

Root and Branch

a novel,
and a critical commentary on
the representation of masculinities in the novels
of contemporary Welsh women writers in English

by

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PREFACE

In a very different kind of novel from *Root and Branch*, and in a context that is far more extreme than any situation that appears in my novel, the character called Mother - or the Great Parricide, or the Grand Emasculator - in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* declares to the protagonist, Evelyn, that, 'To be a *man* is not a given condition but a continuous effort'.¹ With the origins of the word 'effort' lying in the Old French '*esforcier*' meaning to force,² Mother's statement chimes with the arguments of feminists and Women's and Gender Studies theorists from the 1970s to the present day who have challenged the idea that our notions of masculinity and femininity are 'natural' and have asserted the significance of gender as cultural construction, if not cultural enforcement.

This submission for the candidature of Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing consists of a novel that is in many ways concerned with masculinity as well as other facets of individual identity - family, class, nationality, social and political allegiance - and a critical commentary that examines the representation of masculinity in the novels of a number of contemporary Welsh women writers in English. Together, these two components of the thesis explore the contestability of male status, behaviour and values when the established patriarchal models are in a condition of terminal decline³ - which I believe to be the case, however much it sometimes appears that the forces of reaction are holding out.

Set in Wales and Burma, the novel, *Root and Branch*, examines the ways in which one's sense of identity and values can be challenged and stripped away when lines of demarcation, boundaries and borders are crossed. It tells of the transformational experience that the protagonist, Daniel Griffiths, goes through as a man whose personal and family life comes under pressure as a result of his divided affections and grief in Cardiff and in his role as a relief worker operating 'under the radar' in Burma after the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

The novel is organised into three parts, each of four chapters: in each part, two chapters are set in Yangon and the Irrawaddy Delta; one in an old people's home in Cardiff; and one on a kayaking trip down the Rhondda Fawr River. These interwoven narrative strands are told in the continuous first-person present tense, negotiating the shifts between past and present through letters, dialogue and memory to convey the sense of Daniel's

¹ Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago Press, 1991, first published 1982) p.63, italics as in the original.

² *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition Revised (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 556.

³ I have not examined the texts from the perspective of queer theory but this is undoubtedly an area for further research into contemporary writing from Wales. *Queer Wales: the History, Culture and Politics of Queer Life in Wales*, Huw Osborne (ed.), (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016) is perhaps the first comprehensive collection of such essays though it contains little analysis of contemporary queer fiction. I have referred to the Sapphic features of *Random Deaths and Custard* and *Into Suez* but there is scope to examine homo-erotic behaviour amongst the male characters in these and a number of other texts by contemporary Welsh writers. On a broader level, the intervention of Judith Halberstam in *Feminine Masculinity* should be taken into account: uncoupling masculinity from the male, and contesting the 'protected status' of male masculinity, Halberstam's argument that female masculinity offers a cogent alternative has extended the field of gender theory in a way that provides a more nuanced reading and understanding of gender categories than I have addressed in this dissertation.

individual consciousness interrogating his class, gender, social, cultural and political identities and recalibrating his relationships with family, women, friends and colleagues.

A presiding spirit in the novel is the writer, Alun Lewis, who died in disputable circumstances in Burma in 1944 shortly before his 29th birthday. Daniel Griffiths is the same age and often recalls his grandfather's stories of growing up with Lewis in Cwmaman in the Rhondda Valley as well as drawing on quotations from Lewis's poems on occasions. Finally, with all attachments lost, and standing on the brink of the estuary where the Irrawaddy flows into the Andaman Sea, Daniel is confronted by something similar to the sense of 'alone-ness' that Lewis experienced before his death. In this condition, he is well placed to make unconditional decisions.

In focusing on the representation of masculinities in the novels of contemporary Welsh women writers in English, the critical commentary brings literary gender theory to bear on a range of significant texts from Wales. A central thesis of the commentary is that the fictional representation of the world by female writers through the eyes and experiences of female protagonists provides the reader with what I have termed a 'female regard': not simply the antithesis of the desire-laden 'male gaze', but infused with a female sensibility that is at least as much about resilience, esteem and aspiration as it is about desire. As a male who has found feminism to be a liberating force in my sense of masculinity for almost fifty years, my reading of these novels has been disturbing because, although their settings range, collectively, across a period extending from the Second World War to the present day, they depict a cast of male characters who, individually and culturally, maintain a 'continuous effort' to resist change and to preserve and enforce their patriarchal status by any means available - emotional, physical, sexual, economic, linguistic or spatial. In scrutinising the fictional narratives of men and women in modern Wales and elsewhere through a 'female regard', the writers present readers with dominant forms of masculinity that go defiantly against the grain of contemporary liberal values.

This is not to say, however, that these regressive forms of masculinity are portrayed as being successful in turning back the tide. An examination of the behaviour of fictional male characters casts light on the roles, responses, values and conduct of women characters, too. The process of seeking to redress the balance of rights and responsibilities in relationships invariably challenges established definitions, boundaries and lines of demarcation. Breaches, cracks, gaps appear, willingly or circumstantially. In these interstitial spaces, with their uncertainties, disputes and rivalries, narratives occur. This is writers' territory.

The Introduction and first chapter in the critical commentary place masculinities in context by examining the significance of the second wave of feminism in challenging the patriarchal establishment and securing greater advantage for women not only politically and socially but also in terms of literary visibility in the U.S.A., the U.K. - in Wales in particular - and to some degree in Burma. Chapter 2 explores the representation of the Valleys of south Wales as a stronghold of traditional masculinity through two novels by Rachel Trezise in which the female protagonists survive male sexual predation and abnegation of responsibility. Two novels by Catrin Dafydd and one by Deborah Kay Davies provide the basis for consideration in Chapter 3 of the ways in which male domination of the voice - of language, dialogue and the mouth - operates against women's sense of worth. Whatever other angle is explored, the challenge to spatial hegemony is an important feature in every chapter of the

critical commentary. This is especially so in Trezza Azzopardi's depiction of the Maltese community in Cardiff in the 1960s - examined in Chapter 4 - as well as in the portrayal of masculine-imperialist forces at work in Hong Kong and Egypt during the Second World War in novels by Francesca Rhydderch and Stevie Davies that is the focus of Chapter 5.

What are the implications of this interrogation of the work of six important contemporary Welsh women writers? In Azzopardi's *The Song House* - my reading of which is the subject of the second half of the fourth chapter - the central characters, Maggie and Kenneth, transform their initial differences of social status, emotional needs and grasp of the past into a hard-won relationship as a result of the processes of negotiation that they learn from each other and from the bats they watch one evening that are using their natural instincts of echolocation. It is this readiness to enter into negotiation that is absent from the behaviour of so many male characters in the other novels studied. In addition, there are implications for the contemporary male writer: to negotiate those unoccupied spaces in relationships between male and female characters by writing stories that do not reinforce the gender boundaries in their resonances for readers but amplify our awareness of the pathways open to us; so that in our fiction a process of echolocation comes into play between characters and between readers and text.

None of the novels examined in the critical commentary finishes on a pessimistic note, not even for the tragic, desperate, anonymous female protagonist in Deborah Kay Davies' *True Things About Me*. Neither do any of the novels arrive at a conclusion that brings certain closure or offers easy, unblemished prospects for the future. However, as I point out at the end of Chapter 4, Azzopardi's novel, *Remember Me*, ends with the spectral character of Mr Stadnik coming alive in Winnie's imagination to make an observation which ultimately conveys the tenor of all the novels examined, that, 'We live in hope.' This is where the texts explored in the critical commentary and my novel, *Root and Branch*, converge in their sense of direction, for Daniel Griffiths, standing alone at the meeting point of river and sea with little expectation of the future, and having made every forlorn effort - often guileless, often untimely - to arrive at a sense of individual identity, reaches the conclusion that he must turn inland, clinging to the words: 'I hope'.

My sincere thanks go to my supervisors, Professor Richard Gwyn and Professor Katie Gramich, in the School of English, Communication and Philosophy (ENCAP) at Cardiff University, for their strategic guidance, scrupulous eye for detail, and sustained interest and encouragement; and to Rhian Rattray, Postgraduate Manager in ENCAP, for her advice in meeting the organisational requirements of post-graduate studies over the years.

ROOT AND BRANCH

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INTRODUCTION

We read our own lives and those of others, we read the societies we live in and those beyond our borders, we read pictures and buildings, we read that which lies between the covers of a book.

Alberto Manguel.⁴

The idiom chosen as the title for my novel, *Root and Branch*, offers an ambiguity and a paradox that are appropriate for both a work of fiction and a research-based dissertation. As an image, it can suggest origins, attachment, security, cultivation, growth, development and divergence, while associations with the tree of life, the tree of knowledge or a family tree spring to mind, as does a sense of wholeness, potency, naturalness, tradition, connectedness and continuity. But the historical source of the term - in the Root and Branch Petition and Bill of 1640-41 that sought to abolish the episcopacy - lends a more formal, sombre weight to it, implying the challenge to, and removal of, an established authority; a process of deracination and eradication; and the uprooting and lopping of tradition and power. In varying degrees, all of these resonances come into play in my novel about the aspirations, disorientation and dislocation of a young man from Cardiff who volunteers for a covert humanitarian aid mission to Burma in response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis in 2008; his involvement with an anti-governmental group of Burmese political activists; and the subsequent re-casting of his closest personal relationships and his cultural connections with Wales and Burma. The phrase 'root and branch' also has a bearing on one of the central questions that confronts a writer, whether of fiction or of critical theory: the degree to which the attachment to values that might be implicit in her or his work by virtue of, for example, class, race or culture, are in contention with the need to interrogate, disavow, and subvert. A root and branch process is certainly relevant to the role of a reader-researcher examining

⁴ Alberto Manguel, *A Reader on Reading* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010) p. ix.

developments in the contemporary Welsh novel in English: it is a branch of British and European literature that is probably flourishing more vigorously than ever before but which nevertheless appears to be as marginalised as ever, especially compared with the attention given to Irish and Scottish literature. If due recognition is to be given to the literature of Wales, then the reading of it must deploy, in the words of Andrew Webb, ‘a set of critical tools adequate to the task of unpacking the complex relations between the national literary traditions’.⁵

With the writing of my novel taking place alongside my research, I became aware of a particular friction emerging in both processes concerning gender. As the male author of a novel involving the representation of relationships between male and female characters through the voice of a first-person male narrator, I increasingly felt that I needed to negotiate a means of storytelling that avoided, or obviated, any patriarchal values implicit in either my own or my narrator’s mind. ‘Any text’s signifying possibilities,’ says Alice Entwistle in her study of women poets who are rewriting contemporary Wales, ‘are sharpened by knowledge of the differences that gender can make both to the processes which bring it into being, and to the literary traditions by which it is judged and valued.’⁶ However much a male likes to think of himself as being free of patriarchal influences, there is always the possibility, the likelihood, and perhaps the inevitability of dormant or concealed patriarchal propensities coming into play, whether in writing or in reading and evaluating. Equally evident from my research into contemporary fiction from Wales is the fact that male characters are consistently represented by women writers as being unreliable and irresponsible, frequently displaying a range of patriarchal behaviours and values in their relationships with women,

⁵ Andrew Webb, *Edward Thomas and World Literary Studies: Wales, Anglocentrism and English Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013) p. 3. Webb is describing the task of re-positioning the work of Edward Thomas within British and international literature to counteract the Anglo-centric appropriation of Thomas that has diminished recognition of the significance of Welshness in his work.

⁶ Alice Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender: Women Rewriting Contemporary Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013) p. xvi

families and communities: in brief, the representation of a prevailing culture of masculinity in which male characters are unable and unstable. It could be argued that since fictional narrative almost invariably involves conflict and Welsh women writers are writing about the experiences of female characters, then men are likely to be the source of opposition, especially when, with few exceptions, most fiction from Wales explores relationships that fall within what Judith Butler calls, ‘the heterosexual matrix’.⁷ But this seemed to be an inadequate explanation, implying that the writing of individual texts is undertaken without the influence of a social and cultural context, and ignoring any examination of the dynamic forces at work in the depiction of fictionalised men and women within the heterosexual matrix. My interests as writer and researcher therefore arrived at a shared focus: the gender-awareness required of myself as the male writer of a novel involving relationships between male and female characters could be informed by my reading of the representation of masculinities by female writers; while my research could be informed by examination of the inter-face between gender and those themes which lay at the heart of my novel - identity, place, voice, negotiation and independence.

Although ‘masculinities’ has been the subject of theorisation in English and American literary studies since the 1980s, little research into this field of Welsh writing in English has been published until recently.⁸ At the same time, the last thirty years have seen substantial growth in the publication of writing from Wales, particularly the work of women: indeed, the

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Butler explains the term to describe the culturally-constructed model by which heteronormativity is perpetuated: ‘I use the term heterosexual matrix [...] to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised [...] a hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality’ (p. 151). I am not suggesting that the novels of contemporary Welsh women writers necessarily reinforce the hegemony of heterosexual normativity, since many of them challenge the gender roles upon which that ‘grid’ depends, but for the most part, the worlds within which most of the novels are set are those where heterosexuality is the norm.

⁸ Aidan Byrne, Katie Gramich, Steve Hendon and Sarah Morse are some of those who, in recent years, have written about masculinities in literature from Wales, focused primarily on texts from the twentieth-century.

branches of women's writing, in Welsh and English, and in English translation from Welsh, have extended their reach so strongly that the current period could be seen as the first full crown of women's writing in Wales. Since the core of my novel, *Root and Branch*, is set in 2008, I chose to focus on women's novels published since 2000, less for the year's millennial and numerical clarity than for its post-devolutionary significance, the National Assembly for Wales having been established in 1999.⁹ It also provided a generational alignment between my protagonist, Daniel Griffiths, born in 1979, and many of the younger Welsh women novelists who have been published since 2000. A drawback to this choice is the paucity of academic and critical responses to such contemporary writing other than reviews and interviews.¹⁰ Outside Wales, indeed, the nation's literature is given such scant consideration that to avoid appraisal of it simply because others do so would be complicit in the neglect.

I have not entirely overlooked Welsh women's fiction published prior to the year 2000: the current florescence has grown from its roots in the past. Nor, indeed, have I overlooked the work of Welsh male writers. In *Root and Branch*, Daniel recalls the formative influence of his grandparents in his childhood, and a combination of letters and memories reaches further into the past, to the experiences of soldiers in Burma in the Second World War. The writer, Alun Lewis, is remembered as a friend of Daniel's grandfather - a fictional device that introduces a literary presence or shade whose words resonate with Daniel at pivotal moments. By chance, Lewis's unpublished novel, *Morlais*,¹¹ written in the 1930s, finally appeared in print in 2015: a novel in which the eponymous protagonist becomes

⁹ Deirdre Beddoe's *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000) also identifies the millennium year as a suitable point for taking stock in social, economic and political terms. She concludes with the sentence: 'From the standpoint of the year 2000, it would seem to be a fair assessment of women's progress in twentieth century Wales to say that we have come a long way, but there remains a long way still to go.' p.183. The status of Welsh women's writing could be described in similar terms, the cultural development occurring in tandem with the political, or as an intrinsic part of it.

¹⁰ Some academic criticism has of course appeared, particularly regarding those novels published in the earlier part of this century. Trezza Azzopardi and Rachel Trezise gained early recognition that Welsh critics such as M. Wynn Thomas, Katie Gramich, Robert Adams and Stephen Knight have examined in a number of texts.

¹¹ Alun Lewis, *Morlais* (Bridgend: Seren, 2015).

engaged with the struggle to understand what kind of man he wants to be as he grows up. Equally relevant, as will become evident shortly, is the fact that Lewis repeatedly deploys the imagery of eyes, of looking and gazing, of being watched, and the responses to being watched. Finally, the limited theorisation of masculinities in Welsh literature required research into broader gender theory concerned with feminism and masculinities from the 1970s until the present day in order to take a step forward in the task of locating Welsh writing within the broader spectrum of literatures from Europe and beyond.

When I was a young man in the early 1970s, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*¹² had considerable impact upon my sense of male heterosexual identity, clarifying much of my inner disquiet about the patriarchal culture in which I had lived and been educated, and offering a new way of reading by seeking to engage with texts through a gendered sensibility. Coinciding with that experience, John Berger's television series and book, *Ways of Seeing*, enabled me to understand more clearly how our culture is founded on the construct that 'to be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men'.¹³ Berger's analysis of male power and desire in the act of looking at, and producing visual representations of women introduced me to the ideas which were encapsulated, a few years later, by Laura Mulvey in the term, 'the male gaze',¹⁴ and subsequently developed by many other feminist writers such as Bracha L. Ettinger and Griselda Pollock¹⁵ in order to challenge the dominance of phallogentric thinking and practice. 'The male gaze' is a way of looking and seeing derived from a position of supremacist patriarchal culture, and is one of objectification, control and erotic possession. While understanding the oppressive and objectifying function of 'the male gaze', it is nevertheless impossible for me, as a male reader

¹² Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1970).

¹³ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972: Penguin Design Series, 2008) p. 46.

¹⁴ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16.3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6 - 18.

¹⁵ Both Ettinger and Pollock are prolific writers. Their ideas are brought together in Pollock's article, 'Thinking the Feminine: Aesthetic Practice as Introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the Concepts of Matrix and Metamorphosis', *Theory, Culture & Society*, February 2004, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp 5 – 65, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0263276404040479>, accessed 26 May 2015.

and writer, to adopt a putative ‘female gaze’ in order to examine the representation of masculinities in contemporary Welsh women’s novels. However de-masculinised my sensibility, as a reader of novels written by women I remain male. It does not seem appropriate to simply convert the phrase to ‘the female gaze’ in order to describe the way that women writers and their female characters view and represent the performance of masculinity in male characters¹⁶ since a comparable perspective and hegemonic tradition does not exist and the attribution of erotic possession cannot be assumed. Rather, I am proposing the phrase ‘the female regard’ to be more apposite. The act of looking ‘with female regard’ suggests a certain level of detachment, caution and care; of paying attention to, and being heedful of, female needs and interests. As a male researcher endeavouring to read the representation of masculinities with an awareness of ‘the female regard’, I have examined how the performative behaviour of male characters generates a gendered dimension to relationships with women, family and community as well as to place, voice, national and international identity. In deploying the term ‘the female regard’, I have paid regard, too, to Butler’s arguments challenging the homogeneity of notions of ‘female/male’, ‘women/men’ and ‘masculine/feminine’¹⁷ - though the rub is that the words themselves still have to be used. In posing the question of how tightly the concepts of male and female, masculine and feminine, need to be locked into their binary, conflictual opposition, Butler offers the possibility of reading texts with the hope of discovering masculine behaviour that is more nuanced, more negotiated.

While it is important to avoid confusing the writing and reading of fiction with that other level of reality, or fiction, that goes by the name of ‘real life’, it is difficult to resist

¹⁶ Judith Butler’s seminal work on the concept of gender as performance, rather than as something innate, has been all-pervasively influential on gender theory since the publication of *Gender Trouble*.

¹⁷ Butler particularly addresses these questions in Part 1 of *Gender Trouble*, pp. 1- 46. For example, she asks, ‘Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations?’ (p.7). While acknowledging the practicality of such categorisation, she suggests, too, that the formulation of coherent subjects such as ‘men’ and ‘women’ has been a fundamental factor in sustaining patriarchal control.

agreeing with Ben Knights, that 'reading, writing and teaching about masculinities cannot be carried on in aseptic isolation from living'.¹⁸ I do not address it in this thesis, but lingering in the background is the question of what the 'unable and unstable' view of masculinity represented in the novels of contemporary Welsh women writers suggests about the behaviour, attitudes and values of men in Wales in 'real life', in actuality, in the twenty-first century, when considered with 'the female regard'.

¹⁸ Ben Knights, *Writing Masculinities* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999) p. 2.

CHAPTER 1

MASCULINITIES IN CONTEXT

The creation of a new woman of necessity demands the creation of a new man.

Sheila Rowbotham.¹⁹

‘After all, they were their men, their husbands. No one could read them like they could’.²⁰ In the novel *Resistance*, Owen Sheers re-imagines the outcome of World War II: following the occupation of Britain by the Nazis, the male farmers leave their homes to set up resistance cells, leaving their wives to fend for themselves and to defend themselves from German patrols. In the remote Olchon Valley, a small community of women and a group of German soldiers negotiate a delicate relationship that enables them to survive the winter and cope with their emotional and physical isolation. The novel is set in the geographical borderland of Wales and England; in the imaginative borderland of historical reality and fictional realisation; and in the gender borderland of intimacy and alienation between women and men of the same nationality and from nations at war. Although writing in the third-person, the male author mostly represents events and behaviour from the perspective of the women characters. While the wives do not always understand - and the quotation at the start of this paragraph is soon ambiguously qualified by the narrator’s assertion that ‘in truth none of them saw any truth in the men’s behaviour’²¹ - Sheers’ use of free indirect style enables him to achieve a certain degree of female regard in the narrative. In this sense, an additional gendered borderland is negotiated in the interstitial space between the perspective of the novel’s author and that of its characters.

¹⁹ Sheila Rowbotham, ‘Women’s Liberation & the New Politics’, *Spokesman Pamphlet No. 17*, (Nottingham: The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 1971).

²⁰ Owen Sheers, *Resistance* (Croydon: Faber and Faber, 2007) p. 3.

²¹ Sheers, p. 3.

Resistance creates an alternative history in the way that Robert Harris's *Fatherland*²² also imagines Hitler's Nazi Germany winning the Second World War and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*²³ explores the anti-Semitic consequences of Charles Lindbergh defeating Theodore Roosevelt in the 1940 Presidential election. All three male authors pose the simple question, 'What if the result had been different?' and postulate a scenario in which a powerful, single-minded force takes control. Let us consider a further imaginary version of the latter half of the twentieth century with a political-literary bent, albeit restricted to an American-Anglo-Cymric perspective. What if second wave feminism had not happened? This could indeed be the sequel to Roth's novel, with the additional fancy that, twenty-one years later, J. F. Kennedy was not elected either. As a consequence, in the U.S.A. there was no *Feminine Mystique*,²⁴ no Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, no National Organization for Women (NOW), no *SCUM Manifesto*.²⁵ In Britain, the strike for equal pay by the sewing machinists at the Ford factory in Dagenham did not take place in 1968 while in 1970 *The Female Eunuch*²⁶ was not published, the Virago Press was not founded in 1973, the Sex Discrimination Act did not become law in 1975 and perhaps, in the same year, Margaret Thatcher was not elected Leader of the Conservative Party. In Wales, Elaine Morgan did not write *The Descent of Woman*²⁷ so it was not published in 1972; Women for Life on Earth did not march from Cardiff to Greenham Common in 1981; and eight women did not meet in Cardiff in 1984²⁸ to plan the creation of Honno Press and launch it in 1986.

²² Robert Harris, *Fatherland* (London: Hutchinson, 1992).

²³ Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

²⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963).

²⁵ Valerie Solanas, *The SCUM Manifesto* (New York: Olympia Press, 1968).

²⁶ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee Ltd, 1970).

²⁷ Elaine Morgan, *The Descent of Woman* (London: Souvenir Press, 1972).

²⁸ Anne Howells, Kathryn Hughes, Shelagh Llewelyn, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, Althea Osmond, Rosanne Reeves, Leigh Verrill-Rhys and Luned Meredith, reported in Lydia Whitfield, 'Honno Founder Explains How Women Got a Voice', Wales Online, 24 October 2008, <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/honno-founder-explains-how-women-2148161>, accessed 2 March 2015.

If in 1986, some twenty years into the era of second wave feminism that did in fact occur, Deirdre Beddoe could still state that ‘Welsh women are culturally invisible’,²⁹ how much more invisible, one wonders, would they have been had that wave not occurred - regardless of whether it is possible to be more invisible than invisible? To continue the hypothesis, however, one element of this alternative history is easy to predict. The powerful, single-minded force in control would be patriarchal rule: politically, socially and culturally, men, confirmed in their identity without the challenge of feminism, would play the dominant role and women would be confined, limited, as if this were the natural way of the world, in what Butler calls, ‘a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal[s] over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’.³⁰ In Wales, on a literary level, Welsh publishers’ lists and anthologies of poetry and fiction would consist overwhelmingly of the work of male writers, as they did until the 1980s; the universities’ Literature departments would mostly be staffed by men teaching courses that acknowledged only Austen, the Brontës and George Eliot as significant writers in the great tradition, with no sign of Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison or Angela Carter, and especially not Dorothy Edwards, Brenda Chamberlain or Menna Gallie; the editors of the leading Welsh literary journals would all be men; and the National Poet of Wales would, without fail, be male. To imagine an alternative narrative in this way provides a glimpse of the impact of the second, and subsequently the third wave of feminism for women and for men in the broader political and social fields as well as in literary importance in Wales.

