

**WELSH  
WIZARD  
AND  
BRITISH  
EMPIRE**

**DR. JOHN DEE  
AND A WELSH IDENTITY**

**GWYN A. WILLIAMS**



Best wishes,  
from Dad.

THE ANNUAL  
GWYN JONES LECTURE

# WELSH WIZARD AND BRITISH EMPIRE

DR. JOHN DEE  
AND A WELSH IDENTITY

Given by  
**GWYN A. WILLIAMS**  
Professor of History at University College, Cardiff



University College Cardiff Press



First published 1980 in Great Britain by  
University College Cardiff Press,  
P.O. Box 78, Cardiff, CF1 1XL, U.K.

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ISBN 0 906449 21 9

Printed by University College, Cardiff.

*University College Cardiff  
and  
Welsh Arts Council*

### *The Gwyn Jones Lecture*

G.M. Trevelyan once called social history history with the politics left out. The history of Arnold Toynbee has been called history with the history left out. A deal of Welsh history has been Welsh history with the Welsh left out.

Creative and critical writing in the Welsh language has at last been accorded proper recognition. Creative and critical writing by Welshmen or about Wales in a world language has not. To rectify this situation, the University College Cardiff, with the assistance of the Welsh Arts Council, is launching an annual public lecture devoted to writing of quality, creative and critical, by Welshmen or about Wales, in English or any other non-Welsh language of significance: creative and critical writing will embrace poetry, drama, essays, novels, short stories, biographies, history, human geography, mathematics, science, engineering, maritime arts and sciences, in fact any work which can meaningfully be called creative and which is relevant to the Welsh predicament.

Cardiff is a singularly apposite location for such a lecture and Professor Gwyn Jones, formerly Professor of English at its University College, has done us the honour of permitting the lecture series to bear his name. It is a singularly appropriate title since Gwyn Jones has been and is, in himself, creative writer, critic, historian, scholar, teacher, founder of a significant journal, shaper of opinion and a Welshman of international significance.

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|-------------------------|--|
| 1978: Raymond Williams. | The Welsh Industrial Novel.  |
| 1979: Gwyn Thomas.      | The Subsidence Factor.   |
| 1980: Gwyn A. Williams. | Welsh Wizard and British Empire: Dr. John Dee and a Welsh identity |



## WELSH WIZARD AND BRITISH EMPIRE

Dr. John Dee and a Welsh identity

In April 1576, Sir Humphrey Gilbert published his *Discourse on a North-West Passage* which initiated the great cycle of semi-official exploration, colonisation and piratical enterprises of Elizabethan England and launched the first serious British essay in American settlement. No-one did the book excite more than Dr. John Dee, London-Welshman, mathematician and magician of European stature, scientist, Welsh patriot and *Arch Conjuror* of England, whom Elizabeth I called 'hyr philosopher' and who was central to the Elizabethan Renaissance as he was to the first British break-out into the oceans and the New World.

Brooding in his magnificent library at Mortlake, one of the focal centres of the Platonic and Hermetic learning of the European Renaissance, Dee recalled an 'Atlantickall discourse' of his own on Atlantis, as he called America, the *Reipublicae Britannicae Synopsis*, written in English in 1565 and now lost and, during six days in August 1576, constructed an impressive text, the *Pety Navy Royall*, devoted to the Brytish Monarchie and its Incomparable Islandish Empire. He ran straight on into three more massive volumes, all grouped under the rubric *General and Rare Memorials pertayning to the Perfecte Arte of Navigation*: a book of Tables Gubernatick for the Queen's Navigators grounded in his new invention the Paradoxical Compass (now lost), another which he burned as too dangerous, probably because it developed the Christian interpretation of the Jewish Cabala, and a fourth which he completed in the early summer of 1577, the *Great Volume of Famous and Rich Discoveries* on British projects towards Cathay through the arctic seas of the North-East, in which, fulfilling a promise in the *Pety Navy Royall*, he presented evidence of an early British dominion in the north in the days of the British-Welsh hero Arthur and summoned Elizabeth to rebuild a great British maritime



empire in the high latitudes extending from Novaya Zemlya in the Russian Arctic through the Orkneys, Iceland and Greenland to the very shores of Atlantis. His evidence, though supported by material of Venetian and Icelandic and Flemish provenance, was essential British-Welsh.

