

**Writing Back:  
Welsh Emigrants and their Correspondence in the Nineteenth  
Century**

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In his presidential address to Section H (Archaeology and Anthropology) of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1958, the ethnologist, writer and museum curator Iorwerth Peate remarked of the Welsh that “though we are often described as a nation of singers, it would be truer to describe us as a nation of writers and of readers.” In this keynote address I focus on one group of Welsh writers and readers in the nineteenth century: Welsh emigrants and their families and friends who remained in Wales, and the correspondence between them.<sup>1</sup> I begin by referring to parts of a Welsh-language letter dated 17 June 1846 from Griffith Thomas to his old friend, Thomas Evans. Griffith Thomas was a native of Spite, Llanfynydd parish, Carmarthenshire, and at the time of writing was now living in Delaware County, Ohio.<sup>2</sup> I discuss this letter in order to introduce some themes and issues that I will be exploring more fully later in the address. I am not suggesting that Thomas’ letter is by any means typical; on the contrary, every emigrant letter has its own individuality. Nevertheless, to a greater or lesser extent, many of them, perhaps even most of them, share at least some conventions and similarities.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was delivered as a keynote address at the North American Association for the Study of Welsh Culture and History Conference at Morgantown, West Virginia, 15 July 2004. This revised version has retained some of the idiom of an oral presentation. This publication was prepared during a period of research leave funded by the AHRB and I gratefully acknowledge the Board’s support. I would like to thank Dr Douglas Bassett, Dr Christine James, Dr E. Wyn James and Dr Huw Walters for their help in preparing the address and this article. For the Peate quotation, see Iorwerth Peate, “The Study of Folk Life and its Part in the Defence of Civilisation,” *Advancement of Science* 15, no. 58 (1958): 86-94, 86.

<sup>2</sup> Griffith Thomas, Delaware, Ohio, to Thomas Evans, Spite, Llanfynydd, 17 June 1846, National Library of Wales [hereafter NLW] MS 16704D, NLW, Aberystwyth.

The letter's opening sentence is a standard one in all kinds of nineteenth-century correspondence: "*Wele fi or diwedd yn anfon hyn o linellau atoch dan obeithio y cyffyrfeddant chwi ach teulu yn iach fel ac y maint yn fy ngadel i am teilu yn bresenol trwi ddaioni yr Arglwydd*" [Here I am at last sending these lines to you in the hope that they find you and your family well in the same way as they are leaving me and my family at present thanks to the Lord's goodness].<sup>3</sup> Thomas proceeded to ask Evans to send on the letter to his daughter Elizabeth, who was living somewhere in Glamorgan. He requested, too, that his friend secure for him information about Elizabeth and his other daughter, Brichard, who had similarly stayed in Wales and with whom he and his wife had also lost contact by this time. Thomas wished to be remembered to his old neighbours and friends, and more than once in the letter advised them to emigrate to America: "*ac yr wyf yn demeno arnynt yn rhieni a phlant i adel pen Mynydd Lanfynydd a dyfod yn greno drosodd yr America fawr bydd yn gan gwell yddynt oll nag aros yna*" [and I wish they as parents and children would leave Llanfynydd Mountain and come together over to great America it will be a hundred times better for them all than staying there]. Partly in order to supply news regarding his own family in the USA and partly so that the letter's readers could judge for themselves what benefits America had to offer, Thomas provides detailed information regarding prices of land, goods etc. locally and records his success in buying land and building a house on it. At the end of the letter, he once again wishes to be remembered to people he knew in the Llanfynydd area and requests information on his daughters, and also asks the recipient to write back as soon as possible. In this way the letter adopts the common "sandwich" format, as it has been termed,<sup>4</sup> in which formal salutations and farewells enclose passages of observation, commentary and advice. Thomas' final salutations are followed by the testimony of two persons to the authenticity of the letter: "*yr ydym ni yn gosod ein henwau fel tystion iw wirionolrwydd*" [we enter our names as witnesses to its truthfulness]. Scrutiny of the handwriting shows that the letter was written by one of the witnesses, James W. Rice of Columbus, Ohio,<sup>5</sup> while Thomas appears to have inserted his initials "G T." The letter ends by quoting an *englyn* composed by Rice himself, under his pseudonym, Iago Ddu [Black James]:

<sup>3</sup> All translations from the original Welsh are by the author unless otherwise indicated. In all quotations the spelling, punctuation and grammar of the originals have been retained.

<sup>4</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>5</sup> For some biog. details of Rice (c.1828-1908) and tributes to him, see *Y Drych*, 12 November, 17 December 1908; Robert D. Thomas (Iorthryn Gwynedd), *Hanes Cymry America* (Utica: T. J. Griffiths, 1872), Dosran C, 60. An English-language translation of Thomas' work is available, *Hanes Cymry America. A History of the Welsh in America*, trans. Phillips G. Davies (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983).

*Y Llythyr mawr a llwythog – eheda  
Mal [Fel] 'deryn adeiniog  
dros y mor o wlad Madog  
I'r wlad lan lle y cân cog*

*Yn ddewrwyd rho'r newyddion – o'm teulu  
I'm tylwyth yn gyson  
Rho'n Rhes hanes y wlad hon  
Ar diroedd Gymru dirion.*

Large and laden letter – fly  
Like a winged bird  
Over the sea from the land of Madog  
To the country where the cuckoo sings

Bravely and splendidly give the news of my family  
To my relatives consistently  
List news from this country  
On the fields of fair Wales.

Probably thousands upon thousands of letters took wing between Wales and the settlements Welsh people established overseas in the nineteenth century. We cannot know exactly how many were sent and received let alone how many were written and lost or never sent. However, we can safely say that the majority went back and fore between Wales and the USA, as this was the most popular overseas destination for Welsh migrants.<sup>6</sup> Sizeable numbers of letters relating to Welsh migrants in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Patagonia and South Africa have also survived. This substantial correspondence that we have inherited was a direct creation of the emigration from Wales. Indeed, it can be safely argued that many of the emigrant “scribes,” as Arnold Schrier has called them,<sup>7</sup> may not have ever dreamed of putting pen to paper had they not emigrated, or had family members, friends and / or neighbours not done so. Or as Eric Richards has remarked in relation to British and Irish people who moved to Australia in the nineteenth century, migrants were “more likely to reflect on their condition and their lives than those who stayed at home”.<sup>8</sup> As well as being laden with news carried from one continent to the other as described in the *englyn*, emigrant letters supplied a number of other functions, among them supplying information to prospective emigrants, and encouraging others to

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<sup>6</sup> In 1854 the postmaster general of the USA reported that over two million letters were sent to the United Kingdom; in 1874 the figure had risen to well over six million. Arnold Schrier, *Ireland and the American Immigration 1850-1900* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Schrier, *Ireland and the American Immigration*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Richards, “Voices of British and Irish Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Australia,” in *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants: A Social History of Migration*, eds. Colin G. Pooley and Ian D. White, (London: Routledge, 1991), 19-41, 20.

emigrate or conversely dissuading them from doing so. Some letters home were loaded with remittance money or passes to enable other family members to emigrate<sup>9</sup> whilst others were pleas to the recipients to send money to the writers.<sup>10</sup> And, as will be explored further in due course, letters were also heavy with psychological and social significance, as a means of retaining emotional ties on both sides of the emigration arc. As Richard Broome has aptly commented, letters were “precious lifelines between old and new worlds.”<sup>11</sup>

As is true of most European peoples whose histories took on an international dimension as result of nineteenth-century migrations, emigrant letters are our largest and arguably our most important source for the mentalities, activities and attitudes of ordinary Welsh migrants. Commentators have long emphasised the importance of the emigrant letters in illuminating the human and personal aspects of the experience of migration.<sup>12</sup> Letters are invaluable sources that enable us to hear emigrants’ own voices and provide us with an immediate record of events, thoughts and feelings. At the same time, they are also difficult sources to use and interpret. They are rendered problematic by indecipherable handwriting and spelling and lack of punctuation, and, like all personal documents, the challenges posed by their first-hand and subjective nature. The question of the representativeness of surviving emigrant letters, in terms of social and occupational class and gender, is also one that needs to be borne in mind. It is likely that a large number of Welsh letters have long since been lost or destroyed, but thousands have survived: manuscript ones in archives, libraries and private hands, and printed or published ones in newspapers,

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., John Davies, Lampeter, to his daughter in the USA, 7 August 1854, NLW Facs 285; David J. Morgan, Providence, PA, to his mother, 17 August 1870, NLW MS 17441E; Y *Gwladgarwr*, 20 May 1865.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Thomas William Mason, Carisbrook, Victoria, Australia, to a relative, 23 December 1861, NLW MS 22436D; *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, 2 March 1861.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Broome, *The Victorians. Arriving* (McMahon’s Point, NSW: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, 1984), 36, cited in Bill Bell, “‘Crusoe’s Book’: The Scottish Emigrant Reader in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Across Boundaries: The Book in Culture and Commerce*, eds. Bill Bell, Philip Bennett, and Jonquil Bevan (Delaware: Oak Knoll, 2000), 116-29, 119.

