. When we are told that the Sailor "fell", this seems to be both literally, at the scene, and metaphorically – ethically. Criminal punishment was itself, of course, once a "spectacle".[363] At this point in the poem, we know that the Sailor has committed an awful ethical transgression, for which the powers of his imagination – stirred by the scene – now seem to be punishing him:

He met a traveller, robb'd him, shed his blood;
And when the miserable work was done
He fled, a vagrant since, the murderer's fate to shun. [ll. 97-99]

The sight of a corpse swinging from a gibbet pricks at the Sailor's conscience and subsequently stirs "the mind's phantoms", eliciting "shuddering pain" and even causing him to fall down in a trance. He imagines that the stones of Salisbury Plain "as if to sweep him from the day, / Roll'd at his back". Wordsworth draws upon the common belief that the Druids engaged in acts of human sacrifice at the site of the stones, here, thereby facilitating a form of psycho-poetic justice; the Sailor is tortured by the notion of being murdered at the site of the stones, having committed the very same crime himself. The narrator – the poet – acts as the moral guide or ethical authority, contrasting the sins of the Sailor with the slaughter and sacrifice

[363] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1991)

staged by the Druids at Stonehenge. The imagined scene primarily, though, serves a cathartic function for the Sailor:

> As doth befall to them whom frenzy fires,
> His soul, which in such anguish had been toss'd.
> Sank into deepest calm; for now retires
> Fear; a terrific dream in darkness lost
> The dire phantasma which his sense had cross'd.
> His mind was still as a deep evening stream;
> Nor, if accosted now, in thought engross'd,
> Moody, or inly-troubled, would he seem
> To traveller who might talk of any casual theme.

The catharsis and consolation effected by poetic depictions and enactments of the sublime are modelled for the reader through the experiences of the Sailor in these lines. The alliterative "frenzy fires" give way to a slower, steadier pace in the subsequent lines as the Sailor reaches a state of emotional equilibrium, the measured pace of the lines generated and sustained by the frequency of caesura from this point in the stanza, imitative of steady breathing. "[A]nguish", "Fear", "terrific", "darkness": all are terms which could be readily associated with both the awe and terror which define Burke's conception of the sublime. These are all feelings which the Sailor experiences as a result of his own psychological, emotional and imaginative states of being; the "bleak domain" [l. 162] of "Sarum's Plain" [l. 1] is but a catalyst in inducing such imaginings, rather than the primary cause.

Why, though, is Wordsworth prepared to afford consolation to a character who is, after all, a murderer? The answer seems to lie in stanza 11, in which the narrator speaks of the Sailor's dire domestic conditions and financial status as a direct result of social injustices:

> He urged his claim; the slaves of Office spurn'd
> The unfriended claimant; at their door he stood
> In vain, and now towards his home return'd,
> Bearing to those he loved nor warmth nor food… [ll. 91-94]

The Sailor robs and kills a traveller in a state of sheer desperation; it is "miserable work" [l. 98] to him. As Duncan Wu has explicated, a commitment to highlighting political injustice – a view strongly influenced by William Godwin's political philosophy, detailed in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793) – seems to be the most compelling reason as to why Wordsworth should have assumed such a sympathetic stance to the Sailor. Godwin's *Enquiry* specifically names literature as a crucial

medium through which social injustices must be exposed – and, through which, social perfectibility may be attained:

> Few engines can be more powerful, and at the same time more salutary in their tendency, than literature. Literature has reconciled the whole thinking world respecting the great principles of the system of the universe, and extirpated upon this subject the dreams of romance and the dogmas of superstition…Discussion has ascertained with tolerable perspicuity the preference of liberty over slavery…the race of speculative reasoners in favour of despotism, are almost extinct.[364]

However, Wordsworth was to renounce some of Godwin's principles just a few years later, describing the second preface of his *Enquiry* as "barbarous"[365] in a letter to William Mathews in 1796. Wu attributes Wordsworth's disenchantment with Godwin to the latter's seeming preoccupation with the material rather than the emotional:

> Wordsworth's days as a Godwinian were numbered. The vision of man as a kind of automaton whose highest virtue was reason entailed a corresponding denial of passion. Godwin's perspective was a grimly materialist one that looked forward to Marxism. It was fundamentally antithetical to Wordsworth – who knew that emotional truth was the key to those questions about man and society for which he sought an answer.[366]

With Wordsworth envisaging emotional stimuli as being the necessary prerequisites to the salvation of society – specifically, with regard to tyranny and social injustice – it hardly seems surprising that he would embrace the richly affective, ancient landscape of the tyrannical Druids as the backdrop for his politically-driven and emotionally evocative philosophical poem. In this way, Wordsworth's use of the Druids as a poetical motif for political injustice is directly comparable to Blake's depiction of the Druids in his verse. Both poets invoke the ancient Druids as symbols of the danger of dogma, and of cruelty toward man, contrasted with their calls for compassion and sympathy, articulated by means of their own poetic – or bardic – vocation.

As such, in his determination to foreground the emotional, Wordsworth's speaker in *Salisbury Plain* invokes the fear-inducing, awe-inspiring spectres of the Druids by addressing the landscape, Stonehenge, directly; they are the keepers of ancient ghosts, of the Druids:

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[364] William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness,* (Dublin: 1793), p. 20.
[365] William Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805,* ed. Ernest de Sélincourt, 2nd edition, rev. Chester L. Shaver, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 170.
[366] Duncan Wu, "Wordsworth's Poetry to 1798", *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth,* ed. Stephen Gill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 31.

Thou hoary Pile! thou child of darkness deep
And unknown days, that lovest to stand and hear
The desart sounding to the whirlwind's sweep,
Inmate of lonesome Nature's endless year;
Even since thou sawest the giant Wicker rear
Its dismal chambers hung with living men,
Before thy face did ever wretch appear,
Who in his heart had groan'd with deadlier pain
Than he who travels now along thy bleak domain? [ll. 154-162]

Initially, the speaker mistakes the ancient site of Stonehenge for "What seems an antique castle spreading wide" [l. 141]:

Hoary and naked are its walls and raise
Their brow sublime: in shelter there to bide
He ran; the pouring rain smoked thick as on he hied. [ll. 141-144]

The stones of the site are personified as "hoary", conveying the antiquity and mystery of Gray's Bard, with descriptions of his "hoary hair" ["The Bard", l. 19] and "haughty brow" ["The Bard, l. 15] echoed here through references to Stonehenge's "brow sublime" [l. 143] and its walls "Hoary and naked" [l.142]. The settling is ghostly, ghastly – an almost Gothic one:

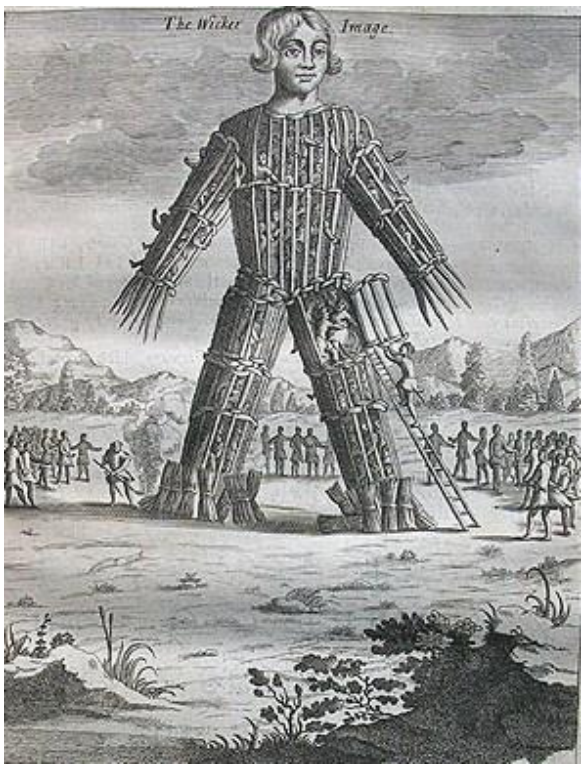
Hurtle the clouds by deeper darkness piled,
Gone is the raven timely rest to seek;
He seem'd the only creature in the wild
On whom the elements their rage might wreak;
Save that the bustard, of those limits bleak
Shy tenant, seeing by the uncertain light
A man there wandring gave a mournful shriek,
And half upon the ground, with strange affright
Forc'd hard against the wind a thick unwieldy flight. [ll. 145-153]

As A. L. Owen has asserted, "Wordsworth in particular very noticeably associates the Druids with darkness".[367] The ominous darkness with which the Druids are presented by Wordsworth is bolstered by personification. Together with the violence of the dynamic verbs "Hurtle", "wreak" and "Forc'd" – and the insistent alveolar alliteration of "deeper darkness" [l. 145] and, its inverted form, "darkness deep" [l. 156] – references to the "rage" of the elements, the wind,

[367] A. L. Owen, *The Famous Druids: A Survey of Three Centuries of English Literature on the Druids*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 49.

the "pouring rain", the "uncertain light" and the "whirlwind's sweep" all, collectively, render an image of an individual overwrought by the natural world and by the forces of the elements. More than that, though, the reader is presented with the fear-inducing force of the imagination; specifically, the spectre of druidic sacrifice – the "giant Wicker" – looms large in the wanderer's mind.

Wordsworth's invocation of the Wicker Man – an effigy, shaped like a man, filled with sacrificial humans – would have been familiar to an eighteenth-century audience. As we have already seen, the resurrection of the Druid-bard in the eighteenth century may be attributed to an interplay between antiquarian and poetic writing, facilitated and complicated by the artistic depiction of Druids and bards through visual mediums, as discussed in the previous chapter on William Blake. Two images which would have very powerfully provoked the interest and piqued the imagination of eighteenth-century writers – historical and creative – are the two below, both printed in the elaborate *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata, or the Antiquities of Ancient Britain derived from the Phœnicians* in 1676, created by English antiquarian, Aylett Sammes:



[368]

[368] Both illustrations from Aylett Sammes, *Britannia Antiqua, or the Antiquities of Ancient Britain derived from the Phœnicians,* (London: [n. pub.], 1676) – artist unknown.

We are presented with the two faces of the Druid – the embodiment of a figure who personifies "contraries" in Blakean terms. On the left, we see the Druid in the same light that Thomson's *The Castle of Indolence* (1748) casts upon him: it is a wise old man that stands pensive, mournful, mystical, foregrounded against the natural, primitive landscape. In contrast, on the right: the wicker man dominates the skyline, the terrifying mode of human sacrifice which Caesar posited as a factual – rather than rumoured – mode of Celtic barbarity. Sammes' Druid does, as such, at once represent the wise, the wild, the holy, and the barbaric:

> The picture was formed by a process of conflating classical descriptions and archaeological finds with extant iconographies of appropriate other types (such as wild men and holy men), who lent themselves to be reinterpreted as druids...Conrad Celtes's description of carvings found at the Fichtelberg in Saxony, Germany...were grafted onto depictions of wild men, green men, and Christian hermits...the visual representation of the WILD MAN or Ancient Briton was well established in the 16th century, and one of the earliest surviving images specifically identified as a druid, a design by Inigo Jones for Lodowick Carlell's The Passionate Lovers (1638), emanates from this performance tradition. [369]

Inigo Jones' conception of the Druid is, though wild – bearing strong resemblance to the notion of the "green men" as described above – also a benevolent one, as evident below:

[370]

[369] John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 614.
[370] Inigo Jones, illustration of a Druid, c. 1638. Jones was also known for his detailed studies of Stonehenge.

Interestingly, it is Jones' sympathetic portrayal of the Druids – rather than the later ambiguous Sammes' version – that Stukeley embraces in his own study of the Druids and their architectural legacy, in the form of his 1740 publication on Stonehenge. Stukeley's work – together with Thomson's – not only constitutes the most influential eighteenth-century introduction to bards, Druids and to the mystery with which they are associated but, in so doing, illustrates the fusing of scholarly, empirical depictions of such figures with creative ones, to imaginative and evocative effect. Describing the Druids as "noble ancestors"[371], Stukeley laments the fact that "the doctrines and works of the Druids have hitherto been so little considered", and offers his study of them as a way into understanding Christianity: through "the knowledge and practice of ancient and true Religion". [372] Such an assertion seems ironic given that, at the opposite end of the same century, Blake makes the same comparison between Druidism and Christianity, but in a pejorative and critical – rather than favourable – sense, as embodied by the tyrannical Druid-bard, Urizen.

Wordsworth's relationship with the Druids could also be said to be similar to Blake's on the one hand, in that he employs imagery associated with, or spectres of, the Druids as a motif for institutional tyranny and a deficiency of compassion, serving as an effective backdrop against which to poetically promote notions of community, compassion and human kindness. For example, the sailor of *Salisbury Plain* has, we are encouraged to believe, has fallen foul of moral law due to desperation to survive, caused by a lack of financial support from the government. The sailor has transgressed moral law as a result of being neglected by society.

The morally ambiguous figures of the Druids are resurfacing spectres, again and again, in Wordsworth's verse. As Owen describes, Wordsworth is at several points in his verse obsessed with:

> ...the 'horrid shrieks', the groans, and the voices of victims that could be heard above the sounds of storm and cataract. Curiously enough, since he was interested in Druid stones, in the Druids who knew the secrets of Nature, the Druids who had known the Patriarchs, the Druids who lived in Drayton's 'darksome groves', and the Druids who waved Toland's white wands in his vision on Salisbury Plain of the long-bearded teachers, his only point of contact with the Druids as they had been described in the original sources is with the sacrificers of men. [373]

[371] William Stukeley, *Stonehenge: A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids*, (London: W. Innys and R. Manby, 1740), p.2.
[372] *Ibid,* pp. 6-7.
[373] *Ibid.,* p. 167.

Conflicting with a Romantic comprehension of man as a born innocent is an implicit assertion that, without civic society, interpersonal, intersubjective relations can become skewed. The Druid is the unguarded, uncensored and unaccountable guardian and agent of such a world - and is, accordingly, comparable with Blake's figure of Urizen: depicted in the plates as a character of intense pathos, he is portrayed as permanently dejected in the fragmented, overly ordered and rational material world for which he is responsible. The danger posed by Urizen, a symbol of institutional power, is that he permits only a monotheistic, "Self-closd" [3] vision of the world.

According to Owen, Wordsworth in fact refers to the Druids more than any other English poet.[374] Jarring with alternative conceptions of the Druids as moral authorities, "the most just of men"[375], Wordsworth, for instance, speaks of and lingers over the cruelty of the Druids, in poems such as "The Vale of Esthwaite" and, indeed, in *Salisbury Plain.* Wordsworth's apostrophe to the "hoary Pile!"[376] of Stonehenge in stanza 18 heralds a vision that is to recur later in some of his works. In Book 12 of *The Prelude* (1805 version), for example, the speaker talks of how "Upon the Plain of Sarum, was I raised" [l. 314] before describing how:

> …through those vestiges of ancient times
> I ranged, and by the solitude o'ercome,
> I had a reverie and saw the past,
> Saw multitudes of men, and here and there
> A single Briton in his wolf-skin vest,
> With shield and stone ax stride across the Wold;
> The voice of spears was heard, the rattling spear
> Shaken by arms of mighty bone, in strength
> Long moulder'd of barbaric majesty. [ll. 318-326]

It is now the poet himself, rather than a character within the poet's narrative as in *Salisbury Plain,* who experiences a vision at Stonehenge. Alone, "o'ercome" by solitude on the Plain, the poet conjures images and sounds of the past; he imaginatively returns to ancient times, seeing an ancient Briton "in his wolf-skin vest, / With shield and stone ax" and hearing the

[374] Stukeley, p. 163.
[375] *Ibid,* p. 168.
[376] The phrase "hoary Pile!" is, notably, one which Wordsworth later uses in apostrophe to an actual castle, as well as to Stonehenge which "seems an antique castle" (*Salisbury Plain,* l. 142). In "Elegiac Stanzas: Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont", the same phrase is used in stanza 5 [l. 17], before the scene is, similarly, linked with the sublime: "And this huge Castle, standing here sublime, / I love to see the look with which it braves, / Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time, / The light'ning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves." [ll. 49-52]. The latter poem was composed in May-June 1806.

"voice of spears". The phrase "of barbaric majesty" signals that this vision is a sublime one – awesome and terrifying – but the power of the poet is seemingly sublime, too. The poet seems to be in possession of an almost pagan-like power, not only able to conjure a vision but to invoke the darkness which then ends this particular vision, giving rise to another:

> I call'd upon the darkness; and it took,
> A midnight darkness seem'd to come and take
> All objects from my sight; and lo! again
> The desart visible by dismal flames! [ll. 327-330]

The poet himself is the agent of the darkness in these lines. The phrase "dismal flames" suggests the half-shadows and obscured sights which, as we have already seen in previous chapters, are so characteristic of Burke's sublime of terror. Such a setting is a perfect one for the scene which follows – a scene which, following *Salisbury Plain,* is all-too familiar:

> It is the sacrificial Altar, fed
> With living men – how deep the groans! the voice
> Of those in the gigantic wicker thrills
> Throughout the region far and near, pervades
> The monumental hillocks; and the pomp
> Is for both worlds, the living and the dead. [ll. 331-336]

The "dismal flames" in *The Prelude* herald a return to the scene of "dismal chambers hung with living men" in *Salisbury Plain.* Key to this vision is an assertion that the "monumental hillocks" are "for both worlds, the living and the dead". This signals how landscape functions in Wordsworth's poetry to forge imaginative communities and emotional bonds shared by both the living and the dead: an idea reminiscent of *Ossian,* and one to which we shall return shortly.

On the one hand, in *Salisbury Plain,* we see a poet who is very much of his time – the images and allusions to the tyrannous Druids foreground the reality of social problems in the poet's present day. On the other, Book 12 of *The Prelude* uses the same scene to highlight the fact that the power of the poet is a transtemporal one. The reader is told of the "higher power" [l. 363] of the poet to actually see, and hear, the past. Moreover, the poet has – from "the vulgar forms of present things / And actual world of our familiar days" – "caught…a tone, / An image, and a character, by books / Not hitherto reflected" [ll. 361-365]. The poet is still invested in the betterment of society – such visions afford him with "sight / Of a new world, a world, too,

that was fit / To be transmitted and made visible / To other eyes" [l. 370-372] – but he also experiences personal consolation by virtue of his imaginings. Tim Fulford has claimed that:

> In the 1805 *Prelude*… Wordsworth treated Stonehenge as a Druid 'sacrificial altar, / Fed with living men', as if following the theories of Edward Davies, and imagined himself as a Druid priest, tracing figures of the heavens in the patterns of stones they arranged on earth, 'gently charm'd, / Albeit with an antiquarian's dream'… The scholarly source was, however, less significant than the young Wordsworth's capacity to overcome the desolation of Salisbury Plain by exercising his ability to imagine. His reverie-vision of the past demonstrated to him the power of his mind to see beyond the material present. The Druids were figures in and of his imagination, tokens of his growing poetic genius.[377]

The stormy solitary walk upon which Wordsworth embarked in the summer of 1793 becomes a "spot of time" to which he refers, and returns, on numerous occasions during his poetic career. Wordsworth describes the effect of such "spots of time" in the previous book of the 1805 *Prelude* – Book 11 – asserting that:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A renovating Virtue, whence, depress'd
> By false opinion and contentious thought,
> Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
> In trivial occupations, and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
> Are nourish'd, and invisibly repair'd,
> A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced
> That penetrates, enables us to mount
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen. [ll. 258-268]

The effect of such recollections is to leave one's mood and soul "nourish'd" and "repair'd". The spots of time upon which such consolation and emotional nourishment are predicated are those of the most intense feeling, those which have left their mark on the mind psychologically:

> This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
> Among those passages of life in which
> We have had deepest feeling that the mind
> Is lord and master, and that outward sense
> Is but the obedient servant of her will.

[377] Tim Fulford, "Strange Meetings: the Romantic Poets and the Stone Circles of the Lake District", *The Harp and the Constitution: Myths of Celtic and Gothic Origin,* ed. Joanne Parker, (Leiden: Brill, 2016), p. 163.

> Such moments, worthy of all gratitude,
> Are scatter'd every where, taking their date
> From our first childhood; in our childhood even
> Perhaps are most conspicuous. Life with me
> As far as memory can look back, is full
> Of this beneficent influence. [ll. 269-279]

The language of these lines is almost religious in nature. The speaker describes an efficacious "spirit" as well as using terms like "lord", "master" and "servant". Furthermore, notions of duty and generosity are suggested through words such as "obedient", "will", "gratitude, "worthy" and "beneficent", which connote almost spiritual consolation to be found in particular "passages of life". The word "passages" gestures toward the poetic, too, and to literary – or, perhaps, scriptural – texts as much as to moments. Important to Wordsworth's definition of "spots of time" is the notion that "the mind / Is lord and master" whereas "outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her [the mind's] will". For this reason, Jonathan Bishop's assertion that Wordsworth's "Druid Reverie" ought to be considered a "border-line case" in terms of qualifying as a "spot of time" seems to be an inaccurately dismissive assessment of the significance of the poet's emotional investment to his personal and imaginative associations with Salisbury Plain.[378] The emotional weight of the scene is bound to the speaker's awe and terror at the scene of darkness and suffering – a scene which is, after all, one conjured by and from his own mind: an exemplary instance, surely, of "the mind / [a]s lord and master".