The rise of feminism as a transformative force in the twentieth century has provided the strongest challenge yet to the patriarchal structures that have always dominated the hierarchies of Western society, as well as the inter-personal relationships between and within

²⁹ Deirdre Beddoe, ‘Images of Welsh Women’, in Tony Curtis (ed.), *Wales: The Imagined Nation* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986) pp. 227-238 (227).

³⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 33.

genders. Consequently, the central issue confronting men has been, and remains, that of how they respond to the demands to concede the powers that they have traditionally wielded in all walks of life, private and public. When the gauntlet was thrown down by feminists, many men tried to trample on it, while others picked it up and rode into the fray, stirred by the adversarial impulse; many pretended they had not seen it and, indeed, many did not see it at all, and have not yet; but there were others who considered it with the realisation that it might not necessarily be a gesture denoting conflict, that it could be read differently, and that the appropriate response would be to negotiate a way of returning it in order to signify acknowledgement of a new relationship, a new alliance.

On the other hand, one of the issues faced by feminist women has been that of how to react to this group of men who recognised the significance of their demands and wanted to contribute to change. When some members of a dominant régime argue the case for the opposition or approve its arrival, a degree of scepticism is to be expected regarding their intentions and integrity. A person who defects from one camp to another is likely to receive a cautious welcome by members of the newly-adopted group, while being treated with scorn by those left behind. In 1987 Elaine Showalter examined the emergence of some English and American male literary theorists, such as Wayne Booth, Robert Scholes, Jonathan Culler and Terry Eagleton, to acknowledge the intellectual significance of feminist criticism and relate it to, or incorporate it within, their own established positions. In general, she welcomed the exciting cultural implications of what she called ‘this first wave’³¹ of male feminist criticism. However, she qualified her enthusiasm by recognising the pragmatic and theoretical questions from feminists who were sceptical of the motives and credibility of the male feminist critics. In particular, she addressed Gayatri Spivak’s question in *Critical Inquiry*:

³¹ Elaine Showalter, ‘Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year’, in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (eds.), *Men in Feminism* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987) pp. 116 - 132 (119).

‘Why is it that male critics in search of a cause find in feminist criticism their best hope?’³²

The polarity of the question might suggest a single answer: that it was because they had lost hope in masculinist criticism. But a body of ‘masculinist’ criticism did not exist: the prevailing dominant ideology had been established by men who had perhaps little or no awareness of the gendered nature of their criticism. In their own minds, they were neither male nor masculinist theorists: they were simply *the* critics - though others might term them, ‘a patriarchy of critics’. Booth, Scholes, Eagleton, each of whom had become eminent figures in this patriarchal field of literary and cultural criticism, had ‘taken some chances of their own’³³ and stepped outside the established parameters by recognising the intellectual challenges posed by feminist criticism. Showalter raised a number of questions about the emergence of male feminist writing, its value and dangers for feminist criticism:

Is male feminism a form of critical cross-dressing, a fashion risk of the 1980s that is both radical chic and power play? Or is it the result of a genuine shift in critical, cultural and sexual paradigms, a break out of the labyrinth of critical theory?³⁴

The questions conveyed uncertainty about the trustworthiness of the male feminists. More recently, in summarising this scepticism towards the first wave of male feminism, Andrew Shail took the view ‘that it was all too easy for a *male feminist* voice to become entangled with patriarchal rhetoric’ but he cautiously claimed a more receptive academic response to the second phase during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and of ‘the possibility, if not the necessity, of something like male-embodied feminism’.³⁵

Concerns about whether the first wave was ‘radical chic’ will hopefully have been laid to rest over time. It seems likely that the male feminists of the 1980s had been seeking for some time to understand the confusion and excitement brought to their sense of gender

³² Quoted in Showalter, p.118.

³³ Showalter, p. 119.

³⁴ Showalter, p. 120.

³⁵ Andrew Shail, ‘You’re Not One of Those Boring Masculinists, Are You? – The Question of Male-Embodied Feminism’, in *Third Wave Feminism – A Critical Exploration*, edited by Stacy Gillis, Gilliam Howie and Rebecca Munford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp. 86 - 98 (88).

identity by the impact of feminist critical writing published over the previous decade or more. As a white heterosexual male, brought up in post-war working-class austerity and educated in a boys' grammar school, I shared some of that turbulent feeling about the behaviour and expectations of my gender during the 1960s. The apparent inevitability of a patriarchal world was never questioned in a school that promoted a form of gentlemanly *machismo* and where females were always 'the other', the subject of sarcasm from staff and pupils alike, and of offensive, often violent sexual fantasy and language from young males who assumed and enforced their sense of innate superiority. Although the period is often remembered as a time of political protest and social upheaval, it was still possible to take a university degree in English Literature with Austen, the Brontës and Eliot as the sole female writers studied, and with only two female lecturers on the staff. Opportunities to question the nature of male behaviour, to discuss concerns and uncertainties, were either few and far between or I did not see them. As I have mentioned, *The Female Eunuch* was the turning point. If Germaine Greer was writing to provoke her women readers to 'discover that they have a will',³⁶ then it exerted a powerful influence on me, too, because its polemic reflected authoritatively, and publicly, the disquiet I felt about the prevalent models of masculine behaviour and privilege. *The Female Eunuch* reflected, through its examples from literature, journalism and social statistics, the dreadful characteristics of male behaviour and the subjugation of females that I had seen; and secondly, Greer described, challenged, undermined and mocked the forms of dominant masculinity that I felt so uncomfortable with, placing the contemporary condition of gender relationships under radical female scrutiny. Despite its detractors, male and female, *The Female Eunuch* has been acclaimed for giving a voice to women,³⁷ but it also

³⁶ Greer, p. 21.

³⁷ In 2016, a panel of women judges on the B.B.C.'s 'Woman's Hour' programme included Germaine Greer in their list of 'The Seven Women Who've Changed Women's Lives'. One of the judges was Cardiff-born writer, Abi Morgan, who said of Greer: "She's a warrior for me [...] She's somebody who went to the frontline of feminism and said 'bring it on'." <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/PnqpZRvgbvMFBCTrwHhhTZ/the-seven-women-who-ve-changed-womens-lives>, accessed 15 December 2016.

gave a cogent, informed and urgent voice to my anxieties and to those of many other men, if my conversations later in life are to be believed. Alongside *Ways of Seeing*, which, as I have mentioned, convincingly articulated the notion of the male gaze for me in 1971, Greer problematised the gendered behaviour that I had learnt and provided the vision and rationale by which it became possible to envisage alternative modes of being and behaving. The impact of reading the book was that which Boone and Cadden describe as being ‘engendered’,³⁸ nurturing in many of us, male and female, the confidence to read life differently.

In her introduction to *The Female Eunuch*, Greer glances at the possible impact of feminism upon the male condition:

It might be expected that men would resist female liberation because it threatens the foundations of phallic narcissism, but there are indications that men themselves are seeking a more satisfying role. If women liberate themselves, they will perforce liberate their oppressors.³⁹

Taking account, too, of the quotation from Rowbotham used as an epigraph to this chapter, the possibility of men achieving greater liberty and a different kind of identity through feminism comes from understanding that the patriarchal tradition is a constricting, reductive force in its concepts of masculinity - albeit with privileges and benefits - resulting in what Knights describes as ‘the harm patriarchy has inflicted upon us all’.⁴⁰ But the questions of what it is to be male and how men, individually and in collective structures, negotiate their relationships with women and with other men, remain as yet unresolved, the subject of theoretical discourse and practice in the fields of masculinities and queer studies. In his essay in *Gender & Theory*, Joseph Boone adopted a personalised rather than a theoretical approach, seeking to,

³⁸ Joseph Boone and Michael Cadden (eds.), *Engendering Men: the Question of Male Feminist Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990) p. 2.

³⁹ Greer, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Knights, p. 1.

coax forth a bit of the ‘me’, the personal pronoun hidden in the word ‘men’, the biologically determined category to which that pronoun also belongs – that individual ‘me’ in this case being the voice of a man who for years now has found in feminism a theory, praxis, and way of life that has become synonymous with his, my sense of identity.⁴¹

To cross the space between the third and first-person possessive pronouns in ‘...his, my...’ a comma suffices, a point of separation and connection. Between the subjectivity of the accusative personal pronoun, ‘me’, and the objective collective noun, ‘men’, a morphological transition is created by the addition of the single, mid-alphabet consonant ‘n’. The shift appears to involve such small devices of signification but the terrain in those borderlands, the ‘theory, praxis and way of life’, is challenging and unfamiliar, often inhospitable, at times treacherous. Nevertheless, it is the route that had and has to be taken.

In 1994, two texts examining the literary and social landscape of Wales were published which provide significantly different perspectives on gender. In his Introduction to *The Urgency of Identity*, David T. Lloyd identifies two ‘flowerings’ of English language literature from Wales, the first being ‘born out of a political environment’ in the 1920s and 1930s in ‘the coal-producing valleys of south Wales, centers (*sic*) of unrest and left-wing agitation’, with Idris Davies, Glyn Jones, Jack Jones and Gwyn Thomas being acclaimed as the representatives. The second flowering in the 1960s is attributed to the momentum given by ‘a group of committed nationalists’⁴² including Tony Conran, Meic Stephens and Harri Webb. Lloyd’s narrative for the development of Welsh writing in English in its first two flowerings is exemplified by an all-male cast while the socio-cultural conditions which nurtured the first in particular - the political agitation of the coalfields - evokes a world that is male-oriented and ‘macho’ in its nature. This partial picture neglects the significance of Welsh women writers and the social and cultural conditions in which they wrote. In their

⁴¹ Joseph Allen Boone, ‘Of Me(n) and Feminism: Who(se) is the Sex that Writes’ in *Gender & Theory*, Linda Kauffman (ed.) (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989) pp. 158 – 180 (159).

⁴² David T. Lloyd, *The Urgency of Identity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1994) p. xxi.

introduction to *Our Sisters' Land*, also published in 1994, Jane Aaron and Teresa Rees assert that 'Women's perspectives have hitherto had little place in orthodox accounts of Welsh life ... *macho* Wales is still the norm in terms of public representation'.⁴³ To be fair, Lloyd's six-page Introduction is not attempting a comprehensive analysis of the development of Welsh writing in English, and he does mention Lynette Roberts and Gillian Clarke elsewhere in his account of the 'flowerings', while his anthology of 'some of the best recent English language poetry from Wales' by nineteen poets does include the work of seven women. However, the reduced narrative in his Introduction appears to comply with the criticisms raised by Aaron, Rees *et al.* whose aim was to provide a fresh analysis of social and cultural life in Wales from a feminist perspective: 'gender relations are changing,' (2) they say, but their collection of essays seeks to set the record straight and to establish a different agenda for the end of the twentieth century and the early stages of the twenty-first.

In her individual essay in the collection, Aaron argues that the influence of feminism in Wales has not only led to change but has produced 'a new and strong female voice within both the Welsh and English-language cultures of Wales'.⁴⁴ She states that women's involvement in political, social and artistic activism between the 1960s and 1980s, such as Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, Welsh Women's Aid, Honno Press and the Greenham Common Movement, brought about a culture which generated 'a resurgence in confidence in its capacity to define itself' and in which the 'requirements for change in Welsh women's sense of identity were, at last, met'.⁴⁵ Thirteen years later, in 2007, the invisibility to which Beddoe referred was described by Gramich as 'triple or quadruple marginalization'⁴⁶ in a book that provides an assertive narrative of the importance of Welsh women's writing in the

⁴³ Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vincentelli (eds.), *Our Sisters' Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994) pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴ Jane Aaron, 'Finding a voice in two tongues: gender and colonization' in *Our Sisters' Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales*, pp. 183 – 198 (184).

⁴⁵ Aaron, p. 189.

⁴⁶ Katie Gramich, *Twentieth Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007) p. 1.

twentieth century. Since the millennium, the gender composition of the literary landscape in Wales has undergone a significant transformation in terms of production, publishing and public recognition. There can be little doubt that if David T. Lloyd were to edit a new anthology, at least half would be the work of women poets: if he were to add Gwyneth Lewis, Menna Elfyn, Deryn Rees-Jones, Kathryn Gray, Zoë Brigley, Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch, Zoë Skoulding, Rhian Edwards, Anna Wigley and Jemma L. Lewis, the anthology could consist almost entirely of women's poetry. In fiction the list is equally impressive with writers such as Stevie Davies, Trezza Azzopardi, Catherine Merriman, Vanessa Gebbie, Catrin Dafydd, Deborah Kay Davies, Rachael Trezise, Fflur Dafydd, Francesca Rhydderch, Kate Hamer and Rhian Elizabeth, ensuring that women are central to the narrative of contemporary Anglophone Welsh literature.

Since half of *Root and Branch* is set in Burma, it seems pertinent to extend this contextualisation of the challenge to male hegemony and notions of masculinity beyond an American-Anglo-Cymric perspective and take into consideration some of the interconnections between literature, politics and gender in Burma.⁴⁷ Deirdre Beddoe's observation on the 'invisibility' of women in the representation of Wales appears to apply to Burma, too, politically and culturally. The established view of the Burmese independence movement in the 1930s and 40s tells of the struggle to release the country from British Imperial rule being spearheaded by General Aung San and the Thirty Comrades, an all-male

⁴⁷ I have chosen to use the term 'Burma' rather than 'Myanmar' that was officially adopted by the country's government in 1989. I am aware that 'Burma' has colonial connotations and is derived from one dominant ethnic group, the Burmans. On the other hand, 'Myanmar' was adopted by the military junta following its violent suppression of the uprisings of 1988. It was eventually recognised by the United Nations, though not the U.K. In 2008, when my novel takes place, the majority of people in Britain would still have used the term Burma. Since then, things have begun to change as greater democracy has been introduced. I have Burmese friends who refer to Myanmar without any concerns. The intricacies of change in language and politics forever challenge us! By way of self-contradiction, I refer to 'Yangon' in the novel rather than 'Rangoon', the former being another change introduced by the junta. On the other hand, Yangon was the name of the city before it was changed to Rangoon during the British colonial occupation.

group of political activists.⁴⁸ No woman appears in the narrative. Yet forty years after independence was secured in 1948, the figurehead for democratic change in Burma was a woman, Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of the General, who became leader of the National League for Democracy in 1990 and finally, in April 2016, State Counsellor - effectively Prime Minister - following her party's victory in the 2015 elections. While her upbringing, education and wealth have undoubtedly provided her with privilege and status,⁴⁹ it is important to view Aung San Suu Kyi's ascent to power in the context of a number of underlying, under-acknowledged changes in the role of women in her country. Burmese women have been, and continue to be directly involved and influential in political, social and cultural life. In her memoir of survival under the military authorities,⁵⁰ Zoya Phan provides a graphic account of her mother's role as commander of a company of female resistance fighters and of their encounters with the Burmese Army during a five-year journey from the Irrawaddy Delta to the Arakan Mountains. Similarly, a virtually anonymous research paper published in 1995 by the All Burma Students' Democratic Front⁵¹ offers a narrative of the political role played by women in Burma throughout the twentieth century: 'During the

⁴⁸ As well as being the traditional account provided in Western texts, such as Louis Allen's *Burma, the Longest War* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1984), pp. 553 - 589, or Jon Latimer's *Burma, the Forgotten War* (London: John Murray, 2004) pp. 11- 26, this narrative is also presented by Aung San Suu Kyi in the opening chapter of *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 3-38, and, more briefly, in pp. 53-57 of the second chapter.

⁴⁹ We might ask whether this is a question of the patriarchy allowing a woman to take such a leadership role in order to assimilate and neutralise her impact, or whether it is an example of an isolated, individual woman who successfully challenges the patriarchy without broader changes in gender roles taking place in Burma. Or is it a case of family dynasty, with the political determination and aspiration for power being passed from father to daughter, encouraged perhaps by Aung San Suu Kyi's mother, Khin Kyi, who was a M.P. in the first Burmese government and later became the first Minister of Social Welfare and Ambassador to India?

⁵⁰ Zoya Phan with Damien Lewis, *Little Daughter* (London: Pocket Books, 2010).

⁵¹ 'Burma and the Role of Burmese Women' attributed to the Documentation and Research Centre of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front, July 31, 1995, posted by caroline@xxxxxxxxxx on 12 October 1995 on <http://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199510/msg00070.html>. When accessed, it appears on screen as a poorly formatted document in Word, so I have saved it in a format that has been regularised as a 20 page document. The page-numbers refer to the pages in my saved copy of the document. While it is difficult to authenticate this paper - and it shows some weaknesses of structure and repetition - the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) was founded in 1988 after the 8888 protests in opposition to the military junta. In common with a number of other organisations that have been struggling for democracy in Burma, the ABSDF has a peacock in its logo. In *Root and Branch*, Maung has a peacock tattoo on his arm, not to identify him as a member of ABSDF but to associate him with one of the myriad pro-democracy underground groups in Burma. The anonymity of this particular paper is not surprising when student activists were being imprisoned and ruthlessly punished as 'subversives' by the junta in the 1990s.

period of struggle for independence and the rise of nationalism and political awareness among the Burmese people, educated Burmese women got involved in the Burmese political arena'.⁵² Such accounts contribute to the re-writing and re-reading of Burmese history, bringing to the fore the role of women in determining the course of events and challenging the narratives that give primacy to men.

In *Freedom from Fear*, Aung San Suu Kyi states that the emergence of modern Burmese literature largely coincided with the demand for independence and 'the evolution of those feelings and aspirations which constituted the foundation of the Burmese nationalist movement'.⁵³ Yet her account of this development consists entirely of male authors.⁵⁴ Other literary histories suggest that women writers have made significant contributions to Burmese literature throughout the twentieth century. Anna J. Allott's 1993 PEN Report, with the candid title of *Inked Over, Ripped Out*, contains the work of a number of important women writers, such as Nu Nu Yi, San San New, Mo Cho Thinn and Ataram.⁵⁵ In Jane Eldridge Miller's 2001 survey of international women writers, Ludu Daw Amar, Ma Ma Lay, Ju and Nu Nu Yi are all identified as worthy of global attention.⁵⁶ More recently, the first anthology

⁵² ABSDF, p. 2. The author cites the Wunthanu Konmari Association, established in 1919 to promote Burmese women's awareness of national tradition and culture. The Burmese Women's Union, the Burmese Women's National Council, the Burmese Women's Association and Darna Thukha were all involved in the struggle for independence and banned by the military junta. The mass participation of women in the numerous street protests that have regularly taken place over the years, from the 1920s onwards, is emphasised, and individual women are named, such as Daw Mya Sein, Daw Ank, Daw Hla May and Ma Khin Mya, for their important roles: 'Countless women participated in the nationalist struggle of the colonial period [...] But they never achieved leadership in their own right [...] no one could deny the role these women's organizations played importantly during the anti-colonialism and pro-independence period'. Interestingly, this reflects the situation in Wales: the 'Introduction' to *Struggle or Starve* (especially pp. 31-36) charts the importance of women's organisations in Wales during the inter-war years, such as the Women's Co-operative Guild, the National Council for Social Service and the Women's Labour League.

⁵³ Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear* (London: Penguin, 2010) p. 141.

⁵⁴ Aung San Suu Kyi, pp. 140 - 164. Although Aung San Suu Kyi studied for an M.Phil in Burmese Literature at SOAS from 1985-87, her reference solely to male Burmese writers in this essay is possibly influenced by the fact that she did not live in Burma between 1960 and 1988. She also studied at Oxford in the 1960s, but it seems doubtful that her education would have been male-dominated there since she was at St Hugh's College. The absence of women writers from her account is puzzling.

⁵⁵ Anna J. Allott, *Inked Over, Ripped Out: Burmese Storytellers and the Censors* (New York: PEN American Center, 1993), accessed through www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/inked-over-ripped%20-out.htm, 15 August 2016

⁵⁶ Jane Eldridge Miller (ed.), *Who's Who in Contemporary Women's Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2001) pp. 162, 196, 204 and 238 respectively. Digital technology has gradually allowed other works by women to become

of contemporary Burmese poetry in dual-language format, *Bones Will Crow*,⁵⁷ contains the work of three women poets, Ma Ei, Eaindra and Pandora, who have been extensively published in their own country; while Ellen Wiles' account of literary life under censorship and in transition gives substantial descriptions of the importance and popularity of Shwegu May Hnin, Ma Thida and Pandora.⁵⁸ In the turbulent history of Burma in the twentieth century, women might not have held many positions of public leadership but their increasing participation in wider social and political spheres has been accompanied by their influential work as writers despite the authorities' attempts to control all forms of publication. In *Root and Branch*, both Maung and his father are presented as serious political activists but so, too, is the oldest daughter, Naw Say, who goes into exile to escape the authorities after her involvement in the 2007 street protests. When Daniel arrives at Naw Say's family home in Yangon, her mother and sisters are busily organising the distribution of political leaflets. Towards the end of the novel, Lily, a woman who has been rescued from the flood-waters, risks her life to warn Daniel and Maung of the arrival of the military. In such ways I have sought to represent the political activity of Burmese women under their own free will.

In the rather less politically-charged context of Wales, the novels of contemporary Welsh women writers reveal a number of major social and cultural changes over the past two decades or more - the structure of the family, employment, social mobility, religious and political values - though they do not, on the whole, appear to engage with the parameters of gender identity and sexuality, particularly those selected for study in this dissertation.⁵⁹ Judith

available, such as those by Khin Khin Htoo, Ma Kin Lay, Ma Sandar, Khet Mar, Khin Swe U and Moe Moe (Inya) in Ma Thanegi's *Selected Myanmar Short Stories* (Yangon: Unity Publishing House, 2009), accessible online from www.burmalibrary.org.

⁵⁷ Ko Ko Thett and James Byrne (eds. and translators), *Bones Will Crow: 15 Contemporary Burmese Poets* (Tadmorden: Arc, 2012).

⁵⁸ Ellen Wiles, *Saffron Shadows and Salvaged Scripts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015)

⁵⁹ A growing number of contemporary texts by Welsh women writers in English do, in fact, explore women's emotional and sexual experiences beyond the parameters of hetero-normativity, problematizing the relationship of masculinity to maleness: Erica Wooff's *Mud Puppy* (London: The Women's Press, 2002); Stevie Davies' *Impassioned Clay* (London: The Women's Press, 1999), *Kith and Kin* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004) and *Awakening* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013); Fflur Dafydd's *Twenty Thousand Saints* (Aberystwyth: Alcemi,

Butler has argued the case for questioning our assumption of the singularity of gender identity, but she accepts that in circumstances of culturally-constructed coherent heterosexuality some form of what she refers to as ‘univocity’ is possible:

Gender can denote a unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some case to necessitate gender - where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self - and desire - where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires a stable and oppositional heterosexuality.⁶⁰

The gender-identity of individual characters in many contemporary Welsh novels, including those under consideration here, is clearly female or male and their relationships are worked out in the context of ‘oppositional heterosexuality’. What is evident, however, when the body of work is considered more generally, is that the characteristics of femininity and masculinity are changing. A ‘heterosexual matrix’⁶¹ persists, but the balance of power in the male/female binary can be seen to have shifted in the novels of Welsh women writers who have had the confidence to define women’s experience afresh.

If literature plays a role in the process of finding and securing the capacity to define one’s identity, individually and collectively, women’s experiences do not have to be represented as complementary to those of men; their values do not need to be compared with men’s values; and their identities, heterogeneous or multiple, do not necessitate the presence of male characters in order to take shape and definition; but the imperative to challenge the patriarchal narrative and to re-define the role of women characters in the literature of Wales has led the majority of Welsh women novelists in recent times to place gender relationships

2008); Rhian Elizabeth’s *Six Pounds Eight Ounces* (Bridgend: Seren 2014); and almost all of Sarah Waters’ novels, from *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) to her most recent, *The Paying Guests* (2015), include non-heterosexual relationships that are presented, to a lesser or greater degree, in the context of wider heterosexual worlds. In their various ways - and beyond the scope of this critical study - they challenge the binary opposition of hetero/homosexuality in their representation of female masculinity and gender identity in flux. They now form a body of contemporary women’s fiction from Wales that could be studied from the perspective of queer theory, perhaps within a framework established by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1990) and Judith Halberstam’s work.

⁶⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 22.

⁶¹ Butler, p. 5.

at the centre of, or close to the centre of, their fiction. This invariably involves the representation of male characters. What kind of male characters inhabit these novels? What do the novels say or suggest about their authors' views of men's relationships with women and the behaviour, attitudes and values that they bring to those relationships? Is there any consistency in the behaviour of the male characters and, by implication, the versions of masculinity that are depicted in the novels by Welsh women writers? To what degree are these male characters trapped in their patriarchal identity?

