

## “Unothering” Wales. Domestication as a tourist marketing strategy

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**Resumen:** Los turistas que visitan el País de Gales son mayoritariamente británicos y su organización nacional de turismo, la Wales Tourist Board, aunque ciertamente está intentando aumentar su cuota de visitantes extranjeros, presta especial atención a aquellos materiales promocionales destinados a una audiencia nacional británica. Dichos materiales, que han sido distinguidos con varios premios en el sector, serán el objeto del presente trabajo, que resalta en especial sus dos características principales: por una parte, su naturaleza intertextual “empotrada”; y por otra, la domesticación de todo lo que entiende por típicamente galés. Como resultado, Gales se acaba convirtiendo en una versión “agradablemente diferente” e incluso perfeccionada de Inglaterra, un claro indicador de que a quien se tiene en mente principalmente es al potencial turista inglés.

**Palabras clave:** Domesticación; Ideología; “Otridad”; Estrategia de marketing; Inglaterra; Gales

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**Abstract:** Tourists in Wales are overwhelmingly British and its national tourist organisation, Wales Tourist Board, although certainly attempting to widen its share of foreign visitors, does pay special attention to those promotional materials designed to target the domestic British readership. Such award-winning materials will be analysed in the present work, which places special emphasis on their two main features: on the one hand, their embedded intertextual nature; on the other, the obvious taming or domestication of Welshness. As a result, Wales is turned into a “gratifyingly dissimilar”, even perfected version of England, mostly catering for the potential English tourist.

**Keywords:** Domestication; Ideology; Otherness; Marketing strategy; England; Wales

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† • Specialism: English for Tourism, discourse of tourism promotion, translation.

*Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief;  
Taffy came to my house and stole a piece of  
beef:*

*I went to Taffy's house, Taffy was not at  
home,*

*Taffy came to my house and stole a mar-  
row-bone.*

(Traditional English nursery rhyme.  
Source: Paxman, 2001: 46)

## Introduction

A quick analysis of some of the latest statistics will prove that Wales is currently one of the UK destinations least frequented by tourists, especially as far as overseas tourism is concerned. Thus, Wales has one of the lowest rates of tourist attractions per region in the UK and not even one of the UK's top 20 paying attractions happens to be in Wales. Moreover, it has been calculated that approximately only 10% of all visitors in Wales are foreign, whereas the proportion in Northern Ireland, Scotland and London is 18%, 20% and 49%, respectively (Hanna, 1996: 5; 23). This means that fewer than 1,000,000 overseas visitors chose Wales as their holiday destination in 2000, spending some £263 million (WTB, 2002a: 25). However, Wales has a fairly good share of domestic tourists, amounting to some 10.9 million visitors in 1999 (BTA, 2001: 59). In 1992, for example –and trends have not changed so much in the last ten years– 8.7% of British tourists choosing a domestic holiday chose Wales as their destination –greater percentages are only achieved by the West Country (13.7%), Southern England (9.9%) and Scotland (9.3%) (Williams & Gillmor, 1995: 75).

All in all, then, the Welsh tourist industry is not small at all, especially if we take into account the nation's small size. In absolute terms, it does look tiny (in 1989, for instance, Wales only provided 4% of the total UK tourist workforce) (Williams & Gillmor, 1995: 77), but it has grown steadily over the last years and can be regarded as an essential source of wealth for the Welsh economy, accounting for some 100,000 direct and indirect jobs (10% of the Welsh workforce) and 7% of Wales' GDP, i.e. "more than construction and agriculture put together" (WTB, 2002a: 4; 19). Over the

last couple of years, job creation in Wales in the field of tourism exceeded expectations, due to which the National Assembly for Wales, in view of the good results, increased WTB's funding more than considerably (WTB, 2002b: 10; 13).