Under the monstrous shadow of Habsburg and Counter-Reformation Spain, the Elizabethan court trod as delicately as Agag, but in response to pressure Dee published his first volume in a strictly limited edition of one hundred in August 1577. It was graced by a gorgeous and allegorical engraving of Elizabeth at the helm of a European imperial ship, restoring the twenty kingdoms of the British Empire and establishing a quasi-mystical, quasi-scientific, quasi-religious world order, under that British-Protestant fraternity of chivalry which Sir Philip Sidney was to personify and Edmund Spenser to celebrate. The drawing is occult in the Hermetic, Platonic and Cabalistic tradition. It belongs to a family of symbols, signs and semiological constructs which Dee created and whose central figure was his celebrated *Monas Hieroglyphica* of 1564, which he said summed up his philosophy. This Monas was an arithmetical, geometrical, alchemical, astral, zodiacal and above all cabalistic sign of a new world order. It was to become the badge of a European movement which Dee launched from Prague in the 1580s, with occult support (in both senses of the term) from the Elizabethan court, a movement of radical religious and political reform, to be led by England and the Palatinate against the Counter-Reformation, the Habsburgs and above all the Jesuits. It was to create its own anti-Jesuit Order, on the model of Sir Philip Sidney's, in the Knights of the Rose Cross (the Cross of the Tudor Rose), *Rosencreuz*, with their invisible colleges and Christian Unions and Jewish sympathies.

Crushed by the Battle of the White Mountain, which also expelled the Czech people from history for two centuries, by the Thirty Years' War and by the grotesque epidemics of witch-hunting in the religious wars, the Order went underground to live an occult and increasingly weird existence

as Rosicrucianism. It re-surfaced during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution as one of the formative forces in a radical and international Freemasonry and to generate those secret circles of *Illuminati* which spokesmen of the Counter-Revolution like the Abbé Barruel, John Robison and Edmund Burke identified as the motor-force of the entire cycle of revolutions after 1790.

By this strange and aberrant route, the ghost of Dr. John Dee returned to his homeland. For it was through the *Illuminés* of Avignon and their relationships with the millenarian and Swedenborgian circles of the London poet, artist and *Jacobin* William Blake that Dee's Cabalistic and Patriarchal conceptions came to infuse the thinking of the London-Welsh *Gwyneddigion*, William Owen and Iolo Morganwg, the Welsh *Jacobins*. This second historically significant cluster of organic Welsh intellectuals who worked and lived in and through the English language followed the same route as those contemporary Czech revivalists who were also creating a new nation out of old legend and reaching back beyond the Battle of the White Mountain to make the past into an instrument with which a present could build a future. The Welsh *Jacobins* were working in precisely the same manner and in Iolo's Druids who pre-dated Jews and Christians, his Order of Bards who were their inheritors and were to be the directive intelligentsia of a Welsh nation conceived in liberty, in his revived Madoc epic of American discovery and his Welsh Zion in a New World, Dr. John Dee's British Israelism was transmuted into a Cambro-British Israelism, to give birth to the first modern Welsh Nation, snuffed out in its turn by the twin Counter-Reformations of political repression and evangelical secession.

Such a future was hardly visible in 1577, but a more immediate potential was certainly apparent to Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who visited Dee on 6 November and, the very next day, presented Elizabeth with nakedly anti-Spanish projects for America and the Caribbean. Before the month was out,



Dee was summoned by Gloriana herself. 'I spake with the Queen hora quinta...I spake with Mr. Secretary Walsingham...I declared to the Queen her title to Greenland, Estotiland and Friseland...'. By June 1578 Gilbert got his patent of colonisation... 'I told Mr. Daniel Rogers', noted Dee, 'Mr. Hakluyt of the Middle Temple being by, that King Arthur and King Maty (another mythical British-Welsh hero) both of them did conquer Gelindia, lately called Friseland, which he so noted presently in his written copy of Geoffrey of Monmouth, for he had no printed book thereof...' Hakluyt the Younger, compiler of the celebrated *Principall Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, was to use the Comelinus Heidelberg edition of Geoffrey of Monmouth of 1587: most of the classics of Welsh tradition, including all the seminal geographical work of Humphrey Llwyd, were being printed at this time in Germany and the Low Countries (where the celebrated illustrator of American exploration, Theodore de Bry, himself a Palatine Rosicrucian in contact with Dee, was to propagate the Madoc story).

And in August 1578, at her summons, Dee went before the Queen at Norwich with twelve scrolls of vellum setting out her title to Atlantic empire. They are lost, but if another set he presented two years later was in truth a summary of them, they would have argued for British dominion over most of the Arctic and the North Atlantic based on the conquests of Arthur and other British-Welsh heroes and, in particular, over the whole eastern American coast, known as *La Florida*, based on Madoc's alleged twelfth-century journeys. The Queen discussed her Title with Dee at Richmond.

Within days, however, Dee had to record that he had succumbed to a fit. For Gilbert's first venture failed and Dee's fellow London-Welshman, William Cecil Lord Burghley, Elizabeth's great statesman, viewed Dee with that hooded-eyed Welsh suspicion which I normally associate with Aberystwyth but which perhaps came appropriately to a man

from the Welsh-speaking district of Herefordshire confronted by one from English-speaking Radnorshire. Dee had nightmares of Burghley burning his books. He became paranoid. He stripped to stare at himself in the mirror... 'my skin all overwrought with work like some kind of tuft mockado with crosses blue and red...' He was plagued by the whispering campaign against him as a black magician and conjuror. His marriage and the birth of a son (called Arthur naturally) he records in passing in a journal gloomily obsessed with his great imperial project.