Furthermore, Tim Fulford asserts that "Celtic history, in the version Wordsworth knew, emphasised priestly violence rather than bardic brotherhood".[379] This is a claim which the next sections of this chapter seek to disprove. For, even in the texts considered thus far, Wordsworth's depiction of the Druids – the "Bardic associates", as Gravil describes them – is far from straightforward.[380] While it is true that they represent violence, darkness and the obscurity that was so revered in association with eighteenth-century aesthetics of the sublime, the Druids are represented as figures of ancient wisdom. The speaker in Book 12 of the 1805 *Prelude* is entranced by the Druids – even after he has envisaged their "sacrificial Altar" – as guides, tutors, "bearded Teachers":

> At other moments, for through that wide waste
> Three summer days I roam'd, when 'twas my chance

[378] Jonathan Bishop, "Wordsworth and the 'Spots of Time'", *ELH,* Vol. 26, No. 1, (March 1959), p. 45. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2872079, accessed on 10/09/16.
[379] Fulford, p. 163.
[380] Gravil, p. 36.

To have before me on the downy Plain
Lines, circles, mounts, a mystery of shapes
Such as in many quarters yet survive,
With intricate profusion figuring o'er
The untill'd ground, the work, as some divine
Of infant science, imitative forms
By which the Druids covertly express'd
Their knowledge of the heavens, and imaged forth
The constellations, I was gently charm'd,
Albeit with an antiquarian's dream,
And saw the bearded Teachers, with white wands
Uplifted, pointing to the starry Sky
Alternately and Plain below, while breath
Of music seem'd to guide them, and the Waste
Was chear'd with stillness and a pleasant sound. [ll. 337-353]

The list of "Lines, circles, mounts, a mystery of shapes" in line 340 is indicative of the speaker's fascination with the landscape and with the longevity of the Druids' impact upon it. They are described as having "knowledge of the heavens", and the constellations; they are in possession of otherworldly knowledge. "Starry" [l. 350] is, of course, a word which has been associated with the bardic and with the sublime, both by Gray and by Blake. In "The Bard", Gray employs "starry" to convey the prestige of British ancestry while Blake uses the term to signal terror and majesty, as well as otherworldliness, in association with bards and Druids. While Wordsworth's depictions of the Druids are, as we have seen, often framed by descriptions of darkness and tyranny, the speaker of *The Prelude* wilfully associates himself with the Druids and with the ancient bards in the lines which preface the account of his vision at Stonehenge in Book 12:

…Dearest Friend,
Forgive me if I say that I, who long
Had harbour'd reverentially a thought
That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
Have each for his peculiar dower a sense
By which he is enabled to perceive
Something unseen before: forgive me, Friend,
If I, the meanest of this Band, had hope
That unto me had also been vouchsafed
An influx, that in some sort I possess'd
A privilege, and that a work of mine,
Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
Enduring and creative, might become
A power like one of Nature's. [ll. 298-312]

Wordsworth's use of the phrase "I, the meanest of this Band" [l. 306] directly links him with the fold of the ancient bards; the protagonist of Gray's poem speaks of his "Dear lost companions of my tuneful art" ["The Bard", l. 39], describing them as "a grisly band" who "linger yet, / Avengers of their native land" ["The Bard", ll.44-46]. The Druids, with their knowledge of the stars and of the skies, represent the earliest prototypes in this "mighty scheme of truth" [l. 302], especially given their rootedness in landscape and in nature: the poet, Wordsworth, ultimately seeks to tap into – or even channel – "A power like one of Nature's" [l. 312].

Thus, while Wordsworth invokes the Druids as a reminder of tyrannous power in the revolutionary context of the 1790s, he also articulates reverence for them – and, indeed, asserts coveted kinship with them – as wise, tutelary figures, ones who worship the landscape and who are themselves closely affiliated with it. They play a political role in *Salisbury Plain* and in *The Prelude*, as Gravil notes:

> The Druids, with their Bardic associates, are…recognized as precursors with whom a modern poet must be connected in a mighty scheme of truth…at a time when Wordsworth thirsted for the destruction of the British fleet, and when he was experiencing 'daring sympathies with power'…the power, that is, of the revolutionary Terrorists whose execution of the monarch Wordsworth has already condoned, and who, in October 1793 and early 1794 would be calling both innocently and heinously for 'Head after head, and never heads enough'…Violent emotions, provoked…by the treachery of a liberticide British ministry and…guilt-laden identifications with those already employing terror to stamp out domestic treason in France, made his imagination acutely apocalyptic…[381]

Even the form and meter of *Salisbury Plain* point to its political agenda. As Emma Mason has noted, the reader is also "alerted to the poem's political content by its Spenserian romance form (eight lines of iambic pentameter plus an Alexandrine line), one traditionally associated with protest narratives.[382]

Wordsworth's bardic sublime is a model whose co-ordinates are landscape, the "bard" or poet, and the power invoked by recalling or reimagining the past, whether recent or agent, to evocative effect. Druids, minstrels, ancient bards and the natural world all figure, but it is the power of the bardic voice specifically – drawn from landscape and from the spectres of people and events, whether real or fictitious – which ultimately takes precedence. While the

[381] Gravil, pp. 36-37.
[382] Emma Mason, *The Cambridge Introduction to William Wordsworth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 66.

bards and Druids are, as we have seen in this chapter, often closely associated terms in literature of the long eighteenth century, the key distinction between them is that – while both are afforded with prophetic power, and are thus unsurprisingly described with the rhetoric of the sublime in many instances, as well as with the natural world and with the forces of nature – the bard is revered for his unambivalently pure, supreme moral character: a claim which cannot be made of the Druids who, for all of their wisdom and learning, are nonetheless also agents of cruelty.

In poetic terms, Wordsworth's decision to foreground the duality of bards and Druids in these poems is important in two ways. Firstly, not only is it conventional in terms of preceding literature of the eighteenth century and, indeed, earlier, but it links the groups of figures is such a way that foregrounds the Romantic connections between the vocation of the poet and the natural world, given that the bard's historical role was one based in the medieval court rather than in the heart of the landscape, whereas the Druids were, in fact, the community who were known for their albeit terrible acts of worship taking place in the "bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks".[383] Secondly, while the bards and the Druids were historically connected groups of people and are, thus, appropriately presented as associate groups in verse, it is also politically effective to present the two groups in contrast to one another: the bard, a voice of liberty, speaking out against the kind of tyranny which the Druids have historically and imaginatively exemplified in the modern age of revolt.[384]

Wordsworth and Wales

In the late summer of 1793, onward from Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth walked on foot to Wales to visit his close Welsh friend from his days at Cambridge, Robert Jones, who lived at Plas-Yn-Llan in the village of Llangynhafal, Denbighshire. Wordsworth had visited Jones in Wales before: he had spent the whole summer there in 1791. During his first visit to Wales, Wordsworth had – with Jones – climbed Snowdon: the sublime scene famously depicted in the final book of *The Prelude*. Deeply influenced by his travels through Wales in the 1790s with

[383] Burke, p. 55.
[384] As explored in Chapter One, there were three groups of Celts who were "particularly influential: the bards, vates and druids." For more information on the roles of and differences between the three groups, see Andrew Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient History,* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2013).

Jones, Wordsworth found there perhaps the richest resource for sublimity on both an individual and national level: landscape. As J.R. Watson has described it:

> In 1791 and 1793...the visits to Wales were by a young and unconventional poet, an explorer of a country that was just beginning to awaken interest as the home of liberty and art. It was a place that would have helped to politicise his poetry. It was also a land in which a young man could climb mountains and find an echo of the Alpine sublimity that had intoxicated him in 1790.[385]

Wales was not just significant to Wordsworth in that it offered him a visual reminder of the sublimity that he had encountered during his travels to the Continent; it was a land of sublimity in itself, as evident in his Welsh sonnets, such as "To the Torrent and the Devil's Bridge, North Wales" and "Composed Among the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales":

> Above all, perhaps, it was different – Welsh, Celtic: North Wales was the land of the druids, priests of an ancient religion and culture; it was the land where the bards had defied the tyranny of the English conquest, and been put to death because they were the guardians of national identity and feeling...a place where the recent awakening of interest in its history and culture...allowed a response from a poet who was struggling, in these years, to find himself, and whose greatest poetry is dominated by two things: the awareness of the self in relation to the external world, and the importance of 'national independence and liberty'. North Wales had much to give to Wordsworth in both of these areas of human and poetic sensibility.[386]

While North Wales, with its historical associations with the last of the Druids at Anglesey and its reputation for the sublimity of Snowdon, most of Wordsworth's first poetic responses to Wales were based on the sights and scenes of South Wales, in poems such as "We Are Seven" and "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798". As James Prothero has pointed out:

> Ironically, though Wordsworth spent far more time traveling in the north, he writes more frequently of the south…He visited Thelwell's farm in Llyswen in August 1798, and of course, there is the journey a month previously he made with Dorothy to the region above Tintern Abbey that resulted in the well-known poem. In the later years he made short visits to the Hutchinson farm in North Wales, such as the

[385] J.R.Watson, "Wordsworth, North Wales and the Celtic Landscape", *English Romanticism and the Celtic World*, eds. Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 101.
[386] Watson, pp. 101-102.

> one in 1810. His last visit was the trip up the Wye as far as Goodrich Castle in 1841.[387]

For all of the sublimity of North Wales, something also struck Wordsworth deeply about the South. As I shall shortly consider, poems like "We Are Seven" and "Tintern Abbey", rooted in South Wales, were fundamental to Wordsworth's poetics: both texts facilitated the development of Wordsworth's poetic identity, particularly in relation to ideas of landscape, the wandering narrator, the bonds between the living and the dead, and the relationship between past, present and future which, as we have already seen, is so fundamental to a bardic identity:

> …the profound life-shaping nature of his 1793 walk through Wales, up the Wye Valley to Plas-yn-Llawn, and his march up Snowden[388] with Robert Jones…was a defining moment for the young poet-to-be, as his memory of it in "Tintern Abbey" and his evocation of the Snowden climb attest…though the ascent of Snowden occurred two years previously on the first trip to see Robert Jones, Wordsworth places it last in the order of events that unravel in *The Prelude*…he finds his vocation as he climbs…in the territory of the mind, Snowden…is the mythological place of self-discovery…Wales is for Wordsworth…the place of imaginative self-discovery, away from home, that allows him to come home. It also gives him an image of his vocation in the tradition of the bard.[389]

Landscape is, once more, presented as a place of self-discovery. Rather than being induced by the depths of the sea, as we saw earlier in the chapter, Wordsworth's knowledge of the self is furthered by the new and yet familiar sight of Snowdon's heights: an alternative source of sublimity to the hills and mountains of the Lake District that he had known and loved as a child.

Childhood – and the innocence, as well as the worldly insights, with which it is associated in Romantic literature – is introduced as a dominant notion in Wordsworth's poetry in "We Are Seven", composed between March and May 1798. Images of youth are often linked to South Wales in the poet's verse: in "Simon Lee, The Old Huntsman, with an Incident in which he was Concerned", composed during the same months as "We Are Seven", we learn that the protagonist has lived "In the sweet shire of Cardigan" [l. 1] for his whole life; "Peter Bell, a Tale" – composed, again, between April and May 1798 – was inspired by "an acquaintance he [Wordsworth] traveled [*sic*] with up the Wye River Valley"[390], and the

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[387] James Prothero, *Wordsworth and Welsh Romanticism*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p. 14.
[388] Throughout this extract, please note that "Snowden" [*sic*] ought to be "Snowdon"; it is an error in the source.
[389] Prothero, pp. 14-15.
[390] *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.

eponymous protagonist himself wanders among "Caernarvon's towers" as well as having seen the "spire of Sarum", thus displaying an appreciation of ancient Celtic and druidic landscapes.

The bonds between the living and the dead, vested by landscape and guarded by bardic song, are at the heart of "We Are Seven". The ballad is predicated on a discussion between the adult speaker and "a little cottage girl" [l. 5], a "simple child" [l. 1], who "had a rustic, woodland air" [l. 9]. The narrator and the child debate the nature of death – specifically, whether or not bonds of affect can transcend the physical separation between the mourner and the deceased. Having asked the child "Sisters and brothers, little maid, / "How many may you be?" [ll. 13-14], the child insists that "we are seven" [l. 64; l. 69], despite the fact that two of her six siblings have died. The adult speaker, vexed and perplexed, asks:

> "You run about, my little maid,
> "Your limbs they are alive;
> "If two are in the church-yard laid,
> "Then ye are only five." [ll. 33-36]

The child stubbornly refuses to accept the adult's assertions of logic, insisting on not only the posterity of her attachment to her siblings, but on her living love for and enduring relationship with them. She sits next to the graves of her sister Jane and her brother John, knitting and hemming [ll. 41-42] while she sits and sings to them [l. 44]. In line 36, death and life are juxtaposed in the phrase "Their graves are green", the graves acting as a reminder of the physical loss of the child's siblings while the adjective "green" connoting not only her living, even growing, love for her siblings, but also situating them firmly in nature's domain; both of her deceased siblings are buried "Beneath the church-yard tree" [l. 32]. It is the child who, in the end, has the final word, her last defiant assertion emphasised by the exclamatory mood and situated at the very end of the line, bolstering the same declarative assertion located at the very end of the previous, penultimate stanza:

> "But they are dead; those two are dead!
> "Their spirits are in heaven!"
> 'Twas throwing words away; for still
> The little Maid would have her will,
> And said, "Nay, we are seven!" [ll. 65-69]

As we saw previously with the Lucy poems, for Wordsworth – and the child speaker in "We Are Seven" – landscape is a keeper of memory, and preserves the bonds between the living and the dead. Landscape documents, and protects, the past. As Watson explicates:

> The landscape becomes a text to be read and interpreted. The understanding of it can be visual, geomorphological, historical, associative, each of these depending on inherited assumptions – how to see a landscape (as sublime or picturesque), how to relate it to history (castles, druid stones). The landscape-text also becomes a site for competing interpretations: different views supplement and modify one another. When it is written about, or painted, it becomes a text which is refigured on each occasion, each writing or painting in dialogue with the previous ones.[391]

Nowhere is the significance of landscape as an imaginative resource more apparent than in "Tintern Abbey", in which "The picture of the mind revives again" [l. 62] and the poet stands

> …not only with the sense
> Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
> That in this moment, there is life and food
> For future years. [ll. 63-66]

The scene is not only affecting in that one moment; its impact is one that endures.

William Gilpin, as one of the most authoritative commentators on notions of the picturesque in the long eighteenth century, claims Tintern Abbey as a picturesque scene on the grounds of its novelty; it is striking "on a *nearer* view"[392], suggesting that the traveller is in "*pursuit* of his object [premised upon] the expectation of new scenes continually opening, and arising to his view".[393] For Gilpin, it is a site of imperfect, "splendid ruin", which is alluring to such an extent that one seeks to "become an inhabitant of it".[394]

Wordsworth's poetic representation of the Abbey, however, deeply problematises Gilpin's definitions of beauty. Like Gilpin, Wordsworth highlights the power of nature and the natural world – its power to adopt, adapt and decay – by framing the poem's testimony to emotional catharsis in language of the earthly, the natural. The words "green" [l. 14; l. 18; l. 108; l. 162] and "landscape" [l. 8; l. 15; l. 25; l. 162] pervade the poem, indicating that the

[391] J. R. Watson, p. 93.
[392] William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, Tintern Abbey (5th ed,. 1800), paragraph 4, as cited at http://www.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/Travel/Picturesque.htm#Gilpin1. Accessed on 24/09/16.
[393] William Gilpin, "On Picturesque Beauty", *Three Essays*, (1794), paragraph 2, as cited at http://www.ualberta.ca~dmiall/Travel/Picturesque.htm#Gilpin1. Accessed on 24/09/16.
[394] Gilpin, *op. cit.*, paragraph 1.

speaker "owe[s] to them" [l. 27] – the landscape, the scenery, these "forms of beauty" [l. 24] – the "serene and blessed mood" [l. 42] which follows sublime experience. Yet, the speaker's cathartic remembrance of the "Five years [which] have passed" [l. 1] is prompted by the "darkness" [l. 53], mere "shapes" [l. 53] which are "dim and faint" [l. 61] that he perceives before him: the obscure contours of the scene. Remembrance is crucial. Wordsworth constantly stresses the "renovating Virtue" of recalling acutely moving moments or "spots of time" – even if they are initially distressing – in his verse.[395] The speaker's emotional state is consequently one of "sad perplexity" [l. 62], one that is "fretful" [l. 54] and "Haunted" [l. 80] before he reaches the "sublime…blessed mood" [l. 38] of "calm and tranquil"[396] being that Gilpin describes. Darkness is, after all, an integral condition of sublime experience for Burke, and Wordsworth's use of "owe" suggests an inherent indebtedness to nature, thus revealing a relationship premised upon an uneven power balance, an ultimate detachment from the natural, the material, the tangible. As Burke states, "darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light", for it prevents, or at least resists, external influence, thereby effecting an internalised emotional, psychological or spiritual experience that could not otherwise occur.[397]

The speaker undoubtedly feels an affinity to nature, but is also aware of the need to display humility to the landscape. This is an idea which finds full expression in a slightly later poem, albeit one which is not set in the Welsh landscape: "Michael: A Pastoral Poem", composed between October and December 1800.[398] The speaker's description of how the "pastoral Mountains front you, face to face" [l. 5] suggests that it is the prerogative of the landscape, premised upon the "gentle agency / Of natural objects" [ll. 29-30], to determine whether or not the individual can rely upon the hills to act as "my second self when I am gone" [l. 39]. One is at the mercy of the landscape to be admitted; the landscape has sovereignty over the human, and thus one must display humility, subservience, before one can become on equal terms with the landscape. Gilpin suggests that landscape invites the traveller, the wanderer, inward – but this is not how Wordsworth perceives the relationship. Rather, the mountains, the landscape, will only "open…out themselves" [l. 7] and admit access to and integration in "a hidden valley of their own" [l. 8] if one first displays humility: only then can one be sure that "among these Hills / Will be my second self when I am gone" [ll. 38-39]. This is even suggested by the title of the poem, "Michael": an allusion to Michael the archangel, at the top

[395] See Book XI of the 1805 *Prelude*, ll. 258-260.
[396] *Ibid.*
[397] Burke, p. 248.
[398] See "Home at Grasmere" for further examples of the need for humans to display humility to the landscape.

of God's hierarchy, and thus closer to God than to man. The name is, accordingly, at once associated with ideas of both landscape and spirituality, with cathedrals, churches and chapels named after the angel often being situated upon hilltops and highland for this reason.

Thus, when Wordsworth and Jones pursue their ascension of Snowdon in Book XIII of *The Prelude*, they do so with humility: "With forehead bent / Earthward, as if in opposition set / Against an enemy" [ll. 29-31]. The individual who wishes to source inspiration from the landscape must approach it in a mood of what Wordsworth terms "wise passiveness", a mood of receptive humility, as he articulates in a poem which he composed in 1798, "Expostulation and Reply":

> 'The eye it cannot chuse but see,
> We cannot bid the ear be still;
> Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
> Against, or with our will.
>
> Nor less I deem that there are powers,
> Which of themselves our minds impress,
> That we can feed this mind of ours,
> In a wise passiveness. [ll. 17-24]

The first of these two stanzas suggests that the human body is innately receptive to the sights and sounds, and sensation of the external world. Indeed, humans have no agency in their sensory faculties; the eye "cannot chuse but see", one "cannot bid the ear be still" and the body feels "Against, or with our will". Thus, not only must man display humility to the landscape, but also to his own physiological, sensory experiences, which in turn give rise to imaginings. The mind "feed[s]" on such sensations. Unlike sensory responses to one's surroundings, however, which Wordsworth presents as involuntary and automatic, one may only enjoy the "impress[ions]" induced, stimulated and afforded by the natural world by consciously entering into this state of wise passivity, which enables the individual to gain richer, deeper impressions.