More than a matter of size, then, the problems of the Welsh tourist industry are related to market distribution. On the one hand, Wales is overdependent on domestic –especially English– tourism (ECTRC 1998: 107), which somehow parallels the situation to be found in Scotland and Northern Ireland. On the other hand, Wales has always found it very difficult to attract overseas visitors, which may be caused by the low awareness of Wales in many foreign countries (WTB, 2002a: 20). At all events, the main sources of overseas inbound tourism in Wales are the United States (21%), Germany (11%), Ireland (9%), the Netherlands (9%); Australia (8%), France (7%) and Canada (5%), Spain ranking 13th with a mere 2% (WTB, 2002c: 11). It is quite clear that, just as in Ireland, the importance of some English-speaking sources of inbound tourism to the region must be related to the patterns of migration in former times.

In any case, this is a somewhat ironic situation, since even when Scotland and Wales are generally recognised as cultures of their own by many a visitor to the UK, England still is the UK destination chosen by an overwhelming majority of foreign tourists (Foley, 1996: 283). And since foreign visitors to the UK are mainly interested in cultural tourism, all this explains why Welsh historic attractions, even whilst being those most frequently visited by foreign tourists, do not feature on the list of the UK's most visited (Hanna, 1996: 32-33).

Indeed, most of the English tourists visiting Wales seem to be more interested in the area's natural resources than in its cultural peculiarities (ECTRC, 1988: 107), which is very much related to the long-held vision of Wales as England's backyard. This can be traced back to the late 18th century, which saw the creation of the concept of "picturesque" which so much benefited formerly despised areas such as Loch Lomond in Scotland, the Lake District in England and, of course, the rugged landscapes of Wales (Gruffudd, 1997: 51-52). However,

when asked, English visitors in Wales also seem quite appreciative of the Welsh language and folklore, which is, in any case, a very different position from that of overseas visitors, who seem to be primarily drawn by Wales' distinct cultural heritage.

A very different result, however, might as well be obtained were we to ask the English population in general (who might consider a distinct Welsh identity a threat to English customs and identity) and not just those who have already chosen Wales as their holiday destination. Overall, then, we have one tourist product (Wales) with two clearly different markets: a domestic one, which is not precisely eager to find a marked Welshness in their destination, and which is mainly interested in the country's natural wonders; and a foreign one, still much inferior to the former in economic importance and mainly interested in finding a different land, home to one of the oldest languages in Europe.

However, the question might also be raised how different Wales is today. Indeed, no one doubts that it has an ancient history. Yet it also needs to be acknowledged that Welsh history is no longer independent from England's after 1536. Ever since, the English culture and language have continuously –and perhaps also increasingly– entered the Welsh territory, always in search of absolute supremacy. Britain's linguistic policy in the 19th century certainly did not do Wales any good. However, and independently of this, the general conditions of contemporary life are not ideal either in order to develop minority cultures. Wales suffered badly during Britain's transition to a post-industrial era, which resulted in high rates of unemployment, the depopulation of (Welsh-speaking) rural areas and generalised migration out of Wales. If to this we add Wales's proximity to England, the good road and rail network linking both nations (which of course facilitates English visits to Wales) and the second-home phenomenon, thanks to which many homes in originally Welsh-speaking and now largely depopulated areas are being bought by English people as holiday homes, not to mention the globalisation inherent to the postmodern era, there are certainly grounds to cast doubt on the state of true Welshness.

Indeed, figures are self-explanatory. In 1911, 43% of the Welsh population spoke Welsh. By 1981, the number of Welsh speakers had been lowered to 19%. And in 1988 only 7.6% of primary school age children spoke Welsh as a mother tongue. Quite unsurprisingly, then, there might be reasons among the Welsh people against the establishment of a strong tourism industry in Wales which might result in a growing number of English people visiting the country or, worst of all, a growing number of businesses being taken over by the English (see ECTRC, 1988: 91-93; 109).

Perhaps because of this, Wales Tourist Board (WTB) is the only national tourism organisation (NTO) in Britain whose aims not only include an increase in the number of visitors to the nation it promotes but also the enrichment of "the lives of the people of Wales, through tourism" (WTB, 2002a: 5) whilst safeguarding "Wales' unique environmental, historical and cultural assets" (WTB, 2002b: 4). Tourism sustainability, therefore, acquires an extra meaning in Wales, where tourism is thought of as a tool not only for the preservation but also growth of the Welsh culture and language. Such an approach seems to be backed up by the majority of the Welsh people, who consider that tourism will help the nation not only leave the crisis behind but also boost a Welsh revival as long as the tourist's integration with the host community is sought through, for example, the promotion of B&B accommodation (ECTRC, 1988: 106).