<sup>12</sup> For important discussions on emigrant letters, their strengths and limitations as a historical source and the ways scholars have utilized them, see Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century America* (Coral Gables, FL.: University of Miami Press, 1972), 1-31; Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*; David A. Gerber, “The Immigrant Letter between Positivism and Populism: The Uses of Immigrant Personal Correspondence in Twentieth-Century American Scholarship,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 3-34; *idem*, “Ethnic Identification and the Project of Individual Identity: The Life of Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 17, no. 2 (July 1998), 1-22; and *idem*, “Epistolary Ethics: Personal Correspondence and the Culture of Emigration in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 19, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 3-23; Eric Richards, “Annals of the Australian Immigrant,” in *Visible Immigrants. Neglected Sources for the Study of Australian Immigration*, ed. Eric Richards, Richard Reid, and David Fitzpatrick (Canberra: ANU, 1989): 7-22. My thinking on Welsh emigrant letters has benefited greatly from the insights contained in these studies.

magazines, journals and books. We have inherited some long sequences of letters, but many are like the one by Griffith Thomas with which I began, that is where only one or two isolated “snapshot” letters by the same author have survived by accident. In such cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to discover more about the writer and her / his history. Probably most extant Welsh letters were written by the senders but, as Griffith Thomas’ letter demonstrates, and as we shall discuss further later, some were written on behalf of illiterate migrants. Nor were “fake” emigrant letters uncommon either. In *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* [The Banner and Times of Wales] in July 1864, a correspondent warned readers that the real address of the Samuel Evans who had written a letter praising America highly as a field of emigration was not somewhere in America but “Cell No 3, Gaol, Cardiff.”<sup>13</sup>

Welsh emigrant letters have not attracted as much attention from scholars of Welsh history and literature as might have been expected. True, one of the earliest collections of emigrant letters to be published was Alan Conway’s *The Welsh in America: Letters from the Immigrants* in 1961,<sup>14</sup> and other specific smaller-scale collections have followed either in books or article form.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Jerry Hunter’s prize-winning study of the Welsh in the American Civil War, *Llwch Cenhedloedd*, has drawn extensively on Welsh-language manuscript letters from that period, whilst Huw Walters has analysed the remarkable number of four hundred and twelve letters that were printed in the Aberdare-published *Y Gwladgarwr* [The Patriot] between 1859 and 1883.<sup>16</sup> In general, historians have predominantly turned to Welsh emigrant correspondence for the information they contain and their testimony to the processes of adaptation and social, cultural and linguistic change in new environments. But, as far as I am aware, these epistles have not yet been studied extensively, and the “*Llythyr o America: Ymfudwyr o Gymru a’u Gohebiaeth*” / “Letter from America: Welsh Emigrants and their Correspondence” one-day conference organised by Cardiff University’s Centre for Welsh American Studies in November 2003 was the first event specifically devoted to this subject.<sup>17</sup> There have been few attempts to study Welsh emigrant letters systematically in line with what scholars of letters written by other nationalities and ethnic groups have achieved in recent years, in what has been an undeniable explosion of work and the emergence

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<sup>13</sup> *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 20 July 1864.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Conway (ed.), *The Welsh in America: Letters from the Immigrants* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961).

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., H. S. Chapman, “From Llanfair to Fairhaven,” *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club* (1986): 147-57; Aled Eames, Lewis Lloyd, and Bryn Parry (eds.), *Letters from America. Captain David Evans of Talsarnau, 1817-1895* (Caernarfon: Gwynedd Archives Service, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Jerry Hunter, *Llwch Cenhedloedd: Y Cymry a Rhyfel Cartref America* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2003); Huw Walters, “Llythyrau’r Gwladgarwr,” *Y Traethodydd*, Ebrill 2004: 107-20.

<sup>17</sup> Held on 29 November 2003, with contributions from Eirionedd Baskerville, Leslie Davies, Bill Jones, Gethin Matthews and Huw Walters.

of emigrant letters as a sub-genre of study in its own right.<sup>18</sup> There are now available explorations of what letters in various specific historical, national and ethnic contexts reveal about speech patterns, language and idioms, and studies of the textuality of letters, their forms and conventions. This keynote address cannot do justice to the many dimensions that Welsh migrant correspondence embraces, although I hope to contribute in a small way by conveying something of the diversity and complexity of these documents. I will be discussing somewhat impressionistically some of the functions of nineteenth century Welsh emigrant letters and the relationships between them and certain aspects of the process of emigration. I also want to discuss certain features of the letters as texts, examine some of their contexts and subtexts, and try to explain some of the complex ways in which this correspondence came into existence. To adapt a phrase by Andrew Brown-May, I seek to shed light on some of the experiential aspects of emigrant letter writing and receiving in this period.<sup>19</sup>

First, I want to focus on the role of the letter as a source of information for potential emigrants from Wales in the nineteenth century, and of advice to them regarding whether or not they should leave their homeland.<sup>20</sup> As is well known, the decision to emigrate depended to a great extent on information available at the time – information about jobs, land, prices, wages, the condition of the soil, the climate, etc., in the destinations being considered. Prospective emigrants obtained their knowledge from several sources: newspapers and emigrant literature like guide books and handbooks, news brought by returning migrants and visitors, and, of course, emigrant letters. The circulation of information about destinations and working and living conditions overseas, and especially in the USA, increased appreciably in Wales from the mid nineteenth century onwards, and so did the demand for it. Both private letters and ones published in the press contributed substantially to these developments.

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<sup>18</sup> See the forthcoming volume edited by Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke, *Letters Across Borders: the Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006, forthcoming), a selection of papers delivered at the “Reading the Emigrant Letter: Innovative Approaches and Interpretations” held at Carleton University, Ottawa, August 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, Arcadia and Museum of Victoria, 1998), xxvi.

<sup>20</sup> For a fuller discussion of the decision making process in Wales in this period, see Bill Jones, *“Raising the Wind”: Emigrating from Wales to the USA in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* (Cardiff: Dept. of Welsh, Cardiff University, 2004), also available on the Cardiff Centre for Welsh American Studies website:

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/cymraeg/english/welshAmerican/welshAmerican.shtml>

See also W. Ross Johnston, “The Welsh Diaspora: Emigrating around the World in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Llafur* 6, no. 2 (1993): 50-74; Anne Kelly Knowles, *Calvinists Incorporated: Welsh Immigrants in Ohio's Industrial Frontier* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), and Lesley Walker, “‘Two Jobs for Every Man’: The Emigration Decision from Wales to New South Wales, 1850-1900,” *Australian Studies* 13, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 99-118.

Scholars who have studied the relationship between information flows and the migration process in several countries are agreed that such information could itself persuade people to emigrate, or indeed not to emigrate. More often, it determined the timing of the departure and the final destination of the emigrants. There is plenty of evidence in emigrant letters and in newspaper commentaries and reports to suggest that contemporaries, including migrants themselves, regarded the letter as an important actor in the decision making process, whether for or against emigration. Writing shortly after he finally emigrated in 1851, Dafydd Shon recalled that he had wanted to emigrate for years but had found it too hard to leave Wales. Nevertheless, during that period, "*wath wath rodd hi yn mynd yn Nghymru o hyd, ac ambell i lythyr go lew o glod i Merica yn dod i'r gymdogaeth*" [it was getting worse and worse in Wales all the time, and the occasional letter full of praise for America was coming to the neighbourhood].<sup>21</sup> In March 1870 *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* drew attention to the "*ysbryd ymfudiaeth*" [the spirit of emigration] that was starting to agitate the people of Bethesda that year again. Apparently almost everyone was talking about emigration to America; several had left recently and many were intending to do so soon. "*Yr ydym yn deall* [We understand]," continued the reporter, "*fod rhai llythyrau pur addawol wedi dyfod drosodd rai o'r dyddiau diweddaf*" [that some very promising letters have come over in the last few days].<sup>22</sup> Examples of private or printed letters that advised Welsh people to stay at home are also common, though not as numerous as those that advocate emigration. In June 1865 the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian's* Merthyr correspondent issued a "Warning to Emigrants," having received "several letters from puddlers and others who left the neighbourhood for sunnier days in America, and the difficulties of procuring lucrative and constant employment is the burden of their song. Intending emigrants would do well to be guided by those who have recently paid dear for their experience."<sup>23</sup>

It is also clear that information for intending emigrants contained in letters circulated widely, as in several parts of Wales emigrant letters were handed around and routinely read in public. David Barton and Nigel Hall have argued that the writing of a letter results just as much from some family or group discussion about what needs to be said as from an individual's initiative while "even more frequently it appears, the reading of a letter is anything but a solitary activity, and may have always been so."<sup>24</sup> In his work on Scottish emigration literature in the nineteenth century, Bill Bell has suggested that "in settler society, the letter from home could function as a

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<sup>21</sup> *Seren Orllewinol* (Pottsville, PA), March and April 1851: 68, reprinted in *Y Gwladgarwr* 2, no. 60 (August 1851): 250-51.

