

***National Redeemer Owain Glyndwrin Welsh Tradition.* By
Elissa R. Henken. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996. Pp.
xii + 250, £12.95, ISBN 0-7083- 1290-X.)**

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Volume 21, numéro 2, 1999

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087820ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087820ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Vaughan Jones, T. (1999). Compte rendu de [*National Redeemer Owain Glyndwrin Welsh Tradition.* By Elissa R. Henken. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996. Pp. xii + 250, £12.95, ISBN 0-7083- 1290-X.)]. *Ethnologies*, 21(2), 212–216. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087820ar>

discussion of any particularities of the particular telling as well as a glossing of the types and motifs involved and the connections to other tellings or cultures that these might lead the reader to explore. Other collections regularly referenced are Aarne-Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale*, Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, Baughman's *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, and the Université Laval's Archives de Folklore.

Having used this book in both lower and upper division university courses, I cannot recommend it highly enough for its immediate accessibility and ease of use. The introductory materials quickly sketch out the history, landscape, and people involved and the organization of the tales by genre allows for a variety of discussions about the form, function, and dynamics of folklore forms and the cultures within which they reside and which they also populate. Such ease and comprehensiveness stem from Ancelet's deft handling of all these matters, a result of many years of work both to study and to encourage the cultures of French Louisiana. We can only hope that *Cajun and Creole Folktales* is but one more byproduct of such work and that there will be more like it to come.

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As the Stone of Scone, the coronation stone of the Kings of Scotland and the great symbol of Scottish independence was being delivered to Scotland after its long exile in England, it seemed inevitable that there should be a revived interest in similar nationalist markers in Wales. Significantly, the Welsh turned to Owain Glyndwr, the redeemer hero of this book and the great symbol of Welsh resistance. Recently the Owain Glyndwr Society was formed, its main aim being to discover Glyndwr's last resting place and to honour that location. Since the year 2000 is the 600th anniversary of Glyndwr's uprising they will encourage the setting up of a significant and ethnically meaningful

millennium memorial. Also in recent years September 16 has been generally observed by Glyndwr enthusiasts as Owain Glyndwr Day, commemorating his proclamation on that day in 1400 by his followers as Prince of Wales. The author acknowledges this recent revived interest in the Glyndwr phenomenon — the naming of institutions and movements in his memory, his inclusion as Welsh hero and inspiration in current protest songs —; indeed at the end of the 20th century Glyndwr is increasingly being perceived as a national symbol of Welshness. As with all renowned political and historical figures he means different things to different people.

Spurred by the return of the Stone of Scone and inspired by “the increase in national confidence and determination,” the *Western Mail* — self proclaimed national newspaper of Wales — instigated a campaign to find and return the remains of Glyndwr to Wales. In an assertive editorial it claimed:

When Welsh self-confidence appears to be rising once more, and with an election looming in which devolution for Wales will once again be an important issue, 1997 will offer the chance to examine the legacy of Glyndwr, and whether history has any lessons for us today. (27.12.96)

It has been claimed that Glyndwr’s unmarked grave could lie in one of two locations just across the Welsh border in Herefordshire, although Professor R.R. Davies, the most eminent of Glyndwr scholars claims that there is no historical evidence to support any particular locality. Seemingly, as with the Stone of Scone, issues of authenticity are secondary to the potential of the “remains” as an ethnic marker.

Owain Glyndwr or Owen Glendower (c.1354-c.1416) was a Welsh nobleman, the descendant of the rulers of Powys in mid Wales whose estate straddled the Welsh-English border. He was, at the height of his success, deemed a worthy successor to the last native Prince of Wales, Llywelyn II, who was killed in a skirmish with the English in 1282 leading to the Welsh defeat. As a youth Glyndwr spent time within the English establishment and had rendered military service to the English crown and even participated in the invasion of Scotland in 1385. It was not until 1400 that Glyndwr resorted to arms in a quarrel with a neighbouring lord, Reginald Grey, and one of King Henry IV’s supporters. He had seized some of Glyndwr’s land and the King refused to make amends. Glyndwr attacked Ruthin and Grey’s home. The rising spread and in 1401 the Welsh of south Wales responded to Glyndwr’s call to “free the Welsh people from the slavery of their English enemies”. The Welsh were being subjected to particularly harsh laws and

regulations by the English crown at this time. Glyndwr invaded some of the strategically located Norman castles in Wales which were built after 1282 to subdue the Welsh. He exploited antagonisms between the English aristocracy and aligned himself with the King's enemies acquiring large tracts of the west of England as part of the Tripartite Indenture written by the King's enemies — this had been prophesied in early Welsh vaticinary poetry. Glyndwr won the support of the king of Scotland, the Irish rulers and he made a treaty with France. From 1406 until the demise of the rebellion in 1415 Glyndwr's fortune wavered. He then disappeared and there is no historical information regarding his whereabouts or his death after 1416. He inspired awe and admiration in both England and Wales and even Shakespeare accords him an honourable role in *Henry IV (Part 1)*. His meteoric rise and his attempts to re-establish Welsh statehood have inspired Welsh patriots throughout the ages, particularly the advocates of Welsh political nationalism this century.