### **The British campaigns**

However, let us for the time being abandon such questions and see how they affect the current promotion of Welsh tourism. As seen above, the area has two clearly distinct markets, each being the consumer of an essentially different product. It follows from this that each product will have its own, separate promotion, thus resulting in two different sets of promotional materials. This situation is by no means unique in the UK and in fact recalls that to be found in Scotland (see Prieto 2003). It should not, therefore, surprise us in the least.

Consequently, Welsh NTO brochures -or info-promotional publications (IPPs), as we prefer to call them- should be divided into

two subsets: those aimed at a British audience and those targeting a foreign audience. It is on the former group –and more specifically the following materials– that the present work will focus:

-WTB 2000a: *A View of Wales. Holiday Magazine 2000*. Cardiff, WTB. ISBN not available. 29.7 cm high x 21 cm wide. 132 pages with full colour photographs plus a map of Wales on the inner side of the back cover. Pages 51-132 are a final supplement with a selection of recommended accommodation in the different areas.

-WTB 2000b: *A View of Wales. Holiday Magazine 2000*. Cardiff, WTB. ISBN not available. 29.7 cm high x 21 cm wide. 132 pages with full colour photographs plus a map of Wales on the inner side of the back cover. Pages 51-132 are a final supplement with a selection of recommended accommodation in the different areas.

-WTB 2001: *A View of Wales. Holiday Magazine 2001*. Cardiff, WTB. ISBN not available. 29.7 cm high x 21 cm wide. 128 pages with full colour photographs plus a map of Wales on the inner side of the back cover. Pages 50-128 are a final supplement with a selection of recommended accommodation in the different areas.

*A View of Wales* is a remarkable publication in many different ways. Firstly, it is a perfect example of embedded intertextuality, i.e. a genre or text type (an ordinary brochure or NTOIPP) being presented as another genre or text type (in this case, a magazine) (see Fairclough, 1998: 118). Indeed, whereas WTB produces the ordinary and expectable tourist brochures in different foreign languages, its main material for the promotion of Wales within the UK is not a brochure but a magazine; or, at least, something that is presented as one. As its editor, Roger Thomas, says,

Although produced by the Wales Tourist Board, it's most definitely a magazine, *not* a holiday brochure. From the feedback we've received from readers of previous editions of *A View of Wales*, you like the formula in preference to the predictable –and, let's be honest, pretty awful– prose you read in most holiday brochures. If we can permit ourselves a small pat on the back, it's also a formula

