

XI

IAITH, DIWYLLIANT A HUNANIAETH MEWN LLENYDDIAETH GYMRAEG I BLANT: O.M. EDWARDS A
CHYMRU'R PLANT
1892–1920

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN WELSH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: O.M. EDWARDS AND
CYMRU'R PLANT 1892–1920

Siwan M. Rosser

Introduction

The growth and range of material produced by the Welsh-language children's book industry over the past 100 years can be viewed as a barometer of national confidence in the face of rapid social, cultural and linguistic change. In 1911, when census returns recorded that 43.5% of the population were able to speak Welsh, 25 books were published for children (Cyngor Llyfrau Cymru 1997: 15–18). A century later in 2011, the percentage of Welsh speakers is estimated to be only 20% of the population; yet 21 books for children were published during January alone. With the overall total of Welsh-language children's books in print standing at nearly 3,000 and significant investment seen in publishing and promotion (including national book clubs, the annual Tir na n-Og prizes for children's literature, and funding for a children's Welsh Poet Laureate), the children's book industry in Wales is currently enjoying a sustained period of growth and vitality unparalleled in any other area of the Welsh book industry.¹

This success, undoubtedly the result of the creativity and dedication of countless authors and publishers, is also due to their awareness of the strategic importance of children's books for the future of the Welsh language. It is no coincidence that the growth of children's publishing is juxtaposed with the language's decline in the twentieth century. As the number of Welsh speakers decreased, producing books for children was increasingly seen as a crucial part of the regeneration project to revive the Welsh language. As early as 1916 in its account of the history of the book in Wales, *A Nation and its Books*, the Welsh section of the Education Board declared that 'a people without a language of its own is only half a nation' and called for an increase in the number of books available for Welsh children in their native language (quoted in M. Jones and G. Jones 1983: xvii). Many of the authors and publishers who responded positively to this report took their lead from the efforts of the romantic

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

nation builder, historian and educationist, Owen Morgan (O.M.) Edwards (1858–1920). Born in Llanuwchllyn, Merioneth and educated at Aberystwyth, Glasgow and Oxford, he was elected Fellow of Lincoln College in 1889. He remained at Oxford until 1907 when he was appointed as the first chief inspector of schools in Wales; he was knighted for his contribution to education in 1916. Throughout his career he also dedicated countless hours to the task of writing, editing and publishing popular material on Welsh history and culture, including two major journals, *Cymru* (for adults) and *Cymru'r Plant* (for children). In these publications, O.M. Edwards's aim was to foster a collective national identity for Wales, and he recognised the importance of involving children as agents to fulfil his cultural aspirations. His famous call to arms to safeguard the Welsh language not on the battlefield, but through children's literature, proclaimed that literature for the young would give life and vitality to the nation, a concept that has informed writing for children ever since:

Os ydyw Cymru i fyw, rhaid i rywrai ymdaflu i waith dros y plant. Nid ar faes y gad, ond mewn llenyddiaeth, y mae eisiau Llywelyn a Glyndŵr.

If Wales is to live, some must dedicate themselves to working on behalf of the children. Llywelyn and Glyndŵr are needed, not on the battlefield, but in literature (O.M. Edwards 1922: 30).

The importance Edwards placed on literature in forming a national identity is a characteristic of many emerging European nations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Wales has parallels with efforts in Ireland, Finland, Flanders and elsewhere to establish linguistic identities (Cotton 1996&1998). Authors, publishers and teachers in these countries sought not only to develop children's literacy skills in their mother tongue, but also to have a profound and formative influence on their choice of language and national allegiance. Promoting children's books, therefore, is often perceived as an essential pillar of socialization and language acquisition, and for some as laying claim to a national identity. In this sense, robust educational aspirations regarding the development and socialization of the child are twinned with cultural ambitions to instil in children a collective sense of belonging.

In this respect, it is impossible to distinguish between the history of Welsh children's literature over the past century and the history of the Welsh language. Both the existence of Welsh children's books and their subject matter have been shaped by the context of cultural marginalization and bilingualism, with one consequence being a dependency on translations and public subsidies. Many of these books reflect contemporary concerns about language, culture and identity, but they also actively engage with their political and cultural context, often giving young readers the opportunity to celebrate their cultural distinctiveness. Yet, very little has been done to explore the cultural significance of Welsh children's literature. This paper will examine this relative lack of academic interest and will argue, by focussing on literature from O.M. Edwards's period, that children's literature should be regarded as central to our understanding of how threatened cultures validate and articulate their own existence.

Welsh Children's Literature: a Marginalized Genre?

It is paradoxical that while substantial financial investment is made in Welsh children's books because of their perceived linguistic and educational value, they are considered to be of little cultural or literary merit. Children's literature in general has been 'perceived by the critical establishment as belonging to a separate sub-culture which has never been allowed a

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

place in the discussion of high culture' (Dusinberre 1999: xvii), and in Wales it is often thought that the motivation to safeguard the language has resulted in the production of a mediocre body of literature for children, a view vividly expressed here by author and educationist Elfyn Pritchard:

Writing for children in Wales can be a crusade, a craft or an art. For many it is a crusade. A love of the language is what inspires these writers. Their efforts are confined to their scarce leisure hours in order to overcome the serious shortage of material in this field. They enter the battlefield as carefree as those that enlisted in the Crusades on Jerusalem. Their activities and zeal resulted in an upturn in the output of new books, but the majority of these were of a very low standard. At the other extreme are those for whom writing is an art. They are not driven by a missionary zeal, but rather by their delight in fine language and the form of the finished work. There are few of these in Wales ... (Elfyn Pritchard [in M. Jones and G. Jones 1983, 60], translated by Gwilym Huws [in *Cyngor Llyfrau Cymru* 1997: v])