During 1580, matters improved. Simon Fernandez, the Azores pilot and pirate often based with his fellow John Callice at Cardiff and Penarth, went on a quick reconnaissance to *Norumbega*, the New England area, and returned to report to Dee at Mortlake. Gilbert revived his colonisation project and promised Dee vast grants of land north of the 50° degree latitude, which would have given him much of modern Canada. On 3 October 1580, Dee was once more summoned to court. There he presented the Queen formal and powerful claims to the North Atlantic evidently serviced by a small team of cartographers. One set survives; it is a superbly executed map with a full and formal Title Royal worked out on the dorse.

This Title Royal, in which Madoc first enters historical discourse, is the first pronunciamiento of British Empire, a term which Dee himself is said to have coined.

It was, then, a London-Welshman, a Welsh patriot acutely conscious of his Welshness, who seems to have invented the expression *British Empire*. This was appropriate. Since at least the tenth century, the century of Hywel Dda and his One Law for One Wales, this tiny and marginal people the Welsh have survived by anchoring themselves in variant forms of Britishness. Hywel Dda was the second of those High Kings which the Welsh, like their cousins the Irish, created in crisis. The first, the ninth-century Rhodri Mawr, Dr. John Dee was to claim as his ancestor. But Hywel it was who defined a



political Wales and defined it as a junior partner of a Britain loosely controlled by the new 'English' dynasty of Wessex. Not until the tenth century did the peoples to the west of Offa's Dyke even begin to think of themselves as Welsh. Up to that point, they conceived of themselves essentially as British, deprived of their Britain by the Treachery of the Long Knives of landless Saxon pirates. As late as that tenth century, *Armes Prydein*, a polemical poem written by a south Wales cleric in opposition to Hywel's pro-Wessex policy, forced on him, of course, by the Viking menace, concentrated anti-Saxon minds not on a Welsh but on a British identity. The longest and most fecund tradition in Welsh history, from the moment of visible birth of Welsh writing in the sixth century in the verse attributed to Aneirin, which is British verse written in what is today Scotland about battles in what is today Yorkshire in defence of Romano-British polity against Northumbria, is the British and Arthurian tradition, shot through with those memories of Romano-Celtic Britain which so infuse that magnificent collection of stories whose survivors were grouped in the nineteenth century under the title *Mabinogion*. It was this which governed the mind of the Welsh: a tradition of mythical history, Heroic Age values, redemptive prophecy, a hard, jewelled, mosaic tradition, already old in the sixth century and remote from that Celtic Twilight which later Welsh writers tried to live up to, after the English had invented it. Under the Tudors that British-Arthurian tradition became virtually official state doctrine. For of all the British identities within which this tiny people anchored itself, Tudor Britain was inevitably the most Welsh.

A story current at the Tudor court had St. Peter reduced to despair by a sudden influx of Welsh into Heaven, driving everyone mad with their incessant talk. He arranged for an angel to stand outside the gates and cry in a loud voice, 'Caws Pôb' (toasted cheese, evidently the original Welsh rarebit). The Welsh thundered out in a stampede after their national delicacy and the gates were slammed shut behind them, to everyone's intense relief.

Henry Tudor, of course, was a descendant of those great survivors, the Tudurs of Anglesey, stock of Ednyfed Fychan, seneschal to Llywelyn the Great. Henry, reared for his first fourteen years at Pembroke, spoke Welsh and spoke English with a Welsh accent. When he landed at Milford Haven in 1485, his agents drenched Wales in the old Arthurian traditions in their novel political persona. Henry took pains to consult a celebrated Welsh diviner near Machynlleth; he depended utterly on a Welsh rally to carry him into England. At Bosworth, he unfurled the Red Dragon of Cadwaladr the Blessed. 'A worthy sight it was to see', says the Ballad of the Rose of England, 'how the Welsh rose wholly with him and shogged them to Shrewsbury.' And to his victory Te Deum in London, the Welsh came shogging in herds, for Merlin's prophecy had at last come true. Henry VII made sure it would: he called his eldest son Arthur... 'The Welsh', said the Venetian ambassador, first professional in that craft, 'may now be said to have recovered their former independence for the most wise and fortunate Henry VII is a Welshman...'