<sup>22</sup> *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 26 March 1870.

<sup>23</sup> *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, 16 June 1865. See, also, the same newspaper, 2 July 1869.

<sup>24</sup> David Barton and Nigel Hall, "Introduction" in their edited collection *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000), 1-14, 4.

community event as well as a private mode of communication.”<sup>25</sup> The same was doubtlessly true among the Welsh overseas, but it was also true of the Welsh at home during the same period. In May 1854 the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* reported that in Merthyr information about emigration “is eagerly sought, and readily given. The letters which arrive by each mail are circulated extensively from hand to hand and house to house, and serve by their glowing contents to swell the numbers of intending emigrants.”<sup>26</sup> “When someone received a letter from America its contents were soon relayed throughout the parish,” records a history of Llanegryn parish in Merionethshire, first published in 1948.<sup>27</sup> It appears that newly arrived emigrant letters in Wales – and perhaps letters from home overseas – were sometimes the specific occasion for the convening of family gatherings. In replying to a letter from their son and daughter in America in 1831, Evan and Mariah Evans of Montgomeryshire stated that other members of the family “all met at home yesterday to hear the letter read.”<sup>28</sup> There is even evidence to suggest that in the rural areas in Britain and Ireland post office officials were asked to read out letters from emigrants.<sup>29</sup> It is apparent that in Wales in the nineteenth century, and particularly its middle years, emigrant letters occupied a complex space in the transition from a predominantly oral to an overwhelmingly written mode of mass communication. Yet that space is a complex and ambiguous one. Letters encouraged the perseverance of orality by being read publicly whilst at the same time they clearly contributed, and were shaped by, emerging literacy.

Nineteenth-century Welsh emigrant letters are also bound up with prevailing contemporary perceptions and preoccupations about the truthfulness, authenticity and reliability of the information contained in them. (The testimony included in Griffith Thomas’ letter discussed at the beginning of this address clearly illustrates this.) In particular, doubts and suspicions regarding printed letters in books, periodicals and newspapers prevailed widely. The writing and reception of Welsh emigrant letters in at least the first half of the nineteenth century must be understood in the context of a climate that privileged private letters over printed texts as a source of

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<sup>25</sup> Bell, “Crusoe’s Book,” 119. See also Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia: Shipboard Diaries by Nineteenth-Century British Emigrants* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 40-41.

<sup>26</sup> *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, 12 May 1854.

<sup>27</sup> “One old man claimed that receiving letters from overseas had been the main means by which wages were increased and the quality of food improved in Llanegryn. When someone received a letter from America its contents were soon relayed throughout the parish. There was much discussion of the wages paid to various workers and craftspeople and of the provisions which were put on the table for everyone regardless of status.” William Davies, *Hanes Plwyf Llanegryn / A History of the Parish of Llanegryn* (Peniarth: Griffith Owen Charity, 2002), 347 (in Welsh, 117-18). The work was first published in Welsh only in Liverpool by the author, 1948. In this edition the reference is on 140.

<sup>28</sup> Evan and Mariah Evans, Montgomeryshire to John and Mariah Pugh, 1831, NLW Facs. 369/39.

<sup>29</sup> See Williams Lewins, *Her Majesty’s Mails: An Historical and Descriptive Account of the British Post-Office* (London: Sampson Low, Son and Marston, 1864), 242.

information. The same thing occurred in Scotland around the same time,<sup>30</sup> although the extent to which the one was privileged over the other in Wales cannot be ascertained without greater research into the topic than has been conducted at present. As emigrant letters contained personal evidence from people known by potential emigrants, and because of this was regarded as more reliable by ordinary people, it is likely that letters had more of an influence on the decision to emigrate than did advice and data printed in guide books or newspapers. The obvious question of how effective emigrant letters were in stimulating or preventing emigration from Wales cannot be answered precisely because, ultimately, the extent of the impact of letters varied from one person to the next. Equally, answers to the question of how “truthful” letters were must similarly be inconclusive. Emigrant letters were influenced by the salient fact that their writers’ impressions were very subjective and rooted in a particular moment in time. Yet circumstances could change quickly, especially in industrial settlements, with their susceptibility to the economic cycle of boom and slump and impermanence as a result of the unpredictable quality and extent of local reserves of raw materials. Consequently what might have seemed as the “truth” to one emigrant could very soon appear to be palpable “untruths” as far as another was concerned.

This is not to deny that some Welsh writers and editors in the nineteenth century exploited personal emigrant letters that were originally intended as private communications, or even composed fictitious missives in order to follow their own particular agendas. As was true in other countries, throughout the nineteenth century there were specific Welsh attempts to use personal letters to promote Welsh settlement overseas and influence people either to emigrate or stay at home: in other words, to use the content of letters as propaganda. There is insufficient space to discuss this aspect in detail, but it is worth remembering that letters glorifying some or other part of the New World, or conversely condemning them, were one of the most characteristic features of the columns of the Welsh press at home and overseas in the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> They were also an inextricable part of the cut and thrust of the fierce debate and controversy regarding whether Welsh people should emigrate, and if so, what was the best place in which to settle. Extensive use of private correspondence was made by supporters and opponents of, for example, the campaigns to encourage Welsh people to settle in Nova Cambria in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, in the early 1850s and in Patagonia.<sup>32</sup> Private emigrant letters were also regularly published in travel books and emigrant guides. An early and celebrated example is *Newyddion Da o Wlad Bell* (1830)

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<sup>30</sup> Bell, “Crusoe’s Book,” 118-19.

<sup>31</sup> See Gareth Alban Davies, “Wales, Patagonia and the printed word: the missionary role of the press,” *Llafur* 6, no. 4 (1995): 44-59; Aled Jones and Bill Jones, *Welsh Reflections: Y Drych and America, 1851-2001* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2001), 7, 25-26.

<sup>32</sup> For Rio Grande do Sul, see, e.g., *Yr Amserau*, 9 April, 28 May 1851, 7, 21 January, 14, 31 April, 5 May 1852; *Y Cylchgrawn*, 3, no. 31 (October 1853): 307-8, and 4, no. 34 (January 1854): 310-11; *Y Diwygiwr*, 15, no. 184 (November 1850): 150-51, 19, no. 299 (October 1853): 310-11. See also Davies, “Wales, Patagonia and the printed word.”

[Good News from a Faraway Country] by John Davies, Brychan (1784[?]-1864), the Tredegar poet, publisher and promoter of friendly societies.<sup>33</sup>

In *Newyddion Da o Wlad Bell*, Brychan edited and printed letters he had received from his friend T. Williams, and J. Williams, formerly of Rhymney Ironworks and Nantyglo respectively.<sup>34</sup> Both letter writers had since become residents in Pottsville, Pennsylvania. Brychan explained that he was publishing the letters for the benefit of Welsh people who were intending to emigrate to America, or who had friends or relatives who had already gone “*i'r wlad hyfrydlawn hono, lle nad yw ei thrigolion yn gwybod ond ychydig am drais a gormes*” [to that delightful country, whose inhabitants know but little of violence and oppression].<sup>35</sup> Brychan also sent compendia of private letters praising America to the Welsh Baptist denomination's journal *Seren Gomer* [Gomer's Star] on several occasions in the 1830s to 1850s.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, the original texts of Brychan's published letters do not appear to have survived so we do not know to what extent, if at all, they were manipulated or “sexed up” by him before publication. He described his friend T. Williams as a “[*g*]wr geirwir a gwybodus, ag na fuasai, ar unrhyw gyfrif, yn halogi ei ysgrifell i fritho papyr âg anwiredd” [truthful and knowledgeable man who would not on any account defile his pen to speckle paper with lies].<sup>37</sup> However, some of Brychan's contemporaries thought he was guilty of deliberate exaggeration and even falsehood whilst the original writers of letters he sent to *Seren Gomer* in 1832 were also severely criticised: “*Y mae yn yr America ddynion yn ymhyfrydu mewn danfon anwireddau i wlad eu genedigaeth, a hynny yn unig i dywys eu cyd-genedl i'r un pydewau a hwythau*” [There are in America men who delight in sending lies to the land of their birth, and that solely in order to lead their fellow countrymen down into the same pits they themselves inhabit].<sup>38</sup> In March 1872 James Walter Price of Hyde Park, Pennsylvania, went so far as to conclude that half the things that were being written from the USA to Wales were lies.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> John Davies (Brychan), *Newyddion Da o Wlad Bell; Sef Crynodeb o Lythyrâu Oddiworth T. Williams, gynt o Waith Haiarn Rymni a J. Williams, o Nantyglo, o Pottsville yn Mhensylwania, Gogledd America, at eu Cyfeillion yng Nghymru* (Merthyr Tydfil: the author, 1830). For biog. details, see *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography Down to 1940* (London: Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1959), 134.