Since Aaron, Gramich and others have given accounts of why a new literary flowering of women writers has occurred and what has nurtured it, a number of additional questions can be asked. What impact is it having? What direction will it take in future? If there is something that might be termed a collective 'voice', what is it saying about women's experience in contemporary Wales? Even if there are divergent voices, what values are being explored, scrutinised and challenged in the literature produced by women from Wales? And, in particular, since a tradition of patriarchal attitudes and behaviour has been the major force that women have had to confront, what do contemporary Welsh women writers in English say about men? What forms of masculinity do they see and represent? In the female regard of Welsh women writers, how do men measure up in a world that has changed? Is there any way in which the male characters in the novels reflect the socio-cultural view that 'gender relations are changing' in Wales; and if so, how does the male dynamic contribute to the change when viewed through the double female regard of female protagonists and female writers? Furthermore, if we recall Greer's suggestion that female liberation can also be liberating for men, we can ask what impact Welsh women writers are having on Welsh male writers, the worlds they evoke and the values that their novels explore. What do male writers in Wales - and elsewhere, of course - have to learn from their reading of women writers, and what do they have to learn in their reading and representation of the world? It is a question

that I have had to ask of myself in writing *Root and Branch*: how has my reading of novels by Welsh women authors influenced my writing? In the roles accorded to female characters, in the description of women, in the dialogue involving women characters, and in the attitudes of male characters towards women: how do I, the male writer who can potentially adopt the male gaze as a habit of cultural assimilation, convert it to one that takes account of the female regard? The critical examination of masculinities in literature from Wales is still in its early stages but to examine the kind of male characters presented by contemporary women writers from Wales provides the opportunity to look beyond traditional narcissistic phallo-centrism and arrive at a triangulated perspective that may enable readers and writers, especially those who are male, to come closer to finding the 'me' in 'men'.

CHAPTER 2

MASCULINITIES AND THE VALLEYS

From this high quarried ledge I see
The place for which the Quakers once
Collected clothes, my father's home,
Our stubborn bankrupt village sprawled
In jaded dusk beneath its nameless hills.

Alun Lewis.⁶²

When Deirdre Beddoe stated in 1986 that, 'Wales, the land of my fathers, is a land of coalminers, rugby players and male voice choirs. Welsh cultural identity is based almost entirely on the existence of these three male groups,'⁶³ her argument not only confronted the country's dominant 'macho' image but was also particularly relevant to the male cultural hegemony of one specific geographical area: industrialised south Wales. While male preoccupations with coal, rugby and choral singing have certainly been significant economic, social and cultural forces in the whole country, they have been at their strongest in the densely populated coastal strip and valleys of south Wales. On one level these interests could be seen to embody worthy values such as hard work, skilful team-play, harmonious music and, in all three, the disciplined activities of the working-class male community. But they could also be said to be symbolic of the patriarchal forces operating in Wales because their effect, as Beddoe argued, has been the marginalisation of women's labour, leisure and voices and an exclusiveness that exposes the inadequacy of received notions of Welsh identity.

Writing in the same period as Beddoe, Gwyn A. Williams, in his influential work, *When Was Wales?*, provided a panoramic view of Welsh history that culminated in an era of two hundred years of capitalist industrialisation which dominated the nation's way of life until the 1980s: 'the heartlands of this new civilization were the deeply scored valleys

⁶² Alun Lewis, from 'Over the Mountain', *Collected Poems*, Cary Archard (ed.), (Bridgend: Seren, 2007) p. 87.

⁶³ Beddoe, 'Images of Welsh Women' in *Wales: The Imagined Nation*, p. 227.

running down from high upland plateaux under the Beacons where God had clearly intended human beings never to live'.⁶⁴ These 'heartlands', or 'this black paradise' as Rhys Davies called them,⁶⁵ consisted of the same area of industrial south Wales that was the source of Beddoe's representation of Welsh maleness: 'the Valleys'. It is a peculiarity of this wedge of Wales that its name lacks specificity: in reality it encompasses a number of valleys and is a geographical plural subsumed within a terminological singular. In many ways the culture of the locality has assimilated, or been conferred with, the weight of national identity, as Dai Smith recognised in 1999, describing the convergence of Welsh identity with that of the Valleys: '... everything that Wales now is can never be separated from the experience of the part of it called, in a still-dismissive generalisation, the Valleys'.⁶⁶

This geographical and emblematic space, 'The Valleys', possesses a number of distinct topographical features for creating an atmospheric setting in novels but can also act as a literary motif reflecting the interior, psychological and emotional world of characters. Topped with treeless moorland, the steep slopes that were the site of countless collieries until the mid-1980s have been greened over with woodlands and nature reserves running down to rivers bordered by small terraced towns and villages. In my novel, the Rhondda Fawr, which is the larger of the two rivers in the Rhondda Valley, is the location for a canoeing trip that Daniel Griffiths and his partner, Louise, embark upon as an act of homage to his family's roots the day before he sets off for Burma. The trip occupies three chapters in which the compatibility of Daniel and Louise's relationship is tested out. The turbulence of the river and the negotiation of the rocks and debris reflect their troubled relationship. But the motion of the river also has resonances with Daniel's conversations with his grandmother elsewhere in the novel, moving in and out of the past and present, the 'real' and the imagined, the

⁶⁴ Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1985) p. 185.

⁶⁵ Rhys Davies, *The Story of Wales* (London: Collins, 1943) p. 32.

⁶⁶ Dai Smith, *Wales: A Question for History* (Bridgend: Seren, 1999) p. 39.

perceived and the confused. On another level, the Rhondda Fawr acts as a diminutive parallel to the flooded Irrawaddy Delta which Daniel travels through when he reaches Burma, branching out in life on a humanitarian aid mission. In the ‘richly figurative spaces’ of the Valleys lies the capacity for what David James calls ‘the tension between metaphor and actuality’,⁶⁷ between imagined, received and perceived representations of the geography, history and culture of the place.

Working-class family histories are often short, the branches of the family-tree only traceable for a few generations back to grandparents and great-grandparents. Such is the power of ‘the Valleys’ in Wales, almost mythical in its intensity, that many who have not even lived there think of the area as integral to their identity - including me. From genealogical roots, we discover anecdotes that feed into the narratives of family history as well as acquiring social value and influence. My paternal grandfather was brought up in the Valleys; my maternal great-grand-parents managed a number of pubs and clubs in the Valleys. The story that my maternal grandmother was runner-up in the Aberaman School Girls’ Beauty Competition provided the source for the revelation by Daniel’s grandmother, Sally, of her disappointment at not being the subject of Alun Lewis’s affections. It was not simply a convenient tale: although my grandmother’s life did not overlap with Alun Lewis’s in Cwmaman, Sally’s reminiscence became, in the writing, a process of fictional convergence between my own roots and Daniel’s.

The Valleys are often read as a male construct. Historical accounts claim that it was the capitalism of male mine-owners and the masters of the ironworks that brought the transformational industrial revolution to the green valleys.⁶⁸ Labour, insofar as it refers to the

⁶⁷ David James, *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008) p.7.

⁶⁸ For example, the index of Dai Smith’s *Wales: A Question of History* is six pages long. Only seven women are listed, of whom three - the American critic Ann Douglas, novelist Josephine Tey and former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher - are not Welsh. In the whole book, Lady Llanover receives a passing mention; a novel by Alice Ellis Thomas is referred to in half a sentence; Megan Lloyd George appears in brackets; and Jennie Lee

production of coal, iron and copper, was male, and the major trade union leaders and politicians were male. With a few exceptions, historiography has not focused on the role of women, despite the fact that prior to the 1842 Mines Act, women were pit workers, as the work of Angela V. John⁶⁹ and the Disability and Industrial Society at Swansea University⁷⁰ has demonstrated. Both Beddoe and Williams identify the fact that women were ‘eased out of the ranks of wage-earners. Their place was within the home’.⁷¹ Public spaces - streets, places of leisure and recreation - were gendered by dominant male presence. Although Beddoe adds the qualification that ‘the rise of the domestic ideology [...] was to mean that the chapel was practically the only public assembly which respectable women could attend,’⁷² even there women found themselves in institutions of male authority, as they often did, too, in the home. Gramich points out that in the work of many Welsh women writers,

the female domestic space, created and maintained by women, can offer a valid political corrective to the freewheeling male spaces which lie outside. On the other hand, the domestic space can also be the site of abuse and exploitation, a place hidden away from public view, where women suffer silently.⁷³

Confined to the home, women did not spend their time in writing, it seems - according to the narratives provided by leading male literary commentators such as Glyn Jones and Raymond Garlick, both of whom command considerable respect for their contributions to the literature of Wales as critics and writers.⁷⁴ In their introduction to *Struggle or Starve* - a collection of

has the distinction of being mentioned twice in the closing pages. In the chapter, ‘Changing Wales,’ which deals with the industrialisation of the country, the text repeatedly refers to quarrymen, colliers and ‘men’ who migrated for work. There are occasional references to ‘people’ but essentially Smith’s entire historical account of the making of Wales attributes the primary productive roles to men while women are, again, invisible.

⁶⁹ Angela V. John, *By the Sweat of their Brow, Women workers at Victorian Coal Mines* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1980)

⁷⁰ The Disability and Industrial Society, *A Comparative Cultural History of British Coalfields, 1780-1948*: <http://www.dis-ind-soc.org.uk/en/index.htm>

⁷¹ Williams, p. 256.

⁷² Beddoe, p. 234.

⁷³ Gramich, p.199.

⁷⁴ Although Glyn Jones’ seminal collection of essays on Anglo-Welsh writers and writing, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, mentions six women writers - Brenda Chamberlain, Dorothy Edwards, Margiad Evans, Menna Gallie, Allen Raine and Hilda Vaughan - none of them are considered worthy of detailed analysis and none of them, other than Menna Gallie, came from those ‘deeply scored valleys.’ Similarly, in the 80 pages of his lengthy essay surveying the history of ‘Anglo-Welsh’ literature from Wales, Raymond Garlick devotes only one short chapter, three pages long, to explaining that ‘at least four women published Anglo-Welsh poetry in the

women's autobiographical writing about life in the Valleys in the inter-war years - the editors, Carol White and Sian Rhiannon Williams, speak of the scarcity of writing available to them as they tried to 'adjust the one-sided, male-dominated version of the inter-war period which had emerged from men's autobiographical and fictional literature'.⁷⁵ While both Jones and Garlick have been significant, insightful figures in promoting knowledge and understanding of the literature of Wales, their marginalisation of the place of women writers is symptomatic of the nature of an embedded patriarchy that operates unconsciously, informing the thinking of the most intelligent and educated male readers and writers.

Until recently, the sole woman novelist from the Valleys to achieve any recognition is Menna Gallie, though she was born and brought up in Ystradgynlais in the Tawe or Swansea Valley, not the Rhondda. Two of her novels, *Strike for a Kingdom* and *The Small Mine*, draw upon her intimate knowledge of politics, language and relationships in a Valleys community to depict social conflict in the fictional coal-mining village of Cilhendre. In *The Small Mine*, first published in 1962, Gallie presents a traditional male-dominated world which is on the verge of change without the men being aware of it. 'As an exploration of women's lives in the mid-twentieth century industrial villages of south Wales, before the impact of the feminist movement began to make itself felt,' Jane Aaron says of the novel, 'it does not have its equal'.⁷⁶ The tragic hero, a young collier named Joe Jenkins, possesses considerable self-confidence in his work, in his sexual relationships with women and as the star of the local choir. The first view of him, crawling out of his stall at the end of his shift, presents the reader with an idealised form of physical masculinity:

eighteenth century' before proceeding to mention four women poets of the twentieth century - Ruth Bidgood, Gillian Clarke, Sally Roberts and Brenda Chamberlain. In the other 77 pages, not a single woman writer is mentioned.

⁷⁵ Carol White and Sian Rhiannon Williams (eds.), *Struggle or Starve* (Dinas Powis: Honno, 2009) p. 8.

⁷⁶ Jane Aaron, 'Introduction' to Menna Gallie, *The Small Mine* (Dinas Powis: Honno, 2010) pp. xiii - xiv.

In the other beams [*of light*] his face was black, beautified, dramatized by the coal, white eye-balls bright, a flash of teeth in the coal-rimed lips. The licked inner bottom lip wetly red, sensual, male.⁷⁷

While the description of Joe's lower lip focuses on a detail that endows his masculinity with sexual appeal, the black and white cinematic quality of the first sentence carries resonances of the miners portrayed in the film *The Proud Valley*⁷⁸ set in the Rhondda Valley. The three principal women characters in Joe's life show different kinds of female regard towards him. His mother adores him and tends to his every need at home. His more independently-minded girlfriend, Cyn, enjoys their reciprocal desire but keeps his advances under control. The woman to whom he goes for sexual release, Sall, is a lonely character, another woman deserted by her husband, who despite being fond of Joe, is a victim of his predation, seen 'as prey, as pleasure, as ease, as easy' (18). She has to keep up appearances for him, maintaining the secrecy of their meetings, but for Joe 'the woman was part of the night, the luck of the night, the pool for the leaping salmon' (25). Joe's casual treatment of Sall exposes the double standards applied to sex in the *mores* of Cilhendre, privileging the traditional qualities of hegemonic masculinity embodied by Joe, and admired in the community at large.

Joe's death, half-way through the novel, brings a duality of response. While Gallie shows sensitivity and respect for its impact upon his mother and the ritualised, communal grief shared by the villagers, she also reveals its power to suffocate as Cyn rejects 'its hollowness, its conventionality, its prescribed form' (106), setting herself against tradition and questioning the sincerity of the community. The incident also releases a different type of masculine force that gains momentum in the second half of the novel as the perpetrator of Joe's death, Tom Davies, also known as Link, tries to take possession of Cyn. Link is the obverse of Joe, ugly, solitary, brooding, emotionally and sexually repressed, as well as the

⁷⁷ Menna Gallie, *The Small Mine* (Dinas Powis: Honno, 2010) p. 1.

⁷⁸ *The Proud Valley*, director Pen Tennyson, written by Herbert Marshall, Alfreda Brilliant, Pen Tennyson, Jack Jones and Louis Golding (CAPAD/Ealing Studios, 1940).

subjugator in a loveless marriage. When he watches Cyn, he studies her every move, and Gallie describes her from his perspective, through the male gaze of desire: ‘this beauty, this wet-dream perfection, this girl [...] he felt he had a right to her now [...] she was in a sense now his, his own, by right of conquest’ (118). The primitive, proprietorial instinct that drives Link to stalk Cyn extends his masculinity to a form of supremacism, tracing it to its primal roots in which Tom Davies is, as Aaron states, ‘the Missing Link’⁷⁹ between animal instinct and male behaviour.

Aaron sees Cyn’s decision to avoid Link’s attention by moving to a new job in Nottingham as ‘necessary but ultimately [...] a defeat’⁸⁰ and, indeed, Gallie ventriloquises a tone of panic and desperation in the final paragraph when Cyn escapes from Link:

She broke away from the stare of his eyes, the pathos of his ugliness. Please, God, save me, don’t let me ever see him again. Just let me get away [...] She turned from him and ran, refusing, rejecting, torn, frightened, and left him in the rain, there on the top, alone, bowed, shabby, the winding gear behind him, the pipes leaking steam around him and the rain coming crossing down like a curtain. (156)

Cyn is undoubtedly ‘torn’, emotionally and from the valley, but her decision to leave is also consistent with her independence of mind and with her rejection of the village’s conventional acts of mourning. Even if it is against her will, perhaps she is becoming one of those young women of the 1960s who moved away, not just from home but also from Wales, to make lives for themselves rather than be set in the mould of the submissive female role assigned to them by tradition. However, the second half of the final sentence of the novel also presents Link in a melodramatic, theatrical light. He is seen, not through the female regard of Cyn, for she has left the scene, but through the narrator’s eyes as the Hyde to Joe’s Jekyll, the life leaking out of him and the industrial backdrop as he takes the final curtain, a wasted, defeated creature of Valleys masculinity.

⁷⁹ Aaron, ‘Introduction’ to *The Small Mine*, p. xiii.

⁸⁰ Aaron, p. xi.

Forty years later, the winding gear and colliery plant had been almost entirely dismantled across the Valleys of south Wales when Rachel Trezise's debut novel was published. In terms of the tradition of women's fiction from the Valleys, Gallie is Trezise's sole predecessor. As Gallie undoubtedly drew upon her experience of growing up in the Tawe Valley when writing *Strike for a Kingdom* and *The Small Mine*, Trezise can also be considered the first female writer to present in her fiction the lives of women from the Rhondda with an authenticity born of experience, observation and imagination. David James states that in discussing literary landscapes, 'the conceptualization of space must take as its starting point the lived experience of place'.⁸¹ In her novels and short stories, Trezise draws profoundly upon her 'lived experience' of the Rhondda to convey the trauma of de-industrialisation, the paradox of poverty and consumerism, and the combative relationships of women and men living in the Valley, though she does not present it as a simple binary of innocent women and culpable men. The Rhondda is depicted as a place where men seem to live without purpose or commitment and seek to sustain their assumed privilege by means of emotional, physical and sexual violence. Through the desperate passions and behaviour of Trezise's characters, traditional male hegemony is challenged by the incipient empowerment of women and by the intrinsic inadequacy of the version of masculinity which men attempt to preserve. In Trezise's fiction, the Rhondda is a site of gender conflict in which men's behaviour is subject to rigorous scrutiny for their irresponsibility and their inability to sustain trustworthy relationships.

Between the 1960s of *The Small Mine* and the 1980s that is the setting at the start of Trezise's *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl*,⁸² the changes in the social infra-structure of south Wales brought a degree of re-orientation of cultural values and gender relations. The female regard in *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* is presented through the first-person narrator,

⁸¹ James, p. 2.

⁸² Rachel Trezise, *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2000).

Rebecca, who endures the emotional and psychological damage inflicted by a number of male characters. She is confronted from childhood with an aggressive, violent model of fatherhood as she witnesses her father cursing and thrusting her mother's fur-coat into the fire. Shortly afterwards, her experience is marked by her father's absence when he walks out. To the four-year-old Rebecca, it seems natural that parents should divorce: 'All mothers and fathers broke up, didn't they?' (3). The novel repeatedly suggests that in the Rhondda, the place of fathers is elsewhere. Rebecca's friend, Joanne, 'juggled continually between her Treorchy father and grandparents and her Ystrad mother' (77). Rebecca's boyfriend, Daf, divides his time between his alcoholic father's house, his step-father's, and his mother's flat; her friend, Griff, has 'probably never seen his father' (105) while her schoolboy lover, Will, lives only with his mother. In this novel, and in the Rhondda Valley that it portrays, being a responsible father does not fit within the version of masculinity embraced by male characters. Irrespective of their relationships with their wives and partners, at best they mostly absolve themselves of involvement in rearing their children; at worst, they are guilty of 'violation [that] could not be undone' (55).

Gramich describes the novel as 'deliberately iconoclastic',⁸³ and Trezise problematises the traditional image of the Welsh miner as hard-working breadwinner and trusted head of the family. Rebecca finds it natural that her biological father is soon replaced by her mother's new partner, Brian Williams, who becomes 'Dad', her 'real father' (12). In the process of displacement and replacement, the absent biological father becomes a figure of fear while the new father is, initially, a symbol of security, working as a collier in the last remaining working pit in the Rhondda. But Brian loses his job, becomes a violent alcoholic and rapes Rebecca in her bed, threatening, 'If-you-tell-your-mother-she-will-get-the-beating-of-her-life-and-so-will-you' (36) as if such brutality were more menacing than the lasting

⁸³ Katie Gramich, *Twentieth Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007) p. 195.

impact of sexual abuse. While both of Rebecca's fathers attempt to exercise their power by violence, the vacuity of Brian's threat is exposed when Rebecca realises that 'I couldn't tell anyone simply because my mother would kill him, go to jail and I would be orphaned' (38). Even an eleven-year-old perceives the performative posturing involved in Brian's attempt to impose masculine control and that violence is no longer the preserve of men. While her mother and step-father continue their drunken brawls, the sexual abuse becomes serial and only stops when Rebecca and her mother, Susan, leave and set up home on the infamous Penrhys estate. The father-figure is once again absent but the situation becomes more complex when Rebecca's mother also spends long periods of absence with her new boyfriend. While Trezise does not establish a sharply-defined male-female binary of irresponsibility - for Rebecca's mother is also alcoholic, violent and neglectful - she does present a scathing picture of recidivist abusive behaviour in the male characters that, with the exception of her boyfriend, Daf, generates in Rebecca 'a natural loathing for them' (86).

In the gendered Rhondda Valley, Trezise deploys a number of different locations where conflict is enacted. The narrative territory that Rebecca inhabits is established by the different homes that she and her mother live in, moving between villages in response to imminent danger or opportunities that arise - Hendrefadog, Penrhys, Ystrad, Maerdy - and by the references to various towns, such as Aberdare, Treorchy and Tonypandy. Within this wider geographical Rhondda, however, most of the decisive incidents occur indoors, in houses, a library, school, college, a court-room; in particular, the bedroom is repeatedly presented as the most intimate, personal space, always subject to male intrusion. The first chapter begins with a scene of female happiness and feminised comfort shared by mother and daughter: 'My mother's bedroom was always cheerfully lit with a big bright lamp, the shade gathered prettily and adorned with lace' (1). Seen through an innocent child's eyes, it is a place of glamour, music and affection until the sound of the father's cursing penetrates,

unleashing his violence, transforming it to a site of conflict and sadness 'as tears fell rapidly from my mother's eyes' (2). When, seven years later, Brian rapes Rebecca, Trezise captures the physical terror of his intrusion into the privacy of the child's bed:

The blankets were pulled back and the mattress rustled as he got into bed and embraced my fragile eleven-year-old body. I could feel his fleshy bulk at a hair's-breadth, slowly moving towards, touching my skin. I screwed up my face with stubbornness and hoped that if I lay perfectly still, he might leave. Besides, fear had rooted me to the sheets because somehow I had an idea of what would happen next. (35)

The precise, disturbing sensations of sound and touch generate a palpable sense of horrified anticipation here, erasing the last desperate vestiges of hope that the man who has been entrusted with the role of 'real father' will not destroy the happiness of their relationship. Almost inevitably in the ever-threatening Rhondda that Trezise presents, the innocent is raped, not only in the confinement of the bedroom, but repeatedly over several years, as well as in a public space when the case goes to Crown Court in Cardiff three years later and the counsel for defence convinces the jury that the accusation has been invented because Rebecca and her mother are jealous of the step-father and his new girl-friend.

If 'mature', adult males are represented as irresponsible, untrustworthy, brutal members of the prevailing patriarchy, the question may be asked whether Trezise, as a writer who was 22 years old at the time the novel was published, offers any sign of hope in the behaviour and values of young men. Three of Rebecca's relationships with young men - Jonesy, Daf, and Will - provide a mixed impression, all dominated by bedrooms. When Rebecca's mother and her new boyfriend go on holiday, abandoning her to look after herself at the age of fourteen, she 'experienced consenting sex for the first time in their bed with a man I knew briefly from Penrhys. It felt so wrong, so ungratifying, so sickening to the point of unconsciousness' (57). Despite Rebecca's dissatisfaction with this under-age sexual encounter with Jonesy, she runs away to Nottingham with him on a journey that takes them through an underworld of hostels, squats, disreputable cafés and back-stage rooms that offer a

form of freedom concealing her unhappiness. In reality, this apparent adventure becomes a case of abduction for which there is no indication of Jonesy's remorse or even any awareness of its implications.

In contrast, the bedroom is a space of happiness in Rebecca's relationship with Daf: it is there that she overcomes her reluctance 'to express my attraction or my fondness to a human and worse, a man' (86). When they first have sex, on New Year's Night 1994, Rebecca is ecstatic: 'This is it, I thought. This is forever, what with having sex for the first time on such a significant date. I'm born, I'm a baby here. This is the start, the beginning of my life, and Daf will look after me forever' (87). The suggestion of Daf, aged 18, fulfilling the role of the surrogate father, offering security and protection, is clear. Daf is sensitive, responsible, studious and creative but he also possesses a reckless streak that makes him attractive to Rebecca, drinking heavily, taking drugs and setting up a shoplifting scam with her 'like some weird Bonnie and Clyde fun-loving criminals' (101). The difficulty in their relationship is Rebecca's inability to find the balance. She becomes possessive, jealous, demanding - 'I am wholly, completely, totally, and utterly, couldn't be more obsessed with Daf' (93) - but he helps her to gain possession, too, of her own sense of being, releasing her from the condition of suspended animation:

Something dramatic happened when I fell in love with Daf [...] My frozen blood melted like coming in from the cold and sitting on the rug by the fire. My muscles came undone and I moved. I heard my voice. I heard my catty, throaty adult laugh for the first time when Daf began to tell me I was beautiful. And then I started to believe him. (115)

In a novel that depicts a broad spectrum of abusive and irresponsible forms of masculinity, Daf is the one male character who displays any form of appreciative or respectful behaviour towards Rebecca, enabling her to feel at ease within her own skin and encouraging her to have a sense of the value of her own voice and identity.