Many authors were, of course, inspired to write for children by their desire to promote the Welsh language, and this was especially true at the beginning of the twentieth century when there was a severe shortage of Welsh books. O.M. Edwards was acutely aware of the lack of books for use in schools and resolved to place literature and knowledge within Welsh children's reach. Others followed his lead, including the journalist and talented storyteller E. Morgan Humphreys who created memorable adventure stories to encourage boys, in particular, to read Welsh rather than English books (his first volume of adventure stories *Dirgelwch yr Anialwch* appeared in 1911). Less talented writers also responded to the increasing demand for Welsh books, yet the above reference to the 'very low standard' of their work and the 'fine language' of the more able writers reveals a preoccupation with literary standards and merit that is typical of traditional Welsh scholarship. A desire to prove the antiquity and wealth of Welsh culture has led to a disproportionate emphasis on texts considered either to exemplify indigenous literary characteristics (such as *cynganedd*) or to be of inherent literary value and national significance. This has resulted in a scholastic hierarchy that has discouraged the study of children's literature and other marginal literary genres until recently.

This situation is not of course peculiar to Wales; the attempt to establish English children's literature as a field of research in the 1970s and 80s is often narrated as a fight to reassess what is considered worthy of academic investigation 'against the academic hegemony of "English Lit"' (Hunt 1992: 2). But the question about what merits literary and cultural value or significance for speakers of Celtic languages is confounded by their cultural position on the Celtic fringe. The study of Welsh, Irish, Gaelic or Breton children's literature is therefore a marginalized subject within marginalized languages and cultures. A useful comparison can be made with the case of Welsh women writers, who have, in the words of literary critic Katie Gramich, suffered 'triple or quadruple marginalization' being women, writing in Welsh, in a literary tradition dominated by male writers, and a culture largely ignored in a British or international context (Gramich 2007: 1). In similar terms, it is no wonder that Welsh-language literature for children has largely been ignored by both Welsh literary criticism and international children's literature studies alike.

But while feminist iconoclasm has challenged the traditional masculine literary canon and has, together with other postmodern theories, created an alternative, vibrant critical discourse in Wales (demonstrated by volumes such as *Postcolonial Wales* published in 2005 and *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales* which appeared in 2007), children's

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

literature has yet to emerge as a major theme in Welsh scholarship. At present, the analysis of Welsh children's literature is confined to a handful of isolated research dissertations, articles and popular discussions (such as R.T. Jones 1974a, and M. Jones and G. Jones 1983), which offer a liberal humanist interpretation of the history of children's literature as a process of maturation from nineteenth century 'didacticism' to twentieth century 'delight'.

This is a common narrative of traditional children's literature criticism, seen for instance in English in the work by John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children: An Outline of English Language Children's Literature*, originally published in 1965. It is predicated on the assumption that as society entered the modern era, authors ceased to consider literature merely as a means to instruct and educate and began to respond to children's own needs and interests, based on an understanding or 'discovery', as R. Tudur Jones put it (1974a), of what children were actually like and what they really needed in a book.

One author above all is praised with discovering the needs of the children of Wales. O.M. Edwards launched *Cymru'r Plant (The Children's Wales)* in 1892 as an independent, nondenominational children's magazine that challenged the dominance of the religious children's magazines of the nineteenth century. Although books for children were scarce, periodical literature for children had been an important feature of Welsh publishing since the 1820s, and nearly all the monthly magazines were published under the auspices of a religious Nonconformist denomination. This had a profound effect on the content and style of the writing. However, *Cymru'r Plant* aimed to be different in subject-matter and tone (Davies 1988: 52–8), and introduced a playfulness and intimacy to the language of children's literature that can be sensed in the editor's opening address to the first edition in January 1892:

Yr wyf yn hoff o honoch, ac wedi pryderu llawer yn eich cylch. Yr wyf yn meddwl fy mod yn eich adwaen yn dda ... Y mae arnaf awydd eich dysgu, os ydych yn barod i wrando arnaf ...

I am fond of you, and I have been much concerned about you. I believe I know you well ... I want to teach you, if you are willing to listen to me ...

This was a radical departure for Welsh children's literature and O.M. Edwards is venerated by Norah Isaac, a leading figure in Welsh-medium education, as the first storyteller since mythological Gwydion to realise the true obligation of children's literature to delight children (Isaac in M. Jones and G. Jones 1983: 1; 13). O.M., as he was affectionately known, no doubt had a natural empathy with children and a relaxed style that was a welcome reprieve from the religious, sombre writing of some of the denominational magazines. But to maintain that his work was enlightened by a knowledge and recognition of what it is to be a child is to deny his contribution to the construction of Welsh childhood at that time. Indeed, post-structural and postmodern perspectives on the child as a constructed concept, subject to change over space and time (James and Prout 1997), invite us to revisit O.M.'s contribution to Welsh children's literature. If we agree with the historian Colin Heywood's assumption, 'that there is no essential child for historians to discover' (Heywood 2001: 170), we can begin to appreciate that O.M. Edwards was not only responding to the interests of his readers, but that he was also shaping and constructing an image of what a Welsh childhood should actually be like.