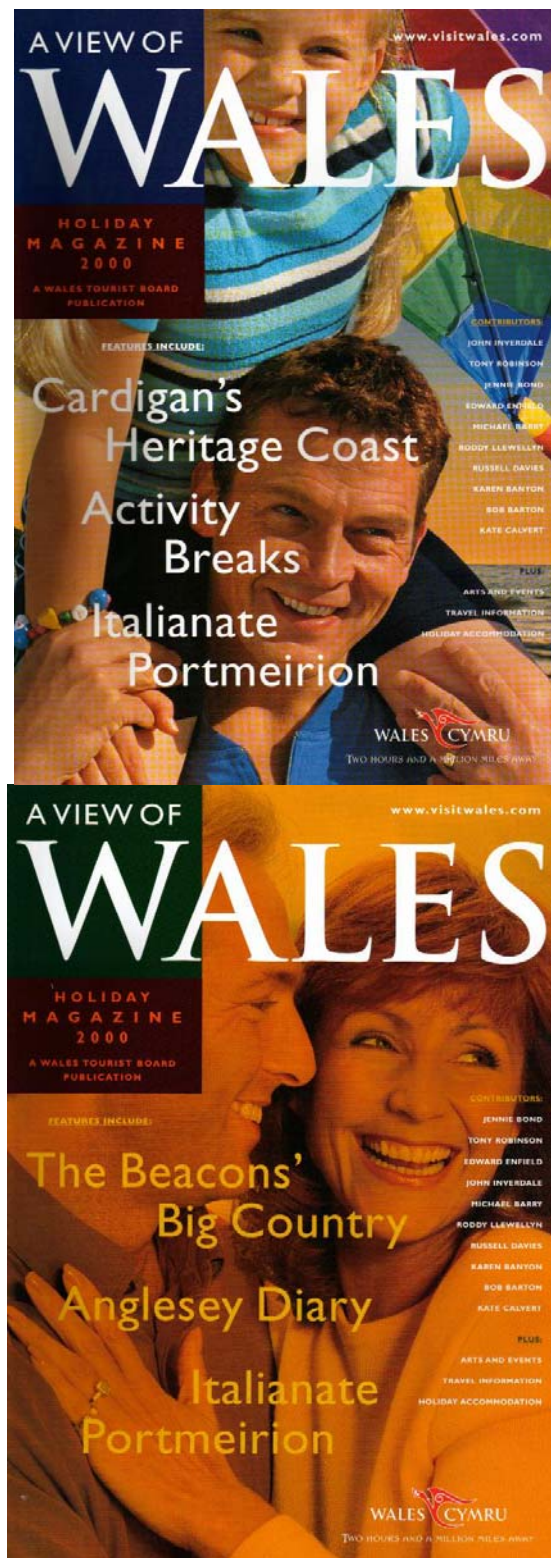


Illustration No. 1: *A View of Wales 2000*. (WTB, 2000a & b)

that won the magazine a top prize in last year's Communicators in Business awards. I hope you'll enjoy reading the



2000 edition. (WTB, 2000a&b: 1)

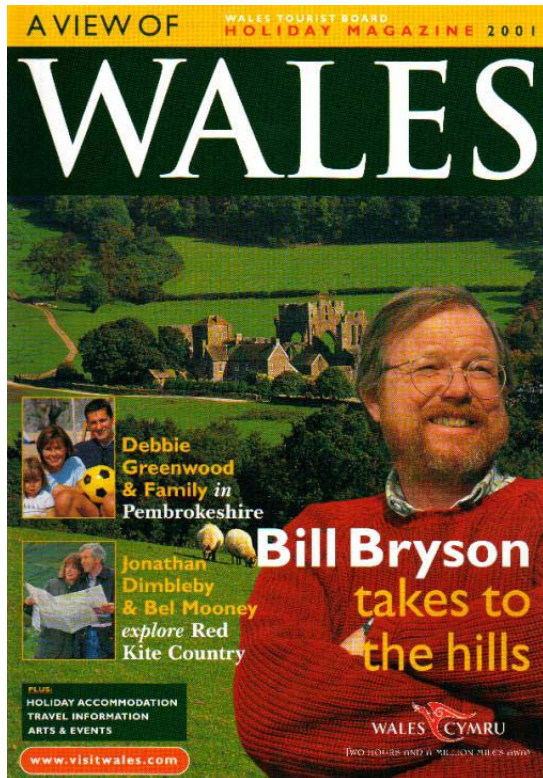


Illustration No. 50: *A View of Wales 2001* (WTB, 2001)

This is a very clever move indeed. Instead of offering potential British visitors to Wales yet another sample of, according to him, trite tourist brochure literature, he presents them with a number of a glossy magazine. Apparently, this is a real magazine and it certainly has its usual format: a cover highlighting its most interesting features, an editorial –from which the quotation above has been taken– and a table of contents on its first page, a series of articles... However, all articles follow the same formula: they are all written by someone well known in the British context and they all deal with the delights they experienced while taking a holiday in some Welsh destination. Besides, the last part of the so-called magazine (pages 50-132) is devoted to the usual British brochure section about accommodation in the destination. *A View of Wales*, therefore, is nothing but a tourist brochure disguised as a travel magazine and aimed at flattering a British audience who are made to believe that they deserve much better than those foreigners who are

perfectly happy with an ordinary, boring brochure.