However important the attention that Daf shows, it is not enough to counterbalance the impact of Rebecca's being a victim of rape. She sets out on a course of decadence that marks a rejection of all that Daf can offer, developing an intense, secret sexual relationship with a sixth-form student, Will. Once again she becomes the subject of persistently oppressive, possessive male behaviour which serves as the converse form of masculinity shown by Daf and destroys any sense of self-respect she has gained: 'He took all my energy away. Took my life, threw all my memories to ruination [...] I was being shaped by a man-made mould' (141). The final phrase here is telling. Even allowing for the respite that Rebecca gains in one relationship, Trezise shows the dominant behaviour in her male characters, both the middle-aged and the young, to be brutal, controlling and corrosive, intent on taking possession of women, moulding them within the terms of their own desires, obliterating their identity. 'I refuse to believe that this world is now a woman's world,' says Rebecca, expressing her 'ongoing cynicism and caution', though her statement that 'change takes lifetimes' (149), both in individuals and in social attitudes, offers the distant possibility of a more optimistic view of relationships between women and men. Horizons have expanded, from the Rhondda to the world, from a young woman's regard for life to generations, though the evidence of any parallel shift in male horizons is extremely limited.

Trezise's second novel, *Sixteen Shades of Crazy*,⁸⁴ is set in 2003 in the small Rhondda town of Aberalaw, a place which seems to illustrate the aftermath of the de-industrialisation evoked by male writers such as Ron Berry in *This Bygone*⁸⁵ or Christopher Meredith in his novel, *Shifts*: 'the convertor shop, the blast furnaces, the open hearth, the scrap bay, the coke ovens, all recently shut and decaying'.⁸⁶ Aberalaw is a town where 'nobody ever left, and nobody new ever arrived' (13). Ironically it is distinguished by a bronze statue in the middle

⁸⁴ Rachel Trezise, *Sixteen Shades of Crazy* (London: Harper Collins, 2010).

⁸⁵ Ron Berry, *This Bygone* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1996).

⁸⁶ Christopher Meredith, *Shifts* (Bridgend: Seren, 1988) p. 181.

of the square of 'a Dai-capped miner, one arm clutching his Davy Lamp, the other curved protectively around his wife and babe-in-arms' (20), the civic authorities memorialising both a romanticised, lost era of labour and an idealised but patriarchal family structure. If the statue brings to mind the 'communities and identities which will hold' that Raymond Williams writes of,⁸⁷ it bears no relation to the reality of the lives going on around it in this novel: it is a false idol, an image of the paternal collier that Trezise exposes through the character of Brian in *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl*. Instead, Aberalaw is a place where men and women are at odds with each other, living in close proximity but mostly for the purpose of sharing alcohol, drugs and sex. It is gendered as a site of constant conflict in which women appear to have secured a degree of authority and self-determination in their lives but where ultimately a form of male hegemony persists, albeit challenged. With most of the events confined to Aberalaw and the immediate hillsides, the town acquires an archetypal intensity that makes it representative of the lifestyles, values and social relationships of small towns in the post-industrial Rhondda Valleys.

The third-person narrative presents the lives of three women who are more social companions than friends: Ellie is artistic and liberal, nurturing an aspiration to become a music industry journalist; Rhiannon is a hairdresser, liberal in her drinking, drug-taking and sexual appetite; and Siân dedicates her life to rearing her children in a manner that renders her more martyr than mother: 'She was 28 but could have been 82' (60). While they appear to represent three forms of female identity - the quasi-feminist; the small-time, ambitious business-woman; and the traditional mother or 'Mam' in the making - they live with a sense of inescapable dissatisfaction brought about by their relationships with men. The novel presents two types of masculinity: the women's partners in Aberalaw who are conventional, indolent losers; and the exciting outsider, the risk-taker whose glamour conceals his

⁸⁷ Raymond Williams, *What I Came To Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990) p. 60.

predatory appetite. The dynamic of the narrative is generated by the arrival of the latter, Johnny, who disrupts the women's relationships with their partners and with each other. Yet in their different ways both types of men are from the same cast, performing a traditional masculinity rooted in maintaining their control and exploitation of women.

The male characters who live in Aberlraw - Andy, Marc and Griff - are utterly conventional in their values and lifestyle. Although they are members of a local punk band, they are without a record-company, an agent or fan-base, and display none of the rebelliousness associated with punk: they're performing an imitation drained of energy and power with no indication of any authentic interest in questioning the status quo. Even the band's name, The Boobs, implies a flaccid chauvinism and suggests that what they do is a mistake. Their music reflects a cultural shift from the Rhondda Valley's tradition of male voice choirs to shared dreams of rock'n'roll fame, pursued unglamorously in a yellow Transit van. When the trio returns from a tour in France, Andy responds to Ellie's scepticism that they will achieve a record-deal: 'The tour went well, babe. It's only a matter of time' (234). But when Ellie raises the possibility of going to London to take up a job as a music journalist, he urges her to work in the shampoo factory on the Pengroes Industrial Estate, seeking to contain her ambitions to the Rhondda. Unable to win his argument, he resorts to sexual conquest: 'Ellie tried to back away but Andy ignored her protests, slowly rolling on top of her, his torso pushing into her midrib, her papers thrashing and dropping to the floor' (257). In his sexual hunger, his demands take priority over her reluctance and her preoccupation with her writing: the paper in which she has been proof-reading a review is symbolically brushed aside by the force of his desire.

The conventionality of the local men's masculinity is evident in their sexual and domestic values. Griff, Siân's husband, hates household chores, wants as many children as possible and refuses to have a vasectomy 'like a stubborn bull who thought his manhood was

in his testicles' (62). Andy is dominated by his nuclear family, his father in particular, and wants a wife who will bear children and stay at home. However, any form of what they consider to be sexual transgression provokes these men to apply rigorous control. When Griff learns that Siân has been sterilised, he refuses to have sex with her. At his first suspicion that she's had sex with Johnny, he takes the children from her and returns to his mother, without discussion, with no consideration of the implications. When Andy learns that Ellie has had an abortion, he takes retribution by having an affair in their home, forcing a final confrontation. Early in the novel, Trezise conveys Ellie's view of the balance of power in relationships in Abergavenny using free indirect style: 'Around here, the women wore the trousers, not because Welsh women were in any manner advanced in feminist thinking, but because Welsh men were so indolent; too dozy for domestic altercations' (12). Although Trezise shows that there is an element of truth in this in the routines of daily life, the balance changes when critical occasions arise and the boundaries of family roles remain under patriarchal dominance assumed by tradition. Andy, we are told, 'was the sanest person Ellie knew and he floundered through life, waiting for the next instruction, unable to utilize his own mind' (56). The final phrase characterises the masculinity of a group of men who cannot think beyond received norms.

The alternative masculinity, presented through the character of Johnny Frick, appears to signal an 'otherness', an adventurous independence of mind offering a persuasive contrast that women find attractive. From the moment he arrives - wearing a thick silver chain, with alabaster skin, 'a scattering of black stubble around a pouting mauve mouth [...] and dark circles under his eyes, the colour of smudged kohl' (8) - he enthralls the women. The description evokes a Dracula figure who releases in women a dramatic reaction against the latent dissatisfaction in their psyches. Physically, psychologically and emotionally, he penetrates each of them. The gothic image is evident in his appearance - 'legs going up to his

neck, every bone and sheaf of sinew distinguishable under tight black denim' (103). It is suggested, too, in the presentation of his home, the converted YMCA - an ironic, playful touch by Trezise - with its black and white designer furnishings to which 'Satan had moved in and he was turning it into a seditious playground, recruiting fallen angels to play tag' (150). This is a portrayal of confident masculinity exuding sexual power over women and using it to take control of and discard them one-by-one. Johnny enters their fantasies, playing on their alter egos. He brings Siân out of her shell, challenging her to mix and drink a Sex on the Beach cocktail, to which she responds by suggesting a Slow Wet Orgasm (108). He engages Ellie in talk about art, politics and America, knowing her craving for such conversation. He rarely needs to use his wits to arouse Rhiannon's libido: he lures her into the kitchen on the pretext of getting her some wine before engaging in sexual foreplay.

The sexual predation occurs over the course of four short chapters. As soon as Ellie's partner sets off on tour, Johnny drives her up to Penmaes Mountain to have sex in the back of the car. Two chapters later he has anal sex with Siân; in the following chapter he has oral sex with Rhiannon. These perfunctory acts are conducted on the basis of a rapacious male dominance and the subjugation of female will-power. While each of the women shows a degree of resistance, they all submit to the persistence, opportunism and escapism that Johnny embodies, as Ellie feels: 'The idea of being dominated, of being *taken*, was quite appealing [...] Johnny's power was so pervasive it freed Ellie from the burden of trying to manage her own moral code' (208). Johnny's masculinity is driven by a desire for sexual conquest that is divisive, devious, ruthless and amoral but its power appears to lie in his position as an outsider, as a man who does not conform to the conventional standards of the close-knit community in Abergavenny. His power, it could be said, lies in the contrast he offers to the proprietorial masculinity of the other men in the town: they are possessive of the women but, unlike the statue of the miner in the square whose dominance rested on the basis

of his role as principal provider, they can make no such claim; whereas Johnny is not possessive but simply takes temporary possession of the women in Satanic fashion, turning them, as Siân says of Rhiannon, ‘sixteen shades of crazy’ (247), as if possessed by demons.

For all Johnny’s appeal, Trezise does not allow the apparent glamour of his masculinity to prevail. In his manipulative way, Johnny’s sexual gratification is achieved by furtive behaviour and secrecy. With Siân the sex is in an alley-way between shops; with Rhiannon, it is in the ladies’ toilets of a pub; and with Ellie, he parks next to a rotting picnic table on Penmaes Mountain and ‘they went at it’ with her face pressed into a blanket where ‘she could see strands of black dog hairs tangled in the yellow fibre’ (209). There is no indication of passion or pleasure. However, the most striking repudiation of his behaviour is established when the police arrest him and he stands trial at Cardiff Crown Court. Before the trial he shows a rare moment of truthfulness when Ellie suggests he should run away with her: ‘I’m no Ronnie Biggs, El. I’m a small-time drug-dealer. You know, in the great scheme of things, I’m just the scum who feeds off the pond-life’ (268). His assessment rings true. Shortly afterwards, the broader perspective in ‘the scheme of things’ is delivered when he appears in court: and Ellie looks at him from the public gallery with a female regard, taking stock of the whole time she’d known him: ‘Ellie scrutinized him for a glint of the gall he’d displayed on the day she’d met him at the Pump House, some little part of her still holding out for him, but he looked like a child lost in the middle of a fairground, complexion like plastic’ (273). As he is sentenced to six years’ imprisonment, Johnny’s masculinity is devoid of macho swagger, the performative confidence he displays when in control draining away.

In the final chapters of the novel, Ellie’s view of Johnny, of her own life and of Abergavenny becomes increasingly lucid and objective. She escapes to New York where she compares the Statue of Liberty with the statue of the miner and his family in the town square: ‘The mining family represented oppression, and Liberty - well, it was in the name’ (306). It is

a rejection of the institutionalised patriarchal and parochial culture of the Valleys. For all the dangerous hard work, pride and solidarity attributed to the colliers, the coalescence of their masculinities into a protective, controlling force in the family and community is seen, in Ellie's female regard, to be both a relic and a dereliction of their responsibility in their relationships with women in the contemporary, changing world.

Trezise depicts the Rhondda as the site of conflicted gender relationships in which the majority of male characters seek to retain their dominant role as father, husband or partner, both in the familiar domestic setting and in the guise of the adventurous, risk-taking outsider. However, they adhere to versions of masculinity that are inadequate because they are illusory: they fool themselves into believing that they still possess patriarchal authority, their eyes closed to the tenuous nature of their assumptions and to the fact that women see through their charade. Their masculine behaviour continues to inflict physical and emotional damage upon female characters and remains oppressive, but the ground has shifted, Trezise's novels suggest, because some women refuse to submit and some are ready to move out, beyond the constraints exerted by the traditions of the Valleys, into a wider world where liberty seems to be a possibility.

CHAPTER 3

MASCULINITIES AND THE VOICE

Languages are very delicate networks of historically accumulated associations, and a thought in Welsh has innumerable and untraceable connections with the thought of past centuries, with the environment, with the scenery even, with one's mother and father, with *their* mothers and fathers, with the moral and emotional terms in which the community has discussed its differences.

Ned Thomas.⁸⁸

At the time that Ned Thomas was writing *The Welsh Extremist* and seeking to elucidate why 'the psychological and material subjection of Wales'⁸⁹ had given rise to militant action in defence of the Welsh language in the late 1960s, the poet, Gwyneth Lewis, was a brilliant student at Cambridge. Looking back on those years as a young writer with a Welsh-language upbringing, Lewis states that 'Wales is riven by complex cultural allegiances',⁹⁰ and goes on to explain her response to the linguistic alienation she felt both in her home city of Cardiff and at Cambridge:

In the end, I decided to live in a *ménage à trois* and to write in both Welsh and English. [...] In me, the two languages constitute an underground water system. They burst out of the earth in two different streams but are of the same nature. Writing in Welsh changes what I can do in English and vice-versa.⁹¹

However, for the monoglot Welsh writer in the English-language, it is likely that a feeling of disjuncture is experienced: an absence, a dried-up stream. In an era when a significant cultural shift is under way to sustain the Welsh language through political, educational, media and corporate intervention in Wales, I very much doubt that I am alone among Anglophone writers in enduring some discomfort when naming English as my native language. 'In Wales, the issue of identity is inseparable from the issue of language,' David Lloyd says,⁹² before

⁸⁸ Ned Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1971) p. 32.

⁸⁹ Thomas, p. 17.

⁹⁰ Gwyneth Lewis, *Quantum Poetics* (Newcastle and Hexham: Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts & Bloodaxe Books, 2015) p. 28.

⁹¹ Lewis, p. 29.

⁹² Lloyd, *The Urgency of Identity*, p. xviii

going on to state that ‘No matter what their relation to the Welsh language and its literature, all Welsh writers are affected by the tensions between the two literatures and cultures.’⁹³ The sense of having ‘lost’ my mother tongue - the gender of that tongue being of some relevance in this context - can give rise to a profound sense of deprivation. Some writers, such as R. S. Thomas, Gillian Clarke and Mike Jenkins, have taken steps to overcome this limitation by learning Welsh but for those others of us who, for a range of cultural, personal and social factors, have remained Anglophone, the lack of bi-linguality impedes our access to those ‘delicate networks’ and ‘untraceable connections’ with our culture of birth. Nevertheless, to take a less pessimistic angle, even if we no longer live in Wales, we will invariably have assimilated some of the vocabulary, colloquial expressions and songs in Welsh, so that the sounds and cadences of the language lie within our linguistic and cultural reach. Traces of ‘the Welsh’ will be evident, to varying degrees, in our accent and imprinted as small features of our dialect and idiolect: a nodal connection with our upbringing, culture and nationality.

In his seminal collection of essays, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* - published just three years before *The Welsh Extremist* - Glyn Jones describes the powerful combination of forces responsible for a form of social homogeneity in Wales:

this conjunction, it seems to me, of Welsh speech, religious nonconformity and political radicalism produced in Wales, in the last century and in this [the twentieth], the country’s most dynamic class, the great creative section of Welsh society from which have sprung almost all its leaders, whether political, artistic, religious or social.⁹⁴

He recognises, however, that it was not strong enough to resist ‘the same forces as have split our whole culture into two, namely anglicization’ (43), brought about by industrialisation, education and migration, particularly in south Wales. Jones claims that ‘a very large number indeed of Anglo-Welsh writers are the first generation of the family to speak English as their

⁹³ Lloyd, p. xx

⁹⁴ Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1968) p. 14.

first language, or their only language' (44). He lists a roll-call of significant 'Anglo-Welsh' writers - twelve of them male, with Menna Gallie the only female - and finds a commonality in the backgrounds of both the English-language and the Welsh-language writers of the time, concluding that 'some of the Anglo-Welsh in fact are Anglo only by the skin of their teeth' (44). Nevertheless, the question can be asked whether the 'homogeneity' that Jones espouses is necessarily a desirable characteristic of a culture, especially if it is patriarchal in its sense of the 'great creative section' holding leadership in chapel, government and literary circles. The anglicisation of Wales has continued apace⁹⁵ and there can be little doubt that the religious, political and cultural homogeneity has declined, becoming more diversified and heterogeneous, though not necessarily for the worse. Yet it still seems credible to claim that many Welsh writers in English today would like to think that they are 'Anglo only by the skin of their teeth', or not even 'Anglo' at all, given that the term 'Anglo-Welsh writer' has generally been replaced by the phrase, 'Welsh writer in English'.⁹⁶

In *Root and Branch* I have chosen to present the protagonist, Daniel Griffiths, as a character who is 'Cardiff born and Cardiff bred',⁹⁷ and who has returned to live in the city after completing his degree in York University. The writing of dialogue presents an author with a number of questions. To what degree should a character's speech reflect her or his social, cultural and geographical experience? How can signifiers such as dialect and accent be

⁹⁵ Janet Davies explains this succinctly in her chapter 'Welsh' in *Languages in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Glanville Price (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000): 'By the late twentieth century, therefore, the majority of Welsh-speakers did not live in areas in which Welsh was the majority language, and over the greater part of the country it became the language of networks within the community rather than of the community as a whole.' (p. 94) However, she also points out that the Welsh-English divide is not simply a case of rural-urban. She refers to 'the transformation of the position of the Welsh language in Cardiff' (p. 96) with the number of Welsh speakers in the city increasing dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century and the status of the language being enhanced politically, educationally, culturally and in the public sphere.

⁹⁶ Stephen Knight explains that the term 'Anglo-Welsh' failed to give 'Welsh status to Welsh people who, not speaking Cymraeg, nevertheless do not feel at all English' (*A Hundred Years of Fiction*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), though at an earlier stage, there were for Saunders Lewis important cultural distinctions to be made: 'the literature which people called Anglo-Welsh was indistinguishable from English literature' (*Is There an Anglo-Welsh Literature?* Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1939).

⁹⁷ The phrase is taken from a popular song by folk-singer, Frank Hennessy, and has been adopted as a motto by Cardiffians for their sense of pride in their origin and upbringing. The importance of maintaining your roots in the city is affirmed in the next line, 'And when I dies, I'll be Cardiff dead,' mimicking a feature of the local dialect in the additional 's' in the verb 'dies'.

integrated into the character's idiolect? To what degree should phonetic transcription be deployed in spelling, and why? In the English-language literature of Wales - as in that of Scotland, Ireland, the English regions, Black America and many post-colonial nations - writers have long tried to reflect the characteristics of local speech in dialogue. A hundred years ago, for example, Caradoc Evans used the syntactical patterns and colloquial phrases that were a feature of Welsh at the time that *My People* was published and translated them directly into English:

“Indeed, now, there's a daft boy, bach!” exclaimed Tomos. “What say you does Enoch want to do that for! Sure me, Dinas is as much as he can manage.”
“Is not that what Job did say?” spoke Katto.
“Dinas is a fairish farm,” said Deio. “Out of his old head is Enoch to leave it.”⁹⁸

It is evident from some of the quotations in the previous chapter that Rachel Trezise draws upon the vernacular of the Rhondda Valley. In his *Cardiff Trilogy*, John Williams consistently deploys features of the local dialect, while Mike Jenkins and Niall Griffiths integrate elements of phonetic re-spelling in their representation of the pronunciation of English in Merthyr Tydfil and Ceredigion respectively. In its acknowledgement of the local, this aspect of the novelist's craft challenges the standardised mode of English in terms of place and class; and in representing the national characteristics of Welsh-English, it can be seen as posing a political challenge to the supranational language of colonising England. The issue that faces the writer is the extent to which these techniques are used and the authenticity with which they can be achieved. How do they contribute to what Steve Waters calls the ‘linguistic energy’⁹⁹ of the text? What effects do they achieve in generating the dynamic world of the novel? How do they influence the depiction of the characters, their relationships with each other and their place in their social environment?

⁹⁸ Caradoc Evans, ‘A Heifer Without Blemish’ in *My People* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1987 edition) p. 57.

⁹⁹ Steve Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010) p. 126.

In *Root and Branch*, I chose to exercise a light touch variation of what might be termed standard informal English in the dialogue as well as in Daniel's first-person narration in the present-tense. However, in opening the novel with a letter written in Burma in 1944 by Daniel's grandfather, I was initially faced with the task of establishing the appropriate register for the written language of a resident of the Rhondda during World War II. The letters of Alun Lewis¹⁰⁰ influenced my decision to opt for standard English with touches of the colloquial and informal-personal. Although Lewis won a scholarship to the prestigious Cowbridge Grammar School, I had no reason to think that Daniel's grandfather would have been less capable of composing a letter of comparable grammatical formality. This decision influenced choices regarding the register of dialogue. The speech of Daniel's grandparents incorporates a limited number of lexical and syntactical devices that are distinctive of the Valleys in general without recourse to the specific characteristics of working-class speech in Cwmaman: they serve as linguistic traces of the locality and community. In the case of Daniel, the issue was more complex since his voice as first-person narrator, as the consciousness of the novel, is far more sustained. His upbringing in Cardiff from 1979 to 2008 implies a different dialect from that of the Rhondda Valleys. I sought to achieve a consistent voice for this role and that of interlocutor in his dialogue with other characters, bearing in mind his education to university standard and his career as a professional laboratory technician. For the most part I have tried to write his voice as one that modulates between the formal and the anglicized colloquial register of the post-1979 generation of children.¹⁰¹ However, it seemed important to reflect elements of Daniel's roots - those

¹⁰⁰ Initially in reading extracts of Lewis' letters in *Alun Lewis: A Life* by John Pikoulis (Bridgend: Seren, 1991) and then in *Letters to My Wife*, by Alun Lewis, edited by Gweno Lewis (Bridgend: Seren, 2015).

¹⁰¹ 1979 is also the year when the first referendum was held in Wales, on 1 March, to decide whether there was enough support for a Welsh Assembly. The result was 20.3% in favour of devolution and 79.4% against with a 59% turn-out. For many people in Wales, the election of Margaret Thatcher in May 1979 led to a deliberate political confrontation with the miners, resulting in the Miners' Strike of 1984-85 and, ultimately, the closure of the coalfields. In 1979, too, the new Home Secretary, William Whitelaw, decided not to approve a new Welsh-

assimilated from his relationship with his grandparents - in his lexis and syntax. As with his grandparents, then, I decided to integrate a limited range of generic Welsh colloquial phrases and syntactical structures into both his narratorial and dialogical voices as a watermark of his cultural upbringing.

I should add, however, that different factors affected my representation of the spoken English of Burmese characters. I again chose to mostly use standard English in order to avoid the pitfalls of trying to represent the syntax of speakers for whom English is a second or third language. At best, the risk is one of mis-representation; at worst, it could appear gauche or ignorant in reducing Burmese-English speech to stereotypical dialect derived from a superior imperialist viewpoint. While Kirsti Bohata explores the political implications of such stylistic choices from a postcolonial position with particular reference to the tensions between English and Welsh in *Postcolonialism Revisited*,¹⁰² I also found myself influenced by Amitav Ghosh's decision to represent dialogue in *The Glass Palace*¹⁰³ in consistent standard English; although the large cast of characters originates from a considerable number of races and ethnicities in Burma and India, the neutrality of standard syntax and spelling retains the emphasis on the meanings of dialogue. This choice can still be political not because it emphasises cultural difference through syntax and pronunciation as signifiers of characters' values but rather, because it allows those values to be inferred from what is said in the context of the dialogue and because it does not convey a sense of 'otherness' of the speakers..

Catrin Dafydd is a novelist who explores the social and cultural tensions between the Welsh and English languages with regard to their gendered significance for her characters. Brought up in the 1980s in the village of Gwaelod-y-Garth, a few miles north of Cardiff, Dafydd weaves back and forth between Welsh and English in her writing, with both a

language television channel despite the Conservative Party's election promise to do so. This led to protests and acts of civil disobedience and the threat by Plaid Cymru M.P., Gwynfor Evans, to go on hunger strike.

¹⁰² Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004)

¹⁰³ Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* (London: Harper Collins, 2001)

political and a gendered slant. Of her four novels, two are in Welsh and two in English. Both of her English-language novels - *Random Deaths and Custard*¹⁰⁴ and the sequel, *Random Births and Love Hearts*¹⁰⁵ - are lighter in tone than those of Rachel Trezise, their comic incidents, playful dialogue and humorous characterisation creating a Rhondda Valley where poverty, isolation and the struggles of family life are presented through slapstick as well as pathos. Dafydd examines the experience of young people whose cultural identity is challenged by the tensions and contentions of bi-lingualism in south-east Wales. Her protagonist and first-person narrator in both novels - eighteen-year-old Sam Jones - is attempting to hold on to her Welsh language roots against the odds in an English-speaking community, while the male characters in her novels are distinguished by their unreliability and, with two exceptions, their lack of interest in their language. So skillfully does Dafydd stitch fragments of Welsh into her English-language novels that ultimately, in a nexus of voice and gender, the difficulties Sam faces in her relationships with men are resolved by the resurgence of the Welsh language in her life and the strengthening of her sense of identity as a Welsh woman.