<sup>34</sup> Brychan's diaries reveal that one thousand copies of the work were printed and also contain some information on how he paid for printing costs and distributed copies. See entries for 3 and 5 April 1830, *Dyddiaduron Brychan* vol. 1, Cardiff MS 3.512, Cardiff Central Library [hereafter CCL]. For a discussion of Brychan's promotion of emigration, see Sian Rhiannon Williams, *Oes y Byd i'r Iaith Gymraeg: Y Gymraeg yn Ardal Ddiwydiannol Sir Fynwy yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 23-24.

<sup>35</sup> Davies, *Newyddion Da o Wlad Bell*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., *Seren Gomer*, 14, no. 191 (August 1831): 243-44, 15, no. 201 (June 1832): 168-71, no. 202 (July 1832): 209-10, no. 203 (August 1832): 238, 39, no. 491 (August 1856): 382-83. See also *Dyddiaduron Brychan*, vol. 4, 8 July 1856, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

<sup>37</sup> Davies, *Newyddion Da o Wlad Bell*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Williams, Pittsborough, formerly of Llangynog, Montgomeryshire, to Isaac Jones, Tan y Graig, Llangynog, 2 November 1832, published in *Y Gwyllyddydd*, March 1833.

<sup>39</sup> James Walter Price to Thomas Price, Wernefigaid, 25 March 1872, NLW MS 20028B.

Certainly the chief purpose of some of the letters presented in published form was to mislead. Yet I would not agree fully with those scholars, for example Charlotte Erickson in her work on letters from English and Scots emigrants in the USA, who consider printed letters as an unreliable source. Along with David Gerber,<sup>40</sup> I would argue that in many respects the differences between printed and manuscript letters have been overdone.<sup>41</sup> Some scholars have adopted the term “America letter” to denote letters that were for the most part produced for the community and in order to supply general information. In contrast, those letters that were written only for private relationships and were a means of maintaining emotional ties have been termed the “familiar letter.” But as was seen in the case of Griffith Thomas’ letter, in practical terms it is difficult to distinguish between the two forms of letter. To suggest that personal manuscript letters belonged solely to a private sphere misses key aspects of the ways in which printed emigrant letters also demonstrate the blurring between public and private spheres. The emigrant letters that can be found in most Welsh newspapers and periodicals of the period include ones Welsh emigrants wrote directly to the press, sometimes apparently in response to requests to do so by certain editors. They also include a large number of examples of initially private letters sent for publication by the recipients or other intermediaries, as we might call them, in Wales – relatives, friends, ministers of religions, former fellow workers – either with or without the original writers’ permission. There are examples of letters written to a wide range of recipients: one or both parents, spouses, children, close family members and friends, and these letters sometimes contain requests that the letters be sent for publication. In just the same way as private letters were experienced communally through being read and passed around, the printing of emigrant letters in the press complicates neat categorisations of “private” and “public” as far as these two main types of emigrant letters are concerned. Further, I have argued elsewhere that the emigrant letters that appeared in late nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals in Wales are multi-layered texts, shaped by social, cultural and religious considerations and, crucially, by the development of print culture. Through acquiring a public audience, these published letters represent the desire to maintain personal links and relationships with a wider circle of friends, former neighbours and acquaintances, and the notion of an international Welsh cultural and religious community.<sup>42</sup>

The processes of emigration from Wales are only one of many contexts that need to be considered if we are to understand in depth the complexity of

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<sup>40</sup> Gerber, “Epistolary Ethics,” 10.

<sup>41</sup> I explore this further in my “‘Going into print’: published immigrant letters, webs of personal relations, and the emergence of the Welsh public sphere,” in Elliott, Gerber and Sinke, *Letters Across Borders*.

<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*

nineteenth-century Welsh emigrant correspondence and its significance. The letters, their history, production and reception, intersected with, contributed to and were shaped by key contemporaneous developments. These include the conspicuous increase in literacy, the emergence of mass print culture, and the expansion of the postal service and of reading and letter-writing in general as social and cultural practices together with the growth of instructional literature devoted to these pursuits.<sup>43</sup> Welsh emigration publicists like Revd. Robert D. Thomas (Iorthryn Gwynedd), author of *Hanes Cymry America*,<sup>44</sup> urged emigrants not to forget their relatives in Wales. “Ysgrifennwch atynt yn aml” [Write to them often], he counselled in his 1854 guide book *Yr Ymfudwr* [The Emigrant], “ac os gellwch, cynnorthwywch hwynt i ymfudo atoch” [and if you can, help them to emigrate and join you].<sup>45</sup> From the middle years of the nineteenth century onwards, monolingual Welsh and English and bilingual handbooks and manuals for letter-writers became more common and widely available in Wales, for example, *Duoglot Letter-Writer. Llythyrydd Dwyieithog* (1848), William Harris’ *Yr Athrawydd Parod*, first published in Tredegar in 1849, and *Humphreys’ English-Welsh Letter writer. Llythyrydd Saesoneg a Chymraeg H. Humphreys* (1860).<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that many *eisteddfod* programmes of the second half of the nineteenth century included letter-writing competitions. The growth of this literature mirrored a similar and contemporaneous expansion and growth in the popularity of manuals in Europe, America and Australia generally.<sup>47</sup> It is intriguing to find in the Welsh publications an awareness of hypothetical situations arising from migration. Humphreys’ letter-writing manual contains a sample of a letter from a young woman who had just gone to service in England to her mother in Wales.<sup>48</sup> The bilingual *The universal letter writer; or art of polite correspondence: consisting of original letters on every occurrence in life, written in a familiar style, adapted to both sexes* published by T. Price, Merthyr, in 1840 contains a sample letter to a brother-in-law abroad.<sup>49</sup> Training on how to write letters as well as

<sup>43</sup> See Barton and Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*; Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau and Cécile Dauphin, *Correspondence: Models of Letter-writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Christopher Woodall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) esp. Chartier, “Introduction”, 1-23, and Dauphin, “Letter-Writing Manuals in the Nineteenth Century,” 112-57; and David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>44</sup> See note 4.

<sup>45</sup> Robert D. Thomas (Iorthryn Gwynedd), *Emigration: Yr Ymfudwr; Yn Cynnwys Hanes America ac Australia yn nghyda Phob Hyfforddiadau i Ymfudwyr* (Newtown, 1854), 116.

<sup>46</sup> *Duoglot Letter-Writer. Llythyrydd Dwyieithog* (Llanrwst: John Jones, 1848); William Harris, *Yr Athrawydd Parod: Sef Hyfforddydd i Ddarllen i Ysgrifenu, ac i Ddarllen Llaw-ysgrifenu cyn Medru Ysgrifenu* (Wrexham: R. Hughes, [1862], first edition Tredegar 1849); *Humphreys’ English-Welsh Letter writer. Llythyrydd Saesoneg a Chymraeg H. Humphreys* (Caernarfon: H. Humphreys, 1860).

<sup>47</sup> See the useful discussions in Konstantin Dierks, “The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750-1800,” in Barton and Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, 31-41, and Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 495-502.