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

Constructing a Welsh Children's Literature

Without the readership networks and financial support available to the denominational magazines, *Cymru'r Plant* had to be commercially viable in order to survive, and it succeeded to reach a circulation of 11,500 copies a month by 1900 and 15,000 a month by 1929. The playful language, wide-ranging content and attractive design won over a loyal readership that was able to identify with the image of childhood presented in *Cymru'r Plant*. This image was very different to the portrayal of children in the earlier religious magazines and echoed essential changes in both the real lives of children and theories concerning childhood during the nineteenth century. The childhood of the readers of earlier nineteenth-century children's periodicals was structured by domestic chores, little or no schooling (apart from the Sunday Schools, which were of central importance from the early nineteenth century as the only access to literacy and learning for children and adults through the medium of Welsh), child labour, the burden of original sin, and the threat of disease and death. The literature produced for them inevitably emphasised the closeness of death and the responsibility of all children, however young, to take on adult responsibilities and ensure their personal salvation. But the children who read *Cymru'r Plant* from 1892 onwards were required to attend school up to the age of 13, they were considered to be spiritually innocent rather than sinful, and their wellbeing was gradually better protected by legislation concerning child labour and health. Childhood became increasingly separated from adulthood, and Romantic views concerning the child's close affinity with freedom, innocence and the natural world came to be naturalized as the normative image of childhood. This image was to have a long-lasting influence, and as O.M. gently encouraged his young readers to play in the open air, and to learn nursery rhymes and birds' names in Welsh, he was envisioning a child still familiar (as an idealised image of childhood at least) to us today.

O.M. Edwards's style and attitude was in tune with late-nineteenth-century western Romantic and educational ideas concerning childhood, and like earlier nationalist writers such as Zachris Topelius (1818–1889) in Finland, who developed a child-orientated style of writing emphasising respect for family, God and country (Westin 1996: 702), O.M.'s writing was also shaped by national aspirations. As Welsh Liberal MPs talked of home rule and young scholars and poets such as John Morris-Jones inspired a literary awakening, O.M. positioned the implied, hypothetical reader of *Cymru'r Plant*, constructed within the text, as the custodian of the Welsh language and culture. Many real readers responded enthusiastically to his call, and the warmth in which he was held in regard by generations of readers is evidence of how readily many Welsh children, parents and teachers welcomed this new way of communicating with the young. As Hazel Davies noted, 'In his own time he was loved and admired, and in many homes all over Wales a photograph of 'O.M.', the national hero, would take pride of place' (Davies 1988: 2).

This 'national hero' was a cultural nationalist; his aim was to foster the loyalty and devotion of the young towards their national heritage. But some criticism has been levelled at O.M. and his peers for inculcating a benign, passive mode of nationalism in the minds of the Welsh people, one split between Welsh patriotism and British loyalty (R.T. Jones 1974b: 158–9). However, it is also recognized that centuries of colonial subjugation, heightened by the rigid implementation of a hostile English-only schooling system in the nineteenth century, resulted in a complicated late-Victorian mindset in Wales, riddled with feelings of

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

inferiority on the one hand and complacency and indifference towards the language and its culture on the other. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that despite the introduction of a more enlightened policy towards the Welsh language in schools at the turn of the twentieth century, many ordinary Welsh people had ceased to pass on the language to their children and saw little benefit in supporting Welsh-language education (Smith 2000: 503–04).

This was the context of O.M.'s efforts to inspire the next generation to love and nurture their language and culture. In the shadow of empire the values and aspirations of an emerging Welsh nation were communicated to children through magazines and fiction, both by O.M. himself and the numerous new authors he fostered as editor of *Cymru'r Plant*. He was establishing a distinct Welsh identity, creating a community of belief that placed ethnicity and language as the central criteria of nationality, thus providing an image of how this emerging Welsh nation 'wishe(d) itself to be (and to be seen to be)' (Hunt and Butts 1995: xi), then and in the future.

This image of Welsh childhood was framed within a Romantic nationalist aesthetic. O.M. promoted the common belief inspired by European philosophers, nation builders and folklorists such as J.G. Herder and the Grimm brothers that the spiritual home of the nation was located among inhabitants untouched by the modern world – the Volk, envisioned in Wales as the *gwerin* – and there was no more powerful an emblem of the Welsh nation than the children of the *gwerin* (P. Morgan 1986). According to O.M., it was the duty of his generation to ensure that these children learnt about their collective cultural heritage in order for them to fulfil their potential as the nation's future.

To consider the child as the embodiment or champion of the nation was a feature of many other emerging nations of the modern era. American writers and thinkers in the nineteenth century consistently compared their political and cultural progress since the American Revolution to the growth and development of children (Griswold 1992: 13–14); following Confederation in 1867, children's literature played an integral part in fostering 'feelings of national identity, independence, pride, and unity' in Canada (Galway 2008: 5); and Gaelic League Irish-language activists at the beginning of the twentieth century centred much of their activity on fostering the loyalty of the young to the extent that the child became 'the focus as principal receptacle and potential transmitter of the Gaelic League's nationalist ideology' (Nic Congáil 2009: 113). Of course, it could be argued that all children's literature is a process of acculturation and socialization (Stephens 1992: 8) as it attempts 'to integrate young members into the society and to reinforce the norms and values which legitimise the socio-political system and which guarantee some sort of continuity in society' (Zipes 1991: 54). But in the case of emerging nations, the apparatus of nation building is also applied to the task of shaping young minds. There is, therefore, a fundamental difference in the way childhood is constructed in such contexts. For instance, whereas the naturalness and innocence of the Romantic child in examples of English children's literature are placed in closed, hidden spaces, set apart from the modern, adult world (such as Alice's rose garden in Lewis Carroll's adventures, and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*), the child-as-nation in emerging or marginal nations is an empowering image that engages the child with his or her cultural environment.