This manipulation is even visible in its cover. At first sight, the two covers in Illustration No. 1 above will be taken as belonging to two different issues of a magazine. However, a simple look at the list of contributors on the right-hand side of both covers shows that they include the same names, although in different order. All this looks a little suspicious and, in fact, our suspicion is confirmed when we realise that both magazines contain exactly the same articles although these are presented, once again, in different order. There is, of course, a reason lying behind all this. WTB 2000a's cover will primarily appeal to families with young children and the expectations of this niche group will be met when noticing that the first feature article contained in this publication actually promotes what is presented as an ideal destination for family groups (the Cardigan Bay Coast).

On the other hand, WTB 2000b's cover will naturally appeal to more mature tourists, travelling without children and, more often than not, in couples. And once again, the expectations of this niche will also be met when reading the magazine's first article which, on this occasion, is not John Inverdale's charming description of a family holiday but the more veteran Jennie Bond's (a well-known BBC Royal correspondent) account of a typically British holiday – involving walking, birdwatching and even canal cruising– with her husband.

Very much the same concept is repeated in WTB 2001 (although, to our knowledge, 2001 did not see the publication of two different issues of *A View of Wales*). The main difference lies in that the main cover picture shows not an anonymous but a very well known person: Bill Bryson, whom the copywriters very well describe as Britain's favourite travel writer and who, incidentally, was topping the charts of Britain's bestselling books at the time when WTB 2001 became part of our corpus.

WTB 2000a & b and WTB 2001 are part of a highly successful campaign which was launched under the slogan "Wales – Cymru: Two hours and a million miles away" and has lasted four years. In its

fourth year, £1.5 million were invested in it, resulting in –among other materials– 11 million leaflets. It has been estimated that the direct marketing campaign generated £68 million in revenue or, what is the same, for each pound invested in it, the visitor is thought to have spent £30 in Wales (WTB, 2002a).

As can be derived from the slogan above, this campaign emphasises Wales' two main assets. On the one hand, its proximity, especially from England (the average train journey from Paddington to Wales takes just over a couple of hours) and, in principle, its different character (once again, especially from England's, which is also its main market). Apart from occasional press releases and advertisements and TV spots, its main materials were the different issues of the "holiday magazine" *A View of Wales*, a good number of which were requested throughout 2001 (WTB, 2002a).

Besides its rather ingenious "embedded intertextual" nature, its main feature is no doubt its constant use of testimony as a persuasive strategy. Thus, each of the articles featured in such issues is supposed to have been written by a well-known figure for the British, some of whom may be Welsh or have Welsh relations (e.g. gardening writer Roddy Llewellyn or the BBC2 arts broadcaster Russell Davies), but this is the exception rather than the general rule. All in all, we could argue that Britishness is emphasised through the choice of personalities, since all of them have in common their popularity throughout the UK.

However, this all-British flavour does not end here. Each issue of *A View of Wales* contains a series of articles promoting destinations all over Wales, the selection varying from year to year, and it is only to be expected that they should contain a good many references to Welsh cultural peculiarities. But, contrary to our expectations, this is not quite the case. This defence of Britishness can already be found in the IPP's editorial, which opens with a patriotic stance in defence of the traditional British holiday:

Mark Twain famously wrote, 'Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.' And so it is with the great British holiday. How many times have you read doom-and-gloom scenarios about the decline and fall

of British tourism? Balance that against the strangely infrequent criticism of cattle-truck package tourism, foreign standards at foreign hotels and the tarnished lure of many overseas hot spots, and the odds seem to be unfairly stacked against the home-grown product. (WTB, 2000a & b: 1)

And continues as follows in its 2001 edition:

No one is pretending that the traditional two-week summer holiday at home is still as popular as its Spanish or Greek equivalent (though there are signs that travellers are becoming fed up of delays, poor standards and the cattle-truck mentality that is all too often part of the package). But visitors are discovering another side to Wales. Activity holidays, shorter holidays and refreshing breaks throughout the year are booming. (WTB, 2001: 1)

In this light, we can now understand why the types of holiday described in the various articles generally conform to firmly-established British holiday patterns. Jenny Bond, for instance, describes a typically British upper-class break including a stay in an old-fashioned country-house hotel, visits to ruined abbeys in very much a Wordsworthian fashion, pony-trekking, canal boating and, of course, birdwatching (WTB, 2000b: 2-7). Such a pattern appears once again in WTB 2001 in a feature article in which writer Bel Mooney and her husband tell about her visit to "Kite Country" in the rather (tourismwise) underdeveloped Mid-Wales (28-33). Apart from the obvious fact that this is a holiday entirely devoted to the observation of the area's wildlife and, most especially, to the typically British hobby of birdwatching, it is worth pointing out that the writer turns Wales into a kind of pre-overdevelopment England for sufferers of nostalgia:

When we passed through the attractive small towns –Llandrindod Wells, Rhayader, Builth Wells and so on– we had a strong sense that they can't have changed that much in the last 20 or 30 years. Certainly there was little uglification of shops, housing sprawl and road development that has disfigured much of southern England.