<sup>48</sup> *Humphreys’ English-Welsh Letter writer*, 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> *The Universal Letter Writer; or, Art of Polite Correspondence: Consisting of Original Letters on Every Occurrence in Life, Written in a Familiar Style, Adapted to Both Sexes. Y Llythyrydd Cyffredinol, neu'r Gelfyddyd o Ohebiaethu yn Foneddigaidd: yn cynnwys Llythyrau Gwreiddiol ar*

information about the postal system in America was included in the handbooks that the Welsh American newspaper *Y Drych* [The Mirror] gave free to subscribers, such as *Yr Athrawydd Parod* [The Ready Teacher] (1860) and *Y Trysor Teuluaidd* [The Family's Treasure] (1877).<sup>50</sup> As a warning to us not to neglect the stylistic and formulaic nature and the conventionality of letters, *Yr Athrawydd Parod* urged letter writers to “*Gocheler unffurfiaeth*” [Beware of uniformity]:

*Ond odid nad rhywbeth yn debyg i hyn y bydd rhai yn dechreu eu llythyrau bob amser: “Annwyl Gyfaill: Yr wyf yn cymeryd y cyfleusdra hwn i ysgrifenu atoch, gan obeithio eich bod yn iach, fel yr wyf finau yn bresenol. Diolch i Dduw am hyny”, etc.*

[Is it not something like this that some start their letters every time: “Dear Friend: I am taking this opportunity to write to you, in the hope that you are well, as I am at present. Thanks be to the Lord,” etc.]<sup>51</sup>

In what might be regarded as an act of self-denial, perhaps, the guide went on to maintain that some people relied too much on letter writing manuals:

*Cofier mai nid i arbed llafur ac amser y bwriedir y llyfrau hyn, drwy gynysgaeddu gohebwyrr â geiriau penodol, wedi eu cyfleu yn drefnus at eich gwwasanaeth, mewn gwahanol amgylchiadau; ond yn hytrach fel esiamplau o’r hyn a ddylai llythyrau fod. Mae yn rhaid i chwi ysgrifenu llythyrau “o’ch penau eich hunain;” oblegid nis gellwch ddysgwyl fod awdwyr Llyfr Llythyrau yn hysbys o amgylchiadau pawb, nac felly yn alluog i gyfansoddi llythyrau yn y fath fodd ag i ateb i’w hangenion’.*

[Remember that these books are not intended to save work and time, by providing correspondents with appropriate words organised in an orderly manner for your use in different circumstances; but rather as examples of how letters should be written. You must write letters from your own point of view because you cannot expect authors of Letter Books to know everyone’s circumstances, nor be able to compose letters in such a way as to suit everyone’s needs.]<sup>52</sup>

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*Bob Amgylchiad mewn Bywyd, wedi eu Hysgrifenu mewn Dull Cyfeillgar, ac wedi eu Haddasu i Bob Gradd a Rhyw* (Merthyr Tydfil: printed T. Price, 1840), 100 (English), 101 (Welsh).

<sup>50</sup> J. William Jones, *Yr Athrawydd Parod: Sef Hyfforddydd Anffaeledig i Ddarllen ac Ysgrifenu Cymraeg yn nghyda Rheolau Barddoniaeth Gymreig ac Elfenau Rhifyddiaeth* (Utica: Davies and Griffiths, 1860); J. C. Roberts (ed.), *Y Trysor Teuluaidd, neu Miloedd o Bethau Gwerth eu Gwybod, Yn Cynnwys Elfenau Gramadeg, Meddygiaeth, Amaethyddiaeth, Cogiaeth etc. Gwybodaeth Wleidyddol, Cyfarwyddiadau Cyfreithiol, Rheolau i Ohebwyrr, Trefniadau y Llythyrdy, Tablau Rhifyddol, Cynllun o Ddwnediaeth ac ati yng nghyda Lluaws o Ystadegau Gwerthfawr* (Utica: T. J. Griffiths, 1877). See also Jones and Jones, *Welsh Reflections*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> Roberts, *Y Trysor Teuluaidd*, 53.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, *Y Trysor Teuluaidd*, 53-54.

One might be tempted to conclude that far too many letter writers were relying on manuals if one considers the frequency with which variations of this same standard opening sentence occurred in Welsh letters or, indeed, if the following testimony has any substance. The perceived problem was addressed directly in a written adjudication on competitions for writing a love letter and a letter from a son to a father in an *eisteddfod* in Llwynypia, Rhondda, in 1879. The adjudicator maintained that

*ei bod yn llawn bryd cael rhwy ffurf i ddechreu llythyr heblaw yr hen frawddeg gynddiluwaidd "Wele fi yn ysgrifenu ychydig linellau atoch, gan obeithio eich bod yn iach fel yr ag wyf fi yn y bresenol". Nid ffol o beth fyddai i ryw stationer gael yr hen frawddeg wedi ei argraffu ar y papyr ysgrifenu. Byddai yn sicr o wneud ffortwn trwy hyn, am fod myrddiynau yn defnyddio yr hen frawddeg fendigedig bob blwyddyn.*

[it is high time we had some way of starting a letter other than with the antediluvian sentence "Here I am writing you a few lines in the hope that you are well as I am at present." It would not be a bad idea for some stationer to make notepaper with that old sentence pre-printed on it. The stationer would be sure to make a fortune out of it, because a very large number use this blessed sentence every year.]<sup>53</sup>

The widespread, even near universal, Welsh usage of this and other formulaic openings and endings has striking parallels with the correspondence of emigrants of other nationalities. Schrier believes the phrase that so exercised the Llwynypia adjudicator characterised the great majority of the letters of Irish emigrants to America he had examined.<sup>54</sup> In her work on the letters of the Clift Family of Cornwall in the 1790s, Frances Austin found that all family members as well as incidental correspondents used this phrase and variations upon it. She suggests that the probable reason for their survival following their first appearance in letter writing manuals in the medieval period is that they were passed down by family tradition.<sup>55</sup> Much more research, including detailed comparisons between manuals and letters, is needed before we can confidently draw conclusions about the extent to which Welsh manuals in both Welsh and English influenced the way nineteenth-century Welsh emigrants wrote letters, and possible variations in the ways the two languages had an impact. I raise the issue in a preliminary way here in order to emphasise that without a consideration of it, we will miss a crucial dimension of nineteenth-century Welsh emigrant correspondence as a social practice.

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<sup>53</sup> *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 21 March 1879.

<sup>54</sup> Schrier, *Ireland and the American Immigration*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Frances Austin, "Letter Writing in a Cornish Community in the 1790s," in Barton and Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, 43-61, 52-54.

As numerous scholars have emphasised, the writing and receiving of letters was a high priority for those emigrants who engaged in correspondence.<sup>56</sup> Without denying the importance of emigrant letters in any way, however, we should be careful not to exaggerate and over-romanticise their significance to all Welsh emigrants and to the Welsh emigration process. Undoubtedly they have immense importance as the only practical method of keeping in touch with relatives, friends and neighbours back in the Old Country. Yet letters also had certain limitations that undermined their effectiveness in these regards. Not every emigrant from Wales wrote a letter; not everyone could. Some emigrants wrote only very occasionally and the number who wrote regularly was perhaps smaller still. Further, the importance attached to the act of writing to people on either side of the Atlantic varied from family to family and changed over time. For so many families, one of the most intense consequences of emigration was disintegration, that is, creating the situation in which connections with family and friends were broken (as we saw in the case of Griffith Thomas earlier). There were also other important elements to the process of maintaining correspondence that could complicate matters and even restrict the letter's effectiveness in keeping families together and keeping friendships alive. As Richard Broome has written, "if letters were 'chains' that bound distant kith and kin, they were often fragile or poor links."<sup>57</sup> These problems, and how emigrants sought to surmount them – in the event that they chose to do so, of course – were also unavoidable components of the social practice of writing and receiving emigrant letters in the Welsh transnational world of the nineteenth century.

To begin with, not every Welsh person in nineteenth-century Wales could write, especially in the earlier part of the century, although as already mentioned, the number of people in Wales who could read and write increased during the course of the century. Yet illiteracy may not have been as significant a limitation as might appear,<sup>58</sup> especially if we bear in mind the often communal nature of letter writing during the nineteenth century, as we have seen, and the problematic nature of defining literacy in the nineteenth century, as numerous scholars have cautioned.<sup>59</sup> Even so, if complete illiterates wished to maintain links they had to find someone to write on their behalf. In some cases, literate members of the family performed the task. Other help was often available locally, both in Wales itself and overseas, in

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<sup>56</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Broome, *Arriving*, 37.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Hassam has suggested that the lower survival rate of shipboard diaries kept by working class emigrants to Australia in the nineteenth century may not be due as much to lower levels of literacy as might appear at first sight. Levels of literacy among assisted passengers to Australia in the 1850s were 81% for Scots, 72% for English and Welsh and 49% for Irish. Hassam, *Sailing to Australia*, 12-13. The same conclusion might reasonably be made in the case of nineteenth-century Welsh working class emigrant letters.