By defining childhood and its expectations within a national context, Welsh children's literature in O.M.'s period demonstrates the radical and visionary potential of children's literature as described by Kimberley Reynolds:

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

It is not accidental that at decisive moments in social history children have been at the centre of ideological activity or that writing for children has been put into the service of those who are trying to disseminate new world views, values, and social models (Reynolds 2007: 2).

The turn of the twentieth century was a time of cultural, linguistic, social and political change as a result of dramatic industrialization, demographic growth and voting reform. Vast numbers of the population were migrating from rural Wales and England to industrial and urban areas of Wales, causing rapid English-language acculturation in many communities in the 1890s. Politically, the traditional dominance of the landed gentry was transformed by the Liberal Party, who maintained an unchallenged majority of parliamentary seats in Wales between 1880 and 1922. This afforded them real influence at Westminster to petition for land reform, education and church disestablishment. Some prominent Welsh Liberal politicians and scholars including T. E. Ellis and O.M. Edwards formed *Cymru Fydd* (known as 'Young Wales' in English, modelled in part on 'Young Ireland') in 1886 to advance the cause of Welsh home rule. But the initial optimism of these liberal nationalists was deflated by 1896 as there was no widespread interest in separatism in Wales, in contrast to Ireland. The 1901 and 1911 census results of the Welsh-speaking population dealt another blow to the confidence of some of the Welsh intelligentsia as they realised that the Welsh language, seen by many as the essence of Welsh national identity, was in decline. The percentage of the population able to speak Welsh fell below 50% in 1901 and decreased further over the following decades. In spite of the literary awakening and increased scholarly interest in the Welsh language and its literature seen in the writing of John Morris-Jones and T. Gwynn Jones, there was a pervasive pessimism about the usefulness and value of the language in the modern world.

Cymru'r Plant and other publications inspired by O.M. Edwards during this period attempted to resist this pessimism by encouraging the young readers to think differently about the future of Wales and to look forward to the role that they could play. O.M. primarily did so by evoking markers of difference such as shared memories and myths, the ancient language and literature of Wales, and its rural landscape, cultivated by small communities of Welsh-speaking inhabitants. In *Cymru'r Plant* these features manifested themselves in stories about national heroes such as Owain Glyndŵr, collections of traditional lullabies and nursery rhymes, and vignettes about the geography, history and people of various, predominantly agricultural, parishes. He was contributing to the creation of an idealised nation and had little interest in the realities of industrial and urban Wales.

But as well as emphasising these common pre-modern tropes of Romantic nation building – recognised by Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith and others as features of imagined or constructed nations – O.M. was also determined to foster a nation that could take its place in the modern world. A keen travel writer himself, he sought to teach his readers about the history and culture of other countries in *Cymru'r Plant* with articles on 'Peoples of the World', 'Other Countries', 'Wonders of the World' and others on a range of related topics. He also published articles on science and nature where the Welsh language was made to serve the needs of a new age; 'He proved its flexibility and its suitability as the language of science, business and commerce ... In *Cymru'r Plant* O.M. Edwards prepared his readers for life in the twentieth century' (Davies 1988: 56).

This was a radical response to the crisis of confidence faced by Welsh speakers at the time. In private, as previously mentioned, many parents were choosing not to speak Welsh with

their children, and in public Welsh-language discourse was mainly limited to the spheres of literature and religion. English was the language of learning at the newly-established Welsh universities and leading scholars such as Professor Edward Anwyl, a member (together with O.M. Edwards) of the literary Dafydd ap Gwilym Society founded in Oxford 1886 to promote Welsh culture, 'saw no role for Welsh as a medium for Modernism' (H.T. Edwards 2000: 220). In an article on the 'national awakening in Wales' published in 1906, Anwyl stated that each language 'has its own domain': Welsh was the language of emotion and spirituality to be learnt at the mother's knee, but 'in dealing with modern ideas, modern science, modern scholarship, and everything else which concerns the intellectual life of the present age, the Welshman's language must be English' (quoted in H.T. Edwards 2000: 221). There was little public resistance to this domestication and infantilization of the Welsh language. Even the 'Society for Utilizing the Welsh Language', established in 1885, along with influential educationists such as Dan Isaac Davies, Beriah Gwynfe Evans and O.M. Edwards himself, called for a bilingual method of teaching by arguing that it would be beneficial to utilize the Welsh language in order to teach English and other subjects to monolingual children. Devaluing the Welsh language as subordinate to the needs of English was a deliberate strategy, as their arguments would probably not otherwise have been tolerated at the time (Evans 2000: 474).