Having entered into their ascent of Snowdon in the spirit of humility and "wise passiveness" [l. 24], Wordsworth and Jones are afforded an experience "most awful and sublime" [l. 76], wherein nature functions as the intermediary to the "soul, to the imagination of the whole" [l. 65]. The poet's interaction with nature, as the vehicle to sublime experience, is itself mediated by a tutelary figure: in this instance, a "shepherd" [l. 7], his authority stemming from his "ancient right / Of office" [ll. 7-8]. Wu clearly identifies this poem as an

account of a sublime experience, asserting that: "The revelation offered on Snowdon is of the identity of soul and imagination."[399]

The very end of Book XIII, and of *The Prelude*, gives us a clear indication as to how Wordsworth perceives the vocation of the poet. It is one inextricably connected to nature:

> Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
> A lasting inspiration, sanctified
> By reason and by truth: what we have loved
> Others will love; and we may teach them how,
> Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
> A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
> On which he dwells, above this Frame of things
> (Which 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
> And fears of men doth still remain unchanged)
> In beauty exalted, as it is itself
> Of substance and of fabric more divine. [ll. 442-452]

The speaker invokes the "Prophets of Nature". He asserts that "we", Wordsworth and Coleridge, will afford "them" [l. 442] – those who are oppressed – with "lasting inspiration" [l. 443]. The two friends will "speak" so as to "teach" the audience, "them", with their words. Solace may be found in "the mind of man" [l. 446], through imaginative acts, especially those inspired by the beautiful "earth / On which he dwells" [ll. 447-448]. Nature, and landscape, are catalysts for imaginative acts and consolation. The role of the poet is to "teach them how" [l. 445]: to act as a tutelary intermediary between man and landscape, humans and nature.

The Sublimity of Scotland and *The Excursion*

The wandering bard is not, of course, confined to Wales. Wordsworth, as we have already seen, was influenced by Macpherson's *Ossian* and – as for other writers for whom the bardic sublime was significant – Scottish writers such as Burns and Scott were also heavily influential, as was the rich aesthetic resource offered by the Scottish landscape itself. In a letter written to Walter Scott on 7th November 1805, Wordsworth describes Scotland as "the most poetical Country I ever travelled in".[400] The poet had first visited Scotland in 1801 before making a six-week tour in 1803 and then embarking on separate visits in 1814, 1831 and 1833.

[399] Duncan Wu (ed.), *Romanticism: An Anthology*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 567.
[400] Wordsworth, 7 November 1805, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd edition, gen. ed. Alan G. Hill, Vol. I, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 601.

In "Address to the Sons of Burns", which Wordsworth started to compose between early September 1805 and 21st February 1806, Wordsworth praises not only the "wit" [l. 9] of Burns but also the qualities which Wordsworth claims he embodied: he was "independent", "generous", brave" [l. 20]. A separate poem, "At the Grave of Burns, 1803", depicts the poet's own reaction to the sight of Burns' resting place:

> The piercing eye, the thoughtful brow,
> The struggling heart, where be they now?—
> Full soon the Aspirant of the plough,
> The prompt, the brave,
> Slept, with the obscurest, in the low
> And silent grave.
>
> I mourned with thousands, but as one
> More deeply grieved, for He was gone
> Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
> And showed my youth
> How Verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth. [ll. 25-36]

Wordsworth emulates the stanzaic form used by the Scottish bard – the Scottish or "Habbie" stanza – composed of six lines, and composed with an aaabab rhyme scheme. Lines 1, 2, 3 and 5 have a meter of iambic tetrameter, while lines 4 and 6 are written in iambic dimeter. However, the speaker writes of more than a great cultural or communal loss; he also writes of a personal one. The reader's eye lingers the singular pronoun "one" at the end of the line which, in turn, echoes and resurfaces at the end of each of the subsequent lines in "gone", "shone" and "throne". The speaker's loss is also an explicitly poetical – and, indeed, philosophical – one; he praises Burns' ability to "build a princely throne / On humble truth" in verse. It is almost as though the speaker has simultaneously lost a part of himself, a facet of, or bridge to, his "youth".

Nor is this the only grave in Scotland upon which Wordsworth focuses in his poetry of the early 1800s. In 1805, Wordsworth composed "Glen-Almain, or the Narrow Glen", a poetic tribute to *Ossian*. The site is imbued with emotional and imaginative significance on the basis of cultural myth and memory attached to the location. Whether or not the claim that Glen-Almain is the grave of Ossian is an accurate one does not affect the evocative power of the spot. Wordsworth writes:

Does then the Bard sleep here indeed?
Or is it but a groundless creed?
What matters it? I blame them not
Whose Fancy in this lonely Spot
Was moved; and in this way express'd
Their notion of it's [*sic]* perfect rest. [ll. 17-22]

The significance of the site is an emotional and imaginative one, not an empirical, historical one. It is an extremely quiet place of contemplation: ideals for the acts of reflection and introspection that Wordsworth so reveres. The only sound that can be heard is that of "one meek Streamlet"; the positioning of "on" and "one" at the end of lines 3 and 4 presents the two words as almost heteronomyic, compounding the sense of one sole, soothing streamlet sound. Glen-Almain, as with Burns' grave, is a site of sombre reflection, evocation, and consolation.

***

As Gravil phrases it, Wales – its history, its myth, and its landscape – was, for Wordsworth, as for other Romantic writers, "pregnant with imprecations, divination, prophecy, revelation, illumination, or omen."[401] As such – given the innately mysterious, enigmatic nature of both the Welsh and the Scottish landscapes – the traveller, in Wordsworth's view, could benefit from an interpreter, an intermediary, who can read the rocks and stones and trees imaginatively. What better intermediary, imagined in the landscape when prompted in poem or painting, than the wise and wandering figure of the bard?

Here, I turn to one of Wordsworth's Scottish poems: *The Excursion.* Published in 1814, but composed over a number of years and in different stages, it is a poem of mediation. While – as Wordsworth acknowledges in the Preface – the intended first and third parts of the poem (as it would have been in its entirety, The Recluse) would have been composed of "meditations in the Author's own Person", *The Excursion* constitutes an "intermediate part", in an intermediary narrative voice. The temporal focus, too, is intermediary: it is on the present, on "an existing state of things".

Indeed, there are multiple intermediary figures presented throughout the poem. In Wordsworth's words: "the intervention of Characters speaking is employed, and something of a dramatic form adopted". It is not only the narrative that is mediated (through dramatic form),

[401] Richard Gravil, *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation, 1787-1842,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 34-35.

but also the emotional content. Scenes of sorrow are presented at a distance afforded not only by the literary medium, dramatisation and characters, but also by the poem's structure. A glance at the Summary of Contents alone hints at a preoccupation with restoring emotional balance, tempering suffering and grief against consolation; it is solace afforded by community, and catharsis. Book Third – "Despondency" – is, for example, shortly thereafter redressed in Book Fourth: "Despondency Corrected".

The Excursion focuses upon the individual's engagement with community, rather than solely upon one's direct, solitary communion with landscape. While introspective meditation on part of the individual – prompted by the act of perceiving landscape – is promoted, it is a dialogic rather than solitary process of engaging with one's surroundings that is ultimately foregrounded. In the same way that the intended first and third parts of The Recluse would be temporally dialogic in that they would have constituted first-person recollections of and reflections on the author's past, "in the Author's own Person", *The Excursion*, as the intermediary section, emphasises dialogue between the poem's key characters and the need for interaction through shared suffering and collective catharsis in the tales relayed.

Rather than one intermediary figure being foregrounded, as in "Home at Grasmere", *The Excursion* presents several – the Wanderer, the Solitary, the Pastor, and the Poet – as well as the protagonists they describe in their narratorial, almost parable-like, accounts. For instance, the character of Margaret, who isolates herself from the natural (and social) world, and the Solitary – emotionally disengaged from others in order to avoid pain – feature in tales which highlight the need for both individual reflection and engagement with one's community and with one's surroundings: socially, emotionally, morally, imaginatively. There is, though, one intermediary figure in particular upon whom this analysis is to be focused: the Minstrel, whom we first encounter at the opening of Book Second:

> In days of yore how fortunately fared
> The Minstrel! Wandering on from Hall to Hall,
> Baronial Court or Royal; cheered with gifts
> Munificent, and love, and Ladies' praise;
> Now meeting on his road an armed Knight,
> Now resting with a Pilgrim by the side
> Of a clear brook; - beneath an Abbey's roof
> One evening sumptuously lodged; the next
> Humbly, in a religious Hospital;
> Or with some merry Outlaws of the wood;
> Or haply shrouded in a Hermit's cell.
> Him, sleeping or awake, the Robber spared;
> He walked – protected from the sword of war

By virtue of that sacred Instrument
His Harp, suspended at the Traveller's side;
His dear Companion wheresoe'er he went
Opening from Land to Land an easy way
By melody, and by the charm of verse. [ll. 1-18]

The minstrel is presented as a figure to be revered, respected by all. Firstly, he meanders across stately scenes, in "Baronial Court or Royal" [l. 3]; then, he wanders the roads of society, through communities, embraced by men of honour, both glorious ("an armed Knight" [l. 5]) and humble ("a Pilgrim" [l. 6]); finally, by those who have rejected society, "merry Outlaws of the wood" [l. 10], or "the Robber" [l. 12], all of whom treat the minstrel with kindness and with courtesy "By virtue of that sacred Instrument / His Harp" [ll. 14-15]. Like the movements of the Wanderer, the account of the journey of the ancient minstrel depicted in these lines, wandering between the various facets of society, in many ways acts as a fitting prologue to the tale of the protagonist of this book of the poem: the Solitary. The minstrel's immersion in all forms of society as described at the opening of Book II serves to proleptically foreshadow that which the Solitary comes to reject.

Key to the significance of the minstrel is his ability to connect – and reconnect – people and places through his music and song, as foregrounded in the closing four lines of this extract:

His Harp, suspended at the Traveller's side;
His dear Companion wheresoe'er he went
Opening from Land to Land an easy way
By melody, and by the charm of verse. [ll. 14-18]

The minstrel, like the Druid, or the bard, very much constitutes a common eighteenth-century motif. When the Druids came to the forefront of the British literary imagination in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the conflation of – and confusion between – bard, Druid and minstrel remained a feature of poetry in particular, as it had been in the seventeenth century. Take, for example, James Thomson's last major poetic work, *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), which presents the figure of "The Bard, a little Druid-Wight" as an advisory, benevolent individual. "Wight", while denoting a creature, also perhaps aurally gestures at the white-bearded image of the Druid that has become all too familiar, signalling, in this instance, both wisdom and goodness:

Behold the merry Minstrels of the Morn,

> The swarming Songsters of the careless Grove,
> Ten thousand Throats! that, from the flowering Thorn,
> Hymn their good GOD, and carol sweet of Love,
> Such grateful kindly Raptures them emove:
> They neither plough, nor sow; ne, fit for Flail,
> E'er to the Barn the nodding Sheaves they drove;
> Yet theirs each Harvest dancing in the Gale,
> Whatever crowns the Hill, or smiles along the Vale. [ll. 85-93]

Various different characteristics of the bardic, the druidic and minstrelsy are intertwined, here. Indeed, the reference to "Minstrels of the Morn" is but one illustration of how terms like "Druid", "bard" and, on this occasion, "minstrel" were used interchangeably in this period, with the latter historically referring to a professional medieval musician and, later, a wandering entertainer – eventually functioning in a social manner comparable to that of a court jester or fool rather than that of a prophetic bard or a wise Druid – though the bards and minstrels historically shared a common fate of wandering and travelling once the royal courts disbanded. It is worth taking a moment here to note that, although both bards and minstrels fulfilled a poetic, performative role in courtly life, a minstrel's role was, even initially, one of dignified subservience - politically passive - in comparison to the advisory and, therefore, actively influential nature of the bard's role to the individual prince or lord they served. As Constance Bullock-Davies explains, in reference to the Welsh minstrel tradition:

> The term 'Welsh minstrels'...needs amplification. On the one hand it does not mean beirdd [bard]; nor, on the other, wandering singers and musicians...As their names [sic], ministrelli, indicates, they were minor officials in the household, professional musicians who ministered to the everyday, personal and domestic needs of the royal family...They announced and accompanied the arrival and departure of the royal family and its noble guests, preceded the various courses at meals, entertained the family and guests both during and after dinner, played for and beat time at dances...provided shows and music for all court functions...and assisted at church services.[402]

The music provided by minstrels, unlike that of the bards, served functional purposes as much as – if not more than – recreational ones:

> The cornours or horn-blowers acted as clocks, for they had to blow the hours; as gongs, for they summoned everyone in the palace to meals; as fire-alarms, for they

[402] Constance Bullock-Davies, "Welsh minstrels at the courts of Edward I and Edward II", *Trafodion Anrhydeddus Gymdeithas y Cymmrodorion / Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, (1972/1973), pp. 104-106. Available online at:
http://welshjournals.llgc.org.uk/browse/viewobject/llgc-id:1419142/article/000084724, accessed on 12/02/15.

> sounded a warning when fire broke out; and as guards in the forests and hunting-fields when they indicated where the king was and kept the party together by blowing special, intermittent signals.[403]

Minstrels fell into two categories of status within the medieval court; they either "lived the lives of well-to-do gentlemen", or else found themselves in the category of those who "frequently qualified for the title of minstrel on an amateur basis". In contrast, as Edward Jones writes in 1784, "the character of a Druidic Bard was perhaps the most revered and accomplished of all others." Jones himself was a musician – known by the bardic name of "Bardd y Brenin" from 1820 when his patron, King George IV, came to the throne – who had served as Harp-Master to the Prince of Wales in the 1790s, and was well-versed in the history of the bards and their role amongst the nobility as a result of his antiquarian activities. The ability to play the harp had always fundamentally distinguished the musically performative role of the bard to that of the minstrel; Bullock-Davies insists, regarding the latter, that "I have incontrovertible evidence that only one was a harper and he was not among the elite. All the others played the trumpet or the crwth." The "crwth", though also a stringed instrument - a sort of rectangular violin - was considered as secondary to the harp, again indicative of the prestige attached to the player of the harp: the bard.

So, to return to the extract from Thomson's verse, in the first two lines alone, we see the eighteenth-century vogue for conflating all things bardic, druidic, and minstrelsy-related exemplified:

> Behold the merry Minstrels of the Morn,
> The swarming Songsters of the careless Grove... [ll. 85-86]

The "careless Grove" is an obvious allusion to the common motif of the oak groves associated with the Druids, based on Roman historian Pliny's influential and explicit assertion that the oak tree was sacred to the Druids, together with the all-healing mistletoe that grew upon it, to be cut down with a golden sickle ahead of an act of sacrifice.

Wordsworth's minstrel in *The Excursion* can be said to fulfil a vocation or office much the same as the Wanderer and the Solitary (pre-seclusion) do. Opening land to land, and community to community, with his music and song, the minstrel serves as a motif for organic community. An early scene of community festivity suggests that a healthy and happy

[403] Bullock-Davies, p. 106.

disposition is to be maintained by one's engagement with, and commitment to, regular acts of communality. Culture, music, and aurality are foregrounded as mediums through which people may be brought into affective interaction – as relayed through the orality, of course, of the Poet's narration of events to us as readers, mediated through the Wanderer's own words:

> We saw a throng of People; - wherefore met?
> Blithe notes of music, suddenly let loose
> On the thrilled ear, did to the question yield
> Prompt answer: they proclaim the annual Wake,
> Which the bright season favours. – Tabor and Pipe
> In purpose join to hasten and reprove
> The laggard Rustic; and repay with boons
> Of merriment a party-coloured Knot,
> Already formed upon the Village green.
> - Beyond the limits of the shadow cast
> By the broad hill, glistened upon our sight
> That gay Assemblage. Round them and above,
> Glitter, with dark recesses interposed,
> Casement, and cottage-roof, and stems of trees
> Half-veiled in vapour cloud, the silver steam
> Of dews fast melting on their leafy boughs
> By the strong sun-beams smitten. Like a mast
> Of gold, the Maypole shines; as if the rays
> Of morning, aided by exhaling dew,
> With gladsome influence could reanimate
> The faded garlands dangling from its sides. [Book Second, ll. 124-144]

The emphasis of the scene is upon a presentness of feeling, on simply enjoying the sensory evocative powers of the "Blithe notes of music" - "Blithe" suggesting ephemeral liberation from thought, care, worry - bolstered by the celebratory connotations of words like "thrilled" [126], "merriment" [131] and "gay Assemblage" [135]. The organic, folk, rustic nature of the gathering is crucial, the "simple pastimes" [150] framed in a natural setting of "the broad hill" [134], "stems of trees / Half-veiled in vapour cloud, the silver steam / Of dews fast melting on their leafy boughs / By the strong sun-beams smitten." [137-140]. It is a scene rich with vitality, with life, with living, reinforced by the present tense of verbs like "melting" [139] and "shines" [141].

Similarly, the comforting sounds of the minstrel or bard are praised in the opening to Book the Seventh, associated with landscape, memory and consolation:

> While thus from theme to theme the Historian passed,
> The words he uttered, and the scene that lay

Before our eyes, awakened in my mind
Vivid remembrance of those long-past hours;
When, in the hollow of some shadowy Vale,
(What time the splendour of the setting sun
Lay beautiful on Snowdon's craggy top,
On Cader Idris, or huge Penmanmaur)
A wandering Youth, I listened with delight
To pastoral melody or warlike air,
Drawn from the chords of the ancient British harp
By some accomplished Master; while he sate
Amid the quiet of the green recess,
And there did inexhaustibly dispense
An interchange of soft or solemn tunes
Tender or blithe; now, as the varying mood
Of his own spirit urged, - now, as a voice
From Youth or Maiden, or some honoured Chief
Of his compatriot villagers (that hung
Around him, drinking in the empassioned notes
Of the time-hallowed minstrelsy) required
For their heart's ease or pleasure. Strains of power
Were they, to seize and occupy the sense;
But to a higher mark than song can reach
Rose this pure eloquence. And, when the stream
Which overflowed the soul was passed away,
A consciousness remained that it had left,
Deposited upon the silent shore
Of memory, images and precious thoughts;
That shall not die, and cannot be destroyed. [ll. 1-30]

The present scene induces, in the Poet, "Vivid remembrance" [l. 4] of a past one. The phrases "accomplished Master" [l. 12] and "time-hallowed minstrelsy" [l. 21] signal the high esteem in which the minstrel or bard is held – particularly by a poet, in light of the evocative capacity of the "soft or solemn tunes" [l. 15] they provide. These tunes are, here, mentally revived in verse, itself inspired by the recollection of a scene invoked by the sights and sounds of the present. It demonstrates how, for the narrator as "a wandering Youth" [l. 9], the "splendour" [l. 6] of a sun-lit sublime landscape, whether it be that of Scotland or Snowdon – when combined with the at once elegiac and consolatory (mythically prophetic) power of bardic song in general, as signalled by reference to "the ancient British harp" [l. 11] – may induce a centripetal retreat into personal memory through the medium of collective cultural memory, prompting a cathartic experience of remembrance, imagination and consolation.

The 1820s

Wordsworth's fascination with the bards, the Druids, and the bardic sublime in relation to landscape was still going strong in the 1820s. In his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, composed from 1821, Wordsworth once again affords significant attention to the subject of the Druids.[404] Hemans was a great admirer of Wordsworth's sonnets. It is not difficult to see why when one considers Wordsworth's depiction of druidic figures, as in the poem below:

III.

TREPIDATION OF THE DRUIDS.

Screams round the Arch-druid's brow the Seamew – white
As Menai's foam; and towards the mystic ring
Where Augurs stand, the future questioning,
Slowly the Cormorant aims her heavy flight,
Portending ruin to each baleful rite,
That, in the lapse of seasons, hath crept o'er
Diluvian truths, and patriarchal lore:
Haughty the Bard; can these meek doctrines blight
His transports? wither his heroic strains?
But all shall be fulfilled; - the Julian spear
A way first open'd; and, with Roman chains,
The tidings come of Jesus crucified;
They come – they spread – the weak, the suffering, hear;
Receive the faith, and in the hope abide. [ll. 1-14]

The first seven lines focus on an Archdruid. The simile "the Seamew – white / As Menai's foam" highlights the aforementioned conventional white robes of the Druids, as per Pliny's depiction of them in his discourse, as well as linking the Druids once more to the sublimity of the sea ("Menai's foam" [l. 2]). The connection between Druids and the sea is partly effected by the invocation of the Seamew as a druidic emblem of a deluge: key to druidic folklore, and further foregrounded by the (itself foregrounded) noun phrase "Diluvian truths". As we have already seen in previous chapters, Anglesey is commonly considered to have been the last site of Druidism; the reference to the Menai Strait situates the setting of the poem on Anglesey's shores. In the second half of the stanza, in line 8, a bard appears, described with the adjective

[404] N. B. Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* were originally published in 1822 as *Ecclesiastical Sketches* – a title retained in the 1827 version – but later changed to *Ecclesiastical Sonnets.*

"Haughty" which Gray also employs in line 15 of "The Bard". The strains of the bard are "heroic" [l. 9]: he stands stoic, a source of consolation, for the "weak, the suffering" [l. 13].