What was this intense nostalgia induced by Mid Wales? A memory of a time when we were young, and the

countryside was empty; before the widespread use of insecticides when armies of moths beat against the lights, and by day the hillsides rang to the song of the birds. To travel in what has become known as ‘Kite Country’ is, in a sense, to recapture lost time [...]. (WTB, 2001: 29)

As can be seen, the Wales presented here, far from being “othered”, is a mainly anglicised one. And this is a common feature to be found throughout these publications. In this regard, another holiday type promoted here is the old-fashioned, typically English seaside resort. Thus, in WTB 2000b Kate Calvert visits Llandudno and Solva (8-11) and takes us to the seaside resort of the olden days with donkeys, piers, seaside strolls and Edwardian hotels, prior to the decadence signalled by the abundance of the infamous slot machine arcades to be found in English seaside towns. The same pattern is repeated again a few pages afterwards in an article written by John Inverdale on his family holidays on the Cardigan Bay Coast, which he terms “Birmingham’s Mediterranean” (20) and where, always according to him, the visitor will experience “that comforting and homely feel of a true British seaside resort” (19).

Once again, WTB 2001 follows the same pattern and endows the description of another seaside family holiday, this time in Pembrokeshire, with the undisguised flavour of British patriotism in what can be regarded as a chant to funfairs and chip shops:

When I was a little girl living in Liverpool, abroad hadn’t been invented yet. [...] We put up our deckchairs and sat feeling like a proper British family. [...] Tenby is a proper traditional seaside resort, but with no hint of tackiness, louts or litter [...] [,] ‘Rock and Fudge’ shops, buckets and spades and lilos hanging outside the souvenir shops. (WTB, 2001: 8-10)

A third aspect that has certainly drawn our attention is the constant celebration of Britain’s glorious past and, most particularly, the Elizabethan and Victorian eras. Thus, in WTB 2000, the prestigious journalist and writer Edward Enfield visits the Victorian spa

town of Llandrindod Wells during its annual Victorian Festival and his article becomes a nostalgic elegy for things past (customs, architecture, Pump rooms, grand civil engineering and, last but not least, the Empire) (42-47). On her part, Susan Marling introduces the Conwy Valley as an area that drew many Victorian landscape artists, very much as the Seine did impressionists, and ends up praising the town’s wonderfully preserved Elizabethan and Victorian heritage (WTB, 2001: 38-43).

What is obvious, then, is that there is very little interest in publicising any details that a British audience might regard as typically Welsh. To such an extent is this so that Wales seems to be presented as an ideal, corrected version of England. Specifically Welsh cultural features are only rarely mentioned; and, if so, they are invariably tamed and domesticated. Jenny Bond, for example, mentions that road signs are bilingual and comments on the fun derived from attempting to see the correspondences between the two languages involved (WTB, 2000b: 2). However, there are also more serious and direct allusions to Welsh cultural specificity. John Inverdale, for example, mocks the widely-held belief that the Welsh will look down on the non-Welsh speaking visitor:

‘Better ask someone if there’s a pub round here that’s still doing food,’ said a voice from the back.