Radicals such as Emrys ap Iwan and Michael D. Jones criticised the 'Society for Utilizing the Welsh Language' for casting the Welsh language into servitude, and argued instead for the language to be used in courts of law, schools and other public domains (Hughes 2010: 245–6). But such views received little support, and most public discussions about language and education were conditioned by this acceptance of the inferiority of the Welsh language. However, children's literature provided a space for resistance. Kimberley Reynolds argues that children's literature, often not taken seriously by the establishment, is afforded a freedom to experiment and dissent (Reynolds 2007: 15), and in the case of O.M. Edwards's writings he is able to present a more forthright argument for the Welsh language in *Cymru'r Plant* than is seen in public debates about the merits of bilingualism in schools. Throughout the 1890s, when allowances were beginning to be made for the use of the Welsh language in elementary schools, there are references in *Cymru'r Plant* to the 'Welsh Not' used for a short period in the mid-nineteenth century to discourage the speaking of Welsh. The 'Welsh Not', similar to the 'bata scoir' employed in Irish National Schools, was a small piece of wood or slate inscribed with the letters 'W.N.' and hung around the neck of a child caught speaking Welsh in class (Millward 1980: 93–5). One *Cymru'r Plant* contributor, Bob Ty'n Brwynog, calls to mind his mother's recollections of the 'Welsh Note' (as it was also called) and how it compelled children to tell on other pupils who spoke Welsh in order to be rid of the 'Welsh Note' themselves (O.M. Edwards 1893: 296). Despite a lack of evidence for this practice, through such reminiscences O.M. as editor attempted to foster or even create a collective memory and hatred towards the 'Welsh Not'. This shaping of cultural memory encouraged the readers to take pride in the advances in Welsh education and to ensure that they exercise their right to speak Welsh, and resist any attempts to suppress the language.

Many short sketches illustrating the merits of learning the Welsh language also appear in *Cymru'r Plant*. In August 1894, for instance, we hear a young boy question why he has to speak Welsh when he is bullied by English-speaking boys at school for being a 'Welshy'. His father responds by stating that the boy must speak the language, as it is the only way he will

be able to converse with his late mother in the afterlife (O.M. Edwards 1894: 205–6). This non-rational justification aligns the Welsh language, as Edward Anwyl did, with the spiritual and emotional; but the father takes the argument beyond Anwyl's ideas about separate domains and states that his son's ability to speak Welsh also places him ahead of his English-speaking peers, intellectually and economically. He insists that having access to two great literatures, Welsh and English, will enrich the boy's mind, and because of his broader experience and skills his prospects for the future will be greater. He maintains that being a 'Welshy' is not an obstacle to progress, and the success of prominent men such as the industrialist and social reformer Robert Owen was in fact down to their Welsh roots.

On the pages of *Cymru'r Plant*, O.M. Edwards was thus offering his readers something new. His style and language were far removed from the sobriety of nineteenth-century religious literature for children, and his optimism was also in contrast to contemporary debates regarding the future of the Welsh language. Yet we must not suppose that O.M.'s ideas were passively received and accepted. There is a dynamic to the relationship between author, text and reader that allows for a creative response, and this is particularly true of the way O.M.'s ideas concerning childhood and the nation were transmitted and received. He was not dealing with fixed ideas, after all; both 'childhood' and 'nation' as constructed concepts are locations for ambiguities and resistance. There is no predetermined shape to the nation or the child; they are constantly shifting social and cultural concepts and any attempt to define them is subject to contention. Similarly, readers are not a homogenous mass; each one will bring his or her own preconceptions about what it is to be a child and what constitutes a nation to the reading process. Furthermore, adults are also often a part of the 'dual audience' of children's books, and can also influence the interpretation of the text. Therefore, despite the impression we have of O.M. as a paternal editor gently moulding his readers into Welsh patriots, there are also ambiguities in the ideas expressed in *Cymru'r Plant* that allow the reader to be more than merely a receptacle for O.M.'s nationalist and Romantic ideology. Through these ambiguities the reader can engage with ideas and form his or her own meaning from the texts.

One such area of ambiguity is the question of child-rearing – to what extent should adults intervene in the development of a child? In his treatise on education, *Émile* (1762), Jean-Jacques Rousseau stated that the innate goodness of the child 'degenerates in the hands of man' and that education should be derived from interaction with the natural world rather than books. This led to an emphasis in Romantic nineteenth-century writing on learning through play and the open air, an emphasis which is often seen in *Cymru'r Plant*. Whereas many earlier religious periodicals stressed the wickedness of childish play, depicting young children suffering serious if not fatal injuries whilst at play, *Cymru'r Plant* advocated the benefits of leisure and recreation. In November 1893, for instance, a short piece under the heading 'Play' states that play is not a waste of time, 'Often, it is through play that a child learns what he can make of the world' (O.M. Edwards 1893: 297). Many examples are offered, such as Isaac Newton who enjoyed flying kites as a child and later discovered the law of gravity. Eluned Morgan, the Patagonian-based writer much influenced by O.M. Edwards, also advocates the benefits of learning through experience, 'Gweld gyntaf, a darllen wedyn, yw'r ysgol orau debygaf i; onid oes ormod o ddarllen llyfrau a rhy fach o ddarllen natur?' ('The best school is first to look, and then to read; is there not too much reading of books and too little reading of nature?') (Quoted in R.B. Williams and Morgan: 13).

The child is set as 'other' to the adult, free from responsibilities, 'with little more to disturb the bliss of childhood', in the words of another *Cymru'r Plant* contributor, Andronicus, 'than such insignificant tribulations as losing a ball or cutting a finger whilst whittling at a piece of wood to make a small boat' (O.M. Edwards 1894: 255–7). Yet this child is also envisaged as the nation's future and is expected to guard and protect the history, culture and language of Wales. To participate fully in the child-orientated nation-building project, the young readers of *Cymru'r Plant* cannot therefore afford to be too separated from the realities of their surroundings. They must also be disciplined and show respect for traditional Nonconformist values such as piety, sobriety, hard work, and dedication.