It is striking that the sonnet begins not with the subject of the opening sentence – the "Seamew", a seagull – but with the dynamic verb "Screams". In the same way that the first word of the poem's title, "Trepidation", conjures ideas and images of terror and of fright, so too does the foregrounded verb "Screams" sharply strike the reader's senses, its own vowel sound echoed "round" in "Seamew" by the end of the line, and highlighted by the caesura. Sounds resound throughout the poem. The "white" of line 1 reverberates into lines 4 ("flight"), 5 ("rite"), 8 ("blight"), chiming in a half-rhyme with lines 12 ("crucified") and 14 ("abide"). The rhymes of lines 10 ("spear") and 13 ("hear") are themselves half-rhymes of lines 6 ("o'er") and 7 ("lore"). The rhyme scheme is unorthodox; so, too, is the volta, which arrives a line later than expected – at the end of line 9, dividing the speaker's anxious interrogatives regarding threats to the bards "heroic strains" from the defiant, confident resolve of line 10 that "all shall be fulfilled".

In this poem, "meek doctrines" threaten to "wither" the heroic strains of the bard with "each baleful rite". As Dayton Haskin asserts, "For Wordsworth meekness was one of a constellation of words to be rescued from popular disdain and made newly serviceable for promoting sympathetic understanding".[405] In this poem, Haskin argues, Wordsworth employs the term "meek" in "connection with 'doctrines' that have from his time to ours been commonly thought to represent a threat to autonomous poetic creativity".[406] The doctrines to which the speaker refers are, of course, those of Christianity.

The final lines describe the ominous arrival that the earlier part of the poem has foreshadowed, primarily through the symbolism of the "heavy" Cormorant: the arrival of the Romans and, with them, Christianity to Anglesey. This is a process which, as J. R. Watson explains, "Wordsworth would in earlier times have found repellent".[407] It is particularly interesting to note that – as Watson succinctly phrases it – "beneath the steady progression of Christianity, which is the avowed subject of the sonnets, there is an undercurrent of sympathy for the ancient druids".[408] Druids are, for Wordsworth, figures of both terror and sympathy.

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[405] Dayton Haskin, *John Donne in the Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 29
[406] *Ibid.*
[407] J. R. Watson, "Wordsworth, North Wales and the Celtic Landscape", *English Romanticism and the Celtic World*, eds. Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 98.
[408] *Ibid.*

Sonnet IV similarly focuses on the Druids – this time, upon "Druidical Excommunication", while Sonnet V invokes the sublimity of both Snowdon and Stonehenge as landscapes and as keepers of cultural memory, centred on the Druids and upon the bards:

V.

UNCERTAINTY

Darkness surrounds us; seeking, we are lost
On Snowdon's wilds, amid Brigantian coves,
Or where the solitary Shepherd roves
Along the Plain of Sarum, by the Ghost
Of silently departed ages crossed;
And where the boatman of the Western Isles
Slackens his course – to mark those holy piles
Which yet survive on bleak Iona's coast.
Nor these, nor monuments of eldest name,
Nor Taliesin's unforgotten lays,
Nor Characters of Greek or Roman fame,
To an unquestionable Source have led;
Enough – if eyes that sought the fountain-head,
In vain, upon the growing Rill may gaze. [ll. 1-14]

Seemingly situated "on Snowdon's wilds" [l. 2], surrounded by darkness, the setting could not be more sublime. Taliesin, the ancient Welsh poet who also appears in line 121 of Gray's bardic ode, is invoked as a figure of posterity, even in the face of uncertainty; the stones at "the Plain of Sarum" [l. 4] and on "bleak Iona's coast" – the "holy piles" – "yet survive" [l. 8]. It becomes clear, however, that even the setting itself is uncertain. Is the speaker in Snowdon? Or, perhaps, "amid Briganian coves" of Northern England, where ancient Celtic tribes once dwelled? Or Salisbury, perhaps, returning to an alternative site of bardic sublimity that we have already encountered in Wordsworth's verse? The "bleak" Inner Hebrides, Iona, and the Western Isles of Scotland are here, too. The speaker is placeless – and lost in time, with only the spectral presence of the "Ghost / Of silently departed ages" for company. Such uncertainty regarding place, date, time, is unusual in Wordsworth's works. Yet the poem seems to reach a comforting conclusion in returning to communal memories of "holy piles" – ancient stones – and Taliesin's old, "unforgotten lays", and to nature, "the growing Rill", and to verse. The solace here is in verse itself, with its chiming, rhyming sounds that may be discerned even if eyes seek "the fountain-head, in vain" through the darkness. The Christian "Rill", spirit, is identified as the speaker's alternative religious consolation by the end of the poem, but it is

nonetheless uttered through verse which is indebted to ancient, Celtic poetic ancestors like Taliesin.

The themes of posterity and a necessary intermediary, so intrinsic to Wordsworth's bardic sublime, resurface in "Composed among the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales". The poem was composed around September 1824. By this point in his poetic corpus, Wordsworth in a way offers himself as our intermediary, as our instructor: a tutelary figure who bridges the gap between the landscape and the human witness. The "Stranger" [l. 3] who wanders the castle ruins is a poetic role model for the reader in terms of how one must approach the landscape. He must remain a humble foreigner if he is to enjoy the privilege of sublime experience, as signalled by a language of humility including "with timid footstep" [l. 2], "lenient touches" [l. 6] and the simile "soft as light" [l. 6]: a reference to the "wan Moon" [l. 7] again indicative of unsettling darkness as a condition of the sublime. This sentiment is reinforced by "profoundest" in reference to the seemingly paradoxical notion of "light deepening the profoundest sleep of shade" [l. 8], as Burke identifies "A quick transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light" as one of the most effective conduits of sublime experience.[409]

Only through meek acknowledgement of time's power – as suggested by the pervasive language of the temporal including "oft" [l. 2], "Old Time" [l. 4], "Relic" [l. 9], "forgotten" [l. 9], "Time" [l. 1], "Seasons", [l. 11], "past pomp" [l. 13] – may one enjoy the privilege of sublime experience, as implied by the very form of the poem. A Petrarchan sonnet, consisting of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter and a tight rhyme-scheme (abba baab ccd ccd), the poem signals the fact that man – his constructions, either linguistic (the poem) or architectural (the castle) – is always secondary to the temporal; one must acquiesce to natural rhythm, as represented by the poetic form and images of the moon: a natural, temporal force. The exclamatory apostrophe to the castle, "Relic of Kings!" [l. 9], echoes Shelley's sonnet "Ozymandias" (composed six years before Wordsworth's poem), which describes the statue of the self-proclaimed "King of Kings" [l. 10] as but a "colossal wreck" [l. 13]: a paradigmatic instance of man's arrogance in the face of the natural and the temporal resulting in merciless effacement of the self, orchestrated at nature's hands.

Wordsworth advocates the accessibility of the sublime as available to all, with "roofless" [l. 1] reflecting the democracy of sublime experience, but humility is that on which Wordsworth's notion of democracy is predicated. Sublime experience is open only to the

[409] Burke, p. 248.

meek, mild, humble; doubt is integral, hence the Stranger's refusal to assert any ethical or moral authority ("nor scruples to upbraid" [l. 3]. Time is presented as all-embracing, consolatory, but only if one treats the temporal and natural with the respect and humility upon which Wordsworth is insistent. Such a sentiment is exemplified in the impassioned affirmation, "Time *loves* Thee!" [l. 11]; it subverts the notion of time as the destroyer, but the preceding lines which describe how man and his works may be "To winds abandoned" [l. 10] act as a warning – to he who would presume power that he does not possess. The "soothing recompense" [l. 14] of sublime experience is, for Wordsworth, a "gift" [l. 14], a privilege: to be enjoyed by he who expresses humility, but is never a property or an entitlement.

That is why the figure of the ancient bard is, while a prototype for the Romantic poet, an unsurpassable one; he is the only one afforded with the grandeur of authority, a voice of the past, the present, the future, and landscapes, for he is at once rooted in all of these while transcending and spatial, temporal or physical divisions between them. Having emphasised the accessibility of sublime experiences, stimulated by landscape, in her verse, it is not difficult to see why similarities have been drawn between Wordsworth's verse and that of Hemans. Writing as a female bard, she challenges Gray's assertion, discussed in Chapter One, that women would not be able to understand, appreciate or respond to "The Bard" to the same extent as a male reader.

Chapter Four: "Spirit of the lyre divine"

Felicia Hemans

To Fancy then he pours his song
To her his wildest notes belong.
Oh! spirit of the lyre divine,
I deck with flowers thy sacred shrine;
Thus let me ever melt with thee,
In the soft dreams of poesy.[410]

In 1847, the eminent Scots critic Reverend George Gilfillan wrote of Felicia Hemans that:

> A *maker* she is not. What dream of childhood has she ever, to any imagination, reborn? whose slumbers has she ever peopled with new and terrible visions? what new form or figure has she annexed, like a second shadow, to our own idiosyncrasy, to track us on our way for ever? to what mind has she given such a burning stamp of impression, as it feels eternity itself unable to efface? There is no such result from the poetry of Mrs. Hemans. She is less a maker than a *musician*, and her works appear rather to rise to the airs of the piano than that still sad music of humanity…[411]

Gilfillan makes a number of claims here: that Hemans does not engage with or evoke "terrible visions" in her works; that her works belong in the domestic sphere of middle-class drawing rooms to be accompanied by a piano, rather than leaving a "burning stamp of impression" in their own right; that, damningly, she cannot hope to emulate the "still sad music of humanity" that the revered Wordsworth – by contrast – generates with his words. In short, Gilfillan does not rate Hemans as a poet.

Scholarship on Hemans has, in recent years, tended to focus upon *The Domestic Affections, and Other Poems* (1812) *Records of Woman* (1828), and "The Homes of England" (1830) – works which lend themselves to considerations of Hemans as a poet of sentiment and the domestic, as well as constituting an ideal case study for female writing of the nineteenth century. However, my focus on Hemans seeks to challenge Gilfillan's disparaging assessment of her poetry. In considering both her early works, *Poems* (1808), and her later collection, *Welsh Melodies* (1821), I seek to show how Hemans' writing provides evidence of a fascination

[410] Hemans "The Minstrel Bard", *Poems*
[411] George Gilfillan, "Female Authors. No. I. – Mrs Hemans", *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,* n.s. 14 (June 1847), pp. 359-63. Reproduced in Susan J. Wolfson, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 593.

with the terrible – the sublime – in conjunction with a long-term preoccupation with the figure of the bard, with bardic history and mythology, and with the wild Welsh landscape. In doing so, I challenge Gilfillan's assertion that Hemans must be considered as a mere "musician" rather than a poet – though I explore how music and sound are integral to her depictions and invocation of the bardic in her verse. Furthermore, I question Gilfillan's implication that Hemans cannot be considered a fitting poetic counterpart to Wordsworth; far from it, I explore Wordsworth's influence on Hemans' works, his respect for her writings in turn, and the thematic and poetic similarities between their Welsh writings. Finally, I focus specifically on Hemans' contribution to re-gendering the bardic sublime: the significance of both setting, and sentiment, in attesting to the role of the feminine in this mode.

In 1800, Felicia Dorothea Browne – as Hemans was then known – left her English birthplace of Liverpool with her family at the age of six or seven years old, resettling at Gwrych near Abergele in Denbighshire, north Wales. Her first collection, *Poems* – published in 1808 – illustrates the formative influence of the Welsh landscape, the myths of Cambria and the ancient bard on her poetry and imagination. While some poems like "Written in North Wales" explicitly refer to Welsh figures and surroundings, those on other subjects – often domestic – nonetheless remain specifically situated in her new locality. Consequently – and in spite of Gray's assertion that "no Woman…can take pleasure in this kind of composition"[412], as discussed in the first chapter – Hemans arguably has the strongest claim of any of the four poets upon whom I have focused in this study to invoke the authority of the bardic sublime. She is the only poet of the four who, like the ancient Welsh bard, actually knows – as an inhabitant, rather than a tourist – the mountains and landscape that are most associated with the bardic sublime.

In an early poem entitled "On Health", the young Hemans conflates the classical with the Cambrian:

> OH! tell me, Cambrians, tell me true,
> Does fair Hygeïa 'bide with you?
> "Yes, she with us for ever dwells,
> In groves, in shady woods, or dells.
> Oh! stranger, turn and stay – for here
> She deigns to give her influence dear.
> In yonder vale her temple stands;
> Her brows entwin'd with roseate bands:

[412] Thomas Gray, *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, volume 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 478.

In Cambria's land she ever dwells,
In groves, in shady woods, or dells.[413]

Hygeia, goddess of health in Greek mythology, is insistently located "here" [l. 5], in "Cambria's land" [l. 9]. The tripling of noun phrases in the refrain "In groves, in shady woods, or dells" [l. 4; l. 10] at once bolsters the poem's emphasis on setting – on the specifically Welsh locality of Hygeia, according to the speakers – and alludes to the imaginative possibilities of the rural Welsh landscape. "Groves", "shady woods" and "dells" have the capacity to be soothing, as spots sheltered by leaves, trees and foliage, as well as enigmatic; they are only ever half-illuminated. Furthermore, as we have seen in previous chapters, groves often connote mystery and magic and are, consequently, commonly associated with the pagan or druidic. Whether or not this poem may be considered to be an instance of bardic or, indeed, sublime verse, it nonetheless gives us a clear indication of Hemans' imaginative response to her Welsh surroundings. They are depicted as being restorative, welcoming, and a source of poetic inspiration. Even as a young child, Hemans exhibited a fascination with the imaginative and evocative possibilities of Welsh lore and landscape. Wales – due to its myths and its landscape – is thus introduced as a site of both well-being and wonder.

"Written in North Wales" offers a similarly reverent view of the Welsh landscape.[414] Hemans describes "happy regions of delight and joy" [l. 1], "scenes of bliss without alloy" [l. 2]. Rhyming couplets in this poem, as with the previous, frame Hemans' early poems as expressions of childlike contentment: "These lovely prospects, how they cheer my soul, / With what delight and joy I view the whole!" [ll. 19-20]. The speaker is carefree, immersing herself in her natural surroundings, describing them with great reverence signalled by repeated use of the exclamatory imperative "Hail!":

Hail! to your mountains, groves, and woodlands dear,
Hail! to your flowery lawns, and streamlets clear;
Hail! to your lowly cots, and stately parks,
And hail! your meadows green, and soaring larks. [ll. 3-6]

The references to "flowery lawns" and "stately parks" in these lines are descriptions of comfortable residential surroundings rather than the wild Welsh hills, of course. However, these almost picturesque images are followed just a few lines later by depictions of the majesty

[413] Felicia Hemans, "On Health", *Poems, by Felicia Dorothea Browne,* (Liverpool: G. F. Harris, 1808), p. 5.
[414] Hemans, *Poems,* pp. 5-6.

of the speaker's more raw, rugged landscape around them; we see a hint of the more sublime images that are to become dominant in Hemans' later works:

> See, too, yon rugged hill, upon whose brow
> Majestic trees and woods aspiring grow.
> There to the right, the vale of Clwyd ends;
> Here to the left, huge Penman-mawr extends:
> Look to the south, the Cambria mountains o'er;
> Hark! to the north, the ocean's awful roar. [ll. 9-14]

The speaker notes the undulations of the landscape, looking up at the wooded hills, and down at the valleys beneath, before considering the mountainous terrain including Penmaenmawr while hearing the roar of the sea below. The discourse of the sublime is palpable in these lines. The fact that even a child as young as Hemans could employ the distinctive rhetoric of the sublime demonstrates just how deeply embedded the discourse had become in the poetry of the period.

The ten-year-old Hemans becomes increasingly perceptive, discerning the sublime possibilities of her surroundings, as expressed in the next poem, "Written on the Sea-Shore"[415]:

> How awful how sublime this view,
> Each day presenting something new.
> Hark! now the seas majestic roar,
> And now the birds their warblings pour:
> Now yonder lark's sweet notes resound,
> And now an awful stillness reigns around.[416]

This poem should not be considered to describe the picturesque; it focuses, rather, on the "awful" [l. 1; l. 6], the "sublime" [l. 1], the "majestic" [l. 3]. The final line is, if anything, eerie: the speaker hears the roaring of the waves, contrasted with the warbling of the birds before silence, and stillness, falls. In this way, Hemans' poem seems to echo another text of the same title: Charlotte Smith's "Written on the Seashore", from her first book, *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays,* which was published in early June, 1784. Smith's sonnet may be twice the length of Hemans' poem, but the melancholic tone of a solitary speaker – listening to the sounds of birds and the roaring of the sea, and fascinated by the sublimity of the view – is expressed similarly by both poets:

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[415] The poem, as with several others in the *Poems* (1808) collection, concludes with Hemans' age: "F. D. B. AGED 10" (p. 6).
[416] Hemans, *Poems,* p. 6.

On some rude fragment of the rocky shore,
  Where on the fractured cliff the billows break,
  Musing, my solitary seat I take,
And listen to the deep and solemn roar.

O'er the dark waves the winds tempestuous howl;
  The screaming sea-bird quits the troubled sea:
  But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me,
And suits the mournful temper of my soul.

Already shipwreck'd by the storms of Fate,
   Like the poor mariner, methinks, I stand,
   Cast on a rock; who sees the distant land
From whence no succour comes – or comes too late.
Faint and more faint are heard his feeble cries,
'Till in the rising tide the exhausted sufferer dies.[417]

The "sea[']s majestic roar" in Hemans' poem echoes the "deep and solemn roar" described in Smith's; the "warblings" of the birds in Hemans' text mimic the "screaming" of the seabird that Smith describes. The "wild gloomy scene" in which Smith delights is also one which entrances Hemans, the repetition of the adverb "how" in Hemans' opening line – "How awful how sublime" – conveying almost breathless reverence for the scene, reinforced by the lack of the caesurae which one might expect between phrases.

The rhyme scheme of Hemans' poem differs from Smith's; the latter is abba cddc effe gg, blending the abba component of the rhyme scheme for a Petrarchan sonnet with the quatrains and heroic couplet of an English one, while Hemans' is aabbcc: sestet couplets. Metrical structure, however, links the two poems. Both poems adhere to a reliably iambic meter (tetrameter in Hemans' poem and pentameter in Smith's) until the very final line of each, which is hypermetrical; both poems finish with a surplus iamb. The excess beats foreground the extent of the "awful stillness" of the scene, of the "tempestuous howl" of the winds – and of the speaker's emotional and psychological struggle, the pains of the "sufferer". It is perhaps surprising that Hemans, as such a young writer, would choose to focus on the more unsettling forces of the natural world around her instead of simply on the beautiful. Moreover, while Smith's verse was praised, readers articulated concerns regarding her sorrowful content, expressing hope that the melancholy expressed was only fictitious:

[417] Charlotte Smith, "Sonnet XII. Written on the Seashore. October, 1784", *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Stuart Curran, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 20.

> It has been suggested by a valuable correspondent, that we cannot adopt a more elegant decoration than a few sonnets by this pathetic poetess. To the number of those originally published by her, she has now made an addition of twenty new ones. We cannot, however, forbear expressing a hope that the misfortunes she so often hints at, are all imaginary. We must have perused her very tender and exquisite effusions with diminished pleasure, could we have supposed her sorrows to be real. - It would be hard indeed if a lady, who has so much contributed to the delight of others, should feel any want of happiness herself.[418]

The preface to Smith's collection seems to suggest that her sonnets are intended to be taken as autobiographical writings. Smith states: "Some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought".[419] She goes on to say that "circumstances" compelled her to "put them into their present form".[420] Despite critics' claims, both then and now, that Smith's sorrow was affected – a theatrical sentimentality for the purposes of captivating her readers – Smith explicitly stated in the preface to the sixth edition of her collection that "I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy".[421]

Smith emphasises both temporal and physical distance in her poem, to the extent that the speaker seems to either feel abandoned or has otherwise wilfully absented herself from the world. The speaker explicitly links herself with the "poor mariner" who eventually dies through the simile of line 10. No help arrives for the mariner, whether seen or imagined – or, else, arrives "too late". He, and the speaker, have become detached from the world. At the end of the poem, we are told that "the exhausted sufferer dies". The specific use of "his", presumably pertaining to the mariner, gives way to a (gender-neutral) determiner, "the", suggesting a perhaps psychic or emotional affinity between the broken mariner and the tormented, possibly female speaker. The "screaming sea-bird" has "quit" – deliberately left – the sea. The speaker describes feeling "shipwreck'd" by fate, having taken a "solitary seat". The land is "distant". These are all images of fracture, of detachment and of things being broken. Even the cliff itself is "fractured". The landscape, which we are told "suits the mournful temper" of the speaker's soul, could readily be seen as an imagined, externalised reflection of the speaker's – possibly Smith's – state of mind at the time of composition.