This was politic play-acting, but the accession of Henry VII initiated that Tudor century which liberated the Welsh from colonialism, introduced them as junior partners into the merchant capitalism of the sixteenth century, at the price of the expulsion of their language from the state and official life, its segregation into a sacral, sacred area of experience which by the eighteenth century was becoming marginal. An immediate consequence was a major migration of the Welsh to the centre of power. Dafydd Seisyllt from the Welsh-speaking region of Herefordshire (old Erging-Archenfield of the Silures, potent and creative marcher land of the Welsh) went up to London as a sergeant of Henry's guard; he bought land and installed his son as court page. His grandson was William Cecil, Lord Burghley, whose kinsfolk still lived in Erging. The Seisyllts, in a transfiguration which was to become commonplace, transmuted into the Cecils who are, as we all know, all too much with us still, late and soon. Morgan Williams from Glamorgan set up as a brewer in Putney,



prospered, married a sister of Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's powerful minister; in three generations, after the customary mutations, the family under its new name produced Oliver. Spotting these somewhat diluted 'Welshmen' among the elite became as much of a national pastime among later stay-at-homes as it was among those British Jews whom in some respects they resemble.

There were hordes of lesser imitators. The London-Welsh emerge as the surrogate capital of their invertebrate homeland and the process reached its climax under Elizabeth I, 'that red-headed Welsh harridan' as A.L. Rowse called her, presumably in what passes for wit in Cornwall, when Blanche Parry from Welsh Herefordshire and cousin to John Dee, ran her household and acted as a focus for a whole Welsh curial coterie in legal, naval, academic and professional circles, when Welsh intellectuals concentrated in such force around the Queen's immediate entourage and behind the first thrust for naval growth and American colonisation. Under Elizabeth, for the first time in centuries, the Welsh Church ceased to serve as outdoor relief for deserving and destitute Europeans. Many Welsh bishops had previously been unable even to speak English (admittedly a disability they shared with most of their flock) but under the Virgin Queen thirteen of the sixteen bishops appointed to Welsh sees were Welshmen. In 1571 Jesus College Oxford was created as a specifically Welsh college, apt symbol of the whole movement.

The impact was no less powerful in the intellectual field. For a Protestant England had to struggle for its Protestantism, for its independent 'empire', for its place in the sun, against that Counter-Reformation Spain which was monopolising the new-found lands in America. Intellectually and emotionally central to this enterprise was the assertion of an aboriginally independent and imperial British identity. The historical roots of this island polity, of necessity, had to be sought in those remote ages, the time of giants, when Albion was an empire and its Christianity free from Rome. The mythical British history of the Welsh, which established Brutus the Trojan as

the progenitor of Britain, Joseph of Arimathea as the founder of its independent Christianity and, buried at the same Glastonbury, Arthur of Britain as its great hero, grew to become quasi-official doctrine under Elizabeth. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *British History* of the twelfth century, with its Welsh and Breton roots, its gigantic King Arthur straddling the European and much of the extra-European world, became an ever-extending heartland of patriotic ideology. Protestantism was derived from the ancient seventh-century struggle of the Celtic church in Wales against St. Augustine and his Roman corruptions. This new Britishness inevitably took much of its tone and colour from those Welsh who had been its first celebrants and were still its most direct inheritors. The Tudors necessarily devoted much time to legitimising genealogies tracing their line back through Welsh and British kings to Arthur and Brutus. In this new Britain, the Welsh with their British tongue, could recover a respectable and central identity, the English create a new and useful one, under those Tudors who *were* the Return of Arthur prophesied by Merlin.

It is no accident that this British and Arthurian cycle reached its climax, in learning, poetry, public ritual and propaganda, in the late 1570s and 1580s, the days of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, when relations between England and Spain degenerated into open war, when the excommunication of Elizabeth brought down repression on English Catholics, when the voyages of Drake, Hawkins, Gilbert and Raleigh culminated in the crisis of the Spanish Armada. It was to this imperial construction that the *Worthiness of Wales*, to quote one of its English celebrants Thomas Churchyard, and Welshmen like Dr. John Dee were central.

Born in 1527 to a Welsh court official, John Dee became one of the foundation Fellows of Trinity College Cambridge in 1546. He moved to Louvain because English humanism was inadequate in science and established intimate contact with some of the seminal minds in mathematics and geography: Gemma Phrysius the Flemish Cosmographer to the Emperor,



Gerard Mercator the great map-maker and Abraham Ortelius of Antwerp. Dee was an astounding polymath. The lectures of this twenty-three-year-old at Paris were a sensation; he was to be courted by princes all over Europe. He returned to England with navigational devices like the balestila or cross-staff, was taken up by the Queen, established himself among the Dudleys, the retinue of the Earl of Leicester and the Sidneys, and at the heart of the Elizabethan Renaissance. A brilliant mathematician like Robert Recorde of Pembroke before him, he published an augmentation of Recorde's *Grounde of Artes*, a mathematical textbook which ran to 26 editions by 1662 and wrote his own seminal Preface to the English translation of Euclid. With his remarkable library at Mortlake, this Mechanicien of the Plat Politicall of the Brytish Monarchie became the thinker behind most of the ventures of the English in their search for the North-East and North-West Passages to Cathay, pouring out treatises, maps, instructions, in his characteristic blend of technology, science, imperialism, speculation, fantasy and the occult.