The conflict between Romantic ideology and Welsh Nonconformist ethics is illustrated in *Cit*, a story by Fanny Edwards, first serialized in *Cymru'r Plant* in 1906, and then published as a novel in 1908. Here we see evidence of how Romantic notions of childhood were sometimes resisted as English and alien in an attempt to establish a Welsh construct of the child, based, as demonstrated below, on Welsh Nonconformist values. *Cit*, an orphan brought up by a loving aunt in rural North-west Wales, has no choice but to go into service at a young age. She is hired as nanny to a middle-class family, the Pennant Joneses, in a fictional university town called Trefan (modelled, no doubt, on Bangor in North Wales). Although Welsh speakers, the habits of the family are very much Anglicised: they attend Church not chapel, and their parenting style, reflecting Romantic ideas about freedom and innocence, is in stark contrast to the discipline expected by *Cit*, raised as she was in a traditional Welsh rural Nonconformist environment. This conflict is at the root of her unhappiness in her new position, as she herself explains:

Un peth, yr oedd yn amlwg nad oedd y plant erioed wedi eu dysgu i ufuddhau i'w rhieni; yr oedd ofn tad a mam yn beth hollol ddiethr iddynt. Ac yn lle bod yn wrthrychau o barch ac edmygedd yn y teulu, yr oedd y tad a'r fam yn gaeth i fympwyon ac ewyllys ddireol y plant. Mae yn debyg eu bod dan y dybiaeth eu bod yn eu dwyn i fyny yn dyner a gofalus. Ni welais erioed gymaint o gamgymeriad. Gorlwytho plentyn â'i ddymuniaidau, a'r hyn a dybiai yn ei galon fach ef sydd yn angenrheidiol, nid oes dim a wna fwy o niwed. Y mae yn blanhigyn bychan mor dyner, fel y gofynnir pob iot o'r cariad a'r rheswm sydd wedi ei roddi tuag at y gwaith hwn, fel ag i'w feithrin a'i ddatblygu yn y modd mwyaf bendithiol iddo ef ac i bawb y daw i gyffyrddiad â hwy yn ystod ei fywyd. Nis gallwn beidio a gresynu, a hynny yn aml, wrth weled y plant yma yn tyfu fel planhigion gwyllt, oherwydd gor-dynerwch, os cywir ei alw wrth yr enw yna, eu rhieni.

For one thing, it was obvious that the children had never been taught to obey their parents; to be in fear of a father and mother was alien to them. Rather than being objects of respect and admiration within the family, the father and mother were slaves to the whims and unruly will of the children. They were no doubt under the impression that they were providing a gentle and mindful upbringing. I never saw such a great error. Nothing could be more detrimental than to indulge a child's wishes, and allow him everything he believes in his heart to be essential. He is such a delicate little plant that it requires every scrap of love and reason to ensure that he is nurtured and developed in a way that is most beneficial to him and to everyone he may come in contact with during his life. I often couldn't but deplore the sight of children growing like wild plants because of the over-indulgence, if it can be called that, of their parents (F. Edwards 1908: 156–7).

In her condemnation of the Pennant Joneses, *Cit* offers us a clear picture of a traditional Welsh upbringing, reminiscent in its horticultural imagery and disciplinary tone of John Locke's ideas in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693):

For liberty and indulgence can do no good to children; their want of judgement makes them stand in need of restraint and discipline ... I imagine everyone will judge it reasonable that their children,

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

when little, should look upon their parents as their lords, their absolute governors, and as such stand in awe of them; and that when they came to ripe years, they should look on them as their best, as their only sure friends, and as such love and reverence them (Locke and Garforth 1964: 52–3).

This Lockean echo is indicative of the puritan principles on which the image of Nonconformist Wales was built in the nineteenth century, an image that came to the fore after the religious census of 1851 indicated that those attending service at the Nonconformist denominations in Wales outnumbered worshippers at the Established Church. From then on Welsh nationality came 'to be defined for many in terms of Protestant Nonconformity' and the culture that surrounded it placed great importance on the 'puritan virtues of honesty, thrift, sabbatarianism and hard work, sobriety and chastity' (D. Morgan 2011: 15). What is missing from the Pennant Jones household is the discipline, boundaries and respect of Welsh family life associated with the image of Nonconformist Wales, mainly because of the absence of a strong mother-figure. The absence of the father is not so much of an issue – he is often unseen in many children's stories from this period, removed from the family home by work or war – but without the love, care and discipline of a principled mother, the children are unable to take their place within society. The ideal family in children's literature of the period is no doubt an image of the nation, and at its heart is the mother who nurtures and safeguards the future generation, fostering in them a deep affection and loyalty towards their language and their nation, akin to the unquestioning love felt towards a mother. In contrast, Mrs Pennant Jones is an affectionate but ultimately unfit mother who is not mindful of her children's manners and behaviour, or of their spiritual and cultural development. The children are not taught to respect their culture and language – and we can infer that such ill discipline and irresponsibility will not only be to the detriment of the children themselves but will also result in an increasingly Anglicised society.

Here Welsh culture is framed in a domestic context, and patriotism is expressed through a respect for faith, family and language. These are internal markers of identity reflected in the original pledge of allegiance to Urdd Gobaith Cymru, the youth movement envisioned by O.M., and ultimately founded by his son, Ifan ab Owen Edwards, in 1922, with the motto 'Byddaf ffyddlon i Gymru, i gyd-ddyn ac i Grist' ('I will be faithful to Wales, fellow man, and Christ'). But when this patriotism is outwardly expressed in Wales's relationship with England, Britain and the wider world, there is further ambiguity on the pages of *Cymru'r Plant*. On the one hand we find a vengeful anti-English ideology, seen, for example, in the verses composed by 'Cwmryn' predicting that a fatal blow will be delivered to English oppression when Arthur and Glyndŵr rise again to set Wales free (O.M. Edwards 1899: 174–5):

Mae'r Cymry heddyw'n deffro,
Yn llawn gwladgarwch pur,
Fe roddir marwol ergyd
I ormes cyn bo hir;
Dros ffiniau'r Hafren araf
Ymlidir rhagfarn ffol,
Draig Goch ein Harthur chwifir
Pan godir Cymru'n ol.
The Welsh are today awakening
Full of pure patriotism,

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

A fatal blow will be delivered
To oppression before long;
Over the slow Severn's borders
Foolish prejudice will be pursued,
The Red Dragon of our Arthur will fly
When Wales is raised to what it was.