Hemans' verse, meanwhile, is firmly rooted in the real landscape that she experienced following her family's relocation to Wales, focusing on the sheer force of nature rather than

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[418] Sylvanus Urban (pseudonym of Edward Cave), *Gentleman's Magazine, and Historical Chronicle,* (1786), Volume 59, (London: Edward Cave), p. 333.
[419] Charlotte Smith, preface to the first and second editions of *Elegiac Sonnets,* in *Poems of Charlotte Smith,* ed. Stuart Curran, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3.
[420] *Ibid.*
[421] *Ibid,* p. 5.

the daintily beautiful. Similarly, in "The Reign of December"[422], Hemans chooses to focus on the chills and grandeur of the winter winds rather than the fertility and beauty of the spring:

> In winter awful, lovely in the spring,
> Romantic Cambria hail! to thee I sing. [ll. 1-2]

"Romantic Cambria" is the muse to which, increasingly, the young Hemans speaks and sings.

Evident, too, in this early collection is Hemans' emerging fascination with the figure of the bard or minstrel – referred to at one point in this collection as "The Minstrel Bard".[423] In previous chapters, we have already witnessed the use of "druid" and "bard" together to form as a single noun phrase; the combination of "Minstrel" and "bard" which forms the title of this poem, "Minstrel Bard" links the historical with the ethnic, the medieval with the Celtic. Maike Oergel notes the nineteenth-century vogue for making "interchangeable use of the terms 'bard', a word with Celtic connotations, and 'minstrel', which had medieval connotations."[424] However, Oergel's assertion is somewhat problematic. Though the terms were often conflated, as I have discussed in earlier chapters, there were several eighteenth-century writers who were careful to distinguish between the terms "minstrel", "bard" and "Druid". Perhaps, though, there is a middle ground to be found. What if, with the eradication of the medieval bards, the role of the minstrels – or, rather, their social status – changed? Thomas Percy suggested that minstrels, once regarded as mere musicians, later became the natural heirs and successors to the bards in that they, too, became serious poets who may dwell in the domain of the privileged.[425]

It is interesting to note that, while the title of Hemans' "The Minstrel Bard" historically locates the bard in the medieval period, the figure is physically located among the "awful summits" [l. 1] of the natural world rather than in the courtly setting we might expect, given that this was the conventional, historical realm of the bard.[428] As such, Hemans' depiction of the bard correlates with that presented by Gray, of the bard standing "On a rock" [l. 15], and

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[422] Hemans, *Poems,* pp. 15-16.
[423] *Ibid,* p. 70.
[424] Maike Oergel, *The Return of King Arthur and the Nibelungen: National Myth in Nineteenth-Century English and German Literature,* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1998), p. 140.
[425] See Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets, together with Some Few of Later Date,* (1844), pp. lvi-lvii, and "An Essay on the Ancient Minstrels in England", pp. xxi-xxiii. For further detail, please see discussion at outset of previous chapter.
[428] For further details, please consult Constance Bullock-Davies, "Welsh minstrels at the courts of Edward I and Edward II", *Trafodion Anrhydeddus Gymdeithas y Cymmrodorion / Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion,* (1972/1973), p. 104-106. Available online at:
http://welshjournals.llgc.org.uk/browse/viewobject/llgc-id:1419142/article/000084724.

the dramatic visual depictions of the bard standing against a sublime backdrop which followed Gray's poem thereafter. However, Gray's bard is an elegiac figure, lamenting to his lyre:

> Robed in the sable garb of woe,
> With haggard eyes the poet stood;
> (Loose his beard, and hoary hair
> Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air)
> And with a master's hand, and prophet's fire,
> Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre. [ll. 17-22]

Hemans' minstrel bard, in contrast, is presented as a joyful figure:

> 'Tis there the poet loves to sigh,
> And touch the harp of melody:
> And wake the measure of delight,
> Or melt in fairy visions bright:
> And sometimes will his soul aspire,
> And feel almost etherial fire. [ll. 3-8]

Notably, while Gray's bard is a grounded, earthly figure – one who is portrayed in Blake's illustrations as the counterpart, the contrast, to the more celestial muse of Gray's "The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode" – Hemans' minstrel bard is at once an earthly figure of the natural landscape *and* one who is associated with the otherworldly. Furthermore, he is not only a figure who produces music and stirs the imagination; he himself is inspired, amidst the landscape, hearing "music in the breeze" [l. 14]:

> Ah! then the fond enthusiast dreams,
> (Enraptur'd with celestial themes,)
> That happy spirits round him play,
> And animate the magic lay:
> Their floating forms his fancy sees,
> And hears their music in the breeze.
> Then, while the airy numbers die,
> He wakes his sweetest harmony;
> To imitate the heavenly strain,
> Which memory fondly calls again. [ll. 9-18]

Content, inspired, the "poet loves to sigh" [l. 3] – signalled in the lines above by the interjection "Ah!" [l. 9] – before touching "the harp of melody" [l. 4] to produce song: "He wakes his sweetest harmony / To imitate the heavenly strain" [ll. 16-17].

The minstrel bard is, as such, presented by Hemans as a quintessentially Romantic role model. The bard immerses himself in nature, he is then moved emotionally, spiritually and imaginatively by what he hears and sees, and he is finally moved once again to create, "to animate" [l. 12]: he is stirred into song. Lines 9-18 seem to describe a vision of sorts – the minstrel bard "dreams" [l. 9], "Enraptur'd" [l. 10], seeing "happy spirits" [l. 11] and "floating forms" [l. 13] in "airy numbers" [l. 15]. Words associated with the heavenly and the otherworldly dominate these lines, the alliteration of "f" sounds in line 13 ("**f**loating **f**orms his **f**ancy sees") – emphasised as the stressed beats – fanning the focus on muse-like figures who motivate the minstrel bard to "animate the magic lay" as they do [l. 12]. Not only do the lines of the poem echo each other, composed of rhyming couplets in iambic tetrameter; vowels are carried within and across lines: "th**e**re" / "m**e**lody" / "m**ea**sure" / "m**e**lt" / "f**ai**ry"; "r**i**se" / "s**i**gh" / "del**i**ght" / "br**i**ght" / "asp**i**re" / "f**i**re". Sound reverberates: through landscape, into imagination, channelled outward again through the strings of the minstrel bard's lyre onto the page and heard or spoken by the reader, from line to line, and from word to word.

As such, the bard is rendered a role model to the reader, for his gift is in his perception of the external world – his sensory reaction to it – coupled with an imaginative response culminating in a creative act. This makes the bard a vocation that any can fulfil, should they possess the Wordsworthian sensitivity to the natural world as well as the creative capacity to express their response to it imaginatively. The bard is not removed from the human; he is, in fact, extremely human. The divine, spiritual power is afforded not to the bard himself but to the spirit of the "lyre divine" [l. 21] – an echo of l. 112 of Gray's "Progress of Poesy" ("Oh! lyre divine, what daring spirit / Wakes thee now"[429]) – the landscape its "sacred shrine" [l. 22]:

> To Fancy then he pours his song,
> To her his wildest notes belong.
> Oh! spirit of the lyre divine,
> I deck with flowers thy sacred shrine;
> Thus let me ever melt with thee,
> In the soft dreams of poesy. [ll. 19-24]

The bard acts as a guide to the reader, showing one how to listen to the landscape, and how to revere the imaginative processes it prompts: through acts of creativity.

[429] Thomas Gray, *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 176, ll. 112-113.

"The Minstrel Bard" only refers to memory briefly. The minstrel bard endeavours to "imitate the heavenly strain, / Which memory fondly calls again" [ll. 17-18], the word "fondly" indicating that the active motivation for reawakening his song is an emotional one: an affinity, or attachment, to the landscape he "loves" [l. 3]. In "The Minstrel to his Harp", the speaker – the minstrel – begins by expressing similar sentiments, fondly recollecting the "songs of joy" [l. 4] he sang in his youth:

> When youthful transport led the hours,
> And all my way was bright with flowers,
> Ah! then my harp, thy dulcet note,
> To songs of joy would lightly float;
> To thee I sung in numbers wild,
> Of hope and love who gaily smil'd. [ll. 1-6]

While the figure of the bard is typically regarded as a keeper of cultural memory – relaying tales of the past (historically, often for the purpose of advising the monarch as to how he may wish to proceed with regard to a political decision) – in this poem, it is the harp itself that acts as a vessel of memory: the minstrel's memories. The mood of this poem is somewhat different from the last; tunes of "young delight" [l. 7] have given way to "mournful strains alone" [l. 10]. A repository for memories – good and bad – the harp, and the playing of it, is a consistent source of comfort, catharsis or consolation:

> I sung to thee of early pleasures,
> In sweet and animated measures;
> And I have wept o'er griefs and cares,
> And still have lov'd thy magic airs:
> To me thy sound recals the hours,
> When all my way was bright with flowers. [ll. 13-18]

The refrain "all my way was bright with flowers" [l. 2; l. 18] is, by the final line, uttered with a bittersweet tone; it is sadly nostalgic for better days. The interjection "Ah!" [l. 3; l. 11], initially appearing in line 3 as an expression of delighted remembering is, by line 11, used contemplatively. Even when his lyre is played in lament, the minstrel finds solace in its sounds: "Ah! yet the pleasing lays impart / A pensive rapture to my heart" [l. 12]. Song, sound, has the power to induce memory, acts of recollection and, thus, catharsis; consolation is afforded by the remembering – and reimagining – of past experiences. Hemans' text resembles Scott's

The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805) in which Scott similarly employs the meter of iambic tetrameter with which to articulate his bardic, elegiac theme:

> The way was long, the wind was cold,
> The Minstrel was infirm and old;
> His wither'd cheek, and tresses gray,
> Seem'd to have known a better day;
> The harp, his sole remaining joy,
> Was carried by an orphan boy.
> The last of all the Bards was he,
> Who sung of Border chivalry… [l. 1-8]

The last of his kind, Scott's Minstrel finds companionship, consolation, in "his sole remaining joy": his harp. Song relies on familiarity: the repetition of notes, chords, words, refrains, sequences. In many ways, this is what the minstrel, and the harp, may offer; they are a means of reliving what Wordsworth would describe as a "spot of time" to cathartic effect, though at a distance – temporally disassociated from the original experience, as well as mediated through an art form which simultaneously offers sensory comfort. This correlates with Burke's reverence for the cathartic possibilities afforded by the distance between the personal and the fictional, mediated by an art work: "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience".[430]

Similarly, the bard's song provides comfort and consolation in offering posterity. In "To Patriotism", for instance, "Valour" [l. 4] and "Fortitude" [l. 7] are encouraged in the British, with "everlasting glory" [l. 22] – to be afforded by the bard's song – named as their reward:

> Do thou Britannia's sons inspire
> With all thy energy and fire:
> Teach them to conquer or to die
> With firm unshaken loyalty.
> Then may some bard record their praise
> In sweet enthusiastic lays;
> And hail the patriotic band,
> The guardians of their native land;
> Whose names shall live in warlike story,
> Consigned to everlasting glory. [ll. 13-22]

[430] Burke, p. 217.

Again, the words of Hemans' poem are arranged in a meter of iambic tetrameter. The poem's structural similarity to the metrical forms of song gives it an almost hymnal quality. This seems fitting in light of the fact that a great number of Hemans' poems were, after all, set to music.

The bard, in Hemans' verse – as in Gray's, Blake's and Wordsworth's before her – is associated with the noble and the brave. In "Genius", the speaker seeks inspiration, invoking Genius to "animate my lyre" [l. 29] so as to improve upon his or her own "artless rhyme" [l. 23]. In doing so, the speaker tries to imagine a poetic forebear, the bard, fancying that:

> Perhaps, where now I pour the simple lays,
> Thy bards have wak'd the song of other days;
> Some Cambrian Ossian may have wander'd near,
> While airy music murmur'd in his ear:
> Perhaps, even here, beneath the moonlight beam,
> He love'd to ponder some entrancing theme;
> And here, while heavenly visions fill'd his eye,
> He rais'd the strain of plaintive melody;
> This fond idea consecrates the hour,
> And more endears the calm secluded bower.[431]

The speaker is attached to the notion of walking in the footsteps of a "Cambrian Ossian" [l. 33], a "fond idea" [l. 39], and goes on to describe how:

> Sweet was the Cambrian harp in ancient time,
> When tuneful bards awak'd the song sublime;
> And minstrels caroll'd in the banner'd hall,
> Where warlike trophies grac'd the lofty wall;
> They sang the legends and traditions old,
> The deeds of chivalry, and heroes bold.
> Oh! Cambria, tho' thy sweetest bards are dead,
> And fairies from thy lovely vales are fled;
> Still in thy sons the musing mind may trace
> The vestige of thy former simple race:
> Some pious customs yet preserv'd with care,
> Their humble village piety declare;
> Ah! still they shrew the fairest flowers and weep,
> Where buried friends of sacred memory sleep.
> The wandering harper, too, in plaintive lays,
> Declares the glory of departed days;
> And, Cambria, still upon thy fertile plains,
> The power of hospitality remains.[432]

[431] Hemans, "Genius", *Poems,* pp. 73-74, ll. 31-40.
[432] *Ibid,* p. 74, ll. 41-58.

It has always been the bard, the poet, who has had the right and, indeed, ability to truly bear testament to the sacrifices and victories of history. The bard himself is regarded as the reliable human vessel or keeper of cultural memory – even more so than the historian – especially given his traditional reliance on mnemonic devices. The "glory of departed days" [l. 56], the "legends and traditions old" [l. 45], the "deeds of chivalry" and "heroes bold" [l. 46] of "sacred memory" [l. 54], are all kept alive through the elegiac and nostalgic songs of the "wandering harper" [l. 55]. The poem is itself divided into heroic couplets – rhyming lines of iambic pentameter – thereby placing the chivalric heroes of the British medieval court, "the banner'd hall" [l. 43], on a pedestal of equal status to the classical heroes, those of Greek and Roman mythology.

Indeed, the bard himself is presented as a counterpart to the classical "sylvan" [l. 127] being of the woods and groves, of the "Cambrian vallies and romantic bow'rs" [l. 126] in poems like "Rural Walks", as well as "Genius" and others in the volume. In "Genius" – invoking the mythological sprite, Ariel – Hemans quotes Shakespeare by way of testifying to both the imaginative inspiration to be found in the natural world and, equally, the capacity of verse or song to induce fanciful visions in response to or of one's surroundings:

> I love to wander by the ocean side,
> And hear the soothing murmurs of the tide;
> To muse upon the poet's fairy-tale,
> In fancy wasted to the moonlight vale:
> Sometimes I think that Ariel's playful bands
> Are lightly hovering o'er "these yellow sands".
>
> 'Tis thus that Shakespeare, with inspiring song,
> Can lead the visionary train along;
> Then by his magic spell the scene around,
> The "yellow sands" become enchanted ground. [ll. 7-16]

The lines quoted from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* above are from Act I Scene II of the play, in which Ariel – the invisible sprite – is singing and playing music, encouraging other sprites to soothe the sea into silence. Like Ariel, Hemans' bard is a figure of (and, in this case, one who may influence) the natural landscape, through verse, sound, song. Moreover, the speaker of this poem does not merely invoke the mythological bard; they present Shakespeare as an exemplary real-life bard, one whose verse lends "magic" [l. 15] to the surroundings he describes, rendering them "enchanted ground" [l. 16]. The bard is endowed with magical, almost sacred powers to enchant person or place, foregrounded in poems like "To the

Moonlight Hour" by half-light amidst shadow, or sublime spots of landscape between earth and sky:

> Sweetest of the pensive hours,
> Welcome to our Cambrian bowers;
> While the harp with plaintive close,
> Bids us love the song of woes;
> Or the lute so gaily sweet,
> Echoes thro' this wild retreat;
>
> …By the poet's melting trance,
> And by his visions of romance…
>
> Ever be thy shadowy beam
> Sacred as the minstrel's theme.
> Sweetest of the pensive hours,
> Welcome to our Cambrian bowers. [ll. 1-6; 13-14; 17-20]

The speaker depicts a mystical scene of half-light ("shadowy" [l. 17]) and half-sounds ("Echoes" [l. 6]), contributing to the almost dreamlike state that the poet's song induces: "the poet's melting trance, / And…his visions of romance" [ll. 1-14].

Thus, for the young Hemans, the bard as well as the lore and landscape of Wales were all rich imaginative resources for her early poetry. The discourse of the sublime inflects many of these poems. Even those which bear no obvious trace of the sublime are nonetheless deeply engaged with the imaginative potential presented by the wild Welsh landscape, especially in relation to ideas and images of ancient Wales and its bardic past. I now turn from Hemans' fictional bards to her meeting with a real bard, before considering her later *Welsh Melodies.*

The Harper of Conway

It was shortly after this collection of *Poems* was published that Hemans was to become acquainted with a practising Welsh bard. In 1811, based on a meeting that had taken place at the atmospheric site of the ruins of Conway Castle, eighteen-year-old Hemans penned "To Mr Edwards, the Harper of Conway", who is described in Hemans' memoirs as one who:

> …had been blind from his birth, and was endowed with that extraordinary musical genius, by which persons suffering under such a visitation, are not unfrequently indemnified. From the respectability of his circumstances, he was not called upon to exercise his talents with any view to remuneration. He played to delight himself

> and others; and the innocent complacency with which he enjoyed the ecstasies brought forth by his skill, and the degree of appreciation with which he regarded himself, as in a manner consecrated, by being made the depository of a direct gift from Heaven, were, as far as possible, removed from any of the common modifications of vanity or self-conceit.[433]

The Conway bard was at once humble – "removed from any of the common modifications of vanity or self-conceit" – as well as esteemed as a figure in possession of a "consecrated" talent, regarded as "the depository of a direct gift from Heaven". This poem was not to appear in print until the publication of the text quoted above – Harriet Hughes' *Memoir* of her sister, Felicia, published with the collected works in 1839. It is a crucial text to consider when charting the trajectory of Hemans' bard:

> Minstrel! whose gifted hand can bring,
> Life, rapture, soul, from every string;
> And wake, like bards of former time,
> The spirit of the harp sublime; -
> Oh! still prolong the varying strain!
> Oh! touch th'enchanted chords again! [ll. 1-6]

The tone of the speaker is ecstatic, reverent, conveyed through the repetition of the foregrounded interjection "Oh!" [ll. 5-6], the exclamatory mood throughout, and the tripling of abstract nouns connotative of the essence of being: "Life, rapture, soul" [l. 2]. The bard is more than just a depository of myth, history and cultural memory; he is more than a singer, or a performer. Hemans emphasises the agency of the bard to reawaken imaginative life, one in possession of a power if not divine, then inherently spiritual and mystical. The word "sublime" [l. 4] is, again, used in conjunction with descriptions of the bard. As E. Douka Kabitoglou asserts, Hemans places "the grand and abstract poetic language in the traditional locus of the sublime".[434] The speaker utters imperatives which urge the minstrel to prolong his song: "still prolong the varying strain / Oh! touch th'enchanted chords again!" [ll. 5-6]. The apostrophe to, or invocation of, the "Minstrel!" [l. 1] at the poem's outset is comparable to other writers' conventional poetic appeals to the figure of the classical muse. The minstrel or bard offers more appeal, however, as a figure who may not only be invoked, but may be emulated; he

[433] Harriet Hughes, *The Works of Mrs Hemans; with a Memoir of her Life, by her Sister,* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1839), p. 18.
[434] E. Douka Kabitoglou, "The Pen and Sword: Felicia Hemans's Records of Man", *Romantic Masculinities,* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1997), p. 110.

inspires through the media of song and verse, which may be learned, practised, honed by any other individual who shares "the magic power…to exercise over the feelings of his auditors".[435]

The bard's song is one of defiance, serving a patriotic role, stirring soldiers into action. Referring to the same Welsh place names as those listed in Gray's "The Bard" ("Conway" [l. 17], "Plinlimmon" [l. 15]) the speaker honours Conway as a site that may "boast a strain / Unrivalled in thy proudest reign" [ll. 17-18]. While "Mona", the Latin term for Anglesey, is typically regarded as the primary (and last) home of the British Druids[436] – the priestly figures of the ancient Welsh world with whom bardic identity was so often conflated in the long eighteenth century – the speaker instead claims Conway as the "Unrivalled" [l. 18] site of music and verse while Mona's "woods be silent now" [l. 16]. The use of "Mona" echoes Milton's 1637 elegy, "Lycidas", wherein he employs bardic and druidic imagery to elegise the death of his young Cambridge friend, Edward King, as explored in my Introduction.

In Hemans' poem, the superlative "proudest" [l. 18] highlights Edwards' home of Conway as an exemplary site of bardic spirit. Then, the speaker goes on to assert the ability of bardic song to awaken patriotic, militant zeal:

> Now Grandeur, pealing in the tone,
> Could rouse the warrior's kindling fire,
> And now, 'tis like the breeze's moan,
> That murmurs o'er the Æolian lyre:
> As if some sylph, with viewless wing,
> Were sighing o'er the magic string. [ll. 25-30]

The sound of the bard's song is "pealing" – deep, profound, prolonged – fuelling the "kindling fire" [l. 26] in the heart of the warrior. The association of the bard's harp with the Æolian lyre [l. 28] by the speaker suggests that, such is the strength and power of the bard's song, that it may even influence the elements, linking to the classical myth of Aeolus, who can command the winds. The bard possesses a power which is, at the very least, equal to the power of nature – of the wind which plays the lyre – for he may move one inwardly, emotionally, and spiritually, while himself being and remaining a figure of the wild, rugged Welsh landscape.