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., Austin, "Letter Writing in a Cornish Community"; Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*.

the form of people who acted as amanuenses, people such as James Rice, as we have already seen, and also John Davies (Brychan) of Tredegar. Davies' diaries offer intriguing glimpses into this phenomenon, although unfortunately they do not include any copies of the letters nor any musings on how to write letters for others or clues as to how far and in what ways he may have influenced composition. From the 1830's to the 1850's, the diaries contain several references to his writing letters to Welsh emigrants in the USA on behalf of others. For example, writing on the part of Thomas Stradling to his brother, John, in Philadelphia in December 1844, the latter having emigrated from Tredegar with his family in 1835,<sup>60</sup> or on behalf of Miss Ann Miller of Tredegar in Welsh to John Maxey, a miner in Carbondale, Pennsylvania, on 12 February 1833.<sup>61</sup> More than once in this period he wrote letters on behalf of the person he recorded only as "Llywellyn Williams' daughter," to her husband, Ben Davies, also in Carbondale.<sup>62</sup> Brychan describes some of the letters he wrote as long ones, although it is not known what length "long" would be in these cases.<sup>63</sup> His entry for 28 December 1856, in which he noted that he had written a letter for Gwallter Miles to his son in Australia, also recorded that he was suffering weariness in his arm.<sup>64</sup> Some of the letters Brychan wrote must have been difficult ones, such as writing on behalf his friend, Thomas Edwards, to the person in Australia who had sent back word of the death there of Edwards' son four months earlier.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, the diaries contain no references to payment for this work, but it is hard to believe that in every case Brychan was merely doing favours for friends or neighbours. He acted as what one might call a cultural emigration agent, as he also composed poetry for people to send to America. On 24 December 1856, for example, he composed some verses to be sent in a letter to Mr Elias Edwards in America at the request of the latter's sister, Mrs Ann Aubrey of Tredegar.<sup>66</sup>

Other correspondents who possessed some literacy skills strove to compose letters on their own. The standard of literacy in the surviving Welsh letters I have seen varies greatly according to the training and education of the writers, as one would expect, whilst in some cases the authors' struggles to express themselves are almost painfully apparent to later readers. There are frequent references to frustrations at not being able to put their meaning into words, and apologies for frequent errors: "*Nid ydym yn gwybod ai yn ddigon medrus i osod ein meddylau mewn modd cymmwys*" [We do not know if we are clever enough to put down our thoughts in a suitable way], wrote Titus Davis of Newark, Ohio, to his uncle in Wales in August 1863, "*ond gobeithio y*

<sup>60</sup> Dyddiaduron Brychan vol. 2, 24 April 1835, vol. 1, 21 Dec. 1844, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

<sup>61</sup> Dyddiaduron Brychan vol. 1, 12 February 1833, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

<sup>62</sup> See, e.g., Dyddiaduron Brychan vol. 2, 22 January 1835, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

<sup>63</sup> Dyddiaduron Brychan vol. 2, 15 January 1834, 26 January 1835, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

<sup>64</sup> Dyddiaduron Brychan, vol. 4, 28 December 1856, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

<sup>65</sup> Dyddiaduron Brychan, vol. 4, 9, 17 April 1856, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

<sup>66</sup> Dyddiaduron Brychan, vol. 4, adjacent to entries for 1 – 6 February 1857, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

*gwnewch ddeall yr hyn a ysgrifenaf atoch*" [but I hope you will understand what I write to you].<sup>67</sup> "I am not in any mood for writing letters," insisted Annie Williams of Milwaukee to her cousin Peter in Tregaron in 1891, "yet I will try and do my best all faults I hope you will be overlooked and consider it is natural for me to make blunders."<sup>68</sup> And yet, surviving letters are also full of fresh and earthy writing, and flashes of humour, comparable to what Arnold Schrier has called "unlettered eloquence."<sup>69</sup> The efforts of David J. Morgan of Providence, Pennsylvania, in 1870 to describe to his mother some phrases he had discovered were in everyday usage in the USA seems to me to illustrate this particular quality well. A minimum amount of punctuation has been inserted into the English-language translation that follows in order to facilitate reading:

*Gair hynod iw y Guess yma i guess i will Neu i Guess Not Mae nw yn Geso  
bob gair bron a dyma air rhyfedd etto fel be bawn i yn Mofin i chwi i ysgrifenu  
yn ol yn gwmws nawr fel hyn mae nw yn ddweid ysgrifenu yn ol  
rightaway Neu fel hyn y ddywedan nw Dere yma rightaway Neu cere right-  
away ag etto dyma air arall i will go now anay-way ... ac fi af fi rhywffordd  
neu rhywfodd wn ddim gallaf eich dod i ddeall hwn neu beidio a pan y  
byddwn yn dweud rhywbeth y y meddw nw own i yn Meddwl Mai Mocan ni  
on nw ar y cyntaf ond nawr wif yn dod iw ei arfer fyn hunan pan bo nw yn  
dweud rhywbeth y y Meddwn i phan bo un yn dweud hefyd ar ateb yn dyfod  
fel i ni yn Dweud yna ie dyna fe Wel Dyma yr ateb yma that So Neu that So  
Sir*

[This Guess is a remarkable word, I guess I will Or I Guess Not[.] They guess nearly every word, almost, and here's another strange word as if I was Asking you to write back exactly as I'm doing now they say write back rightaway[.] Or they say like this Come here rightaway Or go rightaway and here's another word again I will go now anyway ... [meaning] and I'll go some way[.] I don't know if I can make you understand this or not[;] and when I'd say something[,], uh huh they'd say[.] I Thought they Were Mocking me at first but now I've got used to doing it myself[;] when they say something[,], uh huh I say[;] when someone speaks also and the answer comes as we say there [in Wales] yes that's it Well the answer here is that So Or that So Sir.]<sup>70</sup>

Intriguingly, Morgan switched to Welsh in an otherwise English-language letter, reminding us of the richness of some emigrant letters as a source for

<sup>67</sup> Titus Davis, Newark, Ohio, to his uncle, 6 August 1863, NLW MS 3367E.

<sup>68</sup> Annie Williams, Milwaukee, to Peter and Elizabeth Williams, Tregaron, 25 May 1891, NLW MS 12290C.

<sup>69</sup> Schrier, *Ireland and the American Immigration*, 24. He noted that apart from the stilted openings, the great majority of Irish letters were almost conversational in tone. Fitzpatrick has described the way in which Irish writers addressed each other as being "ceremonious – formal, yet seldom stilted; formulaic, yet not perfunctory." *Oceans of Consolation*, 467.

<sup>70</sup> David J. Morgan, Providence, Pa., to his mother, 17 August 1870, NLW MS 17441E.

studying not only language change among the Welsh outside Wales but also patterns of language use in Wales itself. As well as letters in which writers used both Welsh and English, and in some cases revealing that their command of Welsh was more accomplished than that of English, surviving sequences of letters reveal that emigrants sometimes varied their use of Welsh and English depending on the family member(s) to whom they wrote.<sup>71</sup>

Andrew Hassam has argued that “the act of writing and the act of receiving [letters] were equal aspects of a process of communication which also involved the act of mailing.”<sup>72</sup> In a similar vein, Fitzpatrick argues that Irish-Australian discourse and what he calls “Ceremonies of Communication” cannot be understood without analysing the organisation of postage.<sup>73</sup> It would be wise, therefore, to consider the impact of international postal arrangements in the nineteenth century as being central rather than incidental to the history of Welsh emigrant letters. Time spent waiting for letters was an integral part of emigrant correspondence. Although the Penny Postage was introduced in Britain in 1840, decades passed before overseas mail services to the USA were standardised.<sup>74</sup> Postal services to Australia and Patagonia were even more infrequent.<sup>75</sup> Letters took weeks to arrive: for example, a letter sent from Pottsville, Pennsylvania, to Caerphilly in Wales in 1846 and one from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to Aberdare in 1860 each took three weeks to reach their destinations; one sent from Cincinnati to Aberystwyth in 1881 took a fortnight.<sup>76</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the most common features of Welsh emigrant letters in both Welsh and English is the references to letters that appeared to have been lost, to precise information when letters had been sent and received and how long letters had taken to reach recipients.<sup>77</sup>

That so many letters reached their destinations at all appears miraculous. One finds several references in the press to letters that had gone

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<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., letters of Jack Edwards, Cincinnati, to various members of his family in Wales in the 1880’s, NLW MS 20995.

<sup>72</sup> Hassam, *Sailing to Australia*, 43.

<sup>73</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 467-502.