Glyndwr was charismatic, forceful and probably the most emblematic hero of a history of Welsh resistance. His attainments, although ultimately frustrated, represent to subsequent generations of Welsh people a period, whether this is historically viable or not, of Welsh accomplishment when the Welsh and their nation, for a brief moment in history, fulfilled a sense of completeness. Oral tradition, folk narrative, legend and other forms of oral literature by which our national and local past is transferred from one generation to the next, has transformed the more objective and historical accounts into political justification which speak to subsequent generations and are intended to inspire or discourage depending on particular political interest.

In this very readable study of Glyndwr as redeemer hero, Henken looks at traditional elements which create the Glyndwr figure and how these elements function in Welsh culture. She examines the development of the redeemer hero pattern in a Welsh context based on historical continuity rather than on theoretical considerations and includes references to early historical sources and prophesies and the *canu darogan* (vaticinary poetry) which appears in both verse and prose form. The historical and literary documentation subsequent to the Glyndwr uprising is carefully scrutinised. She also studies surviving oral tradition and how this might contain a people's expectations and also his current status as a redeemer hero. This is a role study of Glyndwr in Welsh tradition and how this "enables both understanding of how a single hero functions in his culture and recognition of the hopes and dreams of a nation" (p. 22). She takes the Rosenberg hypothesis as a starting point: "the hero is the vessel into whom the ethos of a culture or sub culture is projected

as a dramatic symbol of its aspirations” (p. 22). Initially the general redeemer hero or hero myth pattern which has been explored by several scholars since the end of the last century is identified. Edward Tylor in 1871 established the basic pattern or “uniform plot” that all heroes are exposed at birth, they are saved by other humans or animals and then grow up to become national heroes. However this pattern does not appear in fully developed form for Owain Glyndwr. But the author persists. The various hero patterns as established by von Hahn and Propp in particular, and based ultimately on Tylor’s prototype were attempts to establish a pattern by which heroes might be identified and hero status attributed and are not attempts to analyze any meaning that such patterns might have in particular cultures. Subsequently, analytical scholars of the hero pattern such as Otto Rank, Joseph Campbell and Lord Raglan were strongly influenced by Freudian and Jungian interpretations in their definitions of the hero and his progression. The author here is concerned with folkloristic analysis of the role of Glyndwr in popular culture and eschews the theoretical issues on which the concept of redeemer hero is ultimately based.

The author conducted most of her fieldwork in the early 1980s but has added data over the ensuing years. She has gathered a great deal of oral testimony from individuals in different parts of Wales revealing the status of Glyndwr in current Welsh tradition. This varies considerably from high political awareness to vague recollections of school lessons to total irrelevance in some Welsh people’s worldview.

Crucial to redeemer hero status is the fact that the death and burial place is implied rather than proven. The redeemer hero does not die but lies in waiting — in another land or in other traditional resting places such as caves or underground caverns — to be stirred once again into action to deliver and restore at a time of national emergency. The latter traditionally results as a consequence to acts of tyranny, oppression and invasion and in the Welsh context at least these are currently reassessed in more social terms. The group, active in the 1980s, which referred to itself as *Meibion Glyndwr* campaigned against second home owners in Wales who were regarded as socially undermining and threatening the traditional base of Welsh speaking communities. Ironically recent research into the exact burial place of Glyndwr is in itself undermining his role as redeemer hero — in tradition a redeemer hero does not have a burial place because he simply did not die. The belief that Owain disappeared into the mists of the *Berwyns* or *Pumlumon* is a very real one in oral tradition and I remember as a child that the most fascinating element of the Glyndwr story was that he didn’t die but lives on—“resting” is

how the author refers to it — waiting for the opportunity to redeem his people. The author contextualises Glyndwr within redeemer hero patterns in other traditions — Ch'ü Yüan in China, Baldwin in Flanders, Frederick Barbarossa in Germany, Holger in Denmark, and Marko in Hungary. Significantly, Glyndwr is not the only redeemer hero recognised in Welsh tradition and the author identifies another seven — Hiriell, Cynan, Cadwaladr, Arthur, Owain, Owain Lawgoch and Henry Tudor. These are now of historical significance but the prevailing status of Glyndwr as redeemer hero is discussed in detail.

The author addresses the transformation from historical to legendary hero and it is here that she applies her skills as folklorist. Folklore uses the concept of culture and history as a process and whilst enculturation is acquired through family, religious, political, educational and informal daily interactions, culture and tradition are seen as dynamic and constantly changing. The relevance of legend, myth, the status and relevance of redeemer heroes is constantly changing within the same culture. There is continuity as the author stresses, but historical relevance is often the result of political expediency and perceived necessity by a motivated minority at a particular time. This is not to deny an oral tradition in the form of local and national legends which overrides this political and mainly nationalist form.

The author provides a folkloristic interpretation of Glyndwr as trickster, escapist, social outlaw — the noble robber as Robin Hood or Twm Sion Cati — destructor, avenger, magician and wizard, and international folk hero. These are discussed in detail and examples provided from oral and written tradition.

This is a well researched and well documented book by a scholar of international standing. Here is a comprehensive and contextual analysis of Glyndwr folklore. The author has researched a wide range of manuscript and printed sources and has travelled Wales collecting oral data which has not previously been subjected to folklore analysis. Here there is a combination of folklore, history, literature and politics of a small nation looking for a source of inspiration. However, it seems that Wales is not ready yet to call upon his services — several individuals have donned his mantle in recent years but none have so far succeeded.

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