In Hemans' collection *The Domestic Affections, and Other Poems* of 1812, a poem entitled "The Bards to the Soldiers of Caractacus" depicts the bards acting as explicitly patriotic

[435] Hughes, p. 18.
[436] See the Introduction for further details. In addition, Chapter Two of Ronald Hutton's, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain*, (London: Yale University Press, 2009) offers more information.

figures who encourage British soldiers to go to war against the Romans in the name of national freedom:

> Valiant sons of freedom's land,
> Ardent, firm, devoted band,
> Rise, at honour's thrilling call:
> Warriors, arm! shall Britain fall?
> Rush, battle-steed,
> Bleed, soldiers, bleed!
> For Britain's throne, for glory's meed. [ll. 1-7]

The meter of this poem differs from that of the majority of poems which we have seen previously. The stresses are generally trochaic in the first four lines, highlighting words associated with honourable endeavours, such as "Valiant", "freedom", "Ardent", "Firm", "honour['s]" and "Warriors". Then, the meter changes to dimeter, stressing the dynamic verbs "Rush" and "Bleed" as imperatives, which are both foregrounded and emphasised by the caesurae that follow them. The text functions as a call to arms, using imperatives such as "Rise", "Warriors, arm!", "Rush, battle-steed" coupled with a rhetorical question: "shall Britain fall?"

Taking Caractacus – the most celebrated resistance figure in relation to Roman invasion – and his soldiers as the intended audience for the bards' (note the plural noun form) song, Hemans highlights themes of patriotism, solidarity and, specifically, the role of the bard in promoting these ideas, together with notions of liberty, resistance and moral courage. The tone of the poem is defiant, reinforced by repeated use of the imperatives "Tell them" [l. 15; l. 17; l. 18], "Go!" [l. 10; l. 12] and heavy reliance on parallelism: "For Britain's throne, for glory's mood"; "Point the falchion, guide the car"; "Our foes consume, / Our swords illume"; "Mount, irradiate! Beam, aspire!"; "By every rite, / Of Mona's night"; "while thy bands disdain… "while thy sons are free". The poem is richly rhetorical, claiming the resistance cause as a "sacred cause" – though not in Christian terms, but in druidic ones:

> Shall the Roman arms invade
> Mona's dark and hallowed shade?
> By the dread, mysterious wand,
> Waving in the Druid's hand;
> By every rite,
> Of Mona's night,
> Arm, warriors! arm; in sacred cause unite [ll. 36-42]

On first reading, one may reasonably link the language of these lines with the genre of medieval or chivalric romance. We are presented with protagonists who face adversity; one may suppose that their faith is – as in medieval romances – key to their courage. It is not, however, in Christian belief that moral courage is to be found. Nor is it the supernatural which endangers the lives and liberty of the text's characters, as one would find in a conventional chivalric romance. Rather, moral courage is to be found in embracing the magic, the mystery and the supernatural forces which are so commonly associated with antagonists rather than protagonists in the genre of romance. It is notable, too, that it is not figures from a noble court for whom we, the readers, feel sympathy, but rather than wild and mysterious figures of the landscape.

If anything, Hemans subverts the genre of medieval romance in these lines. The imagery and language of the extract above exemplify the sublime in the way detailed in Burke's *Enquiry*. The Druid's wand is "dread", "mysterious", and he dwells in the "dark and hallowed shade" of Mona's "night", an "awful shrine"; these are all words which hint at the mysterious, and fear- and awe-inducing qualities associated with the sublime. Equally, the resisting community is described in the spirit of the sublime when understood as a term connoting moral courage: "Ardent bold, sublime, they stand". The "revered" spaces and "sacred" causes are those of the terrible Druids, and of the British, not of the Roman invaders; it is the former, those threatened with invasion and subjugation, with whom we are encouraged to sympathise.

The bards, in this way, act as a moral compass to guide political action. They encourage resistance to repression, to conquest, to "Slavery's dark, debasing chain". Hemans does not only configure the bard's role in this way in a specifically Welsh context. In "War Song of the Spanish Patriots", for example, the "Brave Castilians" [l. 26] are encouraged to fight for glory, so that "Future bards, in lofty strain / Shall sing your praise" [ll. 29-30]. Similarly, in *England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism* (1808), the speaker asks:

> Is there no bard of heavenly power possest,
> To thrill, to rouse, to animate the breast!
> Like Shakspeare o'er the secret mind to sway
> And call each wayward passion to obey?
> Is there no bard, imbued with hallowed fire,
> To wake the chords of Ossian's magic lyre;
> Whose numbers breathing all his flame divine,
> The patriot's name to ages might consign?
> Rise, Inspiration, ride, be this thy theme,
> And mount, like Uriel, on the golden beam!

Again, the bard is associated with the sacred and the spiritual – of "heavenly power", "hallowed fire" and able to inspire a "flame divine" in the breasts of soldiers – as well as with the patriotic. Once more, the poem is formed from sequences of heroic couplets, affording the bard the revered status of a classical hero one might expect of a poem from the English epic tradition. It is "sweet Peace" to which the speakers calls for the bard's song to be dedicated, though: "Thy smile of heav'n shall ev'ry muse inspire, / To thee the bard shall strike the silver lyre" [ll. 581-582]. This call for peace is unsurprising, as Gary Kelly has affirmed:

> …the great patriotic struggle against Napoleonic France was absorbing the British public's attention, centred especially on the Peninsular War in Spain, where Felicia Browne's two brothers were serving in the British army. Early British military intervention went badly, however, and many at home blamed the corruption and inefficiency of a government dominated by the royal court and aristocratic interests and patronage…*England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism* (1808)…represents Britain's engagement as a renewal of the nation's libertarian traditions, derived from classical republicanism, and linked to…independent civic culture…[437]

Hemans is engaged with the highly personal, public and political simultaneously. Even in poems which are geographically-removed from Wales, bardic aesthetics frame her verse. The question of whether Hemans' early verse is written in support of – or in opposition to – war can seem unclear when one thinks back to line 6 of "The Bards to the Soldiers of Caractacus": "Bleed, soldiers, bleed!". Benjamin Kim contends that, rather than promoting or encouraging warfare, it is actually the case that: "Hemans argues for the right of all individuals to fight, die, and be memorialized by the larger society, while lamenting the tendency of the society to erase and forget these acts".[438] The bard is, in this regard, always a comforting figure: he stands for moral courage, and inspiration, and he promises posterity. It is, as such, unsurprising that the bard should go on to be an increasingly central figure in Hemans' poetry, expressed nowhere more clearly than in a later poetic collection by Hemans: *A Selection of Welsh Melodies.*

[437] Gary Kelly, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters,* (Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd, 2002), pp. 19-20.
[438] Benjamin Kim, "'She is no sculptured form of woe': Meaningful Death in Felicia Hemans's Early and Middle Periods", *Wordsworth, Hemans, and Politics, 1800-1830: Romantic Crises,* (Plymouth: Bucknell University Press, 2013), p. 105.

Welsh Melodies

This section of the chapter focuses on Hemans' 1821 collection, *A Selection of Welsh Melodies*, with the aim of illustrating both the continuities and shifts in Hemans' bardic sublime. Elizabeth Edwards has claimed that this collection is "potentially a problematic work for those outside the field of Welsh Romanticism because it is quite delicately but precisely located within this field."[439] It is easy to see why this claim has been made; just a cursory look at the list of titles within the collection indicates that a familiarity with Welsh history and myth is a prerequisite of appreciating the full meaning of the poems: "The Harp of Wales"; "Druid Chorus on the Landing of the Romans"; "The Sea-Song of Gafran"; "The Hirlas Horn"; "The Hall of Cynddylan"; "The Lament of Llywarch Hen"; "Grufydd's Feast"; "Taliesin's Prophecy"; "Owen Glyndwr's War-song"; "Prince Madoc's Farewell"; "Caswallon's Triumph"; "Howel's Song"; "Eryri Wen"; "The Rock of Cader Idris". Welsh words, and Welsh names, place this collection very firmly in the category of what we would now term Welsh writing in English. In this collection, Hemans goes further than merely invoking the very familiar image of the bard; the repertoire of titles constitutes what one may imagine the selection of songs or poems known by heart by a real bard, documenting the often elegiac history of the Welsh while also offering a number of defiant prophecies.

In response to what Edwards describes as a "relative neglect"[440] of Hemans' songs, I seek to go some way to addressing this gap in scholarship. Peter W. Trinder describes the collection as

> a mixture of imaginative recreations of scenes from Welsh history and translations of Welsh poems. The text is unusually rich in her own notes which explain the background in Welsh history, the etymology of place names, pronunciation and other matters of interest. It seems likely that she could read and understand the Welsh language sufficiently for us to accept that the translations contained in this collection may be her own originals rather than paraphrases, but if so they are for the most part very free versions.[441]

The collection of texts was produced with the intention of being sung; while Hemans provided the verse, John Parry – a musician from Denbighshire – composed the music. As such, my

[439] Elizabeth Edwards, "'Lonely and Voiceless your Halls Must Remain': Romantic-Era National Song and Felicia Hemans's *Welsh Melodies*", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 38 No. 1 (2015). Available online at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1754-0208.12160/epdf, accessed on 11/11/15.
[440] Edwards, p. 83.
[441] Peter Trinder, *Mrs. Hemans*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press on behalf of the Welsh Arts Council, 1984), pp. 30-31.

analysis of the poems will, at points, offer comparisons between the text on the page and the text in performance.[442] This was not the only way in which the composition of Hemans' Welsh works was a collaborative endeavour, either. On 22 May 1822, the year in which *Welsh Melodies* was published, Hemans presented "The Meeting of the Bards", which was "Written for an Eisteddvod, or Meeting of Welsh Bards" in London. The detailed accompanying notes penned by Hemans show, as Trinder claims, that "she was well acquainted with the rites of the Gorsedd and its history".[443] Some of Hemans' lyrics were also performed at the music concert in London that day: "Owen Glyndwr's War-song" from *Welsh Melodies*, together with "On the Landing of the Romans in Britain" and "The Welsh Ground". Hemans was, thus, very much engaged with not only acts of Welsh cultural preservation, but acts of transmission: exporting verse and song inflected and shaped by Welsh myth and history to an appreciative Romantic audience.

And, indeed, the audience were appreciative. The *Cambro-Briton* journal, newly-founded in 1819, offered a favourable Cymmrodorion report in June 1822, describing how "the same gentleman [Parry] read a copy of beautiful verses, written by Mrs. Hemans, for the occasion, and which we have inserted in a foregoing page."[444] William D. Brewer comments that, in "The Meeting of the Bards", Hemans asserts "a spiritual and patriotic connection between heroic Welsh bards and her poetic and antiquarian contemporaries."[445] He goes on to add that "the Cymmrodorion Society made a similar symbolic gesture by affiliating itself with the most famous living Celtic poet – it enrolled Sir Walter Scott as one of its honorary members".[446]

Similarly, in an edition of *The Cambrian* – published on 16 November 1822 – a writer praises *Welsh Melodies* on the grounds that:

> Whether we look at the words in an historical point of view, or as exquisite poems, we are equally justified in speaking of them with unqualified praise. As to the manner in which they are adapted to music, we need only name the Editor, to

[442] In my analysis, I consult *A Selection of Welsh Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments by John Parry and Characteristic Words by Mrs. Hemans* (First Number) which was published in London by J. Power in 1821. The full text comprises both pages of sheet music and pages on which the lyrics – the verse – are reproduced separately. There are often disparities between Hemans' titles for the poems and Parry's titles for the songs, which I acknowledge in my readings.
[443] *Ibid,* p. 31.
[444] Cymmrodorion, *The Cambro-Briton,* (June 1822), Vol. 3, No. 30, p. 505. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/30023345, accessed on 11/11/15.
[445] William D. Brewer, "Felicia Hemans, Byronic Cosmopolitanism and the ancient Welsh bards", *English Romanticism and the Celtic World,* ed. Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 173.
[446] *Ibid.*

> convince the public that they could not be in better hands. Mr Parry's intimate, nay, we may say, innate knowledge of the wild, yet melodious, strains of his forefathers, renders him a very fit person for the task. Many of these Melodies were performed at the Brecon meeting of the Bards; and we need only appeal to those who heard them, whether they are not calculated as well as to delight the ear as they are to touch the heart.[447]

If Hemans' words were in safe hands with Parry – commonly known by his bardic name of "Bardd Alaw", awarded to him at the Wrexham *eisteddfod* of 1821 – so, too, was Parry's music in safe hands with London publisher, James Power. Known as an Irish "eminent music-publisher" and "a liberal and upright tradesman"[448], Power was renowned for his connection to ideas of nation and song:

> …as connected with national music and literature, the name of James Power will long be remembered. He was the early and unostentatious patron, and, subsequently, the steady friend of Moore, when adverse circumstances clouded the poet's fortune…The publications of Mr. Power embrace a collection of the compositions of the most popular lyric writers of the last thirty years, which were always produced from his press in a style of neatness and embellishment, superior to all contemporary works.[449]

Even just a cursory glance at Power's advertisements – listed at the back of Parry's and Hemans' *Welsh Melodies* collection of 1821 – corroborates Power's reputation for supporting various national airs. Together with an advertisement for Moore's *A Selection of Irish Melodies,* there are listings for *A Selection of Scottish Melodies, A Selection of Indian Melodies, A Series of French Songs* and a combined collection of *Popular National Airs*, offering Swiss, Sicilian, Catalonian, Venetian, Italian, Swedish, Portuguese, German, French, Welsh, English, Scotch, Hungarian, Indian, Russian, Maltese, Languedocian and Cashmerian vocal music. Moore's *Irish Melodies* inspired other works in turn, including Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* of 1815, 1816 and 1824-1829, written in "the national melodies style he learned from Tom Moore."[450] As such, Hemans' *Welsh Melodies* were not unique in assuaging a thirst for national music; many of these other collections refer to the use of, or reverence for, the harp, for instance. What is

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[447] *The Cambrian. Or General Weekly Advertiser for the Principality of Wales,* (16th November 1822), No. 982, published by W. C. Murray and D. Rees, Swansea, p. 4. Available online at: http://newspapers.library.wales/view/3325280/3325281, accessed on 19/02/16.
[448] Sylvanus Urban (pseudonym of Edward Cave), *Gentleman's Magazine, and Historical Chronicle,* (July 1836), Volume 42, (London: Edward Cave), p. 552.
[449] *Ibid.*
[450] Thomas L. Ashton, "Byronic Lyrics for David's Harp: The Hebrew Melodies", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* Vol. 12, No. 4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 1972), p. 665.

interesting about Hemans, though, is that she cannot be said to have been simply responding to a particular literary vogue of the period; her interest in Wales, song, the bardic, and the national are all ideas which we have already come across in her earlier works, and ones which combine to find sublime expression in her *Welsh Melodies.*

An idea which keeps recurring in relation to both bardic verse and bardic activities is that of community: cultural solidarity, emotional bonds between the living and the dead, preserved and perpetuated by verse and song. While elegiac sentiment is invoked throughout the long eighteenth century by the voice and image of the last solitary bard, this voice is one that connects figures and events of past, present and future, while inspiring the verse of modern "bards" – poets – in turn.

Hemans' conception of the figure of the bard is, though, one that shifts over the course of her literary career. Interestingly, by the 1820s, Hemans has taken to representing the historical figure of the bard as an apolitical defender of peace, rather than as a militant defender of nationhood, as typically depicted in art and literature of the eighteenth century. As Hemans writes in a letter of 1823, addressed to Miss Jacob:

> The idea entertained of the bardic character appears to me particularly elevated and beautiful. The bard was not allowed, in any way, to become a party in political or religious dispute; he was recognised so completely as the herald of peace, under the title of "Bard of the Isle of Britain", that a naked weapon was not allowed to be displayed in his presence. He passed unmolested from one hostile country to another, and if he appeared in his uni-coloured robe, (which was azure, being the emblem of peace and truth,) between two contending armies, the battle was immediately suspended. One of the general titles of the order was, "Those who are free throughout the world", and their motto, "The Truth against the World.[451]

These words are somewhat surprising to come across in Hemans' collection, given how militant, political and defiant many of her earlier poems are. What is clear is that, by this stage in Hemans' writing, her purposes for invoking the figure of the bard have changed somewhat. This is probably partly dependent on context, given that poems such as *England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism* (1808) were written during a period, the early nineteenth-century, which was dominated by national – and personal, for her two brothers were serving in the British army at this time – struggles with Napoleonic France. Furthermore, these lines illustrate the fact that the bard, in the Romantic imagination, was at once the human face of the mysterious, ancient Welsh landscape – imbued with powers of prophecy – as well as simply a wandering

[451] Felicia Hemans in a letter of 2 July 1823, as reproduced in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters,* ed. Gary Kelly, (2002), pp. 421-422.

figure of pathos, often presented by eighteenth-century writers solely as a spectre of the past who evokes one's sympathy. He is invoked not only in the context of a politicised, nationalistic discourse, but in a deeply affective one – as a Wordsworthian wanderer, a solitary figure who is the last of his kind, at one with landscape, displaced from his society, now detached from others for whom he once sang and to whom he relayed tales of the past.

Another surprising aspect of this letter is the fact that Hemans claims that it is the mere sight of the bard – not even the sound of him, of his words, or song – that historically has the power to prompt the cessation of hostilities on the battlefield. The bard can, therefore, be said to function as a symbol as much as a poet. This casts a new light on visual depictions of and responses to the figure of the ancient bard who, until now, we have only seen as a solitary figure amidst the landscape, rather than as a recognisable visual and physical symbol in society.

The recipient of Hemans' letter, quoted above – Miss Jacob – was the daughter of William Jacob: a "travel[l]er and well-known writer", as asserted by Susan Wolfson.[452] In the autumn of 1822, the year before this letter was composed, Miss Jacob and her father had visited Hemans at Bronwylfa. Hemans' sister, Harriet Hughes, reflecting on this meeting in her edition of Hemans' memoirs, considers it to have been of great significance to and "good fortune" for Hemans, marking the start of a lifelong friendship with the Jacobs, which was "not only highly interesting in itself, but most advantageous in a literary point of view".[453] Having visited Hemans, the Jacobs left

> nothing to regret but the shortness of its [the visit's] duration, laid the foundation of a long series of kind and active services on the one part, and of grateful appreciation on the other. "Believe me", wrote Mrs Hemans to Miss Jacob, "the few hours we passed in your society will be long remembered; and, to use an expression of our old Welsh bards, we shall look back to them "as to green spots on the floods"; for our paths, in this retired part of the world, are seldom crossed by those who leave any deeper impression upon our memory than "the little lines of yesterday".[454]

As evident in the quotation above, Hemans' fascination with the bardic was at once integral to her relationship with the Jacobs, and to her own discourse. Hughes remarks on this, saying that the

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[452] Susan J. Wolfson (ed.), *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), f. 489.
[453] Harriet Hughes, *The Works of Mrs Hemans; with a Memoir of her Life, by her Sister, in Seven Volumes,* Vol. 1, (Edinburgh; London: William Blackwood & Sons; Thomas Cadell: 1839), p. 64.
[454] Hughes, *ibid.*

> bardic expression above alluded to, with many others, equally quaint and figurative, was frequently quoted by Mrs Hemans, who took infinite delight in all that related to the ancient days of Wales, and was at this time engaged in an undertaking which, from the course of reading it led to, initiated her into much that was striking and original in the legendary lore of her adopted country.[455]

In another letter of 1823 – written in January, six months before the aforementioned text – Hemans writes to Miss Jacob of the knowledge of Welsh lore which she has acquired as a result of working on *Welsh Melodies*:

> I do not know whether I mentioned to you that I had been engaged, last summer, in writing words to our national Welsh airs which are just published. I found it a very interesting employment, as it made me acquainted with many traditions and legends of the country, some of which are extremely striking…[456]

Rather than just organically, progressively familiarising herself with Welsh and bardic lore over time, it seems that Hemans actively sought to learn more about her Welsh surroundings, in terms of both the mythology and the history with which place and landscape were associated.