<sup>74</sup> See Lewins, *Her Majesty’s Mails*, 172-73, 176-84, 245-54 and (for regulations regarding overseas mail in the 1860s), 312-14; Charles Wilkins, *The Official Hand-Book and General Postal Guide for Merthyr Tydfil* (Merthyr: Merthyr Express, printer, 1873); Charles Browne, *Getting the Message: The Story of the British Post Office* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1993), 111-16; M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Athlone Press, 1985), 146-90; Howard Robinson, *Carrying British Mails Overseas* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964); Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, 32-49.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of mails between Ireland and Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 467-72.

<sup>76</sup> See, e.g., William & Rees Thomas to their parents, Daniel and Mary Thomas, Caerphilly, 21 August 1846, D/DX fq 37, Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff; Thomas Walters, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to his brother, 9 March 1860, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL; Jack Edwards, Cincinnati, to his sisters, 25 July 1881, NLW MS 20995.

<sup>77</sup> For context, see the discussions in Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 473-82, 485-95; Gerber, “Epistolary Ethics,” 12.

astray.<sup>78</sup> Likewise to letters that had been sent to incorrect addresses. The newspaper *Seren Cymru* [Star of Wales] reported on 24 August 1866 that it had received a letter from America that had been addressed to a Mr John Morris, Chancery Lane, Mountain Ash, Glamorganshire. Apparently the letter had been opened by – hard though it is to believe – the only John Morris in the area, but it had not been intended for him.<sup>79</sup> “Mind when you write next time to put Carmarthenshire on the address”, advised Mary Davies of Cynnwyl Elfed in May 1895, in a letter to her son, William Edward Davies, in America.<sup>80</sup> According to Williams Lewins in *Her Majesty's Mails: An Historical and Descriptive Account of the British Post Office* (1864), one of that organisation's biggest challenges was the high number of illegible, misspelled, misdirected or insufficiently addressed letters. In 1863, during which the Post Office handled 642 million letters, its “Dead Letter Office” employed fifty persons and returned to senders “considerably over” two million letters, three quarters of them ones that were insufficiently or incorrectly addressed. Nearly 11,000 of the returned letters or packets had no address on them at all.<sup>81</sup> Nor was it only a matter of entering wrong or incomplete addresses, or no addresses at all. In the 1860's, the Merthyr Tydfil Post Office displayed a notice containing advice on where on the envelope to put the stamp. Apparently some correspondents were putting the stamp on the other corner to the address, but in so doing were forgetting, as the *Merthyr Telegraph* put it in an item entitled “How to address a letter,” that “where the head of the queen goes, the obliterating stamp must follow.”<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, press columns also carried remarkable stories of letters being delivered correctly even with minimal details on the addressee.

One way of combating the vagaries of the postal system, especially in the early decades of the nineteenth century, was to entrust conveyance of letters in the hands of emigrants or visitors as they left Wales for America, or in the case of the USA to return visitors or returning emigrants. Brychan's diaries also include references to this mode. When John Stradling and his wife left Tredegar for Philadelphia in 1835 they took with them not only five children but also one of Brychan's letters to his uncle, J. Lewis, in Utica.<sup>83</sup>

Not for nothing, then, in their letters, did emigrants fervently hope that their epistles would travel speedily and safely, and entreat their recipients to respond promptly. Thus Thomas and Catherine Walters, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in July 1856:

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<sup>78</sup> See, e.g., Evan and Rachel Lewis, Bridgend, to their daughter-in-law, Jane Lewis, Danbury, Conn., 28 [July] 1845, NLW MS 16098C.

<sup>79</sup> *Seren Cymru*, 24 August 1866. For a similar story, see *Merthyr Express*, 19 February 1870.

<sup>80</sup> Mary Davies to Edward Davies, 22 May 1895, NLW Facs. 369/23.

<sup>81</sup> Lewins, *Her Majesty's Mails*, 187, 204-12.

<sup>82</sup> *Merthyr Telegraph*, 8 September 1860. For similar advice, see Jones, *Yr Athrawydd Parod*, 35-36.

<sup>83</sup> *Dyddiaduron Brychan*, vol. 2, 24 April 1835, Cardiff MS 3.512, CCL.

*Fi anwil Frawd Rwy yn dymyno y daw yr llinellai hyn yn saff tros y moroedd mawrion eang cyn bo hir y dir eich gwlad, a phan derbynwch hin o leiniau ymwnwch ei hateb yn yr ôl. Mewn ciflimder mwia cyflim carem ni cael un yn nol.*

[My dear Brother I desire that these lines will have come safely over the great seas to your country before long, and that when you receive them that you will reply. We would like to have one back in the fastest possible speed].

*“Halwch yn nol mor ginted y ceuoch y llithir hwn”* [write back as soon as you get this letter], pleaded the same writer four years later.<sup>84</sup>

As the Welsh proverb puts it, *“hir pob aros”* [every waiting is long], whether that period of expectancy and anxiety was in Wales or in the countries where the Welsh had settled. Some emigrants and relatives and friends back in Wales had to wait longer than others. If references to letters that went missing, and appeals to answer quickly are salient features of Welsh emigrant letters, then so too are complaints that immediate family members, relatives or friends were not answering letters quickly enough, and apologies for delays before writing or replying. In a long and detailed letter to his brother in Bala in 1841, John Burgess, Toronto, complained that no-one in the family wrote to him; they said they did not have time to write.<sup>85</sup> *“A ydynt oll yn fyw?”* [Are they all alive?] asked Isaac D. Williams, of St. Clair, Pennsylvania, in July 1863, whilst making the same point in a letter to his brother and sister.<sup>86</sup> According to Titus Davies, also in 1863: *“Nid wyf wedi cael dim hanes o Gymru er is llawer blwyddyn ac fe gariwn gael rhyw fwndel mawr o newyddion bellach da chwi cofiwch am danom”* [I have not had any news from Wales for several years and I would love to have a large bundle of news now for goodness sake remember about us].<sup>87</sup> And from another perspective, here is Annie Williams of Milwaukee once more:

This is not the date I intended this letter to be started in, but for some reason or other time has flew and here it is nearly spring over and Summer here and I cant say that I have done one half that I ought to have done, but no use building Castles in the Air they surely come down.<sup>88</sup>

Expressing sentiments that regularly appeared in letters, in 1886 Revd. David

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas Walters, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to his brother, [?] July 1856, 12 March 1860, Cardiff MS 2.786, CCL.

<sup>85</sup> John Burgess, Toronto, to his brother, James Burgess, Maesafallen, Bala, 1841, NLW Facs 369/13.

<sup>86</sup> Isaac D. Williams, St. Clair, Pa., to his brother and sister, 31 July 1863, NLW MS 22436D.

<sup>87</sup> Titus Davis, Newark, Ohio, to his uncle, 6 August 1863, NLW MS 3367E.

<sup>88</sup> Annie Williams, Milwaukee, to Peter and Elizabeth Williams, Tregaron, 25 May 1891, NLW MS 12290C.

Davies of Nelson Flats, New York, reassured a friend in Wales to whom he had not written for two years that even though he had not been in touch for so long, he had not forgotten him.<sup>89</sup> Other Welsh migrants wrote regularly, even if they felt they did not have anything to say. In this case the act of writing and sending a letter was at least as important to emigrants and their families and friends back in Wales as was the content of the letters if not more so.<sup>90</sup> "Nothing of importance has occurred since my last letter to you," said Jack Edwards of Cincinnati in a letter to his sisters in Wales in March 1883, "so I simply write for the sake of writing."<sup>91</sup>

Whilst in the USA for a few months in 1876-77, the Welsh poet Richard Davies (Mynyddog) (1833-1877), from Llanbryn-mair,<sup>92</sup> got the impression that there was a good deal of apathy and negligence in several respects regarding writing back to Wales. Some emigrants with whom he had apparently conversed confessed that they had not written to their parents or other relatives, including those who had helped them to emigrate, for five or even ten years. They had omitted to do so even though they had received several letters from home in the meantime. In an article entitled "*Ysgrifenu i'r Hen Wlad*" [Writing to the Old County], composed whilst he was in the USA, Mynyddog felt it necessary to appeal to the Welsh who had been living there for several years to make

*[p]enderfyniad a rheol i ysgrifennu, dyweder bob mis, neu ddau neu dri, a daw y peth yn eithaf rhwydd a didrafferth i chwi. Synai llawer o honoch y llawenydd sydd ar lawer aelwyd yn Nghymru pan ddaw y postman a llythyr ag amlen felen a stamp y Talaethau Unedig arno i'r tŷ. O! y fath orfoledd sydd yn mynwes yr hen wraig, a'r fath ffrwd o sirioldeb sydd yn neidio i wyneb yr hen wr wrth gael gair oddiwrth John, neu pan wedi cael darlun Jane, o'r Merica! Y mae llawer o'r rhieni serchog hyn yn meddwl cymmaint o'r llythyrau a dderbyniant, ac yn eu prisio mor uchel fel y cedwir hwynt yn y fan goreu yn y tŷ; ac yr edrychir arnynt trwy ddagrau lawer gwaith yn y dydd.*

[it a rule a to write, say every month or two or three, and the thing will come pretty easily without any bother. Many of you will be astounded by the delight felt in many homes in Wales when the postman delivers a letter with an American stamp on it. Oh, what rejoicing is in the old woman's breast, and oh what a stream of joy pours over the old man's

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<sup>89</sup> Revd. David Davies, Nelson Flats, New York, to Morgan Evans, Oakford, Cardiganshire, 19 August 1886, NLW MS 14287B.