He was also, of course, like Kepler after him, as much magician as scientist, a caller of devils holding converse with angels, the Arch Conjuror of England. He was once imprisoned under Mary for trying to 'enchant' the Queen and when he left for Poland and Prague in 1583, the London crowd sacked his library as the den of a black magician. He is said to have been the model for both Shakespeare's white Prospero and Marlowe's black Faust: 'tis magic, magic which hath ravished me....

Although she may sometimes have pursued her remarkable researches with a perhaps Rosicrucian passion, it is Dame Frances Yates who has restored John Dee to his full Renaissance stature. He falls into place not only among the Hermetic and neo-Platonist thinkers but among the practitioners of that older Jewish Cabala brought to Christian Europe by the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in 1492, a tradition earlier than the more widespread Lurian Cabala of the Diaspora. This was a Cabala which focused understanding

on the concept of number and proportion, on the manipulation of the sacred letters of the language which God gave to Moses, and on the secret, divine language hidden within it, on the penetration to truth through numerology and the multiple Names of God. Transmitted through the Florentine Pico della Mirandola, the Venetian Francesco Giorgi and the German Henry Cornelius Agrippa and drawing on a tradition of Christian Cabala derived from the Catalan Ramon Lull and the German Reuchlin, this in the high noon of Renaissance audacity transmuted into a creed which strove to transcend not merely Protestantism and Catholicism but Christianity and Judeism themselves, which married numerology and mathematics, astrology and astronomy, magic and science. Before it was extinguished in the hideous religious wars, it was evolving a concept of a universe of three spheres: the elemental world which could be assimilated through medicine and philosophy, the physics of Agrippa's curriculum; the celestial, the stars, intermediaries between the human world and the Creator with his angels, which could be assimilated through astrology and mathematics, the mathematics of Agrippa's curriculum; finally the super-celestial, the realm of those angels who were intellectual concepts and could be approached only through the study of religious ceremonies and above all the Jewish Cabala, key to the original language which God gave mankind. Cabala, linked with the magic which embraced all three spheres and could enable the Magus to converse with angels directly, was the key to a world-renovating belief which would transcend the ferocity of doctrinal war on earth.

In all this, of course, there were the seeds of a genuinely scientific outlook, though the magic frame had to be broken before that outlook could emerge. John Dee's Preface to Euclid is a landmark in mathematical thought... 'By number a way is to be had to the searching out and understanding of every thing able to be known...' He had a grasp of abstract mathematical theory, particularly that of proportion based on the work of the Roman architect Vitruvius; he applied it in



practice with his navigators, artisans and technicians. But he also summoned angels and held conversations with them through the medium Edward Kelley and the mystical Polish prince Laski. He built on Agrippa and the German artist Albrecht Dürer and through number reached out to the super-celestial world by means of the Jewish Cabala. His diagram the Monas which was so secret he feared he had committed a mortal sin by publishing it, combines signs of the seven planets, the zodiac Aries for fire, a species of alchemy, a strong mathematical thrust and above all the Cabala, 'the stupendous fabric of the Hebrew letters...' He ended as a proponent of a world science-cum-magic expressed in a politico-religious Empire opposed to that of Rome, the Habsburgs and the Jesuits, grounded in that Elizabethan Empire which had such ancient British roots, stretching back into Patriarchal times themselves.

Such an Empire was bound to be Welsh in origin. Dee was totally committed to the old British and hence Welsh traditions of island empire. He steeped himself in those traditions.. 'the origins and chiefe points of our ancient British histories...' was the title he gave many of his laboriously constructed texts which are now lost. He traced his own genealogy to Rhodri Mawr, claimed kinship with the Tudors, immersed himself in the new chorography, the detailed topographical survey which was to culminate in a definitive British history and which gave birth to William Camden's magnificent *Britannia*. In secular reality, or rather, to be precise, in that secular mythology which *was* historical reality to his age, such an empire could only be Arthur's.

'O Glastonbury! O Glastonbury!' Dee wrote in his *Pety Navy Royall*, 'that Apostle-like Joseph, that triumphant British Arthur!...' What Britain needed were a Christian Aristotle and a Christian Alexander; these Dee as a British Philosopher, modestly offered to provide. In his campaign for the building of a British navy of sixty tall ships and the mobilisation of British resources in the service of oversea

expansion, he could summon up from strictly English precedent only that peaceable King Edgar, who had 4,000 ships according to the decidedly innumerate author of the *Flores Historiarum*. Dee quoted Edgar's obituary, but added 'and why not Arthurus Brytanis?' Why? Because Arthur had been a thorn in Saxon eyes and had defeated them twelve times. Edgar after all had been 'but a Saxon'; his progeny qualified for General Empire only because Albion was now (now underlined) the greater part of British Empire... 'But yet', said Dee, 'there is a little lock of LADY OCCASION, Flickering in the Ayre, by our hands, to catch hold on: whereby, we may, yet ones more (before all be utterly past and for ever) discretely and valiantly recover and enjoy, if not all our Ancient and due Appurtenances to this Imperiall Brytish Monarchy, yet, at the least, some such Notable Portion thereof...'