The setting for *Random Deaths and Custard* is in the predominantly Anglophone area around Porth in the heart of the Rhondda, where Sam Jones is employed in a custard factory and obsessed with the possibility of her own 'random' death by unexpected circumstances. Sam's connection to the Welsh language is through her Nanna and her education in a Welsh-medium school. Amidst the comedy, Dafydd presents some unsavoury male characters: to her mother, Sam's father is a 'bastard' (12), a gambler serving a prison-sentence for fraudulent benefits claims; her Uncle Martin is a paedophile; her friend, known as Arse, was raped by her step-father at the age of 14 and had to have an abortion. Her manager at work, Chief, is lewd, incompetent and emotionally unstable. On a different level of dysfunctionality, her

¹⁰⁴ Catrin Dafydd, *Random Deaths and Custard* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ Catrin Dafydd, *Random Births and Love Hearts* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2015).

brother Gareth suffers post-traumatic stress disorder following a tour of Iraq and spends most of his life shut in his bedroom. 'Men piss me off,' says Sam. '... It's absolutely pathetic. Massagin' their egos and their cocks at the same time' (54). Dafydd not only presents the narrative with a female narrator's regard and voice but also depicts a Rhondda where such sense of community as exists is sustained by women, whilst men remain at the margins of the social and fictional narratives.

An air of liminality is generated around the central male character in *Random Deaths and Custard*, a figure of chance in more ways than one. Tellin, as he is referred to, is a catalogue salesman who happens to knock on the door when Sam chokes on a fish-finger and he performs abdominal thrusts to save her from 'Random Death number four'. When she asks his name, his teasing reply - 'Ah, that would be tellin' ' (36) - earns him an ambiguous sobriquet that signifies both an act of speech and a sense of secrecy and mystery. From that moment on, he becomes the risible focus of her romantic and sexual fantasies:

Tellin came and offered me breakfast in bed. Toast and those croissant thingies [...] He told me he loved me and then walked me to the bathroom and came into the shower with me ... I been doin' a lot of this recently. Imaginin' that I'm doin' things with Tellin. (51)

Tellin epitomises the loving, domesticated male she has never experienced, as well as the sexually attentive object of her desire. She has one more unexpected glimpse of him from the bus when his actuality as a young man with a bag over his shoulder and a catalogue in his hand is transformed into an exotic figure from a television commercial:

Suddenly the bus turns into this Turkish tent and he's wearin' some kind of Arabian headgear. After that he feeds me Turkish delight [...] then he kisses me and the taste of Turkish Delight (*sic*) pours between our mouths. (71)

Subsequent events - such as Tellin's apparent failure to turn up for their first date, his accidental death in a collision with a car, the revelation that he has a fiancée, and the way in which the local newspaper dramatises and distorts the story of him saving Sam's life into the

legend of a local hero - all contribute to the elusiveness of the character. As his life is revealed and re-invented, privately and publicly, he becomes ever more removed from the reality of the man that he actually is, or could be, or the man that Sam imagines him to be. The final ironic twist occurs when, after his death, she discovers a fact about him that she finds saddest of all:

He went to Rhydfelen school, that's what the piece said. Spoke Welsh then, I thought. We would've had kids who spoke Welsh. Nanna would've loved him. (131)

As Sam considers the thwarted ideal that would have reached back to her roots and stretched forward to future branches of her family and culture, Tellin embodies a make-believe masculinity that bears little resemblance to the other male figures inhabiting Sam Jones's Rhondda. He represents a projection of her unfulfilled longings, a fortuitous line of masculine connection with the Welsh language, offering a potential shared continuity of identity that is unfortunately and dramatically cancelled out.

Further elements of gender significance are evident in three other devices that Dafydd employs to explore the promotion of the Welsh language and culture in *Random Deaths and Custard*. Her paternal grandmother, Nanna, is the one remaining member of the household who understands Welsh. Nanna does not actually speak Welsh at home but sits in isolation watching the popular Welsh-language television soap, *Pobol y Cwm*. Despite disliking the programme, Sam watches it with her as a way of sharing a cultural bond which is strengthened when she meets one of Nanna's friends, a wealthy Welsh-speaker from Cardiff named Danny Bishop. After Nanna's death, Sam takes Danny to her funeral and he later sends her a cheque for £500 in appreciation to pay for her Welsh lessons. It is in keeping with the whimsical nature of events in the novel that the cheque is ruined when Sam leaves it in the pocket of her jeans which are put in the wash; but it also perhaps symbolises the fact that Sam cannot become dependent on the goodwill of another: if she really wants to improve her Welsh, she must find the means to achieve it herself.

However, Dafydd provides the resolution to Sam's unfulfilled desire to speak Welsh in a further unexpected incident at a rock music gig. Following the performance of a Welsh-language band - the name, Pink Fluid, paying homage to the English-language band - Sam is chosen to give her opinion in an interview on television, even though she had found the singing incomprehensible. Despite her panic, something is released inside and she shows the fluency which she believes herself to be incapable of achieving:

'Ydy,' I said. Die, die. I want to die. 'Maen nhw yn swnio'n da iawn. Mae Pink Fluid yn cyffrous.' Stop there, I thought, quit while you're ahead, but I didn't did I? I fuckin' didn't. 'Ond ti dim gallu clwed geiriau nhw o gwbl. Mae 'The Death' fod yn da hefyd. Nhw ar olaf,' I smiled. (186)

Dafydd does not labour the point but there are several possible implications of the way in which Sam finds her Welsh voice at this juncture.¹⁰⁶ At various times in the novel it is evident that she feels separated from the people she calls the 'Welshy-Welshy twats' (2): despite having some proficiency with the language in school, she experiences both a cultural and social division outside. On this occasion, however, she speaks in a context that interests her, with friends at a rock concert, and responds to the immediacy and pressure of the situation. Sam is able to draw upon her dormant Welsh language skills learnt in school and in her relationship with her grandmother. In addition, there is a suggestion that her pent-up desire to speak the language, expressed throughout the novel, is released when the opportunity arises - something perhaps of the 'underground water system' bursting out of the earth that Gwyneth Lewis speaks of. Characteristically, it is given a comic gendered touch by Dafydd in that the interviewer is 'this very good lookin' man, who looked a bit like Mike Phillips the rugby player' (185), his masculinity complying with the stereotype of Welsh

¹⁰⁶ In *Postcolonialism Revisited*, Kirsti Bohata states that, 'The refusal to translate is a political act which asserts the validity of the untranslated language and signifies both difference and absence; difference in the sense that the untranslated word acts as a synecdoche for the cultural differences of the linguistic group to which it belongs, and absence in that the word and therefore the culture is opaque and unknowable to the reader' (121). Dafydd is undoubtedly political in her writing but in such sections as this, involving lengthy use of untranslated Welsh, she would not necessarily assume a culture that is 'unknowable' to the readers since many of them are likely to be monoglot English speakers from Wales or bilingual Welsh. This applies to the sequel, too, of course.

machismo, but it is a moment when Sam re-connects, emotionally and linguistically, with her own sense of national identity, her roots.

The setting for the sequel, *Random Births and Love Hearts*, is Pontypridd at the mouth of the Rhondda Valley, where the Rhondda Fawr and Rhondda Fach rivers flow into the River Taff, the meeting-point between the small towns of the valleys and the coastal strip where the capital city, Cardiff, is located. Sam is now a single mother in her twenties, impoverished and just about coping, having been betrayed and abandoned by her partner, Richard. Since her husband had done the same, Sam's mother takes the view that 'Richard is a bastard. Richard is a selfish little bastard' (6): the cycle of recidivist male behaviour and of female opinion of men continues.

Dafydd does not present a picture of patriarchal power, however, for the male characters are not strong or cohesive enough a force to exercise control. A patriarchy requires bonding and continuity, a code of common male values and attitudes towards the place and role of women - even if men argue or fight amongst themselves. In Dafydd's novels, the male characters generally appear to be isolated figures, unable to sustain a sense of purpose in their lives: in *Random Births and Love Hearts*, a care-worker, Arthur, takes advantage of Sam's Auntie Peg then abandons her; Sam's friend, Arse, suffers her husband's violence; the husband of Sam's work colleague, Pauline, runs off with another woman; despite his efforts to set up a successful business after returning from Iraq, her brother Gareth tries to commit suicide. If men assume their superiority, their right to do as they wish, then Dafydd suggests that their supposition rests on shaky ground.

However, men continue to shape the lives of women, both because of the consequences of their irresponsibility and infidelity and because of the fact that women still find themselves attracted to them. An absent partner and father of her daughter, Richard persistently tries to win his way back into Sam's favour and home. He starts with sexual

seduction, gradually moving closer, offering to make a financial contribution when he starts to earn some money, and intruding into her bedroom when she is changing to go to work. 'He's bright enough to know that I want him, and I want rid of him,' (27) Sam realises as she succumbs. Is the sex consensual? Is it negotiated or is it predation? Sam's narration indicates full self-awareness of what's happening on both their parts, his stealthy, shifty moves to gain approval, her reluctant indulgence. But while she is hurt and feels self-condemnation and regret afterwards - 'All I want to do is rub it out with a rubber' (27) - Richard enjoys his success, relaxed with a hand behind his neck in a posture that Sam observes: 'I remember some psychologist saying once that when someone puts their arms on their heads ...they think that they're in complete control' (28). How quickly and easily Richard assumes his male right to sexual gratification while using it as a ploy to manipulate Sam, penetrate her emotions and her body, and re-gain a foothold. On this occasion Sam recovers and resumes control of the house, telling Richard to leave, but for the remainder of the novel she faces an internal struggle as he pursues a line of emotional attrition: he brings birthday presents to their daughter, gains an invitation to join the family for Christmas dinner, and leaves a trail of anonymous romantic Post-it notes for Sam. Pursuing a hopeless dream as a musician, Richard makes no serious atonement for his betrayal of Sam and their daughter: although Dafydd does not refer to body odour, Germaine Greer might be speaking of his type of masculinity when she says, 'The saddest, smelliest, most shambling male individual still imagines that women will find him attractive and is prepared to act on the assumption'.¹⁰⁷

Part of Sam's confusion lies in her relationship with another man who appears to offer a very different kind of masculinity from Richard and who also embodies her desire to resume her use of the Welsh language. Sam becomes attracted to the physical appearance of Arwyn Pritchard, Deputy Head Teacher at her daughter's primary school, from the moment

¹⁰⁷ Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (London: Anchor, 2000) p. 372.

she first meets him: 'I notice his hair. His hair is too cool for school. Like a surfer dude from down Pembrokeshire he is' (76). Dafydd increases the demand that she makes of the non-Welsh-speaking reader towards the end of *Random Deaths and Custard* by introducing more extended conversation in Welsh between Sam and Arwyn, carefully judged by embedding Welsh phrases within English syntax, such as 'Look, we've got a cyfarfod staff ar ôl ysgol', or vice-versa: 'Yes, so, wel, yn y cyfarfod staff heno, 'na i godi'r mater ar gyfer y minutes' (76). While this reflects Arwyn's awareness that Sam's command of Welsh is limited, it also becomes part of his attractiveness as a male, his consideration towards her, transformed into a frisson of sensuous, sexual experience when he leaves: 'I just stand there for a moment. Sort of still smelling him' (76).

Like Tellin, Arwyn becomes something of a fantasy figure who remains at a distance from Sam, guarding his professional status as a teacher, although he features as a presence in the narrative more than Tellin does. In depicting Arwyn's male characteristics and impact, Dafydd combines his physical attractiveness with his power in being a Welsh speaker: 'All that Welsh inside his head,' Sam thinks. 'All those things he can say that I can't. All that claim he has on things that are just out of my reach and always will be' (113). Interestingly, when Arwyn asks Sam out on a date, he speaks in English and the morning after, in bed, he continues to do so. Manipulatively, he uses his command of Welsh to seduce her and English, the language of colonial power and authority, in the act of sexual conquest. While Sam recognises that she may be one in a long line of Arwyn's lovers, she still has fantasies of a long-term relationship precisely because of his being a Welsh speaker with whom she can achieve a deeper form of communication: in a remark reminiscent of the statement by Ned Thomas in the epigraph for this chapter, she says, 'I actually think that a different me comes out when I say things in Welsh. It's like another memory opens up in my head. As if another part of my personality comes alive' (135). Arwyn appears to offer Sam the possibility of

fulfilling her sense of Welsh cultural identity combined with the sexual, social and professional qualities of his masculinity that contribute to his power. The potency of this imagined possibility is realised through the plot when Sam believes that the trail of Post-it notes containing brief romantic messages has been left by Arwyn. When the truth becomes apparent – that it is Richard who is leaving them – the spell is punctured. This confusion of Richard and Arwyn's identities becomes a narrative emblem for the way in which their male characteristics merge. Sam's attraction to Arwyn is finally deflated when she tells him that she is pregnant but that he is not the father: 'Without noticing, he lets out a faint breath of relief' (213). His breath is neither Welsh nor English but a primal sound of escape. For the reader, in fact, it is not at all certain that he is not the father-to-be, but Arwyn suddenly complies with the behaviour of other men in the novel, not wanting to acknowledge or take responsibility, and his departure is marked by a casual turn of phrase: 'Hwyl fawr, Sam,' he says, before heading down the steps, taking his language with him' (214). The abruptness and finality of his farewell lends a particular coldness to Arwyn's masculinity, eliminating any illusion of his genuine interest in Sam, and strengthening the view that he has used his language as a weapon of sexual seduction.

If Dafydd infuses Arwyn's maleness with the power of the Welsh language and identity, she does not, in the end, make Sam dependent upon him or any other man. In the final pages, Sam rings Richard up, dictates the terms upon which he can have access to their daughter, requires him to pay maintenance and states that 'I wanna be a single Mam' (231). It is not a negotiated arrangement: Sam is assertive, Richard compliant. However, Sam fulfils her sense of identity as a woman and as a mother by demanding the means of independence to live without a male partner, and finally arrives at an agreement with her daughter, Gwen, that they will speak Welsh together in the home: 'How's about Mami and you speak Welsh together from now on?' (232). The agreement implies not only a future that will generate a

female language lineage from mother to daughter, but also the gendered potential that lies in their shared decision to make a Welsh home ‘together’, a bond of language and womanhood. It is a reconnection of the link that Sam had shared with her Nanna and it harks back, too, to the moment in *Random Deaths and Custard* when she learns that Tellin was a Welsh speaker and imagines that they could have brought up their children as Welsh speakers. The critical force in the continuity of the Welsh language, Dafydd’s novels seem to imply, is the power of parents to share the language with their children and embed it securely within their lives.

While the English-language novels of Catrin Dafydd deliberately address the political, social, personal and literary tensions and opportunities generated by bi-lingualism in Wales today, one of the characteristics of the work of Deborah Kay Davies is the absence of ‘Welshness’ in the Anglophone voices of the narrators and characters: instead, Davies’ primary purpose is to express the voice of women’s experience. Davies grew up in Pontypool in the Afon Lwyd valley in south Wales, but neither her novels - *True Things About Me*¹⁰⁸ and *Reasons She Goes to the Woods*¹⁰⁹ - nor her collection of short stories - *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful*¹¹⁰ with its narrative and thematic continuity that renders it novelistic in form - draw upon the Valleys for their sense of place or linguistic mode of dialogue: while the three texts differ considerably in narrative, form and style, they are connected by their representation of distinctive areas of female experience. In an interview with Catherine Jones about the main male character in *True Things About Me*, Davies says, ‘I wasn’t interested in him. It’s the women I’m interested in. I’m not interested in talking about female power or male power, just the dangers of that relationship.’¹¹¹ It is difficult to imagine that an author would have no interest in the male character in a novel which focuses so

¹⁰⁸ Deborah Kay Davies, *True Things About Me* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Deborah Kay Davies, *Reasons She Goes to the Woods* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014).

¹¹⁰ Deborah Kay Davies, *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008).

¹¹¹ Catherine Jones, ‘Deborah Kay Davies: Now I Can Call Myself a Writer’, *Wales-on-Line*, 25 June 2010, <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/showbiz/deborah-kay-davies-now-can-1914951>, accessed 27 July 2015

powerfully on the dynamics of the central female character's relationship with a man but Davies denies any interest in gender politics, adding: 'The sisterhood may be horrified, but I know there are people who have knee-jerk reactions.' This implies a degree of impatience with the anticipated response of feminist critics who might react against the obsessive, submissive behaviour of the female protagonist in *True Things About Me*. In *The Independent*, Boyd Tonkin reports - presumably on the basis of conversation with Davies - that she 'does not worry that some people might find the story "shocking or anti-feminist"'.¹¹² Nevertheless in a further interview, Davies says of her narrator's anonymity, 'I didn't want to give her a name. She is an everywoman, I think. She could be you or me',¹¹³ a statement which claims a considerable significance for the protagonist, and about which 'the sisterhood' of feminists, and every other reader who considers themselves to be embraced by the term 'everywoman', would be entitled to form their own opinion.

In *True Things About Me*, the female regard on women's experience is presented through the first-person narrative voice of an anonymous female protagonist, the victim of despotically invasive male behaviour. The title of every chapter begins with the first-person singular pronoun - from 'I go underground' at the start to 'I innovate with soft furnishings' at the end - but the reader is witness to a process in which the sense of identity, the 'I' of the narrator, the female voice, is assaulted, abused and eroded almost to obliteration. Little is revealed about the background of the male character - also anonymous - to offer any psychological insights into his violent libido and exploitative behaviour. This resembles Rachel Trezise's depiction of the abusive 'real father,' Brian Williams, in *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* and the Machiavellian Johnny in *Sixteen Shades of Crazy*. But Davies is also

¹¹² Boyd Tonkin 'Summer of Tainted Love', 25 June 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/summer-of-tainted-love-a-season-of-strictly-adult-stories-about-the-shadow-side-of-love-and-sex-2009639.html>, accessed 27 July 2015.

¹¹³ Nan Craig, 'An Interview with Deborah Kay Davies', 1 July 2007, http://www.bookslut.com/features/2011_07_017852.php, Accessed 5 April 2013.

sparing in providing information about the background of her female protagonist so that her behaviour can appear irrational, born of desires and impulses that are not explained or developed out of a previous life with which the reader is familiar. Joanna Briscoe is puzzled about this in her review in *The Guardian*, without indicating whether she finds it satisfactory or otherwise:

Her trauma is affecting and well described, but it leaves us wanting to know more. Has this reactivated memories of an earlier abusive incident? What in her past has informed the extremes of self-destructive behaviour to which she soon succumbs? Who is this woman? We never find out. We aren't told which town she lives in, what her name is, and what events have marked her life so far. The dearth of biographical information is remarkable in a full-length work.¹¹⁴

In her 20s, the narrator is from a comfortable middle-class family, works in a welfare benefits office, maintains a secure relationship with her parents and owns her own house and car. Apparently independent of means and mind, she is propelled out of the mundane routine of her daily life and detached from its values and moral code by a violent, exploitative man, to find herself in a position of obsessive sexual, emotional and domestic submission.

The man is introduced on the first page as a figure of insouciant *machismo* and sexual allure when the narrator catches a glimpse of him, the next claimant in the queue, with curly blond hair, arms crossed and eyes closed. It is as if he is shut off from the world. With her second glance, the erotic interest stirs: 'Broad shoulders. His legs were long, stretched out in front of him, clad in faded, nicely tight jeans' (2). In the course of their formal interview, in which it is revealed that he has just come out of prison, his flirtatious, demanding manner starts to establish his sexual power: 'His shirt was open at the neck. His throat was kissable' (3). Again, the immediacy of the attraction resembles Ellie's response to Johnny in *Sixteen*

¹¹⁴ Joanna Briscoe, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/31/true-things-about-davies-review>, accessed 4 June 2014.

Shades of Crazy and Sam's to Tellin in *Random Deaths and Custard*: her normal behaviour is disturbed and becomes self-conscious under his male gaze. The man is at ease, assuming control in the dialogue, exploiting the phallogentric performance of his masculinity, experienced in arousing spontaneous sexual interest. He teases at the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in an official context with his ambiguous replies to her administrative questions and the innuendo of his rejoinder about her lack of lunch-break: 'You look as if you could do with a long one' (3). At the end of the day, he waits for her outside her office, a predator not to be refused, and they have instant rough sex against a pillar in an underground car-park. His laconic comments after their climax - 'Short and sweet' - and when he puts her into a taxi - his 'See you around' (6) not dissimilar to Arwyn's 'Hwyl fawr, Sam' - indicate his casual attitude towards sex and towards his conquest, certain that his dominant, abrupt manner will further stimulate her fascination and desire. Davies introduces a man who is confident of his sexual potency, displays a brutal style of seduction, and has no qualms about casting women aside once he has had them. It is another forty pages before he appears again, raising the narrative possibility of his being a one-night stand but suggesting, too, the male behaviour consistently displayed in the novels under consideration of being elsewhere, of coming and going at will.

Although there are cameo appearances by several other men - the narrator's father; the husband of her friend, Alison; and a blind date, Rob - they are all presented as mild, modest, conformist creatures of habit, lacking the allure of the anti-hero who becomes the perverse cynosure of the narrator's compulsive desire. As Rebecca Barry says in *The New York Times*, he is 'rescuing the narrator from the safe things, from her ordinary life, while threatening to destroy her'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Rebecca Barry, 'A Novel of Dark Sexual Obsession', *New York Times* 29 July 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/31/books/review/true-things-about-me-by-deborah-kay-davies-book-review.html? accessed 15 June 2013>.

While Davies presents a form of masculinity in this man that is utterly unreliable and dishonest, she brings out his insatiability as he raises the stakes with each encounter, penetrating the woman's body, her lifestyle, her home and her emotional balance. 'You have to get used to the fact that I'm a cruel bastard,' he says (97). His initial seductive double-entendres and erotic body-language are replaced by an aggressive voice and behaviour. He speaks in imperatives. When he sends her a text giving the address of a rendez-vous for a sado-masochistic encounter, he adds the word 'NOW' - capitalised (115). He demands compliance and he counters any attempt at resistance with menace or violence. When she tries to eject him from her house, he pushes her over so that she strikes her head against a coffee table then brushes the incident aside: 'We'll pretend this hasn't happened, he said, stretching his arms above his head and yawning' (176). The indolent gesture is reminiscent of Richard indolently placing his hand behind his neck when he seduces Sam in her bedroom in *Random Births and Love Hearts*, indicative of his sense of easy, unquestionable control.

What is particularly poignant in the seemingly inexorable momentum of male hegemony in the novel is its impact upon the woman's voice. From the outset, the man directs their exchanges of speech. In the underground car-park, he puts words into her mouth: 'I'm so ready, he said. Are you? Yes, I said, and opened my legs for him. Say fuck me, he said, so I did' (5). The process of alienation from her own voice is under way. The next day, when she rings in to work to explain her absence, she tells a lie to her colleague and friend, Alison, and notices, 'My voice was unfamiliar' (8). When she meets up with Alison, she is evasive and diverts conversation away from herself. She organises leave from work and shuts herself up in her house but gradually feels ill at ease in her own home: 'I didn't feel I could trust it any more' (52). On the occasion of an apparently romantic encounter in a luxury flat, the man becomes increasingly sadistic in his sexual demands and, in an act that symbolises

enforced voicelessness, pushes her balled-up knickers into her mouth: 'He hurt me but I didn't make a sound,' she says (119). It appears that her identity, her body's ability to respond to the experience to which it is being subjected, has been obliterated in the manner that Rebecca Solnit elucidates: 'Violence is one way to silence people, to deny their voice and their credibility, to assert your right to control over their right to exist.'¹¹⁶ However, although the woman becomes increasingly isolated, she hangs onto the faintest threads of her own voice which eventually enable her to survive. She has a number of conversations with images of herself reflected in the mirror and retains a trace of objectivity: 'My face in the mirror didn't recognise me. She had different eyes from the eyes I'd always thought I'd had. Her hair was thinner and flatter than mine. She had a disappointed mouth' (203). Despite her reclusive behaviour, and contrary to the man's orders, she manages to confide in her loyal friend, Alison, who gives her hope that she might 'stumble on my old self' (179). Finally, in an entirely different way but with an echo of the way in which Sam Jones finds her voice through her pact with her daughter at the end of *Random Births and Love Hearts*, the woman overcomes the loss of voice, the inarticulacy which the man has driven her to, when she holds a conversation with the foetus in her womb: 'I placed my hands on my belly, and tried to communicate a message to the tiny thing in there. I didn't make any promises' (210). This impulse, by which she hangs onto her female voice and her sense of identity as a woman with maternal prospects, motivates her to carry out her plan. As she makes her way through her house to suffocate the man lying in a drunken stupor on her bed, she feels the power of the moon bathing her body in light and 'Encasing my inch-long baby like a benevolent forcefield' (212). When she presses a pillow over the man's mouth and nose, it is an act of revenge for the sadistic speechlessness that he has enforced on her and it shuts off his access

¹¹⁶ Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things To Me* (London: Granta, 2014) p. 6.

both to breath and voice: 'I told him I was sorry, but I didn't mean it' (214). She not only retrieves the power of speech but she also speaks with liberty of mind.