So we asked a man, who shrugged his shoulders and disappeared into a nearby shop. Oh no. Dafydd was right. Speak English and you’re a pariah. It was then that I noticed he had a sweatshirt on saying ‘Rapid Vienna’. I don’t suppose their fan club’s that big in Newcastle Emlyn. The first person you ask directions from doesn’t speak the lingo. (WTB, 2000b: 18)

Apart from this, this article stands out because of its clear aim to turn Wales into a most “unWelsh” and, therefore, not truly different but simply gratifyingly dissimilar area. Thus, Cardigan Bay becomes “Birmingham’s Mediterranean” (20) and is accordingly re-named “the Costa del Cardigan” (18). Funnily enough, then, unWelshness seems to be a precious asset when it comes to promoting Wales to a British/English audience and this can be

seen again in the article on “Italianate Portmeirion” (WTB, 2000b: 48-50), which is described as “the most un-Welsh village in Wales –strange, surreal Portmeirion, a slice of Italy perched on the edge of Snowdonia” (48).

Not even those sections openly dealing with cultural and historic heritage, rare though they are, provide significant exceptions to this pattern. Thus, in WTB 2000b Tony Robinson, a popular TV comedian, visits Anglesey and analyses several periods in the history of Wales. Quite naturally, he starts with Pre-History, and it is to be pointed out that he presents it as the Pre-History of all Britons (he speaks about “our ancestors”), not just the Welsh people (24). Then, he goes on to present Celtic heritage as something affecting the whole of Britain, not just the so-called Celtic fringe: “[a]bout 3,000 years ago, new people migrated to Britain [...]” (25), only to finish by referring to what is perhaps *the* Welsh cultural institution par excellence: the eisteddfod, which he tames in three different ways. First of all, he advises fellow visitors to forget about the language barrier: “I don’t speak Welsh and am a bit apprehensive about going, but my fears prove groundless. Everyone is friendly and welcoming, and they’ve even set aside an area to teach the rudiments of the language to non-Welsh speakers” (26). Secondly, and quite surprisingly, he openly declares it an invention of London antiquarians two hundred years ago (26). And thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, he turns the apparent otherness of this institution into simple, gratifying dissimilarity by calling it a “respectable middle-class version of Glas-tonbury” (26).

Finally, WTB 2001 also includes an article in which a somewhat more ideologically-biased presentation of heritage might be expected. We are referring to Bill Bryson’s walking route along Offa’s Dyke. Indeed, the very nature of such ancient remains might have favoured a lengthy dissertation on the time-old obsession on the part of the English to keep the savage Welsh at bay. However, this is cautiously avoided by the author:

For all its venerable grandeur, surprisingly little is known about the origin or purpose of Offa’s Dyke. Traditionally, it is

ascribed to King Offa of Mercia, who in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century decreed that an earthen barrier be built along the border between Wales and his own realm next door. Because of its erratic nature –rising along some stretches to commanding heights of 20ft or more, but elsewhere standing as little more than a low hedgebank, and in yet others disappearing altogether– historians cannot agree on whether it served as a defensive barrier or merely boundary marker. (WTB, 2001: 5)

This said, it is only to be expected that no particular Welshness is emphasised in Bryson’s article. And this is soon confirmed, once the reader has fully processed the absolutely conscious connotations of the author’s errands on a typically British walking holiday, rejoicing in the sight of ruined abbeys and castles –another reminder of Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey–, the glory of voluntary solitude along the way but also the good company to be found in that typically British institution which is the pub.

## Conclusion

Overall, then, it will be agreed that *A View of Wales*, as the flagship of WTB’s campaign in Britain, promotes a rather aseptic Wales, one region in which natural wonders are about the only thing the English visitor will consider different from their native England. Otherwise, the country is depicted very much like an improved version of the “real olde England” which is increasingly hard to find in England itself. The very few “native” traits mentioned serve to add local colour and quaintness to an otherwise excessively familiar landscape whilst serving of course to do away with negative stereotypes which might function as powerful deterrents to potential English visitors.

It will now be interesting to see whether the new marketing and advertising campaign launched in 2002 under the slogan “The Big Country” will continue along these same lines. Its coverage will be unprecedented as a result of a £10 million media spend over three years (WTB, 2002d), so a far wider presence of Wales in the British media is only to be expected.



However, we still do not know whether this greater visibility will translate as a somewhat less “aseptic” image of the country. The new slogan, which quite bravely includes the word “country” seems to indicate that this will be so, although the foundations of the 2002 campaign on the successful “Two Hours and A Million Miles Away” campaign suggest that it will be a gradual process.

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