Hemans' interest in educating herself in the myths and poetic forms related to the bardic, however, does not displace her reverence for the Welsh landscape itself. In another letter to Miss Jacob, from December 1822 – following Miss Jacob's visit to Bronwylfa, and to Hemans, with her father – Hemans writes:

> Although not born in Wales, my long residence here has sufficiently naturalized me to make your admiration of our mountain-scenery highly gratifying. I am no stranger to the country around Llangollen, and I dare say you know that its beauty and grandeur derive additional interest both from history and tradition…I once passed through that scenery at night, when its sublimity was inexpressibly heightened by the fires which has been lighted to burn the gorse on the mountains. The broad masses of light and shadow which they occasioned gave it a character of almost savage grandeur, which made a powerful impression upon my mind.[457]

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[455] Hughes, *The Works of Mrs Hemans; with a Memoir of her Life, by her Sister, in Seven Volumes,* Vol. 1,, *op.cit.,* pp. 64-65.

[456] Felicia Hemans in a letter of 31 January 1823, as reproduced in *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans: With Illustrations of her Literary Character from her Private Correspondence,* ed. Henry F. Chorley, (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836), pp. 90-91.

[457] Felicia Hemans in a letter of 19 December 1822, as reproduced in *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans: With Illustrations of her Literary Character from her Private Correspondence,* ed. Henry F. Chorley, (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836), p. 87.

This passage is helpful in clarifying Hemans' relationship to Welsh landscape and mythology. She reveres the former in its own right, but relishes it even more when the experience of it is heightened by, firstly, knowledge of "history and tradition" associated with it and, secondly, seeing it in extremes of light and darkness and, thirdly, as in the case above, as a living landscape: in motion. Perceiving such a sight leaves "a powerful impression" upon one's mind.

Given the stirring of the senses by the sight of certain places – by sites of sublimity – which Hemans articulates in her letters to Miss Jacob, and in her verse, it is unsurprising that the poet should have developed such a deep and strong attachment to Wordsworth's poetry and modes of thought. Writing in a letter to Maria Jane Jewsbury, a writer and one of Hemans' closest friends, Hemans thanks Jewsbury for sending her a copy of Wordsworth's verse in print:

> The inclosed lines, an effusion of deep and sincere admiration, will give you some idea of the enjoyment, and, I hope I may say, advantage, which you have been the means of imparting, by so kindly entrusting me with your precious copy of Wordsworth's Miscellaneous Poems. It has opened to me such a treasure of thought and feeling, that I shall always associate your name with some of my pleasantest recollections, as having introduced me to the knowledge of what I can only regret should have been so long a 'Yarrow unvisited'. I would not write to you sooner, because I wished to tell you that I had really *studied* these poems, and they have been the daily food of my mind ever since I borrowed them.[458]

Hemans' first real encounter with Wordsworth's works was belated in relation to the timespan of her own poetic career, yet intense:

> There is hardly any scene of a happy, though serious, domestic life, or any mood of a reflective mind, with the spirit of which some one or other of them does not beautifully harmonize. The author is the true *Poet of Home*, and all of the lofty feelings which have their root in the soil of home affections…Many of these lines quite haunt me, and I have a strange feeling, as if I must have known them in my childhood, they come over me so like old melodies. I can hardly speak of *favourites* among so many other things that delight me, but I think 'The Narrow Glen', the lines on 'Corra Linn', the 'Song for the Feast of Brougham Castle', 'Yarrow visited', and 'The Cuckoo', are among those which take hold of imagination the soonest, and recur most frequently to memory.[459]

[458] Felicia Hemans in a letter composed mid-1826, as reproduced in *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans: With Illustrations of her Literary Character from her Private Correspondence*, ed. Henry F. Chorley, (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836) p. 173-174.

[459] Felicia Hemans in a letter of 31 January 1823, as reproduced in *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans: With Illustrations of her Literary Character from her Private Correspondence*, ed. Henry F. Chorley, (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836), pp. 174-175.

As well as those listed above, Hemans expresses praise for and growing fascination with the "Ecclesiastical Sketches", which "I have read, and do constantly read with deep interest. Their beauty grows upon you and develops as you study it, like that of the old pictures by the Italian masters."[460] Hemans' list of poems, detailing those which she has found to be particularly moving or interesting with further study and reading, is notable for its engagement with the bardic. In "The Narrow Glen", for instance (otherwise known as "Glen-Almain"), the speaker focuses on the figure of a particular bard: Ossian. The poem was composed in June 1805, two years after Wordsworth had embarked on his tour of Scotland in 1803 with Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge, and is set in the narrow or "Sma' Glen" of Glen Almond: the site of (according to tradition) Ossian's grave. The focus is not, though, upon whether the tale of Ossian is fiction or fact:

> Does then the Bard sleep here indeed?
> Or is it but a groundless creed?
> What matters it?...

We return to the long-eighteenth-century dichotomy I introduced at the outset of my thesis: empirical truth versus emotional truth. The site of Glen Almond, when Wordsworth first encountered it, was – as far as he was aware – but a peaceful place which fixed "its own peculiar character of removedness from the world, and the secure possession of the quiet of nature more deeply in our minds".[461] The poem was written afterwards, as Dorothy details in *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland* (1874), "on hearing of a tradition relating to it, which we did not know when we were there"[462], though the tradition of Ossian's grave associated with the site was in fact well-established at the time of their visit. Though Dorothy's account of the trip was not published until seventy-one years after the original excursion, she completed writing it on 31st May 1805: almost exactly the same time that Wordsworth composed "The Narrow Glen". As such, both offer accounts of what they saw, mediated through the distance of time, inflected by the mythology specific to the locality in the interim. Wordsworth's poem is a synthesis of two disparate forms of memory: cultural memory, associating Ossian's grave with a place where "sights were rough, and sounds were wild", and personal memory of a site that is, in reality, "calm; there cannot be / A more entire tranquillity". As Fiona Stafford explains,

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[460] Hemans, *ibid,* p. 176.
[461] Dorothy Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland,* ed. Carol Kyros Walker, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 175-176.
[462] *Ibid,* p. 176.

> Wordsworth's poem is called 'Glen-Almain, or the Narrow Glen', not 'Ossian's grave' – it is a poem of place, showing how places are imbued with deep, hidden emotions and how local stories can transform memories of personal experience. The land often held truths much deeper and truer than paper records and as Wordsworth responded powerfully to this special place, he also demonstrated the way in which local myth was a means to express profound human concerns…to communicate feelings too deep for ordinary language. In effect, Wordsworth was laying Ossian to rest in his proper surroundings by quietly suggesting that the controversy was misplaced, stirring up inappropriate feelings, when all the time, something simpler, but deeper and more essential was being overlooked.[463]

There is no sense of the prophetic bard in question, Ossian, living on into the present, here, or of the voice of the ancient bard still singing into the current moment. In this way, "The Narrow Glen" differs from many of the other bardic poems I have discussed thus far – including those by Hemans – in which the ancient bard remains in the here and now; he is either invoked or ventriloquised in the present, or as echoes of the past. What the poem does offer, though, is an impression of the intrinsically inextricable nature of lore and landscape in relation to one another. Setting – the cultural associations with the landscape – is integral to Hemans' poetics.

A number of Hemans' poems – both early ones, and several in *Welsh Melodies* – allude to or explicitly describe the sea. In "The Sea-Song of Gafran" (entitled "The live-long Night" by Parry), an opposition is established between the medieval court – the bard's traditional, original setting – and the wilderness of the sublimely dark natural world which eighteenth-century poets revere and closely associate with the bard. The speaker, Gafran (who Hemans tell us "was a British Chief, who in the fifth century undertook a voyage to discover the islands which…were known under the appellation of Gwerddonan Llion", but whose "expedition was never afterwards heard of")[464] contrasts the medieval court ("hearth-fires", "gay songs", "wine-cups", "festive circle", "halls", "mead") with an ominous, sublime setting – at sea – under a "shrouded" moon", "clouded" stars and gathering storms – all descriptions sung against the backdrop of the "wild moan" of the waves.

The sea offers a liminal space, exemplifying both the savage forces of nature as well as connecting different realms of civilisation, land to land, court to court, functioning as a means of transportation and trade to civilised society. The bard is, similarly, a liminal figure: he belongs both in the very midst of polite society, a key figure in the medieval court, as well as

[463] Fiona Stafford, "Wordsworth's Poetry of Place", *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth,* eds. Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 321-322.
[464] Felicia Hemans, "The Sea-Song of Gafran", *A Selection of Welsh Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments by John Parry, and Characteristic Words by Mrs. Hemans,* (London: J. Power, 1821), p. 6.

wandering in the wild, singing of the past and prophesising about the future. Fundamental to this idea is the understanding that, like the sea, the bard offers a point – a mode – of connection: he can, like the sea, connect different communities to one another; he can serve civic needs through historical song offering political guidance for the court, or he can affiliate himself with the dominant, sublime forces and sounds of nature. The bard is an eternal, a constant – in a way soothing, yet also able to induce sublime awe and terror, through sound – in a manner much like the cyclical rhythms of the ever-present sea. It is notable that, as we have seen in the verse of Gray and Blake, the final moment of the last bard is always visually staged atop of a cliff: an edge, between land and sea, between life and loss, between being a part of the present and a relic of the past. Blake writes of how "All things Begin and End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shores."[465] Gray describes how "Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night".[466]

Hemans' fascination with the sublime possibilities of seascape – as I explored earlier in "Written on the Sea-Shore" from her 1808 *Poems* collection – converges with mythology surrounding the ancient Welsh bard to evocative effect. The bard is claimed as part of the landscape – not of the court – by Hemans, as for Wordsworth, Blake, Gray, Macpherson and almost countless others in the long eighteenth century. In "The Hall of Cynddylan", all is "voiceless and still", "lonely and bare"; the ancient bard can, no longer, be found there. It is in the landscape that we must look for the bard, now.

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The seemingly pacifistic depiction of the bard which one may expect from Hemans – given the focus on the peaceful connotations of the bard in her letters to Miss Jacob – is, however, undermined in *Welsh Melodies* by one key literary device: rhythm. In many of the poems, Hemans employs a trochaic meter – known as the "marching" foot – which may connote militaristic marching, given the themes of cultural and national conflict in these texts. In the first poem, for instance, "Druid Chorus on the Landing of the Romans", a meter of catalectic trochaic tetrameter is employed throughout; seven beats in every line. Given the poem's focus – the landing of the Romans – one could argue that the marching rhythm may simply be

[465] William Blake, "Jerusalem", *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. David Erdman, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1988), Chapter 1, plate 27, p. 171.
[466] Thomas Gray, "The Bard", *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith,* ed. Roger Lonsdale, (London: Longmans, 1969) p. 200, l. 144.

attributed to the Romans themselves, marching into the Druids' land. However, not only is trochaic tetrameter a rhythm which also drives other poems in the collection – including, in fact, the subsequent one, "The Sea-Song of Gafran" – but Parry's own title for the poem-as-air, "Captain Morgan's March", attributes a strong Welsh surname to the Captain: "Morgan".

Thus, though the bards themselves may be portrayed as pacifistic by Hemans by this point in her literary career, they are nonetheless strongly affiliated with nationalistic Welsh military activity, as well as with the verbal, magical dangers posed by the curse and powers of the Druids: "Know ye Mona's awful spells?". The trochaic stress on "Mon" (pronounced "moan") is evocative to an almost Gothic degree when combined with ominous descriptions of the Welsh landscape: "storms and seas"; "mystic bowers"; "nature's gloom"; "shadowy coast"; "haunted solitudes"; "lightning stroke"; "fiery sky". The interrogative, "Think ye, 'tis but nature's gloom / O'er our shadowy coast which broods?", implies that there is some other force or being which "broods" over the "Dark Isle". "Dark Isle" is itself a translation of the Welsh, "Ynys Dywell", with "Ynys" meaning "island" and "Dywell" constituting a mutated form of the adjective "tywyll", meaning "dark". Hemans offers footnotes throughout the *Welsh Melodies* collection to explain Welsh words, place names, figures or ideas, including here where she introduces "Ynys Dywell" as "an ancient name for Anglesey". Such footnotes affirm Hemans' learning of and immersion in Welsh lore, landscape and language; she, herself, is in this way fulfilling the role of an ancient bard in poetically perpetuating these terms and histories.[467] The notion of the female bard is one to which I turn – and explore in much more detail – later in this chapter.

The difference in Hemans' title for the poem and Parry's name for the poem – "Druid Chorus" and "Druidical Chorus" respectively – is slight but significant. Hemans uses "Druid" as a proper noun (evident in reprinted editions such as that of 1887, for instance) whereas Parry uses the pre-modifying adjective "Druid*ical*" [emphasis my own], in conjunction with the alternative title "Captain Morgan's March". The effect of this is that Hemans' version seems to invoke the voice of the ancient Druids whereas Parry's reappropriates it for patriotic purposes – as an anthem to be sung by the military of the modern day, perhaps – a reading which is supported by the fact that a marching trochaic meter is used in several of the poems.

[467] It is difficult to ascertain how fluently Hemans was able to read and speak the Welsh language. However, as Jane Aaron has asserted: "As some of her [Hemans'] verses in *Welsh Melodies* are translations from Welsh-language originals, it would appear that she could also at least read, if not speak, Welsh." For further details, see Jane Aaron, "'Saxon, think not all is won': Felicia Hemans and the making of Britons", *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text*, 4, No.1, (May 2000), p.2.
Available online at: http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/romtext/files/2013/02/cc04_n01.pdf, accessed on 03/07/2016.

Like other poems from the collection, of course, "Druid Chorus" uses a multiplicity of voices and sounds simultaneously. This is not only implicit in the noun "Chorus" in the title; in Parry's adaptation, there are six musical parts working together at once: maestro (conductor), treble (the highest singing voice, historically that of a young boy before the inclusion of little girls in choirs was permitted in the twentieth century), alto, tenor (the highest male voice), bass (the lowest male voice), pianoforte (piano or – in this case, as Parry states, harp accompaniment). The typical role of musical accompaniment from the piano is, though, inverted here – and, as Parry says, is a role that "might be performed on the Harp as well as on the Piano-Forte":

> I had a still stronger reason for "pursuing an easy path," and for preserving the melody in the accompaniment, which was, that *Pennillion,* or Epigrammatic Stanzas in the Welsh language might be sung to different airs, after the manner of the Ancient Britons, - a mode of singing not so easily accomplished as those who are strangers to it may imagine.
>
> The singer is obliged to follow the Harper, who may change the tune when he pleases, and also perform variations, whilst the vocalist must keep time, and end precisely with the strain. Those are considered the best singers, who can adapt stanzas of various metres to one melody, and who are acquainted with the four-and-twenty measures, according to the bardic laws and rules of composition.[468]

Among the bardic laws and rules of composition named above are the "four-and-twenty measures" of *cynghanedd*: complex forms of sound pattering which we explored in Gray's ode, "The Bard", in Chapter One. Ideas of community, shared history, and local attachment are foregrounded by the collective and defiant utterance of the curse-like verse, composed of alternate rhymes (ababcdcd efefghgh) in voices high and low, young and old. Furthermore, the "f" rhymes – "stay" and "prey" – are, in turn, repetitions of the "b" rhymes: "obey" /"away". Rhymes and half-rhymes return in a number of the poems; echoes and ghosts of the bards and Druids wander throughout.

There is always a sense of the past living on in the landscape, as foregrounded at the outset of "Taliesin's Prophecy" (entitled "The Dawn of Day" by Parry):

> A VOICE from time departed, yet floats thy hills among,
> Cambria! thus thy prophet bard, thy Taliesin sung!
> The path of unborn ages is trac'd upon my soul,
> The clouds, which mantle things unseen, away before me roll.
> A light, the depths revealing, hath o'er my spirit pass'd

[468] John Parry, "Advertisment", *A Selection of Welsh Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments by John Parry, and Characteristic Words by Mrs. Hemans,* (London: J. Power, 1821).

A rushing sound from days to be, swells fitful in the blast,
And tells me that for ever shall live the lofty tongue,
To which the harp of Mona's woods by Freedom's hand was strung. [ll. 1-8]

There is an – albeit, interrupted – rhythm of iambic tetrameter. Every other line is missing a stressed (eighth) beat; something important is visually absent, though we can hear that it ought to be there, in the very heart of the line. The tone of the piece in performance – as composed by Parry – is haunting; written in the key of B minor (see C# and F# as indicated in the key signature), the mood is deeply melancholic. In the first stanza, the words emphasised by the subsequent pause caused by the omission of a beat all refer to the temporal – the past, present and prophetic: "time departed", "unborn ages", "revealing", "for ever"; in the second stanza, the highlighted words refer to Britain's past: "the mighty" (*Ynys y Cedeirn* or "Isle of the Mighty", which Hemans tells us is "an ancient name given to Britain"), "Uthyr's kingdom" (a reference to Arthurian legend), "Arvon's Mountains" ("Arfon" meaning "facing" or "opposite" Anglesey – traditionally considered to be the final home of the Druids). These pauses are honoured by Parry with crotchet (also known as quarter) rests, marked with the sign: 𝄽. Moreover, it is not just something from the past that is missing – "A voice from time departed", that of the bard – but there are also spectres of the future: "unborn", "unseen", "days to be". The bard in the Welsh tradition is, we must remember, also a "prophet bard"; not only documenting the past, ensuring posterity for those who have and that which has come before, but also envisaging the future.

Snowdon, revered as a site of sublimity by many Romantic writers, features prominently in Hemans' *Welsh Melodies*. One poem, "Eryri Wen" (listed as "White Snowdon" by Parry), specifically focuses on the mountain as both a symbol of the sublime and of the bardic. Snowdon is described as "Monarch-hill", "holy ground", "mountain-throne", "temple of the bard", "fortress of the free": a site of eminence, power, holiness, and inspiration. Hemans even invokes mythology linking Merlin with the mount: "the awful spell / Yet holds unbroken sway, / As when on the wild rock it fell, / Where Merddin Emrys lay!". Foregrounding the mythological link between the sublimity of the Welsh landscape and poetic genius – a theme which I shall also explore, shortly, in "The Rock of Cader Idris" – Hemans once again provides footnotes to the poem, demonstrative of her immersion in Welsh lore and landscape. First, she cites eighteenth-century Welsh antiquarian, Thomas Pennant:

Snowdon was held as sacred by the Ancient Britons, as Parnassus was by Greeks, and Ida by the Cretans. It is still said, that whoever slept upon Snowdon would

> wake inspired, as much as if he had taken a nap on the hill of Apollo. The Welsh had always the strongest attachment to the tract of Snowdon.[469]

Snowdon, and Welsh landscape, are thus presented as alternative – but equal – sources of inspiration to those from classical history; Hemans depicts Snowdon as a site of genius, and of reverence. Then, Hemans quotes a second Welsh historian, William Williams:

> Dinas Emrys…a celebrated rock amongst the mountains of Snowdon, is said to be so called from having been the residence of Merddin Emrys, called by the Latins Merlinus Ambrosius, the celebrated prophet and magician: and, there tradition says he wrote his prophecies concerning the future state of the Britons.
>
> There is another curious tradition respecting a large stone, on the ascent of Snowdon, called *Maen du yr Arddu,* the black stone of Arddn. It is said, that if two persons were to sleep a night on this stone, in the morning one would find himself endowed with the gift of poetry, and the other would become insane. – *See WILLIAMS's Observations on the Snowdon Mountains*.[470]

Not only is Hemans mining the imaginative possibilities offered by the dramatic landscape and by the mythological history in which it has been framed; she demonstrates the extent of her knowledge of and attachment to the landscape by turning to academic, (what may be considered at the time as) empirical antiquarian sources in order to bolster her claims to myth as truth. Such a sentiment seems to lie at the heart of this poem, foregrounded by the opening assertion that "Theirs was no dream, oh!"; the magic of Snowdon is not merely myth for Hemans. The vocabulary typically associated with the sublime in the period comes to the fore – "shadow'd", "Deep thoughts of majesty and might", "awful", "stormy haunts of yore" – and, in stanza two, imagined history is defiantly presented as truth, reinforced by the opening italicised third person plural pronoun:

> *They* fabled not, thy sons, who told
> Of the dread power, enshrin'd
> Within thy cloudly mantle's fold,
> And on thy rushing wind!

As we see in both the first line and the last line of the poem – both foregrounded words – a sense of otherness is emphasised "Theirs", "Their" and, here, "*They*". The word "enshrin'd"

[469] Hemans, "Eryri Wen" / "White Snowdon", *Welsh Melodies,* p. 59.
[470] *Ibid.*

again attaches almost religious significance to the site; "dread power" and "on thy rushing wind" emphasise the force, the majesty, and the power of the landscape. Its power is eternal and indestructible: "For ever"; "the awful spell / Yet holds unbroken sway". The "sunlight of immortal dreams" shines on. Again, the conflation of the human and the landscape is referenced – specifically, how landscape bears memory to the past, to those who have inhabited it, whose voices live on directly through it, or can be poetically invoked as inspired by the landscape:

> Midst rocks which heroes died to guard,
> Their spirit dwells with thee.