<sup>90</sup> Broome argues that "the contact symbolised by the letters was far more important than the news they contained." Broome, *Arriving*, 36.

<sup>91</sup> Jack Edwards, Cincinnati, to his sisters, 12 March 1883, NLW MS 20995.

<sup>92</sup> Mynyddog went to the USA in a vain attempt to improve his health. He died in July 1877, shortly after his return to Wales, aged 44. For biog. details, see D. E. E., "Notable Men of Wales: Mynyddog," *Red Dragon* 4 (July-December 1883): 1-7; J. M. Edwards, *Ceirion a Mynyddog* (Wrexham: Hughes a'i Fab, 1912); T. R. Roberts, *Mynyddog: Ei Fywyd a'i Waith* (Gee: Denbeigh, 1909).

face at receiving word from John, or a picture of Jane from America! Many of these loving parents think so much of the letters they receive and value them so highly that they keep them in the best place in the house and tearfully look at them several times a day.]

Mynyddog claimed he knew of a mother in Wales who had three sons doing well in America, but not one of them had written to her for two years. She apparently went out into the street every morning, whatever the weather, to await the postman, only to receive not a letter but heartbreaking disappointment every time.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps this story is a fictional one, or a reporting of what we might today call an “urban myth.” It is worth noting, however, that a similar episode was related in the *Merthyr Telegraph* in August 1857.<sup>94</sup> Who knows how many mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, conducted themselves in the manner portrayed by Mynyddog and the anonymous *Merthyr Telegraph* reporter? Certainly the attitude of one other nineteenth-century mother was completely different. In response to the complaint of her son, living in Sandridge, Australia, in the Victorian goldfields, that she did not write him many letters, Gaynor Edwards of Criccieth, in a Welsh-language letter of February 1863, replied coolly that she sent as many letters as he did, so if he wrote more, so would she. In the same letter, this enterprising mother sent him a picture of Criccieth Castle, explaining that she hoped it would instil in him enough *hiraeth* that he simply had to return home.<sup>95</sup>

The types of salutations and sentiments from which I have quoted extensively in this address, and which are apparent in the Griffith Thomas letter I discussed at the beginning, have a fundamental function and significance. The slant of scholarly writing on emigrant letters as a genre has changed over time. At one time scholars ignored the form and language of letters and the personal material within them such as apologies for delayed replies, poor handwriting and spelling and having to rush in order to finish in time for the post, their references to mailing arrangements and even their family news. Such scholars maintained that these were marginal and of little value and interest compared to the factual material in the letters, whilst editors of collections often excised them from the published extracts.<sup>96</sup> So, too, did Conway in his collection of Welsh-American letters, stating that he had

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<sup>93</sup> *Y Drych*, 15 February 1877; *Y Gwilydydd*, 16 March 1877.

<sup>94</sup> *Merthyr Telegraph*, 29 August 1857. The item concerned an old woman who for several months had “bored, teased and blowed up” her postman and “day after day ... pounced upon him unexpectedly; came up to him deliberately; accosted him sometimes with gravity, at other times kindly, as if a ray of sunshine stealing over a rugged face would touch the feelings, by some cabalistic means attract a letter from his ample store.”

<sup>95</sup> Gaynor Edwards, Criccieth, to her son, 23 February 1863, NLW Facs. 369/2.

<sup>96</sup> Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants*, 9. See also the discussion in Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 20-21, and Gerber, “Immigrant Letter between Positivism and Populism,” and “Epistolary Ethics,” 8-9.

excluded “dross” such as “personal inquiries, condolences, salutations, and endearments” as well as the “flowery passages of those who seemed unable to refrain from demonstrating their bardic potentialities.”<sup>97</sup> However, the work of scholars like Fitzpatrick on Irish-Australian correspondence and David Gerber on that of English, Scots and Irish Protestant emigrants to the USA has critically revised this approach. As David Fitzpatrick has recently shown in *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia*, a collection whose scale of achievement both awes and humbles other scholars working on emigrant letters, these “epistolary forms” had a “consolatory function,” to reassure readers that familial solidarity was intact.<sup>98</sup> That such a purpose is relevant also to Welsh emigrant letters, and might just as easily apply to family at home as to emigrants themselves, is suggested by the words of Evan and Rachel Lewis of Bridgend to their daughter in Connecticut in 1844: “We received your letter with great joy and were glad to have the consolatory intelligence that were in it.”<sup>99</sup> Fitzpatrick rightly emphasises the need to analyse the emigrant letter as a literary genre, and also as a “cultural institution, involving conventional procedures of composition and receipt.” Personal letters, he continues, “mattered to writers and readers because they were potentially an effective instrument for defining and modifying human relationships.”<sup>100</sup> In a recent milestone article, Gerber has drawn attention to characteristics and functions of emigrant letters he calls “epistolary ethics.” After emigration had disrupted families and friendships, emigrants had to reconfigure the nature of their relationships with people who had stayed at home. It was no longer possible to do this face to face; consequently the letter was a means of negotiating new terms regarding what was acceptable and desirable and what was not. Gerber argues that features of letters such as references to what he terms “reciprocity and neglect,” “conveyance of letters,” and “emotional states described as related to sending and receiving letters,” among others, were how some emigrants “through the medium of personal correspondence ... explicitly began to transform old relationships by, in effect, setting up informal agreements, an *epistolary ethics* for the exchange of letters.” This testimony contained in emigrant letters, maintains Gerber, enables us to get closer to the wider psychological, social and cultural aims that lie behind the more obviously apparent purposes of the letter in communicating facts, thoughts, emotions and desires.<sup>101</sup> The analyses of Fitzpatrick, Gerber and others offer challenging yet exciting perspectives from which to study nineteenth-century Welsh emigrant correspondence.

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<sup>97</sup> Conway, *Welsh in America*, “Preface” (no pagination).

<sup>98</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 20.

<sup>99</sup> Evan and Rachel Lewis, Bridgend, to their daughter-in-law, Jane Lewis, Danbury, CT, 6 May 1844, NLW MS 16098C.

<sup>100</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 23.

<sup>101</sup> Gerber, “Epistolary Ethics,” *passim* (quotation on p. 5).

To conclude, Welsh emigrant correspondence was a multi-faceted, complex and sometimes ambiguous, even contradictory phenomenon. There is no doubt that the relationship between some Welsh emigrants and letter writing was characterised more by apathy, neglect and avoidance than by emotional intensity and deep psychological need. Personal preference and circumstances as well as factors far beyond the control of emigrants and their families could limit the effectiveness of the letter as a means of communication. Yet, for other transnational families, the letters received in, and sent from Wales were, as one Welsh emigrant in San Antonio, Texas, told his brother in 1885, “all to me as precious as life itself,” and written correspondence was the principal means of sustaining that transnationality.<sup>102</sup> The practice of writing, receiving and responding to letters from Wales and America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Patagonia, South Africa and elsewhere was an essential element in the process of emigration and the lived experience of Welsh emigrants in this period. It was a centrality that would be lost in the second half of the twentieth century as the letter was challenged by mass use of the telephone and, later, e-mail, and by cheaper and faster overseas travel. To adapt Mynyddog’s claim, I would suggest that because of their richness as literary artefacts, their symbolic importance and their revelatory power, nineteenth-century Welsh emigrant letters should occupy, if not the very best place in the house of Wales’ literary heritage, then at least a prominent spot that might draw the visitor’s eye as the threshold is crossed. Further, like families and friends in nineteenth-century Wales, we need to bring emigrant letters out to study them more often (although perhaps not tearfully), to pass them around and scrutinise and discuss their contents. In a very real sense, those “*llythyrau mawr a llwythog*,” those large and laden letters that James Rice urged to take wing across the oceans, still await – and deserve – our responses.

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<sup>102</sup> Evan Thomas, San Antonio, Texas, to his brother, 27 December 1885, NLW MS 22015C.