But alongside such patriotic sentiment, a British, colonial ideology is also expressed as readers are encouraged to take pride in the glory of the British Empire. 'Brythoniaid Bychain' ('Young Britons'), a song composed by J. Allen Jones of Welshpool and published in *Cymru'r Plant* 1896, reconciles the contradiction between these two ideologies by maintaining that the Welsh, by virtue of their descent from the original inhabitants of these islands, are founding members of the British Empire, and should, as 'Glyndŵr's children', vow to fight for Britannia to the death (O.M. Edwards 1896: 166–7). In another example Nest, a young female character devised by O.M. Edwards, whose sea voyage was first described in *Cymru'r Plant* and later in *Llyfr Nest* (1913), is urged by an old colonel aboard ship to honour the British flag seen in so many of the countries they have visited, as it stands for 'freedom, equality among nations, and religious tolerance' (O.M. Edwards 1913: 53–4).

Here we have a desire to foster a fierce patriotic loyalty towards the language, landscape, history and culture of Wales (internal national features associated with a Celtic sensibility), but also a desire to implant an aspiration to succeed on the British, colonial map (that is, to imitate Saxon drive and ambition). This dual identity – both Welsh and British – allowed the expression of a deep-rooted suspicion and even hatred towards England and an aspiration to be British within the same publication (A. Jones and B. Jones 2004: 83–91).

As editor of *Cymru'r Plant* from 1892 to 1907 and then from 1912 to his death in 1920, O.M. Edwards was navigating these complexities and contradictions, offering a radical image of Welsh as a modern, practical language on the one hand and advocating British colonialism on the other. By expressing the distinctiveness and difference of the Welsh, O.M. Edwards aimed to resist a homogenising English ideology and was influenced more generally by Irish, Finnish and Hungarian expressions of national self-determination at the time. But his objective was also to ensure that Wales could participate fully in the success of Britain and the Empire. O.M. was not alone in his effort to align Welsh patriotism and British loyalty, as the career of Lloyd George, formerly a staunch supporter of Welsh home rule, illustrates (K.O. Morgan 1981: 35, 44, 58, 139, 208, 412). Welsh lyric poetry of the period also often expresses split loyalties, as Robin Chapman has recently demonstrated (Chapman 2004: 29), but I would argue that this duality is at its most apparent and contradictory in children's literature. The supposed simplicity and innocence of children's literature belies its ideological content, and *fin de siècle* children's literature is filled to the brim with concerns, fears, hopes and expectations resulting from Wales's position on the periphery of Empire.

Conclusion

The period between 1892 and 1920 was a time of radical change in Wales, and it was O.M. Edwards who realised the importance of children in the development of the emerging Welsh nation. Through his writing and editorship, O.M. embedded popular myths that maintained the Welsh-speaking community for over half a century (Llywelyn-Williams 1960: 13), the most prevalent of which was the myth of the classless society, a common myth amongst

stateless nations throughout Europe in the nineteenth century (R.W. Jones 2007: 75). O.M. showed indifference and even disdain towards the urban middle and industrial working classes, focussing instead on his image of choice for Wales, namely the classless, cultured, rural *gwerin* (Sherrington 1992). But this meant that he was not able to appeal to the majority, and as a result O.M.'s patriotic ideas never gained widespread acceptance in Wales (R.W. Jones 2007: 29–30; 70). But O.M.'s aim was never to revolutionize Welsh society, and his inability to respond to the needs and interests of the urban and Anglicised classes was typical of many Liberal Welsh Nonconformist leaders at the time who found the emerging socialism of the working classes disconcerting and even intimidating (Morgan 2011: 38). This unwillingness to engage with the growing urban and industrial populace of Wales hindered the rise of nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century. Wales, after all, relied heavily on its heroes, myths and cultural leaders to structure its national identity, in contrast to Scotland, for instance, which relied more on re-configuring historical institutions as pillars of nation-building. O.M.'s myth of the *gwerin*, therefore, would have a profound influence in forming patriotic sentiments and positive attitudes towards the Welsh language, but lacked the general appeal to motivate political change.

In children's literature written and inspired by O.M. Edwards between 1892 and 1920, childhood is depicted as having its own innate qualities and affinity with the spiritual and natural, cultivated by O.M. into a love for nation, humanity and God. He may not have inspired political nationalism among the readers, parents and teachers influenced by *Cymru'r Plant*, but he established the importance of children's literature as an essential medium for the development of a national identity and presented a forceful counterargument to those who saw no place for the Welsh language in the modern world. The early growth of Welsh children's books in the twentieth century is deeply indebted to O.M. Edwards, and his ideas about nationhood and the *gwerin* infused much of the writing. But as this paper has demonstrated, ideas about childhood and national identity are fluid and ambiguous, and children's literature is loaded with often contrasting ideologies concerning language, culture and identity. Because so much of our children's literature is intended to guide and shape young readers, it is as ideologically complex as any other literary genre, and as a result should be central to our understanding of how the future of a marginal or threatened language such as Welsh is imagined and practised as social fact.