The fairly stable meter – lines alternating between iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter – contribute to the general tone of inevitability with which Hemans articulates the majesty and power of the site. The recurrent exclamatory sentence moods can be viewed as indicative of agitated protestation as much as fervency: defiance against those who would doubt the forces which Hemans feels in her surroundings, emphasised by fricative alliteration "**f**ortress of the **f**ree!". In performance, in accordance with Parry's sheet music, the tone is haunting. Composed in the key of C minor (see the three flats in the key signature, A♭, B♭ and E♭), the mood is grave, melancholic and, at times, unnerving.

Further conflating the sublime landscape with bardic power, a particularly striking poem in *Welsh Melodies* is "The Rock of Cader Idris" (known as "The Ash-Grove" in Parry's musical adaptation). The bard is no longer represented in any direct way at all, by the time that we reach this poem. He is alluded to, a phantom presence, a spectre invoked through song, framed in a sublime rhetoric of awe:

> I lay on that rock where the storms have their dwelling,
> The birth-place of phantoms, the home of the cloud;
> Around it for ever deep music is swelling,
> The voice of the mountain-wind, solemn and loud.
> 'Twas a midnight of shadows all fitfully streaming,
> Of wild waves and breezes, that mingled their moan,
> Of dim shrouded stars, at brief intervals gleaming,
> And I felt, midst a world of dread grandeur, alone!
>
> I lay there in silence – a spirit came o'er me,
> Man's tongue hath no language to speak what I saw!
> Things glorious, unearthly, pass'd floating before me,

And my heart almost fainted with rapture and awe!
I view'd the dread beings, around us that hover,
Tho' veil'd by the mists of Mortality's breath,
I call'd upon Darkness the vision to cover,
For a strife was within me of madness and Death!

I saw them – the powers of the wind and ocean,
The rush of whose pinion bears onward the storms;
Like a sweep of the proud-crested wave was their motion,
I felt their deep presence – but knew not their forms!
I saw them – the mighty of ages departed,
The dead were around me that night on the hill;
From their eyes, as they pass'd, a cold radiance they darted,
- There was light on my soul, but my heart's blood was chill!

I saw what man looks on, and dies! – but my spirit
Was strong, and triumphantly liv'd thro' that hour!
And as from the grave, I awoke to inherit
A flame all immortal, a voice and a power!
Day burst on that rock with the purple cloud crested,
And high Cader-Idris rejoic'd in the sun;
But, oh! what new glory all nature invested,
When the sense, which gives soul to her beauty, was won! [ll. 1-24]

No bard is physically present, here, but he nonetheless implicitly haunts the lines as the moans of "mighty of ages departed" in line 21. Indeed, the speaker – a poet, no less – is a recipient of bardic power and legacy on awakening: "And as from the grave, I awoke to inherit / A flame all immortal, a voice and a power". A language of the sublime pervades: set at a site of "storms", "phantoms", "dread beings", "shadows" and "dread grandeur", the speaker is overcome by a spirit who evokes feelings of "rapture and awe". Though in darkness, the speaker is afforded a visionary power, emphasised by the repetition of the phrase "I saw". It is spirits that the poet sees – spectres of the past – together with "the powers of the wind and ocean", evoked by "The voice of the mountain-wind, solemn and loud". The poet exemplifies the Romantic genius: in dialogue with the landscape, blessed with divine insight, reverential of nature. In a footnote to the poem, Hemans notes that one of the Welsh poetical Triads thus describes the attributes of Genius: "The three primary requisites of genius: an eye that can see nature, a heart that can feel nature, and boldness that dares follow nature". This description sounds distinctly Wordsworthian – unsurprising, of course, given the extent of his influence upon Hemans' verse. In her poem to Wordsworth, Hemans praises him as "True bard, and holy!...Who, by some secret gift of soul or eye, / In every spot beneath the smiling sun, / Sees where the springs of living waters lie".

At the end of the poem, Hemans refers to an 1804 antiquarian text, Edward Davies' *Celtic Researches, on the Origin, Traditions and Language of the Ancient Britons; with some Introductory Sketches, on Primitive Society*:

> There is a popular Welsh tradition, that on the summit of Cader-Idris, one of the highest mountains in North Wales, is an excavation in the rock resembling a couch, and that whoever should pass a night in that seat, would be found in the morning either dead, raving mad, or endowed with supernatural genius.
>
> – *See* DAVIS'S *Celtic Researches.*[471]

Power, inspiration, and authority – and a form of solace, of consolation – come from nature for Hemans. One of the primary ways in which this belief manifests itself in her verse is in reimagining the wails of the Welsh landscape, and then finding comfort in joining their chorus through one's own song. Though her verse mourns a culture, and a people, lost and gone, the bardic lives on through the musicality of verse, and in the echoes of the landscape which the bards inhabited. This may be why, in Parry's adaptation, the tone of the piece is, in fact, celebratory. The musical direction is *andante*: to be performed at a moderately slow tempo. Rather than such musical direction being outlined in order for the performer to accentuate an elegiac or ominous mood – and though such a light-hearted tone does not seem fitting for the poem's dark content – one may infer that Parry is specifically responding to the joy of genius afforded to the individual who endures the wind and wildness of Cader Idris, in accordance with the Welsh tradition. Awe-inspiring, terrifying – a conduit to genius – the tradition of Cader Idris may be regarded as exemplifying the bardic sublime.

The Female Bard

One of the most interesting things about this particular poem, "The Rock of Cader Idris", is that, with Hemans as writer – and doubly so, if we are to take her as speaker – we encounter the female appropriation of the conventionally masculine aesthetic realms of both the bardic and the sublime. This is something that we witness from Hemans' earliest poems, but given that the focus of this poem is upon the speaker's birth as bard, one may infer that we are here witnessing the empowerment or enlightenment of a female individual as bard; they assume

[471] Felicia Hemans, "The Rock of Cader Idris", *A Selection of Welsh Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments by John Parry and Characteristic Words by Mrs. Hemans,* First Number, (London: J. Power, 1821), p. 12. This text, written by Hemans, appears as a footnote at the bottom of the page under the poem.

"supernatural genius" [ll. 37-38]. Anthony John Harding has offered a similar reading of the poem:

> The speaker, who has obviously survived this gruelling initiation, claims the masculine Romantic attributes of "immortal flame," "voice," and "power." Although the poem is clearly spoken in the persona of the male bard, there is a sense in which (as in Blake's *Milton*) the precursor's voice is appropriated by the neophyte, in this case female…As in many of Hemans's poems about a male literary tradition, though, the rearticulation of the bardic voice conceals something more traditionally feminine, a scene of reading. It is through *texts* that the tradition of Cader Idris descends to Hemans.[472]

The notion of the possibility – or, rather, reality – of a female bard is an important one. In a recent essay, due to be published imminently, Murdo Macdonald notes the role of females as both warriors and bards in *Ossian*:

> It is interesting to note how many of Macpherson's female characters fall into the warrior, hunter and / or bard category. In the Morison edition of 1795 one finds two of Thomas Stothard's images showing strong, creative women, the warrior bard Sul-malla, from Temora Book VI, [a]nd Inibaca, whom Stothard shows holding a shield…The gender equality between Ossian and Malvina with respect to bardic activity resonates strongly with the cultural reality of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd as it would have been evident to Macpherson. He would have been well aware of the significance of female bards…[and] of the heroic acts of Jacobite women during the 1745 uprising.[473]

All of the visual depictions of the bard in Chapter Two were male, masculine ones, almost certainly as a result of the influence of Thomas Gray's ostensibly masculine depiction of the figure in his poem of 1757.[474] Furthermore, in *Ossian*, the role of the bard is specifically stated as being to document the history of male figures from the past: "He heard the Bard his brave forefathers praise". However, as both Harding and Macdonald have pointed out in the lines cited above, there are historical and literary links with the feminine intrinsic to what is conventionally considered to be the masculine tradition of the bardic. In addition, the juxtaposition of the bardic with the natural world in itself constitutes the contrasting of the

[472] Anthony John Harding, "Felicia Hemans and the Effacement of Woman", *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices,* ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley, (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 1995), p. 146.
[473] Murdo Macdonald, "James Macpherson's *Ossian* and European Art", *Scottish Studies International,* (forthcoming publication), pp. 13-14.
[474] Please refer back to Chapter One on Thomas Gray for a discussion of gender in relation to Gray's "The Bard" (1757).

masculine with the feminine: the closing lines of "The Rock of Cader Idris" praise "her beauty"; "She", Mona, is the driving defiant force of "Druid Chorus on the Landing of the Romans", for "She the rolling orbs can stay" and "She the mighty grave compels"; "her smile" – that of the "Welsh Ground" – is celebrated in "The Fair Isle". In turn, she – nature – is always depicted as sublime in Hemans' verse, framed by a masculine rhetoric of force, and awe, and power.

Hemans' footnotes to several of the poems in *Welsh Melodies* indicate that she herself sees her role as being similar to that of the historical ancient bard. For instance, in "The Lament of Llywarch Hen", she comments that "The golden chain, as a badge of honour, worn by heroes, is frequently alluded to in the works of the ancient British bards"[475]; in "Grufydd's Feast", she similarly remarks that "Wine, as well as mead, is frequently mentioned in the poems of the ancient British bards".[476] In signposting her knowledge of typical bardic allusions – as well as highlighting the fact that she is employing them in her own verse – Hemans herself stakes a claim to the title of bard. Even if she were not to claim the title itself, Hemans' own words would still be imbued with the authority and drawing on the prophetic power of her bardic forebears. Documenting the past poetically, engaging with typical themes, forms, images and language, she appears to envisage herself as providing a bardic voice for the present day. In emphasising the loss of the medieval court as she does throughout the collection, Hemans renders explicit the need for the bardic spirit to live on through new songs, and in a new mode.

Historically, the aesthetics of the sublime have been placed in the domain of men. Yet, as John Pipkin has compellingly argued:

> Theoretically, women are supposed to be incapable of experiencing, embodying, or articulating the sublime; yet in the Romantic period, more women were writing poetry than ever before, and their poems often aggressively engaged the same tropes of terror and nature popular with male writers…poetry is supposed to be an inappropriate medium for women writers, since it is, according to Burke, the most sublime medium of artistic expression; yet many women writers were praised for their poetic accomplishments by male writers and critics of the period...[477]

It is particularly interesting to consider – in light of Hemans' reputation for the sentimental - Pipkin's assertion that:

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[475] Hemans, p. 17.
[476] *Ibid,* p. 22.
[477] John G. Pipkin, "The Material Sublime of Women Romantic Poets", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* Vol. 38, No. 4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 1998), p. 608. Available online at http://www.jstor.org/stable/451089, accessed on 23/03/16.

> …paradoxically, men alone are supposed to be capable of experiencing and describing the sublime, and yet, those mental faculties that are most affected by the sublime are frequently troped as feminine.[478]

Pipkin's words suggest that any writer who has the ability to understand and to articulate ideas about "feminine" mental faculties should excel, likewise, as a writer and thinker on the sublime. Gray, for instance, is not renowned as a writer of the sublime – yet he is highly regarded for his sentimental verse like "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard". As we have seen, such sentimental strength lends itself to expressions of the bardic: that which is, in itself – in the eighteenth century – almost always, and increasingly, intertwined with ideas of the sublime and, often, of landscape.

The Bardic Sublime in the Domestic Space

Finally, one of the most interesting facets of Hemans' model of the bardic sublime to consider is that of audience, of setting, of the location in which she intended for her works to be received. While the *Welsh Melodies* are arranged and divided into multiple vocal and musical parts, in most instances, they would have been performed in a drawing room at home, to a middle-class audience, with piano accompaniment. Either the pianist alone could sing along, or, a sole other person, or a collection of people in various musical parts or – alternatively – all in chorus.
This does, of course, signify clear markers of class and commodity in relation to Hemans' audience. Historically, in the medieval period, the bard belonged to the social realm of the upper classes: the court. Then, by the eighteenth century, he had become a figure wandering the landscape, bound by matters of neither class nor money; he was at once a humble man of no discernible means or income and, simultaneously, a neo-divine figure to be revered, richly endowed with artistic merit, musical talent, lyrical prowess, affective power and sublimely prophetic insight. Accordingly, the bard did not discriminate between individuals of different classes with regard to who his audience could or should include. As we saw in Chapter One, however, this is not to say that all writers of the eighteenth century did not draw such distinctions; Gray, for one, emphasised the need for a high degree of learning to have been achieved before an individual could properly appreciate and understand his bardic verse, thereby implicitly excluding the lower classes and – explicitly – asserting that the bardic was also out of bounds for any female.

[478] Pipkin, *op. cit.,* p. 608.

In almost all cases – in relation to almost all of the poems – there is an obvious disparity between the tone of the poem and the tone of its musical accompaniment when one hears Hemans' and Parry's *Welsh Melodies* performed. As aforementioned, "The Rock of Cader Idris" is a key example of this disjunction. When I played the piece on the piano for the first time, I was very surprised to find that the dark, mysterious mood of the verse was wholly antithetical to the celebratory mood of Parry's music. Perhaps, however, it is not as strange as it might first appear when one considers the context of Hemans' audience, and the audience to whom Parry would have consciously been pitching their collaborative musical endeavour.
Parry was well-versed in the composition of national airs. Among Parry's other works were: *Antient British Music; or, a collection of tunes, never before published, which are retained by the Cambro-Britons, (more particularly in North-Wales) and supposed by the learned to be the Remains of the Music of the Ancient Druids, so much famed in Roman History* (1742); *British Harmony: Being a collection of ancient Welsh airs, the traditional remains of those originally sung by the bards of Wales, carefully compiled and now first published with some additional variations* (1781); *A collection of Welch Airs, arranged on a plan never before attempted, forming six divertimentos, each consisting of three of the most favourite airs, expressly adapted for the pianoforte. With accompaniments for a flute and violincello. Also notes and observations on the mode of playing and singing the Welch Music* (1810). Many of Parry's titles specifically included reference to the fact that the pieces presented had been "arranged for the Pianoforte" – that is to say, for performance at the home, in the domestic space. The bardic, in the *Welsh Melodies*, had to be rendered suitable for pleasant drawing room performances which would appeal to the tastes of the middle classes: those for whom playing and enjoying the pianoforte was an accessible – and affordable – pastime. For, as Roy Johnston explains:

> Most other instruments could be housed, displayed and demonstrated in modest premises; maintenance was largely a matter of strings and reeds, which in a good many cases could be bought, fitted and tuned by the purchaser of the instrument. The piano was a quite different commodity. Delicate as it might be in many parts of its mechanism, it occupied a bulk and weight that posed many problems in getting it to its purchaser.[479]

[479] Roy Johnston, "'That Domestic and Long-suffering Instrument': The Piano Boom in Nineteenth-Century Belfast, *The Piano in Nineteenth-Century British Culture: Instruments, Performers and Repertoire*, ed. Therese Ellsworth and Susan Wollenberg, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), p. 13.

Wealth, physical space in one's home, and the ability – the learning – to read sheet music and to play the instrument were prerequisites of being able to participate in the performative culture of musical adaptations of the bardic in the private sphere. Even if one were to instead attend public performances of the music, having disposable income would nonetheless be a necessity. In this way, *Welsh Melodies* as bardic music occupied a much more selective class-based sphere of reception than the poems as artworks in themselves. However, not only was this, namely, the privileged space of the private sphere, but it was the domestic space: the feminine space. One could argue that the bardic was, consequently, relocated from one feminine domain to another by Hemans' and Parry's collaborative presentation of *Welsh Melodies*: from the rushing forces of mother nature, with the poetic bard being conflated with dramatic landscape and its sublime forces, to the beautiful, pleasing and uplifting rhythms of the bard as represented in music which was to be played and enjoyed in the domestic, feminine, private and social context of middle-class drawing rooms. Bardic verse – or, rather, music – could, as such, be pitched as a separate commodity: to intrigue, to uplift, and to entertain, rather than to solely, or predominantly, tap into the affective complexities of fear, awe and consolation intrinsic to the bardic sublime.

Perhaps, though, these did not even need to be considered as separate responses to the bardic sublime at all. Rather, could it be that the bardic sublime as an aesthetic and affective mode had evolved to a greater degree – to a point at which the distance afforded by artwork, which Burke insists upon as a necessity for the sublime to be rendered pleasurable rather than simply terrible, was magnified, its effects augmented? Hemans seems to have found a way of innovatively reconciling the courtly, historical origins of the bard's role with his – or, indeed, her – Romantic role in the natural world. Hemans, in a way, widened access to the bardic sublime: if one was unable to walk amidst the sublime landscapes invoked, or if one was not able to physically read the texts, one could hear them – the lyrics – in song, and in music. One could, thus, enjoy the affective catharsis of the bardic sublime without even needing to leave one's home to seek a sublimity of landscape; even greater imaginative input and agency from the individual is, thereby, demanded in terms of visualising the sublime. The imagination would, consequently, be stirred and stimulated by the pleasurable melodies of the bardic in contrast with the sublime obscurity and the, at times, ominous tones of its lyrics.

Whilst the *Welsh Melodies* as sheet music, as we have seen, would not necessarily have been accessible to all from a socio-economic perspective, the poems themselves would have been more so. Distinguishing between the two forms of the poems is important in acknowledging one of the main contributions offered by Hemans to the field of the bardic

sublime: that is, her own approach to it – and her engagement with it – foregrounded the *multiplicity* of ways in which it could be enjoyed and appreciated by others. It is a form which moves individuals in different ways, to different extents, based on a combination of the visual, the aural, and the literary. Moreover, Hemans makes a strong case for seeing the feminine, as well as the masculine, dimensions of the bardic sublime, in terms of both setting and ideas of sentiment.

Conclusion

The bardic sublime is a mode of poetry, and a form of rhetoric, which at once focuses on the individual and the collective, "masculine" strength with stereotypically "feminine" sentiment, preoccupied with the past and the future, and how they relate to the present. It is, as such, not difficult to see why it would appeal to writers exploring new ways of articulating matters of politics, religion, emotion and – most specifically – "true", raw feeling expressed through imaginative media of mythology, imbued with history, rooted in a very real landscape for Wordsworth and Hemans, in history for Gray, and in an innovative personal mythology for Blake, reliant on bards and Druids as known symbols. The bard remains a constant – transhistorical, living on through verse – while also taking on very specific roles according to the particular time and place in which he speaks. The idea of legacy, of engaging with what has gone, and been written, before, and then imagining it anew is integral to the modes of the bardic sublime explored by Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Hemans alike. For Hemans, the extent of possibility presented by the bardic sublime as a mode of expression is realised most fully: as a voice that can belong to not only all men, in all times – of any social status, as exemplified in Wordsworth's verse – but to women, too. If one could not afford to hear, or to play, bardic music, landscape was, nonetheless, an ever-accessible catalyst for thinking about the bardic sublime, as were poetic allusions which tapped into shared cultural memories, mythology and history. In the same way that the bardic voice resounds everywhere – in landscape, in the home, in spoken verse, in written verse, in music, or in visual art – it also belongs to all people.

Furthermore, the bardic sublime is a mode of expression which has proven to be powerful and effective in contexts well beyond that of its eighteenth-century heyday. As the case study of János Arany demonstrates, the bardic sublime was so established as a mode of rhetoric by the latter part of the nineteenth century that its tropes and efficacy were transferable not only to another age, but to another cultural context entirely. Looking further ahead at the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it would be fascinating to consider how writers such as W.B. Yeats and R.S. Thomas – two writers who were very much engaged with notions of Irish and Welsh identity respectively, who are both typically regarded as heirs to the Romantic tradition – adopt and adapt ideas of bards, landscape, Celtic tradition and the English language in their own verse. How would these ideas resonate in the modern age and within different, and highly politicised, Celtic cultural contexts?

Likewise, a fruitful way in which one might take this research forward would be to look at how the precedent set by Hemans, as a female bard, resonates with contemporary female writers. Welsh writers such as Mererid Hopwood and Gwyneth Lewis are both well-known as bilingual modern poets who draw heavily upon ancient Welsh prosody and mythology in their own, very forward-thinking, works. To what extent has the bardic sublime been claimed and developed as a form of rhetoric for the contemporary Welsh female poet? Moreover, how have female writers *outside* Wales employed the co-ordinates of the bardic sublime in order to advance their own poetic – or, indeed, broader – agendas? Has devolution altered its form?

This study has, I hope, raised as many questions as it has resolved. It is clear that beyond Wales and beyond Britain, beyond the eighteenth century – and even, I contend, beyond *now* – the bardic sublime has a power that is at once culturally-specific and culturally-transferable. Time does not erode its power but rather strengthens it. Debates about independence for Scotland, Ireland and Wales rage on, and it will be interesting to see how the bardic sublime, as a form of rhetoric, may come to find expression in these new cultural contexts. Forever a form for expressing liberty and empowerment, the bardic sublime remains tied to its original Welsh context, but ready to embrace emerging, ever-changing, international new ones.

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Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text
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Eighteenth Century Collections Online:
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