For the British Arthur had enlarged his realms much further long before the days of Edgar. Dee, as Elizabeth's British Philosopher, was about 'to open the door of his philosophical and political British furniture' to reveal to the Queen, herself descended from Arthur, the true foundations of her English or rather British state. For if sea power had been the stay of the Athenian state, how much more was this true of the British Empire... 'O Albion, O Britain, O England and I say thrice times over, O Brytan yet again...'

And in his *Famous and Rich Discoveries*, Dee went on to thunder out a roll-call of Arthur's great conquests in the North. He used two major sources. One was William Lambard's *Archaionomia* of 1568. Lambard was a celebrated jurist versed in Arthurian lore and, using an 'ancient text', he said of Arthur.. 'His kingdome was too little for him and his mind was not contented with it'; so he subdued 'all Scantia (now called Norway) and all the Islands beyond Norway, to wit Iceland and Greenland which are appurtayning to Norway...' and he went on into a sonorous chant, listing all Arthur's kingdoms which ranged from Lapland and Russia through Scandinavia into the Arctic and to the Pole. There had



evidently been a massive extension of Arthur's mythical conquests; Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century had contented himself with Iceland and 'the Six Islands of the Ocean Sea.' This roll-call of Lambard's reverberates through the sixteenth century and seems to have its origin in French texts. William Worcestre, a Bristol antiquarian familiar with that city's ventures into the Atlantic in search of the magic island of Brazil which might have taken Bristol men to America before Columbus, certainly knew of such Arthurian conquests from French manuscripts. This testimony Dee fused with that of the apocryphal journeys of the Zeno brothers of Venice, published in 1558 and best known in England from Ramusio's collection of voyages of 1574. The Zeni peopled the fourteenth-century Arctic with imaginary islands which were duly to figure in the great world maps of Mercator and Ortelius and which Dee allotted to Arthur.

The critical moment, however, came in the summer of 1577, after he had finished his *Famous and Rich Discoveries*, when, in a reply to a query from Dee about his mapping of the polar regions, the great cosmographer Gerard Mercator sent him a letter summarising the testimony of the Flemish or Dutch explorer Jacob Cnoyen of s'Hertogenbosch. Cnoyen cited a mysterious but evidently fundamental text, the anonymous *Gestae Arthuri*, Deeds of Arthur. This was very knowledgeable about the Arctic and quite patently drew heavily on the massive knowledge of the Icelanders (with their admixture of Celts) who had been sailing those seas as far as Markland (Labrador) and Vinland (Newfoundland) in America for centuries. The *Gestae* organised this knowledge in an Arthurian pattern; it had Arthur's great army penetrating the northern seas from Scotland in the sixth century, losing thousands of people but colonising the polar and American islands, thrusting Britain right up against the Pole. This *Gestae* was evidently rather late; it uses the travels of Marco Polo and recalls the fifteenth-century maps of the Dane Claudius Claves Swart, the first to depict Greenland, and themselves based on the explorations of the Icelanders; they were no less a source

for the Zeni text. The *Gestae* attributed to Arthur the peopling of a mythical island Grocland, which in terms of the geography then known to Mercator, Ortelius and Dee, had to lie in the immediate vicinity of America. More startling still, Cnoyen asserted that in 1364, eight survivors of 'these people' including a Fleming by five generations' descent, had turned up in the court of the King of Norway at Bergen and had given an account of the polar journeys of an English friar who had presented yet another lost geographical text, the *Inventio Fortunatae*, to King Edward III. The latter book had certainly existed; it had been used by Martin Behaim for his first great globe and by Johannes Ruysch for his early maps; John Day had mentioned it in his famous letter to Columbus.

This information, which was characteristically a blend of genuine geographical knowledge and fantasy, massively supplemented Dee's evidence on early British empire... 'Gestae Arturi', he wrote, 'a rare testimony of great importance to the Brytish title to the Septentrional Regions, Atlantis in particular...' But this information also stopped him in his tracks. These people of 1364 could not possibly have been descended from Arthur (his margins fill with entertaining calculations). Where then did these British or Welsh come from? Dee opened the door of his British furniture still further, in a search for Welsh adventurers later in date than Arthur. And in a history composed by Humphrey Llwyd, a celebrated Tudor geographer who was a protégé of the seminal Netherlands school, he came across Madoc, that Welsh prince who in 1170 was said to have sailed away from civil wars in Wales, to have found a marvellous land, returned for colonists, sailed off again to disappear. This land, Llwyd said, 'must needs be...by reason and order of Cosmographie...' that American land the Spaniards claimed to have discovered.