NOTE

- 1 Compare, for instance the 617 adult fiction titles listed on the Welsh Book Council's website in August 2011, www.gwales.com, with the 1325 titles in the fiction for children and young adults section.

WORKS CONSULTED

- Aaron, Jane. *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007.
- Aaron, Jane and Chris Williams. Eds. *Postcolonial Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005.
- Chapman, T. Robin. *Meibion Afradlon a Chymeriadau Eraill: Golwg ar y Dymer Delynegol, 1891–1940*. Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 2004.
- Cotton, Penni. *European Children's Literature I & II*. Kingston: Kingston University Press, 1996, 1998.
- Cyngor Llyfrau Cymru. *Llyfrau Plant: Children's Books in Welsh 1900–1991 [Cyflwyniad Gan/Introduction by Gwilym Huws]*. Aberystwyth, 1997.
- Davies, Hazel. *O.M. Edwards*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988.

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

- Dusinberre, Juliet. *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999.
- Edwards, Fanny. *Cit. Gwrecsam: Swyddfa 'Cymru'r Plant'*, 1908.
- Edwards, Hywel Teifi. Ed. *A Guide to Welsh Literature, Volume V, C. 1800–1900*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000.
- Edwards, Owen Morgan. Ed. *Cymru'r Plant*. Vol. II, 1893.
Ed. *Cymru'r Plant*. Vol. III, 1894.
Ed. *Cymru'r Plant*. Vol. V, 1896.
Ed. *Cymru'r Plant*. Vol. VIII, 1899.
Er Mwyn Cymru. Wrecsam: Hughes a'i Fab, 1922.
Llyfr Nest. Gwrecsam: Hughes a'i Fab, 1913.
- Evans, W. Gareth. 'The British State and Welsh-Language Education 1850–1914'. *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains 1801–1901*. Ed. Geraint H. Jenkins. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000: 459–82.
- Galway, Elizabeth A. *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood: Children's Literature and the Construction of Canadian Identity*. New York; London: Routledge, 2008.
- Gramich, Katie. *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007.
- Griswold, Jerome. *Audacious Kids: Coming of Age in America's Classic Children's Books*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Heywood, Colin. *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*. Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2001.
- Hughes, Lowri Angharad. "'Y Teimlad Cenedlaethol": Cymru a'i Gyfoeswyr'. *Y Traethodydd* CLXV. 695. 2010: 232–255.
- Hunt, Peter. *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism*. London; New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Hunt, Peter and Dennis Butts. *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- James, Allison and Alan Prout. *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. 1990. 2nd ed. London: Falmer Press, 1997.
- Jones, Aled and Bill Jones. 'Empire and the Welsh Press'. *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain*. Ed. Simon J. Potter. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004: 75–91.
- Jones, Mairwen and Gwynn Jones. Eds. *Dewiniaid Difyr: Llenorion Plant Cymru Hyd Tua 1950*. Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1983.
- Jones, R. Tudur. 'Darganfod Plant Bach: Sylwadau ar Lenyddiaeth Plant yn Oes Victoria'. *Ysgrifau Beirniadol VIII*. Ed. J. E. Caerwyn Williams. Dinbych: Gwasg Gee, 1974a: 160–204.
The Desire of Nations. Llandybie: C. Davies, 1974b.
- Jones, Richard Wyn. *Rhoi Cymru'n Gyntaf: Syniadaeth Plaid Cymru. Cyfrol 1*. Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 2007.
- Llywelyn-Williams, Alun. *Y Nos, Y Niwl, a'r Ynys: Agweddau ar y Profiad Rhamantaidd yng Nghymru, 1890–1914*. Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1960.
- Locke, John and F.W. Garforth. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. London: Heinemann, 1964.
- Millward, Edward G. 'Yr Hen Gyfundrefn Felltigedig'. *Barn* 207–08. April/May 1980: 93–5.
- Morgan, D. Densil. *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales, 1914–2000*. 2nd ed. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011.
- Morgan, Kenneth O. *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880–1980*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Morgan, Prys. 'The Gwerin of Wales – Myth and Reality'. *The Welsh and Their Country*. Eds. Ian Hume and W.T.R. Pryce. Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1986: 134–52.
- Nic Congáil, Ríona. "'Fiction, Amusement, Instruction": The Irish Fireside Club and the Educational Ideology of the Gaelic League'. *Éire-Ireland*. 44. 1&2. 2009: 91–117.
- Reynolds, Kimberley. *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Sherrington, Emyln. 'O.M. Edwards, Culture and the Industrial Classes'. *Llafur* 6.1. 1992: 28–41.

Nic Congáil, Ríona. Eag. *Codladh Céad Bliain: Cnuasach Aistí ar Litríocht na nÓg*. Baile Átha Cliath: LeabhairCOMHAR, 2012.

Smith, Robert. 'Elementary Education and the Welsh Language 1870–1902'. *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains 1801–1901*. Ed. Geraint H. Jenkins. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000: 483–504.

Stephens, John. *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. Harlow: Longman, 1992.

Westin, Boel. 'The Nordic Countries'. *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Eds. Peter Hunt and Sheila G. Bannister Ray. London; New York: Routledge, 1996: 699–709.

Williams, R. Bryn and Eluned Morgan. *Eluned Morgan: Bywgraffiad a Detholiad*. Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1948.

Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. New York: Routledge, 1991.