Like Johnny in Rachel Trezise's *Sixteen Shades of Crazy*, the man in *True Things About Me* projects a masculinity of potent otherness, toxic and seemingly irresistible. It is an invasive, penetrative masculinity, colonising the life and the space of the subjugated female. This masculinity never questions itself, never doubts its right to indulge its sexual appetite. Although both novels explore the experiences of women, it is the male figures who attempt to destroy the sense of identity of the women they prey upon. They are men who are unable to sustain relationships and whose lives are unstable because of their precarious lifestyles and dangerous behaviour; but they also alienate women from their values and relationships and drive them towards breakdown. If Davies' device of making the woman anonymous is intended to suggest that she represents the vulnerable potential in 'everywoman', it could be considered that the decision not to set the novel in a specific location implies that it is 'anywhere', while the device of making the abusive male character anonymous could suggest that he is 'everyman'. Although such an unequivocal reading seems doubtful, it presents a reading of the dynamic of male-female relationships in the novel that is consistent with the authorial intention for her female narrator reported by Boyd Tonkin. The version of abusive masculinity that Davies presents is rooted in violent patriarchal control and an imagined phallocentric world: in the midst of a sado-masochistic sexual act, the man declares, 'You can't do without me, can you, poor baby? ... You need me. I think I'll come back for good ... I know that's what you really want,' (200) assuming the woman's total dependency, projecting his own desires onto hers, obliterating her will. The implication is that, in the end, he is deluded in his sense of absolute power by virtue of his gender, his mistaken belief in his supremacy as a male. When the narrator takes the one action that releases her from his control, it is under the impulse of her femaleness: pregnant, she is compelled to defend the

baby she is carrying as well as herself. Like Sam Jones, albeit in far more extreme and perilous circumstances, she finds her voice in her the assertion of her self-determination. Her biological and human identity as a woman enables her to summon her last vestiges of strength in overcoming her obsession with, and brutal abuse by, a man whose version of masculinity has been presented by Davies as conceivable and credible yet unexplained.

CHAPTER 4

MASCULINITIES URBAN AND RURAL

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant -
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind -

Emily Dickinson.¹¹⁷

In the final paragraph of *Twentieth Century Women's Writing in Wales*, Katie Gramich affirms that whilst she does not subscribe to Victorian determinism, 'there is still truth in the notion that there is a mutually formative relation between a place and a people'.¹¹⁸ This 'formative relation,' whether urban or rural, is inevitably intertwined with a web of other relations, political, economic, social and cultural, of which the perspective on gender that Jane Aaron expresses in her Introduction to *A View Across the Valleys* is one:

The gendered polarization of themes within the canon of Welsh stories in English, with the men focusing on the community and the women on the hilltops, also increases the sense of a destructive split between two incompatible but mutually vulnerable worlds.

Aaron explains that 'to women locked in sweated labour inside those homes [*in the valleys*] by virtue of their social role,' the hills would have 'called with a particular intensity'.¹¹⁹

When she states that, in the twentieth century, male Welsh writers in English focused on the community, she must have in mind authors such as Rhys Davies, Jack Jones, Lewis Jones, Gwyn Thomas, Idris Davies, and Alun Lewis, and, more recently, Ron Berry and Christopher

¹¹⁷ Emily Dickinson, 'Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant' from Thomas H. Johnson (ed.), *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1970) p. 506.

¹¹⁸ Gramich, p. 210.

¹¹⁹ Jane Aaron, 'Introduction' to *A View Across the Valleys: Short Stories by Women from Wales c. 1850-1950* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999) p. xix.

Meredith, all of whom have written of the industrial towns and villages in the Valleys of south Wales. As Aaron's anthology illustrates, Welsh women writers, on the other hand, looked up to the hills and the rural landscape across the valley as a form of escape, an alternative setting for their stories, especially for their tales of those female characters who were outsiders to social norms. While Gramich acknowledges Aaron's argument, she extends the thesis, saying that 'Welsh women writers have used the trope [...] emphasizing the climb to the mountain-top as a personal journey; the view from the top often becomes an affirmation of belonging to a place and a community'.¹²⁰ The implication of both Aaron's and Gramich's argument is that the reader finds in Welsh fiction in English a 'mutually formative relation' not just between a place and a people but between a place and a gender: a slant on experience, perception and response, related to the gender of the author and the fictional characters. As Gramich says elsewhere, 'male and female authors frequently conceive of and project different constructs of Wales and Welshness, indicative of contemporary gender ideologies'.¹²¹ To take the point further, it can be argued that within a particular place, the division by gender leads to the allocation of 'place', in both spatial and social, hierarchical terms: such as, in parts of Wales until recently, men in the pit, women in the house; men in the pub, women in the house; men in the choir, women in the house; men in the union meeting, women in the house; men out and about in the street, women on the threshold, scrubbing the doorstep.

Aaron envisages the emergence of a way out of this 'destructive split'. Conscious that the short stories in her anthology were written between 1850 and 1950 but published as a collection at the end of the twentieth century, she sees recent social changes bringing less prevalent 'gender segregation' and expresses the hope that 'a more integrated balance

¹²⁰ Gramich, p. 205.

¹²¹ Gramich 'Narrating the Nation: Telling Stories of Wales' (*North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, Vol. 6.1: Winter 2011) pp. 2-19 (3), <http://welshstudiesjournal.org/article/view/12>, accessed 11 January 2016.

between the feminine and the masculine'¹²² will result. The novels of Welsh women writers published since 2000, such as those of Rachel Trezise, Deborah Kay Davies, and Catrin Dafydd, seem to avoid the hills like the plague - even the hilltop estate of Penrhys in Trezise's *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* bears the hallmark of desolate urban life rather than rural landscape. The focus of these contemporary women writers is the community, the town, whether the small urban districts of the Valleys or the anonymous suburbia of *True Things About Me*, and they explore the lives of women who are seeking to 'find their place' rather than 'know their place', to 'take their place' rather than 'stay in their place'. However, the novels give little indication of greater balance in the relationships of women and men, or of a resolution to the segregation of genders. In the main, they present men whose notions of masculinity adhere to the traditional and patriarchal, resistant to the idea of greater balance. Indeed, in the regard of these Welsh women writers of the twenty-first century, their male characters embrace notions of masculinity that involve violence, menace and abuse of women on a scale that is rarely found in the work of the male writers named in the previous paragraph whose *oeuvres* dominated literary publication in Wales in the first three-quarters of the twentieth-century. These women writers present a range of male characters who do not acknowledge and are unable to reciprocate changes in the roles, expectations and liberty of women. They write of men who have not learnt how to negotiate.

While it is a truism to say that most stories involve conflict and its resolution, it is not a truism that conflict requires violence, intimidation, oppression. The processes of negotiation have the capacity to generate powerful narratives, particularly in contentious relationships between men and women. Negotiation involves both internal and external narratives, people learning to recognise and modify their own habits, assumptions, responses, emotions and behaviour as well as those of the other person. To cede authority or control can

¹²² Aaron, p. xx.

appear risky, raising fears of vulnerability and subjugation, even when power is itself constraining and when participation in mediated relationships offers the possibility of greater liberty. As a young man, I found the arguments of feminists liberating for my sense of masculinity, and continue to do so. In *Root and Branch*, Daniel and Louise have reached a stage in their relationship where they encounter a number of issues that cause recurring tensions: the decline of first romance, childlessness, jealousy. I am not sure whether my decision to write an entire narrative thread to the novel about their kayaking trip down the Rhondda Fawr was deliberately symbolic but the river that winds through the landscape of Daniel's upbringing, through the countryside and small towns of the valley towards the city where they live, provides a trope for exploring the ebb and flow of negotiation in their relationship. The reader learns that in the early days of their attraction, Daniel acquired his kayaking skills in order to please Louise and the exciting white-water runs they enjoyed sealed their relationship. On the day before Daniel leaves for Burma he suggests that they canoe down the Rhondda Valley in homage to his deceased grandparents but Louise sets the pace before an incident occurs that challenges Daniel's nostalgic view of the area. Daniel's internal monologue, his dialogue with Louise and the events that occur beyond his control, all involve negotiations in which their positions shift, where the gendered balance of power tilts this way and that, and where, ultimately, a provisional resolution is reached. Although the outcome is not altogether happy, Daniel's involvement and understanding in his relationship with Louise is perhaps more fruitful for what they share than if he had attempted to retain some vestige of patriarchal authority - which, in any case, would have been a delusory strategy and certain to fail.

Trezza Azzopardi is a writer whose work I have become particularly interested in for the way in which, in the course of her four novels to date,¹²³ the gendered worlds have shifted from the patriarchal dominance in her debut, *The Hiding Place*, to the more conflicted though still male-dominated relationships in *Remember Me* and *Winterton Blue*, concluding with the tentatively negotiated in *The Song House*.¹²⁴ Each novel also involves a shift in location - from Wales to Norwich, London and the Norfolk coast, and back to Berkshire - from urban to rural settings in which the gendered power relationships and places are connected, each imagined locality allowing the possibility of a different angle of scrutiny. In these novels Azzopardi approaches the 'truth' of relationships from a variety of slants, always with a sense of the elusiveness of truth but retaining the possibility that saying it, writing it, might bring us closer.

Born Maltese-Welsh and brought up in Cardiff, Azzopardi crosses geographical and cultural boundaries in her fiction as in her life. Currently living in Norwich, her nationality is not an issue in her work, it seems. In a *New Welsh Review* blog reporting Azzopardi's appearance at the Hay Festival in 2010, Kathryn Gray writes: 'Does she regard herself as a Welsh writer? No. She's a writer, she says. Plain and simple. The rest doesn't (shouldn't?) come into it'.¹²⁵ Deborah Kay Davies gave a similar reply in an interview with Nan Craig: 'I do not think of myself as a Welsh writer. I am a writer who is Welsh. I love being Welsh, it's who I am, I can't be anything else, that's all I can say!'¹²⁶ Although neither Azzopardi nor Davies seems particularly concerned to be identified or categorised as a Welsh writer, the cultural worlds that their characters inhabit have a strong bearing on the nature of the male and female relationships that they present. The setting of *True Things About Me* is a

¹²³ A fifth novel, *The Tip of my Tongue* (Bridgend: Seren, 2013), is one of a series by Welsh writers who were commissioned to reinvent the tale of Geraint, son of Erbin, from The Mabinogion in a contemporary setting.

¹²⁴ Trezza Azzopardi, *The Hiding Place* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2000); *Remember Me* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2003); *Winterton Blue* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2007); *The Song House* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2010).

¹²⁵ <http://www.newwelshreview.com/article.php?id=299>, accessed 5 February 2015.

¹²⁶ http://www.bookslut.com/features/2011_07_017852.php, accessed 5 April 2013.

deliberately anonymous British town where all the sites within it - streets, cafés, shops, districts - are unnamed, as if they are spaces that offer another level of reality that is comfortable, secure, almost dream-like, and removed from the brutal emotional and psychological places that the protagonists visit. Azzopardi, on the other hand, depicts each location for her novels with cartographical scrupulousness, precisely naming and describing each place that her characters set foot in, mapping the movements and changes of direction that occur in the power, tensions and reciprocities between the genders.

In *The Hiding Place*, Azzopardi reveals the experience of poor working-class women and daughters living under a harsh patriarchal regime through the first-person narrative voice of Dolores, or Dol, recounting her observations, imaginings, and fallible memories, both as child and adult. While exposing the inner-workings of patriarchal power structures on the brink of implosion, Azzopardi also presents the female capacity for survival in the face of male aggression. Set in the 1960s in the impoverished, multi-cultural area of Butetown in Cardiff - or Tiger Bay as it was popularly called - the novel challenges the popular view of the area as an integrated community. The characters live in a dangerous world where intimidation, coercion and violence place them at risk of each other's impulses, demands, desires and passions, especially in the constant conflicts between males and females. The novel is immersed in a specific urban location, its narratives for the most part played out within a spatial square mile around Hodges Row and Loudon Place, and the characters' social and emotional territory stopping at the 'hump-backed Devil's Bridge' at the top of Bute Street. The term 'square mile' is borrowed from Gramich who has commented on the impact of such restricted spaces in many Welsh novels:

In such a setting [*Wales*], allegiance and a sense of belonging to one's 'square mile' can be very strong and ... the 'square mile' itself can be manipulated into a microcosm of the larger whole which is Wales.¹²⁷

While the cultural characteristics of the community in *The Hiding Place* do not suggest a microcosmic picture of Wales as a whole at that time, the term 'the square mile' is appropriate for describing the familiarities, developments, changes, breakdowns and even the pleasures in the interactions of male and female characters.

Overlaying the geographical square mile with the 'square mile' of gender relationships, Azzopardi achieves what Gramich calls 'the suffocating intensity'¹²⁸ of *The Hiding Place*. Its very confinement lends a sense of Butetown possessing an internal dynamic that renders it remote from the rest of Cardiff. As a point of arrival and departure for seafarers, it is also a place of separation, an interstitial space between Wales and the world, bearing little evidence of traditional notions of Welshness and more those of hybridity or what might be called internationalisation, or even de-nationality. That it is set at a time when Malta was granted a degree of independence from the United Kingdom, becoming a sovereign Commonwealth realm as a step towards independence in the 1970s, also lends a post-colonial undercurrent to the novel. When Dol's father, Frankie Gauci, slips into port, he 'hasn't chosen Cardiff by accident', for he sees it differently, 'Tiger Bay - the Valletta of Britain!' (42). Any sense of belonging is only tenuous, temporary: his intention is to spend his money then 'cut another passage on the sea' (40). However, Butetown becomes a place of refuge both for him and for his future wife, Mary, who has run away from the hardship of life in the Cynon Valley (her tale could almost have come straight from the pages of Aaron's anthology), and they maintain a difficult marriage for nineteen years under a regime of masculine domination that appears to be a given.

¹²⁷ Gramich, p. 3. The phrase is a translation from a common saying in Welsh, 'y milltir sgwâr', meaning one's 'neck of the woods', as it were, and similar, perhaps, to the term used by Raymond Williams, one's 'knowable community'.

¹²⁸ Gramich, p. 8.

The limitations of patriarchal control become evident. Azzopardi presents a community in which male characters are habitually and emotionally separated from their families, their over-riding condition being that of isolation and otherness. Inhabiting a self-contained, culturally-constructed masculine world with its own hierarchical values and territories, they are not even capable of sustaining enduring relationships and loyalties amongst themselves. Butetown is portrayed as a gendered space where the public spaces - the streets, betting shops, pubs and clubs - are the domain of men who abide by a code of conduct that they expect everyone to accept; while the interiors of houses are the preserve of women and daughters where they try to make ends meet, bringing up families, and finding escape-routes down alleyways to avoid the perils when men return home.

In the male world, the desire for money is the primary force that drives the sense of masculine identity, the power structures and the commodification of family and social relationships. In Joe Medora and Frankie Gauci, Azzopardi shows two exiled Maltese men for whom, in their different ways, money is the most important value in their lives. In the minor characters of Salvatore and Martineau, she depicts men who are rather more sensitive and less ruthless but they are compliant and complicit with the dominant values of the patriarchy. Although the men use the Maltese term, *habib*, with each other, the strength of the bond it supposedly embodies is determined less by the hand of friendship than by a hand of cards. At the moment that his sixth daughter, Dol, is being born in hospital, Frankie's preoccupation lies elsewhere because he is playing cards with Joe Medora, Martineau and Ilya the Pole upstairs at the Moonlight Club:

In the top room, all four chairs are occupied. There is a haze of cheroots, a sweat of onions, the stink of eggs in oil. My father has staked everything on the winning of the game.' (12)

In this rancid male domain, luck is the authority the men accept, yet Frankie already appears to be isolated from his fellow card-school gamblers, the only one whose compulsion is so

strong that he is prepared to risk his family's livelihood on a wager. Rather than de-stabilising the men's identity, the unpredictability of gambling reinforces their sense of masculinity. In an interview Azzopardi explains the cultural impetus:

I felt so much that his [*Frankie's*] belief in luck was driving everything, and that it wasn't a complete act of will that he would behave in such an appalling way. That partly comes out of the culture I was born into.¹²⁹

Conveniently, this cultural condition lets men off the hook - in their own minds. Possessing the power to choose and place a stake, then waiting for luck to decide the outcome, is assumed to be a male right and absolves them of responsibility. When Anthony Giddens states that, 'Men want status among other men, conferred by material rewards and conjoined to rituals of male solidarity',¹³⁰ he sees this as an understanding that was shared by both sexes in the nineteenth century but one that has fallen behind the times in 'the development of modernity'. In offering its 'ritual of male solidarity', poker provides the opportunity for status, money and the consensual male rules of the game but it also creates losers, losses and division. The card-school is privileged male territory: in that room at the top, removed from female regard, they are behind the times and in hiding from other realities.

In exile from their home countries, the men in this community are also in exile from their homes. Do they choose public spaces as their haunts because of the pleasures, freedoms and fraternity they find or because they are not at ease in their homes, they do not fit in? Frankie's place in his family is distinguished by his absence. When he is in the house, he sleeps alone in the Box Room - 'It's always open, as if he's saying he doesn't really live there' (4) - while his wife and daughters share the two larger bedrooms. But on the occasion that a fire breaks out shortly after they have moved into the house and the infant Dol is rushed into hospital with her injuries, he is elsewhere. When he eventually goes to the hospital and

¹²⁹ Jessica Murphy, 'Out of Hiding', *Atlantic Unbound Interviews*, 1 February 2001, <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/interviews/int2001-02-01.htm>, accessed 21 December 2015.

¹³⁰ Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) p. 61.

weeps over Dol - 'Bambina, he chants, Bambina, Bambina, Bambina' - his daughter's retrospective realisation is that 'In truth, my name has deserted him; he can't remember what I'm called' (67). The appearance of feeling distraught by his daughter's injuries is exposed as a false, ritualistic display of emotion - and since his nickname amongst the other men is Frankie Bambina, he may be weeping for himself. The alienation is evident when Frankie reaches towards Dol, 'wanting to touch me but not knowing how' (68). The gap between father and youngest child is symptomatic of a man whose version of paternal identity is incapable of showing the simplest form of sympathy towards his maimed daughter.

However, Azzopardi shows that Frankie also seeks to impose traditional male authority in the home with absolute, violent control. When his daughter, Fran, is accused of setting fire to a shop, he ignores the presence of the police and adopts the role of the autocrat, demanding the power of judgement and punishment: 'Bring her! He shouts, Bring her Now!' (112) and when Fran appears, he 'leaps forward at the sight of her: she jerks like a puppet off his fist' (113). Similarly he attacks another daughter, Celesta: 'Celesta shuts her eyes, waiting, and when the blow comes it whips round the room like gunshot' (130 - 131). This is spontaneous violence, unrestrained, habitual, performed as if engrained within his sense of masculinity, but in both cases it stems from Frankie's need to save face in front of others, or, as Jacqueline Rose says, 'When men enact violence against women, they are at once fulfilling their requisite identity but also bearing witness to its frailty'.¹³¹ Frankie's weapon of choice is his leather belt, an accoutrement that is the ultimate symbol of his performative power to punish. It comes into prominence in the final stages of the novel when Dol and her sister, Rose, visit their old home on the day of their mother's funeral and Frankie's belt is found in a bin-bag of old clothes:

¹³¹ Jacqueline Rose, 'The Greatest Challenge', in *The Guardian Review*, 18 October 2014.

The belt whips out from the bag with a noise which startles them both ... The leather is black and worn. There is a sunrise carved into the buckle, the orb and beams mouldered green at each proud edge. Unmistakable. (238)

The orb and beams of the sunrise-buckle are a bitter, ironic reflection of Frankie's inflated sense of his own significance and power: the belt is 'worn' from the way it has been used to beat his daughters into painful submission. Rose and Dol recall their father waiting for Fran on another occasion 'sitting downstairs with the belt across his knees and his eyes on the door' (238). Frankie's accusation reveals his frailty for he is punishing Fran as a substitute for his grudge against his wife's adultery. Knights explains the cause of such violent masculine behaviour in terms that are similar to the inability to 'find the me in (me)n':

the problem for the man who knows that he is not living up to the heroic narratives is the sense of a gap in his own consciousness: the rankling awareness of the disparity between the model and the actuality. Through this gap flows resentment and anger at self and at others.¹³²

The ferocity of Frankie's anger erupts from a sense of his own sexual inadequacy - Joe Medora has become Mary's lover - and, having fallen short of the 'heroic' patriarchal role of husband/lover/father, he has become a victim of the very 'ideal' that he upholds. That Fran bears the female version of his own name may suggest an element of self-loathing and transferred self-flagellation, while the belt becomes the primary form of paternal connection with his daughters. One of the final memories which Dol conjures up is of her father 'standing in the kitchen window as the water splashes in the drain, easing the evidence from the sharp tongue of his belt' (277). Not only is he washing away evidence of guilt from the belt but he is also cleansing himself of the blood-tie with his daughter and family. The metaphor indicates that he speaks with his belt, always his final word. The gap through which the anger flows is the disparity between the public model of patriarchal authority and Frankie's private knowledge of his inability to fulfil the expectations it raises. Violence is the conventional male hiding place into which he retreats.

¹³² Knights, *Writing Masculinities*, pp. 190 - 191.

The commodification of the family is a shared male value in the novel, vividly illustrated when Frankie sells his daughter Marina to Medora and later strikes a deal for his 17-year-old daughter, Celesta, to marry 41-year-old widower, Pippo Seguna. In both instances, familial and paternal values are less important to Frankie than buying favour and status, though it is inconceivable that a son would be the subject of such a transaction. Equally, to Medora and Seguna, the deals are worth making: female members of the family act as sexual and social currency, being bought and sold to satisfy male desires and needs. The arrangement with Joe occurs when Frankie is at his most vulnerable, unable to pay the rent. Azzopardi sets up an ambiguity about the identity of Marina's father: while Joe Medora claims her as his daughter, born out of his affair with Mary, he has his doubts but sweeps them aside with the confidence that his power engenders; on Frankie's part, once the seeds of doubt are sown, he overcomes his anger and projects his uncertainty onto the whole family:

It doesn't occur to Frankie that Marina might not be Joe's daughter; Frankie sees Joe in the child now, sharp as diamond. He wants her out of his sight - he's happy to be rid of her. He would abandon Mary, too, and all the rest of us if he could. And with just that extra bit of money, with a little luck, perhaps he can: perhaps he can get away. (74)

Frankie rationalises the sale of Marina into an opportunity to find favour with Joe and, subliminally, to loosen the ties with his family. He feels a conflict of rage and desire at his wife's possible betrayal - 'He wants her, he hates her' - but his resistance is limited compared with the 'burning itch in his breastbone' (97) that he feels when Pippo bargains for Celesta's hand in marriage. Frankie's identity as husband and father are challenged in both transactions. 'Me and You, Frank. We are Business Men...And we are Men,' says Pippo (106), and from that moment on, Frankie negotiates his way through a maze of opportunities to acquire the money that enables him to buy his way out of his family and the community where he has spent most of his adult male life. He refuses to listen to the pleas of his wife and daughters, a case of what Knights describes as 'the insistence with which patriarchal

masculinity seeks to drown out the other ... instilling fear of ridicule, humiliation or loss of status'.¹³³ He puts on his best suit when he visits Pippo and the entire proceedings from initial meeting to the wedding celebration becomes a male performance in which Frankie plays a number of roles: the autocratic father and husband; the wily crook who organises the theft from the safe in *The Moonlight*; the duplicitous wheeler-dealer who makes another pact with Joe Medora to place the blame on Salvatore; and the fugitive male making his escape on board ship, severing his entire relationship with his family.

The novel is in two parts, the second, shorter part making a leap in time, to the 1990s, when Dol returns to Cardiff for the first time in thirty years to attend her mother's funeral. The city is now both a storehouse of memories and a wrecking-ball of change, and Azzopardi introduces two younger men, Jumbo and Louis, the sons of Celesta and the recently deceased Pippo, marking a generational change in the representation of masculinity. On one level, Jumbo and Louis are maintaining the entrepreneurial flair of their father with plans to open a new restaurant. They are sons of modern Cardiff: 'the city was busy, set and full of purpose' (200). Jumbo in particular is 'looking for smart money. Bay money [...] he'll use any means now' (215). Azzopardi raises the initial expectation that the cycle of masculine preoccupation with money has not changed from one generation to the next.