A Welsh seafarer Madoc had actually entered European discourse three centuries earlier, in a thirteenth-century romance by Willem of Ghent, the Fleming who composed the superb Dutch version of that medieval best-seller *Reynard the*



Fox. His romance was probably based on historical personalities, on the exploits of those Welsh half-Vikings who had appeared in the Celtic-Scandinavian world of the Irish Sea since the tenth century. One such, a Freeman of Wales who raided their settlements from Lundy Island, had registered in the sagas of the Icelanders themselves in the middle of the twelfth century. For Dee, this clinched it. According to his friend John David Rhys, another of these Welsh Europeans, who had taught at Siena, Venice and Padua, travelled in Crete and Cyprus and published best-selling books on Italian grammar and pronunciation in Italy, Dee unearthed a map showing the tracks of Madoc and the Oxford astronomer far out in the Atlantic. Dee at one time was speculating that Madoc might have reached Bermuda, which was itself possibly a model for Prospero's island in *The Tempest*.

It was Madoc who knit Dee's British Empire together. In the Title Royal presented to Elizabeth in 1580, he heads the list. Thence, Madoc swept into British and European discourse, to lodge in the very first pre-eminence, supported by all those other heroes surging up out of the Welsh pre-history of Britain, in that very voice of the new British imperialism, Richard Hakluyt's classic *Principall Navigations* of 1589. For one brief generation, the Worthiness of Wales reached its Tudor climax in Madoc and all his kin as the symbolic spearpoint of the first British thrust into a New World. John Dee's mystical British world empire was translated into an earthier reality.

Dee himself did not witness this directly. In 1583, he took off on his vast but abortive mission to Europe, to return to a Jacobean England which had turned chilly to the kind of thinking he represented, to be banished to an English Siberia in Manchester, to die in poverty and neglect and to suffer three centuries' scorn as an eccentric and a fraud.

The point about Dr. John Dee is that, striking as he was as an individual, he was also in some senses representative. He and that whole cluster of Welsh Tudor humanists to which he belonged (for there were dozens of them) were also the organic

intellectuals of a class; that class we lumber with the unhelpful description *gentry*, a class which had climbed through two centuries of colonialism over the ruins of Welsh principality and aristocracy alike, to be hoisted to their summit by Thomas Cromwell with his Welsh brother-in-law and his Acts of Union. They were the first Welsh intellectuals fully to enter an English language cultural universe through a British identity. Their entry marks a decisive bifurcation in Welsh tradition. At the very moment when John Dee was carrying this new British Welshness to its climax, the Welsh-language poets Edmund Prys and William Cynwal were locked in an enervating combat, the *eisteddfodau* at Caerwys were failing to regenerate the poets' guild and its culture. A culture which had been buoyant and innovatory in the fifteenth century stammered before the Renaissance and the new frontiers even as it was brutally expelled from political life in the first attack by the English state on the Welsh language. It now seems to me that the experience of the first major constellation of Welsh writers in English is in some, perhaps limited but nevertheless central, senses, *exemplary*.

Welsh historiography, like Welsh history and the Welsh landscape itself has been grotesquely mutilated. Welsh historiography is almost as hallucinatory as Spanish historiography has been until recently. G.M. Trevelyan once called social history, history with the politics left out. The history of Arnold Toynbee has been called history with the history left out. A great deal of Welsh history has been Welsh history with the Welsh left out.

One crippling deformation has been the fairly recent divergence in language which has become mutually exclusive and sometimes hostile. In recent generations, this, as it were, extended backwards in time, to create multiple historiographies which are in some vital senses no less mutually exclusive; they have sometimes been quite alien to each other, like the 'memories' of two mutually insulated 'nations'. They are both totally inadequate. We lack an



effective and credible history of the Welsh intellect, of Welsh writing and of the condition of production of Welsh writing.

Two models seem to me helpful. One is Gerald Brenan's remarkable history of the literature of the Spanish people. In order to write a history of the literature of the Spanish people, Brenan had to deploy eight languages. Any serious and effective history of the Welsh intellect will need to deploy at least four (leaving out of account Caernarfon Welsh and Cardiff English) and, moreover—and infinitely more exacting—to give adequate weight to each in historical context and in a complex inter-acting totality. In this respect, the second model seems to me the seminal work (work of a European and indeed world significance) of Raymond Williams. I am thinking in particular of his essays on *The Long Revolution*, *Keywords*, *Marxism and Literature* and his testimony in *Politics and Letters*. There is no socio-cultural work on Wales of comparable calibre and scope in either English or Welsh, though some recent studies demonstrate an approach to it. The production of such work has become an urgent necessity. To no people's history are the concepts of Antonio Gramsci more relevant, whichever of the four historic languages is involved.

Here, I think the experience of this Tudor generation may prove exemplary. They were deeply Welsh, Welsh patriots who knew no conflict of languages. They used English as centrally as Latin. They were peculiarly *European* in formation; the content and drift of their thinking were quite distinctly European rather than narrowly English. This had been true of successive generations of Welsh organic intellectuals of course since the twelfth century, when the Normans prised Wales out of the Celtic-Scandinavian world of the Irish Sea and inserted it into Latin Europe.

The Normans also drew a frontier across the bony face of Wales. Consider that frontier. It lasted for five hundred years. Nations have been born, lived a span and died in less time. That frontier, the frontier between March and *Pura Wallia*, has appeared and re-appeared throughout our history.

Merchant capitalism, Puritanism, Old Dissent as opposed to Methodism, industrial capitalism, the English language, all rooted themselves in the easier, more accessible lands of the March. Today that frontier is a frontier in matters great and small, between two languages (where it can sometimes seem like a Berlin Wall between two civilisations), between a Wales which is dry on a Sunday and a Wales which is wet, a Wales which is radical and a Wales which is conservative. Consider the Serbs and Croats, two people biologically close, indeed biologically one, split by a political demarcation line which subjected them to the radically different disciplines of Habsburgs and Turks. They evolved into two mutually hostile nations. The line was never so hard in Wales. It was constantly crossed; it constantly served as a zone of interaction. It was repeatedly swept away by those upsurges from the Welsh people themselves, whatever rulers they were subjected to, upsurges of an irreducibly Welsh identity whose survival over a millennium and half constitutes one of the minor miracles of history. Nevertheless the persistence of a line first drawn through this few and fragile people in the twelfth century suggests a certain historical congruity.

The March drew most of the Welsh into Europe, made the Welsh a European people. In response, the Welsh turned their rich oral traditions into a scintillating written literature simultaneously Welsh and European. They gave Europe one of its most formative literary-historical experiences. The Arthurian traditions were transmitted into Europe and the Crusader states as coveys of interpreters, Welsh, English, Breton, Norman, Fleming, transformed the conditions of literary production. Welsh knights, Welsh towns, Welsh merchants appeared; Welsh shipping nosed into the Gironde. Henry le Waleys of Chepstow could serve as mayor of London and Bordeaux; Welsh students could move to Paris where John of Wales shone, and to its offshoot Oxford. The Welsh moved more often into a mainstream of European rather than specifically English creativity.



This is even more striking in the Tudor generation of course. These men were now free of the English language, indeed masters of it some of them, but they were so only because the Tudors had liberated them and made England into *Britain*. They were very noticeably *European* in their formation and style. This was even more true of their less numerous but no less brilliant Catholic rivals, of the tragic saga of the Catholic exiles, when Gruffydd Robert could produce his Welsh grammar on St. David's Day in the Milan of his patron Carlo Borromeo, when Morris Clynog could publish his Welsh Christian Doctrine in Rome. The Welsh students in Rome, Milan, Douai and Valladolid were not strong enough to carry clout and they became, interestingly enough, as anti-Jesuit as any John Dee; their Europeanism is of a similar quality.

Moreover and possibly more striking still, this characteristic remains true of that second cluster of organic intellectuals in and through English at the end of the eighteenth century, Iolo Morganwg, William Owen and their kin. These new Welsh, in both periods, used English in their creative work, were European in formation and style, intensely *British* but not English in their identity, and American in their ultimate focus.

That pattern I find to be recurrent from the sixteenth century into the *Jacobins*. I cannot say as yet whether it survives as anything more concrete than metaphor after the earthquake from the 1790s. I do not know whether this peculiar formation survives the passage across the most dramatic dividing line in the history of the Welsh, when the Welsh population graph becomes a right angle, when two-thirds of the people are sucked into an English-speaking and continuously revolutionising south-east, when a new imperial and democratic industrial civilisation is created and a new Welsh populist identity claws its way into existence. Nevertheless, when one considers the highly distinctive pattern of Welsh industrialisation, far more American than English in its rhythm and manner, when one broods over the all-pervasive American character of its so-called

'anglicisation', when one thinks of its massive British commitment and explores whatever of Europe there might be in it (a sight more than might appear at first inspection) and when one further recalls that this Americanism, Europeanism and Britishness all appear to be in incipient dissolution, some serious exploration of a possibly exemplary generation in Tudor times at the point of cultural bifurcation seems called for. Raymond Williams, in his latest writing, has begun to call himself a Welsh European and in a distinctive, differentiating, indeed distancing sense.

I conclude, then, by suggesting that this generation of Dr. John Dee, this first major generation of Welsh writers who used English as their creative medium, European in formation, non-English British in identity and American in ultimate focus, may repay a study different in form and purpose from any they have yet been subjected to. This would not only be a worthwhile project in its own right; it would help to re-set the historical analysis of collective mentalities among the Welsh, an analysis which is at present badly skewed. It might establish a method and a style which could prove of wider application.

I personally believe that this generation of John Dee can serve as a symbol, a sign, a *monas*, if you like; a *monas* to exemplify the process by which what was a condition of creative work for a fistful of intellectuals has become the historical predicament of a people.