While Jumbo is compliant with his mother's wishes, accepting her encouragement to forget the past and 'keep facing forward' (234), Louis is desperate to discover the family's stories: 'Louis wanted history', Dol observes (244). As he walks Dol the short distance back to Loudon Place, he conjures up a way of life that he has only been able to piece together, realising that the place, and his family's place in it, are elements of his identity:

This place - it's a little world, right? he said, cupping his hands together as if he had captured a moth. And Mam didn't want us to know... But people round here - he let his imaginary moth free into the air - They knows us. You hears talk... (244)

¹³³ Knights, p. 223.

The 's' tagged onto the verbs shows that he has acquired the syntax of a native Cardiffian while a tattoo of a dragon on his chest suggests his allegiance to Wales rather than Malta. Realising that his mother has not told him about his grandmother's funeral, he is determined to attend:

I'm going, he said, We'll all go.
And he linked his arm through mine.
Nearly there, *Aunty*, he said, grinning again, Wasn't so terrible, was it? (246)

As a young male, Louis is coming to the kind of agreement with Dol that is moving in the direction of family and gender acceptance, an acknowledgement of his roots, and a reciprocity that has not been previously been evident in any of the male characters. The movement from the first-person singular pronoun 'I' to the plural 'We' is a decisive affirmation of connection, between the past, the present and the future; between the old way of life and the future; between the disparate elements of the family and the playful enjoyment expressed in the recognition of Dol as 'Aunty', acknowledging the validity of a female line of kinship. Louis forges an adventurous relationship with Dol, first of all moving away from his mother to stand beside her at the funeral, then setting off on a jaunt with her instead of going directly to the wake. They exchange their experiences of the city and 'He leads me further in, cutting his path to the heart of the Docks' (255), taking her to the original Moonlight Club. The relationship between Louis and Dol brings to the novel the possibility of male and female negotiation of difficulties, across age-difference, upbringing and experience.

Is Azzopardi suggesting a thread of hope in the new masculinity of young men?

Certainly, Louis is the one person who understands that for Dol there is still a missing link in the reunion of the female members of the Gauci family so he goes out to find Fran and bring her back to the family home. 'Did I do the right thing, Aunty Dol?' asks Louis' (282), showing himself to be a male who willingly places himself under female scrutiny and regard. The question is a rejection of the patriarchal claim to automatic authority and correctness that

his father and grandfather believed in. Dol offers no answer but there is something of the rhetorical question in what Louis says that the reader will recognise: a process of joining-up is taking place, being negotiated across the fractures of family-life and gender. It is falling into place, in the street that had formerly been patriarchal territory, signifying the possibility of transformation of gender relationships in the urban environment that had harboured such dysfunctionality.

While the gendered significance of space is evident in all four of Azzopardi's novels, she has gradually moved from urban to more rural settings with each one, shifting the borders of the characters' identities and emotional territories. *Remember Me* is the story of a 70-year-old destitute woman, Winnie, in search of her possessions, memories and identity, starting in the centre of Norwich and exploring her life's journey in the surrounding countryside, manipulated and rejected by both male and female characters. *Winterton Blue* opens with an aerial view of Cardiff by the male protagonist, Lewis, before he sets off on a mission to London and East Anglia where he meets troubled artist and schoolteacher, Anna; as their relationship develops, they visit a remote seaside location where they attempt, like all the protagonists in Azzopardi's *oeuvre*, to put their dislocated world into some kind of order. As the most geographically expansive of the four novels, *Winterton Blue* takes a lengthy route across southern Britain, yet Azzopardi still confines her characters to small spaces which become the gendered hiding places where their sense of belonging, identity and allegiance, are put to the test.

In *The Song House* Azzopardi re-locates the setting for her exploration of relationships and memory to rural Berkshire, an area that might be thought of as the heart of comfortable, middle-class England. An initial business arrangement in which 67-year-old Kenneth Earl employs Maggie Nix - in her thirties - as his amanuensis, turns into a complex negotiation of roles, power, recollections and emotions. Like *The Hiding Place*, the novel

covers a time-span of thirty years, though it focuses on the connections between particular short periods in Maggie's childhood and in her life as an adult. It presents a rural setting that is susceptible to flooding from the River Bourne, a name that implies a boundary, a line of demarcation that separates and connects, and is also understood by Maggie as a child to be linked with birth and a sense of belonging. The novel's intensity is created by the fact that most of the events, both in the past and in the present, occur within the confines of three domestic sites: in Kenneth's ancestral home, Earl House; in nearby Weaver's Cottage, where Maggie grew up; and fifteen miles along the river, in Field Cottage where Maggie takes refuge. In such restricted spaces, and through the use of third-person narration in which the slant on events mostly shifts back and forth between Maggie's and Kenneth's perspective, Azzopardi mediates a 'more integrated balance between the feminine and the masculine' as their emotional attraction prevails over the obstacles that separate them.

In the case of Earl House, Azzopardi represents the property as gendered, the family name that it bears evoking a male aristocratic lineage. It is located in a rich, fertile landscape when viewed through Maggie's eyes at the start of the novel:

It's high summer, hot and arid, but the overgrown hedges on either side of the path cast a welcome shade; walking between them is like being in a tunnel...She is surrounded by fields of crops; she recognises the burnt gold of barley, and the silver feathering of ripe wheat. There is no wire to keep her out. (1)

She sees a place of light and shade, gold and silver, and, unusually, lacking boundary fencing: is this an invitation to enter or careless estate-management? While Maggie thinks herself alone as she approaches the house, she is in fact the subject of male scrutiny, for Kenneth is watching her, looking down from the top floor: perhaps an employer's perusal of a potential member of staff, perhaps with the desire of a 'male gaze', perhaps both. Inside, the house is impressive and spacious, while the room Kenneth calls his 'den' is markedly male with its dark décor in maroon and midnight blue, leather armchairs, a painting of a stag, piles of paper stacked all over the floor, collection of clocks and an aquarium. Although Maggie is

being interviewed for the post as amanuensis, she virtually appoints herself: 'The advert said 'live in', she says, So where do I stay?' (13). Thereafter, Kenneth shows her around the house as if she is a guest, explaining and justifying its foibles, subjecting his home to her female regard. When she asks him to show her the object he hates most, he presents her with a black mug with the Playboy logo etched in gold. It seems that Kenneth has experienced the difficulty of 'finding the me in me(n)' with this symbol of patriarchal and institutionalised male sexual appetite, and when Maggie drops and smashes it in a playful mock-accident - 'Whoops [...] I'm so clumsy' (18) - she is taking the first step towards a re-alignment of their relationship, undermining the property's conventional masculinity.

Weaver's Cottage, where Maggie was brought up in a small hippy commune in the 1970s with her mother, Nell, also bears the stamp of male property, owned by Maggie's grandfather and let rent-free to his son and her father, Ed, on condition that businessmen can come to fish for trout in the adjacent stretch of river at weekends. Maggie recalls the long hot summer and drought of 1976, when she grew up with the message that 'In our house, everything is free and everyone is happy' (74), but beneath the surface of apparent liberty, the power-structure of gender relations is under male control. Ed keeps Nell close:

he says she is his forever, she was meant for him and he was meant for her. He wraps a lock of her hair around his fingers as he says it, winding the auburn curl tighter'.
(26)

Under the guise of romantic clichés and gestures, he exerts proprietorial authority over Nell, restricting her contact with others, with a suggestion of underlying menace.

However, with Ed and his friends coming and going as the whim takes them, Weaver's Cottage also becomes the territory where Nell and Maggie find a degree of emotional security. Maggie imagines her mother's feelings:

... she sees the house as her protector. It is her shield [...] The world outside can do what it wants; safe inside the house, Nell is queen.

When she first saw Weaver's Cottage, she thought it idyllic. Set low behind a thicket of trees, you could miss it entirely. The only visible part was the roof, half-

covered in ivy. Up close, there were tall white hollyhocks in front of the windows and a short cobbled path to the door. The place looked so perfect, so unspoiled: a house a child might draw; a house in a fairy tale. (27)

A close female bond between mother and daughter is established in the intimacy and innocence of their retreat: singing songs, reading *Janet and John*, making love-heart tattoos on their skin from a bottle of cochineal. As in several other novels under consideration in this dissertation, male characters assume the authority and the right to be absent, to be elsewhere; but in so doing, they create a space in which the attachments between female characters are strengthened, the spaces they occupy feminised: in this case, perhaps, in a rather ingenuous, unworldly manner. But there is no such place as an idyll in Azzopardi's novels: instead, there are numerous illusions and delusions. When Ed sets off to form a band, he is replaced in Nell's bed by another member of the commune, his friend Leon, who spends most of his time under the influence of drugs or alcohol and eventually engages Nell in constant violent arguments. More dramatically, the period of female happiness in Weaver's Cottage is shown to be provisional when it is torn apart by the intervention of another male who snatches Maggie from her bed at night, again foregrounding the objectification of females as they are handed from one male to the next.

The third location, Field Cottage, is the house that Nell was given to bring her daughter up in, after the abduction, fifteen miles away and conveniently 'out of the way' (147). Although the cottage represents a female refuge, we learn that it had also become a different source of oppression for Maggie as a child when her mother tried to take control of her every thought and opinion: 'She was a child who couldn't speak, with a mother who couldn't listen' (171). Maggie eventually moved away, only to return when Nell was dying of cancer. Its significance, and the reader's knowledge of it, increases in the second half of the novel when Maggie leaves Earl House and makes her way to Field Cottage as the river is rising. As Maggie realises that 'her mother couldn't stop her from doing anything now' (154),

there is some similarity to the last section of *The Hiding Place* because in both novels the daughters' return to their home is an act of purgation, The river seeps then pours into the building, bringing with it a surge of memories from her past, and the only item that she clings to is the notebook in which she writes her memories of childhood. Having come to terms with her relationship with her mother and with that part of her past, she leaves the cottage forever, knowing that to retreat into a female-gendered hiding place does not provide the solution she needs.

If the male-female gender relationships of the alternative society in Weaver's Cottage are patched-up from fragile allegiances, the fabric of the unlikely relationship between Kenneth and Maggie in *Earl House* becomes stronger as each thread of the past is woven into the present. Kenneth is needy because 'lately he's felt his days merge seamlessly into each other, felt how quickly time can pass; how quickly, and how slowly' (8), as if he is aware of the paradoxes of time and already preparing for old age, for the end; while Maggie, unbeknown to Kenneth, is seeking to make sense of her memories of the trauma of abduction that are brought to the surface. In helping each other to re-capture the past, they are in some way released from its constraints. When Kenneth interviews Maggie to help him catalogue his huge collection of music albums, their relationship appears to be traditionally patriarchal with Kenneth being older, wealthier, empowered as the male employer, and Maggie playing a subordinate secretarial role. But in pursuing their individual purposes, they have to negotiate a range of obstacles - including the unreliability of memory, their own impulses and desires, and the interventions of other characters - in order to arrive at a position where they want to be together. While the danger is that Kenneth could be seen simply as an elderly man infatuated with a younger woman - and this is a stage that he goes through - I find their relationship to be convincingly negotiated. As Maggie undermines the terms and expectations of her status as an employee, Kenneth responds, happy not to have adopted the conventional

status and behaviour expected of an employer. From the outset, Maggie is calm, collected and playful. Kenneth is awkward, self-conscious, overly-polite and bashful. Their exchanges become increasingly personal as they engage with each other's insecurities and edge towards emotional and gender reciprocity.

A critical element in the relationship is the problem of finding the voice to articulate memory. Kenneth appears to be seeking to make sense of his long-term music memory because his short-term memory is becoming increasingly unreliable, but in order to do this he needs the help of another. For Maggie, however, the quest to piece together the experience of being abducted when she was four is more mysterious: 'She doesn't know why she must do this; she has no reason except that it seems a natural thing, a childhood act revived.' (1) To access this experience, she draws upon Kenneth's reminiscences to trace back to the roots of her memory. James argues that in the novel, *Thinks ...*, David Lodge suggests that 'memory is circular rather than linear, and that multiple pasts resound in the chamber of one's present-day consciousness, re-echoing like an ensemble of episodes contrapuntally arranged and rarely played in tune with each other'.¹³⁴ While multiple versions of the past resonate through *The Song House*, memory lacks even the certainty of circularity and is kaleidoscopic, constantly changing shape in patterns that appear to be beyond the viewer's control. Kenneth and Maggie share a need to recollect the past and encapsulate a version of it in language, spoken and written, whilst both becoming aware of the inadequacy of their efforts to do so. Kenneth angrily dismisses his own attempts to describe the experience of hearing Winchester Cathedral Choir singing *All Things Bright and Beautiful* as 'utter tripe' (33) but Maggie is able to placate him by persuading him to see her role as that of a ghost-writer:

Will they still be my memories, he says, finally, If you're writing them?
I'm a very good listener, she says.
And you'll be my interpreter, he says, catching air in his fist. That's what you
said?

¹³⁴ James, *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space*, p. 99.

That's right, agrees Maggie, not correcting him, You see, we're both good listeners. (36)

When typing up Kenneth's memories of the hymn, Maggie finds that it awakens and releases her own apprehension of the past and she uses the fountain-pen that Kenneth has given her to secretly write her memories of childhood in the back of a notebook: 'Resurrect his time, she tells herself, and then your own' (38). Listening; being attentive to each other; being able to translate inadequate accounts of experience into a coherent form; trusting each other to arrive at a credible exegesis without dispossessing, without claiming ownership; ceding control without fear of loss or humiliation; recognising mutual capabilities; giving each other the means to find a voice that will unlock the past: these are the processes of interpretation and negotiation that they offer and which form the basis of their emotional convergence, so that gradually, in Patrick Gale's words, 'something like love'¹³⁵ develops between them, albeit with a number of difficulties along the way.

Instead of simply re-visiting the past by unearthing the memories associated with his records, Kenneth gradually comes to confront his present self. In the confines of his office, listening to Maggie typing downstairs, he is spurred by her proximity to find a way of seeing the physical reality of who he is and writing it for himself:

He presses the nib of his fountain-pen onto the blotter and marks out his shortcomings in furry blue blobs: his age; varicose vein like an elver climbing up his leg; hair falling out where it should be growing and growing where it shouldn't. How big his earlobes are. The terrible, irrevocable whiteness of his pubes. Spreading his hands in front of him, he studies the familiar tremor [...] He would prefer Maggie to love him for who he is now. For what he is now. (60/61)

The explicit comparison of his corporeal self as he actually is with the self that he 'should' be, or perhaps was, is an act of acknowledgement and acceptance. That he speaks of love is an assertion for the first time of the possibilities of their relationship without recourse to

¹³⁵ Patrick Gale's review of *The Song House* in *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-song-house-by-trezza-azzopardi-1990619.html>, accessed 5 February 2015.

disguise. As it does for Maggie, the pen becomes an instrument that enables him to confront a version of the 'reality' of who he is and to be prepared for Maggie to cast her female regard upon that reality, to love him 'for who he is now'. The physical, sensual and sexual soon become dimensions of their relationship, such as on the occasion when they are lying side by side on the lawn drinking wine under the stars:

He holds it [*the wooden spoon*] up as she did and they wait again. It's not long before the bats return, a sudden swoop of one, two black flashes, circling above the spoon and vanishing again into the night.

Wonderful thing, radar says Kenneth.

Echolocation, says Maggie.

Kenneth shifts himself up onto his elbow.

Do you think you could echolocate my wine, my dear? All this excitement has made me quite parched.

The touch of their glasses chimes on the night air. (99)

They are both aware that they are going through a process of transformative echolocation with the space around them, with the past, and in their emotional relationship with each other through their conversation and physical proximity. Tantalisingly, when Kenneth closes his eyes 'he feels the lightest brush against his lips' but is uncertain whether it is a bat's wing, Maggie's hair, the breeze, or - 'to him, beyond belief' - a kiss (101), and the reader knows no more than he does. At the same time, Maggie gradually pieces together, in the fragmented narrative that Azzopardi deploys, the childhood trauma of her abduction, the hours of being locked up, and the make-believe role that she was being lined up for as a changeling, a substitute for the daughter that Kenneth's wife, Rusty, dreamt of having.

There is a significant difference in the ways that Kenneth and Maggie address the past, however: while Kenneth feels empowered in talking about his memories, Maggie only does so through a secret journal, though she does ask Kenneth questions from time to time which have greater significance than he is aware of. This could be regarded as a matter of gendered authority, that, despite the frustrations he feels, Kenneth feels confident in his status as the wealthy male to employ a female secretary to listen to him whereas Maggie's covert

memoir is indicative of her female apprehension. It is more nuanced than that, more negotiated, however. Kenneth avoids talking about some of his clearest memories and Maggie has to prompt him, for example, to speak of his relationship with his former wife, Rusty: 'You can tell the truth, Kenneth, she says. These notes are for you, remember' (104). On this occasion, Maggie's sensitive, encouraging questions enable Kenneth to talk of the difficulty he found with the expectations of his role as a male in marriage: 'I suppose I was a safe enough prospect. I would be successful, you see, which was what women wanted, back then. And all a man wanted, apparently, was a beautiful wife' (106). It is another occasion when Kenneth has difficulty in finding the me in (me)n. The revelation brings them to a point of delicate balance in which Maggie's question of why Kenneth left his wife runs the risk of his anger. For one moment he resumes patriarchal and proprietorial authority: 'Don't think you can simply come in here and accuse me. Don't think for one minute I wouldn't send you packing.' (106). The next, he plays a love song, Bob Dylan's *Lay Lady Lay*, only to find the sentiments rejected as Maggie challenges the male narrative and the implicit identification of the characters in the song with themselves: 'Because he doesn't know *her* story, she says, It's always *his* story' (109).

James speaks of 'Azzopardi's ability to navigate between interiority and external event'¹³⁶ and the durability of Maggie and Kenneth's emotional status, their feeling that is 'something like love', is tested when Maggie leaves Earl House half way through the novel and takes refuge in Field Cottage. The separation, with each of them taking their place in gendered locations fifteen miles apart, is part of the process of negotiation. Without Maggie's presence, Earl House becomes a site of male contention, between father and son, where Kenneth has to hold out against the increasing intrusiveness of his son, William, who is anxious that Maggie could come between him and his inheritance and his plans to turn Earl

¹³⁶ James, p. 120.

House into a boutique hotel. At Field Cottage - a female site, as I have shown, contested between mother and daughter - Maggie has to shake off the reek of the past and feel released before she is ready to go to Kenneth.

Clutching her notebook and photographs, she wades and stumbles through the muddy, cleansing waters, an immersion that prepares her for the return to Earl House where she will bury the past and seek to negotiate the steps forward in her relationship with Kenneth. When they meet, Maggie still has a story, a truth to tell him: ironically, the notebook that contains her story is no use when she gives it to him because the pages are stuck together and the ink has run. The final act of negotiation between them will occur when she confronts her own concealed story about her abduction and finds a way of telling it to Kenneth, face to face: 'Then I must tell you, she says, taking him by the hand and leading him back up the hill, There's something you ought to know' (262). That hill is significant. It takes them away from the danger of the flood-waters but higher up, looking down on them from the top floor of the house, in the position that Kenneth held when Maggie first arrived, is Kenneth's son, William: a threat, a shadow whose slant on the situation is totally different from theirs.

Azzopardi does not settle for easy resolutions to the traumas of rejection, violence and isolation. But there is a sense at the end of each of her novels, particularly *The Song House* and *The Hiding Place*, of the possibility of negotiated gender relationships in the urban and rural places that serve as hiding places against despair. In *Winterton Blue*, Lewis and Anna sit at the sea's edge, sharing a cigarette, 'a small red circle of light, burning a hole in the darkness' In *Remember Me*, Winnie returns alone to her abandoned shop. As she conjures up a ghost parade of those she has encountered, she wishes for nothing, but the spectre of her friend, Mr Stadnik, smiles at her and says, 'We live in hope.' At the end of *Root and Branch*, having journeyed down the Irrawaddy River in Burma and arrived at open sea, Daniel is at a point where he has lost everything, including his friend and guide. He is alone but turns and

walks back inland where the authorities are waiting. I would like to think that the resonance achieved is something like that in the novels of Azzopardi, one in which the process of negotiation is vital to engagement with hardships and losses, which is why Daniel's final words are 'I hope'.

CHAPTER 5

MASCULINITIES EAST

Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on.

Edward Said.¹³⁷

Edward Said's view that the 'Orient' is a 'semi-mythical construct' and that the term, together with the concept of 'the West', is without 'any ontological stability' has some similarities with Judith Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* that the notions of masculine and feminine are cultural constructions with shifting meanings.¹³⁸ Both are concerned with positioning, with the relationship of one to the other; both recognise the provisionality and conditionality of the concepts, questioning their actuality and homogeneity; and both address, and challenge, the power-structure implicit in the binary, which they consider hegemonic. Analysing Flaubert's presentation of the Egyptian dancer, Kuchuk Hanem, as the model of an Oriental woman, Said conflates issues of gender, geography, culture, power and voice:

she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her.¹³⁹

For the writer who lives in 'the West' and chooses to write the stories of people in 'the East', the question is one of how to write without assuming a 'basic distinction between East and West' or the ascendancy of 'Western' values, systems and *mores*: it is a question of how to avoid the generalities of stereotypes and focus on the particularities of mutable characters and

¹³⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979) p. 3.

¹³⁸ Said, pp. 7- 8.

¹³⁹ Said, p. 23. Later in *Orientalism*, pp. 184 - 192, Said examines in greater detail Flaubert's account of his visit to Egypt and his encounter with Kuchuk Hanem in his travel notes, letters and fiction, notably *Herodias* and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Acknowledging the danger of over-simplifying the complexity of Flaubert's Oriental writing, Said nevertheless takes the view that it is woven throughout with 'an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex' (188): not simply the male gaze but the Western male gaze.

their stories. When it is a 'Western' male writing of an 'Eastern' female character there is an additional risk of double hegemony. Further questions arise. If characters of European origin are re-located to 'the East', how do they respond to the change of context; how much cultural baggage do they bring with them; how do they adapt; how are they changed; how much do they seek to impose their values? In writing about characters and events in Burma in *Root and Branch*, I have been aware that I am writing about a post-colonial country, one that was subjugated into the British Empire in the nineteenth century and colonised until its independence in 1948. Even seventy years later, there is the risk of deep-rooted imperialist attitudes seeping into the language of the text, of Orientalist constructs feeding into the imagination, and of an Orientalist 'male gaze' influencing the representation of female Burmese characters.

Imperial and colonial hegemony displays many of the characteristics of patriarchal hegemony: desire, invasion, conquest, possession and enforcement. In fact, Sara Mills argues that in British colonial society 'gender roles were polarised, perhaps to a greater extent than they were in the home country. The empire was generally considered to be a place of masculine endeavour',¹⁴⁰ while Clare Midgley also speaks of 'the construction of imperialism as a masculine enterprise'.¹⁴¹ Underlying the words 'endeavour' and 'enterprise' are the notions of an imposed social and cultural operation and of enforced, gendered territorial control. By extension, the decline of imperialism implies the potential vulnerability of masculine hegemony. Both Francesca Rhydderch's *The Rice Paper Diaries*¹⁴² and Stevie Davies' *Into Suez*¹⁴³ concern a problematic triangular relationship between a female protagonist, her military husband and an intimate friend in a remote outpost of the British Empire in the 1940s and early 1950s. They focus primarily on the experiences of women

¹⁴⁰ Sara Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) p. 55.

¹⁴¹ Clare Midgley (ed), 'Introduction' to *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) p. 7.

¹⁴² Francesca Rhydderch, *The Rice Paper Diaries* (Bridgend: Seren, 2013).

¹⁴³ Stevie Davies, *Into Suez* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010).

characters but they show how their encounters with the East are mediated by the gendered roles of colonial life under the control of men. Rhydderch and Davies present a number of connections between the operation of colonial and male hegemony in the East, a nexus of interest and resistance to change at a time when the imperial era was in a condition of decline and when Western male hegemony was starting to unravel.

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842-1997, but the predominant setting for *The Rice Paper Diaries* is the single hiatus in this period of over 150 years of British rule, just before, and at the start of, the Japanese Occupation of 1941-45. The novel presents the experiences of colonial luxury, internment in a Japanese camp and post-war west Wales from three female perspectives: the protagonist Elsa, her daughter Mari, and the Chinese amah, Lin. The main male characters - Elsa's husband, Captain Tommy Jones; and her lover, Dr Oscar Campbell - embody contrasting versions of masculinity and occupy different roles in the service of British colonialism. Rhydderch initially shows a way of life in Hong Kong in 1940 in which the hierarchical colonial functions of race, class and gender are being conserved in blissful denial of any threat from the war in Europe. The British rule; the Hong Kong Chinese serve. The British live in their residences on The Peak and socialise in the splendour of their clubs and hotels; the local people live in crammed, impoverished communities down by the harbour. Male officials manage the political and economic life of the colony while their wives manage the domestic staff. The colonial élite enjoy a life of privilege, opulence, tradition and conformity with established roles and modes of behaviour - 'the social niceties people were supposed to exchange over drinks and dinner at the Peninsula' (53). The Peninsula Hotel is the fulcrum of social life¹⁴⁴ in Hong Kong, its name

¹⁴⁴ According to the company's website, when it was opened in 1928 the Peninsula Hong Kong was intended to be the 'finest hotel east of Suez' - a fortuitous claim for the connections I am making between these two novels: <http://www.hshgroup.com/en/Property-Management-Portfolio/The-Peninsula-Hotels.aspx>. Although the event is not specifically referred to in the novel, the fact that the British Governor surrendered Hong Kong to the Japanese in the Peninsula Hotel in 1941 lends an additional ironic undercurrent to the scenes of colonial confidence and swank that Rhydderch presents in the hotel.

perhaps ironically suggesting that the lifestyle enjoyed there is out on a limb, exposed and vulnerable, although colonial society does not acknowledge this possibility.

Male hegemony is not foregrounded as the source of narrative tension or conflict in the first half of the novel. It is presented as intrinsic to the way of life in the colony: to borrow from Sara Mills, the reader sees men and women alike ‘performing Britishness’.¹⁴⁵ Elsa feels a flicker of irritation when her sister reminds her that ‘when you get married, you don’t just choose a man, you choose a life’ (57), but she accepts it and embraces the life that her husband’s status provides, initially at least. However, the power correlation between gender and colonialism becomes much more explicit when the Japanese invasion is successful and the British, Dutch, and Canadian civilians are taken to Stanley Internment Camp. The Western community that is organised inside the camp is modelled on the structures that are known and valued. It is the men who agree that they need ‘organisation from the top down, a plan of action’ (106) so they set up a number of committees and make the appointments. It is the men who establish an executive Temporary Committee to oversee the implementation of the new structure. Tellingly, Tommy offers Elsa a position as head of the entertainment committee, suggesting she could start a theatre troupe and raise the spirits. That she declines in favour of helping out on the medical committee is an indication of her growing independence of mind and heart. When an education committee is set up, it consists, in Tommy’s words, of ‘plain-faced, do-gooding women of the type I could do without, but at least the children are being kept occupied’ (111). The comment reveals his sense of self-importance and his aversion to women who have created the committee of their own initiative: though he is compensated by the fact that if the children are ‘occupied’ - a word that carries some freight in the circumstances - the interfering women will be so, too. In their study of the experience of women in Stanley Camp, Bernice Archer and Kent Fedorowich

¹⁴⁵ Mills, p. 49.

suggest that some of the linkage between gender and colonialism was loosened by the sense of female community:

it was assumed that they [*women*] would contribute to camp life in the traditional roles of wife, mother, nurse, secretary and teacher; roles clearly defined in the pre-war colonial system. However, it can be argued that internment and its inherent pressures allowed women the opportunity to loosen some of these pre-war constraints [...] although Stanley was administered along the existing colonial structures and social hierarchies of the time, there is evidence to suggest that these shared experiences of an enforced communal lifestyle imposed by internment initiated a shift in pre-conceived gender and class attitudes.¹⁴⁶

Indeed, the change that is evident in Elsa when she returns to New Quay in west Wales at the end of the war shows a considerably more self-assured woman. However, the organisational structure established in the internment camp is presented by Rhydderch as being rooted in the colonial status quo, albeit somewhat circumscribed, in which male hegemony is assumed to be integral to the internal management and regulation of the community.

Prior to the Japanese invasion and in the camp, Tommy and Oscar are agents of this highly gendered form of colonialism, Tommy serving in Customs and Excise and Oscar being a doctor in the British hospital. Tommy is popular, charming, good-looking and attractive to women though his physical strength is acquired from his upbringing in a Welsh farming family in Ceredigion. When Elsa first meets him, he is on leave between postings and takes her on a tour of the farm, a proprietorial air about him, a male with prospects, displaying the territory he will inherit. Relaxed, good humoured and hospitable, he impresses her with tales of exotic adventures in Customs and Excise, capturing pirates and confiscating contraband off the coast of China. His physicality, as worker and lover, is presented through his hands which become a trope for his family, class and cultural roots:

Elsa loved Tommy's hands. She'd married him for them. A farmer's hands like shovels, with blunt-edged fingers, they reminded her of where she came from and

¹⁴⁶ Bernice Archer & Kent Fedorowich (1996), 'The Women of Stanley: Internment in Hong Kong 1942–45', *Women's History Review*, 5:3, 390, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09612029600200119>, accessed 2 February 2016

what her people did, either farming the land, or travelling the world as merchant seamen, as Tommy's family had always done. When she turned his hands over, she could trace the lines in his palms, as if they made a map of New Quay that she carried with her everywhere. When she took him to bed, he spoke to her in Welsh and ran his farmer's hands over her breasts. (50)

Elsa appreciates the common bonds between them while the final two sentences suggest her taking the initiative, romantically and sexually. Later, in the internment camp, an echo of Elsa's sentiments occurs to Tommy when he is looking at the long grass and the lemon trees: 'There must be something in my blood that makes my fingers tingle [...] The farmer in me. It's what my father does. It's what everyone does where I come from' (109). He feels a sense of origins, locality and tradition in his hands and puts them to use by creating a garden to provide food for the internees. In his logbook, the tone of the entry for 15th August 1942 changes in its description of the crops of parsnip, 'lemons like waxed suns', cucumbers, spinach, brassica, chard, celery, gooseberries and 'the golden skins of onions' (122): a harvest festival of rich, sensuous language in which his five senses and his very being are in tune with the growth of the fruit and vegetables. However, when he attempts to combine his roots as a man-of-the-soil with his individuality as a man-of-action by hiding wireless parts beneath the plants to organise an escape, it leads to his downfall.

In colonial society, Tommy tends to conceal his Welsh rural upbringing to embrace the Anglicised manners, class-status and commitment to duty required of the agents of British imperialism. As Bohata puts it, describing Welsh responses to the power of the British Empire, 'An obvious way to avoid the inferiority attached to Welshness was to become English [...] changing oneself is surely much easier than challenging the hegemony.'¹⁴⁷ In his relationships with women he displays the conventional male behaviour, polite, courteous and patronising, designed to charm single and married women alike, lighting their cigarettes, exchanging glances and smiles, pushing their chairs in when they sit. This is an acquired,

¹⁴⁷ Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p. 132

winning performance of masculinity, far removed from that practised at home. But Tommy's underlying sexual attitude towards women is revealed when he casts his male gaze on a young woman carrying rice to the kitchen at the internment camp: she is dressed in a makeshift top made from flour sacks 'embroidered with pink flowers around the edges where the sacking met the pale white mound of her breasts' and his gaze lingers to take in 'her firm buttocks sticking out of her tight shorts like ripe greengages' (118). His erotic thoughts, using a lascivious simile that acquires additional weight from his sensual description of fruit elsewhere in his logbook, are given a further charge by the fact that he is with Elsa at the time, though she is more concerned with looking after their baby daughter, Mari, who is ill.

At this moment, another aspect of Tommy's masculinity emerges that aligns him with Frankie in Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place* and a number of men in Trezise's *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl*: the tendency to be absent, to be elsewhere, at critical times. On this occasion Tommy states that Elsa should have told him about Mari's cough so that he 'could have done something' - a comment which indicates his sense of power even if he gives no indication what he could have done - to which Elsa's retort is 'You're always so busy with that garden' (119). At the start of the novel, when Elsa is about to give birth to their first child, we are told that 'Tommy had been to see her and gone back to the office again' (20), doubly absent because he is otherwise occupied when his wife most needs him and when their first baby is born dead.

The primary cause of Tommy's absence is his commitment to management. On the tour of the farm in Ceredigion with Elsa, it is not only Tommy's proprietorial prospects that are being flagged up but his role as a man whose life lies in running things, in 'doing something' with the managerial prioritised over the domestic. In my novel, *Root and Branch*, there is a moment when Daniel is trying to persuade the Burmese political activist, Maung, that they should change the route of their journey to seek help for a family rescued from the

flood. Maung's impatient retort - 'Why don't you people stop trying to run the show?' - is one of the key moments in the novel: although Daniel's motives for proposing an alternative route are, on one level, humanitarian, they could also be seen to rise from an assumption of the right to manage. In rejecting Daniel's suggestion by the use of the impersonal collective noun-phrase, 'you people', Maung challenges the extant traces of British colonialism that he finds in Western aid agencies. In *The Rice Paper Diaries* Tommy's immersion in management, both in Customs and Excise and in Stanley Internment Camp, is a vital element of his masculine identity but it erodes his relationship with his wife and daughter. When he conceals the radio components in the garden at the camp, he sees himself as taking the initiative, but he does so in isolation, embarking on a maverick operation which might appear heroic but is doomed to fail. When the plan is discovered, he is arrested, imprisoned and tortured, separated from his wife and child, an absent husband and father for the longer term, until the war is over. Ultimately, in adopting the masculinity he associates with being a colonial functionary, Tommy becomes alienated from his family and his roots so that when he eventually returns to west Wales, he is irritable, brooding, conniving, 'a tired, dead face' (169), and a shadow of the man he once was.

While Oscar Campbell also plays his part in maintaining the British régime in Hong Kong, he represents colonial hegemony by virtue of his class as well as by a form of masculinity that is attractive in its elusiveness. Rhydderch creates a certain mystique around him by withholding any background information about his life; restricting his presence in the first half of the novel to fleeting appearances seen from a female perspective; and referring to him more frequently as the subject of Tommy and Mari's conflicting reflections in the second half. It is telling that he first appears and takes care of Elsa in Tommy's absence, as the doctor who sees her through her unsuccessful childbirth. Perceived through Elsa's semi-conscious vision, Oscar is authoritative, identified simply as a 'man's voice' as if maleness

alone provides reassuring control, along with his white coat and ‘good English brogues’ (21). When one of his fingers catches her hair, the frisson that accompanies the accidental attachment is developed some time later when they recognise each other at the Peninsula Hotel: ‘She realised he was still holding onto her hand and she wanted to cling onto it, this firm, truthful grip on her loss’ (52). In contrast with Tommy’s hands that are connected with working the land, Oscar’s hands make human contact, attending to matters of birth, loss and consolation. He maintains polite, formal behaviour, displaying professional concern and understanding but keeping his distance in a manner that only serves to awaken Elsa’s interest as she watches his every movement, even as he walks away from her.

The tension between two versions of masculinity comes into focus during the Japanese occupation. As a confident male doctor, Oscar possesses the status and privilege that Tommy resents - ‘His superior attitude gets under my skin’ (106) - but a view that is at odds with the realisation that Oscar feels slightly ashamed of the privilege afforded to the élite officers who are housed in separate bungalows. The rivalry increases as Tommy’s volatile determination ‘to make a stand, to show the bastards who’s boss’ (113) is over-ruled by Oscar’s calmer acceptance of the situation and of the need to negotiate survival. While Tommy goes his own way with his covert radio plan, Oscar accepts the leadership accorded to his class, establishing the committee structure that is given recognition by the Japanese authorities in the camp. It is a mantle of responsibility that he bears with ease, as Tommy reluctantly acknowledges: ‘that slick way he has of saying something that is clearly not the truth but sounds closer to it than anyone will ever get. That’s why people trust him, let him lead’ (121). Oscar’s assured masculinity, with its charisma and propensity for leadership, is derived from the established authority of his class and gender but exercised with the restraint and rationality that enable him to understand the changes in the balance of colonial power.

When Tommy is arrested and imprisoned, the opportunity arises for Oscar to replace him both as Elsa's lover and in a paternal capacity. Rhydderch employs a complex device for telling the story of Elsa and Oscar's subsequent relationship, making a shift in time, place and person by presenting the post-war narrative through the eyes of seven-year-old daughter, Mari, who is brought 'home' from Hong Kong to New Quay, Ceredigion. She remembers drawing a picture,

of her, Elsa and Oscar sitting on the beach at Stanley, her playing with a twig making shapes on the surface of the sand, while Elsa sat up on her knees, and Oscar stretched back on his elbows, his long legs crossed at the toes (189).

In this portrait of happy family life, secure and at ease, Oscar is the surrogate father. It contrasts with Mari's experience of being with Tommy in New Quay after his release from prison: rude and aggressive, chopping the head off a rat, bribing her into betraying her mother's secret correspondence with Oscar. In Mari's eyes, two types of masculinity are in conflict, the one generous, loving and nonchalant, the other sullen, cantankerous and scheming. At the end of the novel, we learn that after his divorce Tommy is posted to Kenya where he lives until he dies and is buried with full naval pomp, while Oscar turns up in New Quay to Mari's great excitement and the new family - Elsa, Oscar, Mari and baby Owen - finally set up home in Clapham. The implication is that Tommy's masculinity is one that is set in its ways until the end, exiled from the 'square mile' of land in west Wales where he was once so much 'at home' and continuing to participate in British colonialism in its final phase; in contrast, Oscar's is a masculinity that comes to terms with the changes in the modern world, perhaps symbolised by living in London in the late twentieth century where cosmopolitan diversity arising from the rejection of colonialism blurs the distinctions between 'East' and 'West'.

The conflict between those from the West who maintain the lines of demarcation and attempt to regulate the East by colonial occupation and those who want to loosen the

distinctions, politically and personally, is a central theme of *Into Suez* by Stevie Davies. It is brought into focus in the middle of the novel when the protagonist, Ailsa Roberts, visits the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1950 with her close friend, Mona, and greets the ticket-collector in Arabic and a little hand-gesture that Mona has taught her. The response is immediate:

‘*Aleicum salaam!* Welcome, Mesdames, welcome, bienvenues!’ he said, beaming, head on one side. His eyes were an amazing green, surrounded by smile-wrinkles.

Meeting those eyes, Ailsa felt freed from chains, able to recognize the other for the person he was. *I exist, and you also exist*, her eyes told him. *I have a right to live, and this is also your right*. There were ways of ducking under the fence her tribe erected against other tribes, a criminal barrier made of fear, greed and guilt. A rare moment in history was transacted in every personal meeting [...] To welcome the white invader as an honoured guest: why ever should they stoop to do so? Ailsa was seeing hospitality where before she’d seen – or apprehended – veiled hostility. (248-249)

In this exchange of looks, this meeting of eyes as Ailsa perceives it from her female regard, a brief recognition is achieved in which barriers of race, gender, faith, and culture are surmounted. The statement, ‘I exist,’ is an assertion of independent identity in overcoming racial and social prejudices, and an understanding that to submit to them is a diminution of self; while Ailsa’s sense of their individual ‘right to live’ is not only a rejection of violence between nations and religions but also a justification of her right to be in that place, secretly, with her friend Mona, against the wishes of her husband, to live as she wishes to live. Having previously experienced the male gaze when walking through the streets of Cairo as a woman on her own, she now meets the ticket collector’s eyes with a sense of their reciprocal respect in this ancient ‘underworld’ (245). In the man’s welcoming look Ailsa finds dignity and approval. She acknowledges, too, that the blame for racial antipathies should be attached to ‘her tribe’ - colonial Britain - that had engaged in political machinations and territorial conquest for generations. Is she being naïve? Is Ailsa making an idealised, romantic interpretation of the friendly greeting, green eyes and wrinkled smiles? Is it truly a moment when the shackling binaries of East-West, male-female, Arab and European, oppressed and oppressor - those divisive universalities - fall away, or is it an illusion that Ailsa is generating

in the excitement and intimacy of the particular occasion? She is indeed in a state of heightened emotion at having escaped with Mona on this excursion, ‘two women in one dream’ (245), and at a later point in the novel she recognises, ‘I’ve been drunk [...] drunk on Egypt [...] it had been a drug, an intoxicant’ (364). Yet Stevie Davies is clear, in an essay about the writing of *Into Suez*, that she intended these words to have some import, quoting from *A Drive to Israel: An Egyptian Meets His Neighbors* by Ali Salem in which he describes the Oslo Agreement ‘as embodying [...] the moment of recognition of the other. I exist, and you also exist. I have a right to live, and this is also your right.’ Davies says, ‘I gave her [Ailsa Roberts] some of Salem’s words. They are her talisman’.¹⁴⁸ In this incident, Davies writes of a hopeful moment in which, for the characters involved, the entire period of British colonialism in Egypt dissolves. Placed half-way through the novel, it is given pivotal significance as an occasion when the sense of otherness evaporates, when politically and culturally constructed animosities between East and West are buried, negotiated through language, gesture and eye-contact in the interaction of two individuals, female and male.

In the context of the novel as a whole, her remark to Mona - ‘Every meeting between persons of good will is political. Each one closes the gap’ (249) - is important in the themes of division, segregation, and antipathy that prevail in *Into Suez*. So pervasive and powerful are the forces of hostility, it is implied, that to achieve such a meeting requires ‘persons of good will’, male and female, to step over and beyond the racial and gender boundaries, and to risk abuse, rejection and violence on personal, social, and political levels. Ailsa Roberts takes such steps in a number of ways and has to come to terms with the consequences for her personal relationships - particularly with her husband, Sergeant Joe Roberts - because such actions attempt to set into reverse the established processes and forces of political and patriarchal expansionism.

¹⁴⁸ Stevie Davies, “‘I Exist and You Also Exist’: Writing *Into Suez*”, *Planet* 197, Winter 2010, p. 57.

When Joe and Ailsa's daughter, Nia, arrives at the mouth of the Suez Canal fifty years later, she sees the territory as 'a map of fluid boundaries from generation to generation' (374), a phrase which resonates with Edward Said's comment - referred to at the start of this chapter - about the absence of 'any ontological stability' in the constructs of 'the Orient' and 'the West'. On the 'map of fluid boundaries' that is drawn in the novel, the dynamic power of the narrative is generated through Joe and Ailsa's opposing views of colonialism, a friction that is enmeshed with their conflicting concepts of the pliability of the boundaries in gender roles and identities. When Joe Roberts is flying over Egypt in a Dragonfly helicopter he takes the view that 'Suez was the greatest military installation in the entire world. The sheer scale of it all: the centre of the empire. You had to be proud' (108). The Suez Canal is a line of division between Asia on one bank and Africa on the other, and as a lower-ranking naval pilot, Joe is not only proud but entirely embraces the strategic necessity of the British presence as 'friends and protectors' of Egypt, defending it from the atheist Russians with their sights on the Persian oilfields (299), and allegedly preventing World War III.

In contrast to the expediency of Joe's perception, Ailsa possesses a broader historical perspective: when she first arrives in Egypt on board the emblematically named *Empire Glory*, she sees the Canal's importance, from the time of the Pharaohs to Napoleon and to Ferdinand de Lesseps, as a link between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, between Europe and Asia. She sees, too, that the line of trading communication is 'the artery of Britain's Empire', a blood-line of imperial invasion, occupation and exploitation: 'How many Arab slave labourers had died to dig ... this ditch the Roberts family was arriving to defend as - somehow - British, as British as the Manchester Ship Canal?' (97). Just as Hong Kong is shown to be the contested site of British and Japanese Imperialism in the early 1940s in *The Rice Paper Diaries*, so in *Into Suez*, the Canal is the locus for the antagonism between Egyptian nationalism and British Imperialism in the aftermath of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty

of 1936 and in advance of the Suez Crisis in 1956. The military base on the edge of Ismailia where Joe and Ailsa are quartered is an isolated outpost, the last remnant of seventy years of British occupation, and the Canal becomes an emblem of the lines of demarcation between Joe and Ailsa's values and priorities, between masculine imperialist agency and, eventually, feminine provocation of the status quo. Although Ailsa initially settles for the domestic role allocated to her, in common with the attitudes and behaviour of other servicemen's wives, she becomes increasingly isolated as she chooses to pursue her clandestine relationship with Mona beyond the parameters of military protocol and beyond the scope of Joe's male possessiveness. With their marriage under pressure, Joe makes the mistaken assumption that Ailsa is having an affair with Ben Serafin-Jacobs, Mona's husband, leading to the dramatic showdown that is the climax of the novel.

From a Welsh working-class family, the son of a violent, alcoholic furnace-man, Joe Roberts is a Royal Air Force aircraft fitter whose masculinity is defined by conservatism and regulation in his attitudes towards his career, nationality, and status. Having left school at fourteen to work as a tinsmith apprentice at the South Wales Canister Company prior to joining up at the age of nineteen, it is no surprise perhaps that he shows a traditional male fascination with machines and is excited by the experience of riding a 350cc Matchless Tiger motorbike or flying in a helicopter, as if the mechanical and the manual are in his blood, his roots. To achieve the rank of Sergeant in the R.A.F. shows a degree of aspiration and success in his career and he loves life in the Air Force, 'the comradeship, the safe hierarchy'. When he meets Ailsa at the port in Cairo and is introduced to Mona and Wing Commander Ben Serafin-Jacobs, his hand shoots up in salute:

a barrier that put them all in their places [...] fraternisation between officers and other ranks could never be countenanced. Fraternisation, Joe's ramrod arm had said, would undo the proper and natural order of things; it would soften military discipline, the foundation of the Empire. (92)

For Joe, the structure of military and colonial life ‘confirmed the order of things’ (121) with its ranks, duties, codes of behaviour and symbols. It is for this reason perhaps that while he takes pride in the British Empire, he is ashamed of the fact that Welsh is his first language because ‘his tongue betrayed the threadbare poverty in which he’d grown up’ (31). His participation in the imperial-military project has taken him out of impoverishment, alienating him from the culture and language that he associates with it. Although his background and rank differ from those of Captain Tommy Jones in *The Rice Paper Diaries*, they both embrace the patriarchal culture of colonialism and distance themselves from their mother-tongue, the language of their upbringing, attaching themselves to English, the language of the British Empire which, for them, offers expectations and prospects. In *The Welsh Extremist*, Ned Thomas argues that the Welsh language is the basis of Welsh identity:

The Welsh identity [...] lacks the strain of militarism and imperialism which is there in the British identity [...] I am not exonerating Welshmen from having participated in that imperialism. It is merely that when they did so, they did so as Britishers, not as Welshmen. The Welsh language was not part of that imperialism, and as a Welsh speaker in his own country the Welshman was himself the victim of a kind of imperialism.¹⁴⁹

The behaviour of Joe Roberts and Tommy Jones suggests that they would not disagree with much of this: entering the British forces, they privilege the English language over Welsh because it identifies them as British military representing an Empire they believe in, diminishing their Welshness and elevating their Britishness. Joe, however, would not attribute the poverty of his childhood to British imperialism, would not see himself as its victim in the way that Ned Thomas suggests.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist*, p. 33. However, this assertion has been contested by a number of Welsh writers, such as Jane Aaron, Nigel Jenkins, Aled Jones and Charlotte Williams. In *Postcolonialism Revisited* Kirsti Bohata argues vigorously that ‘Ned Thomas’s statement makes a convenient but flawed and simplistic division between ‘Welshmen’ and ‘Britishers’, which ignores Welsh involvement in imperial missionary work throughout the Empire [...] as well as Welsh colonization of Patagonia, not to mention North America, Australia, and so on.’ (p.5) Such significant Welsh-language and Nonconformist engagement in Empire, imperialism and colonialism renders Thomas’s distinction historically dubious.

If ‘the natural order of things’, with its regulations and boundaries, provides Joe with a sense of values and identity, it fuels his prejudices against anything that lies or steps out of bounds. Ailsa perceives in her husband, ‘the decency that in the end was the core of his character’ (169) and towards the end of the novel, the ageing Mona tells Nia that her father ‘was not a vile man [...] Joe was a lovely man [...] You need to understand the times, to judge him’ (426). Nevertheless, the prejudices of Joe Roberts include racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-intellectualism. He thinks of Egyptians as backward, inferior and lazy, and speaks of them in private as ‘wogs’ or ‘Gyppos’ living in ‘Wogtown’, succumbing to the disparaging language of the colonisers, ‘the tribe’. His masculine prejudices feed on Ben’s race and perceived effeminacy: a ‘Jewboy’, a ‘blond poufter,’ ‘queer as a coot’, a ‘public school queerboy’. In an interview in *New Welsh Review*, Davies says that Joe,

is a casual racist; he’s a working class conservative, without education, low in the social hierarchy, full of sweetness and humour but with a dark streak of racism and misogyny. Where did he get that? It was written into social norms. The characters’ tragedies are born of individual flaws – but false values are also rashes symptomatic of their cultures.¹⁵⁰

Although Joe’s feelings and language may be symptomatic of his adherence to conventional, culturally-constructed versions of masculine and colonial culture, there are occasions when he avoids the very worst forms of behaviour and shows degrees of respect towards those he might usually consider to be ‘other’. He does not ‘abuse or scoff at the Egyptians to their faces and disliked it that others did’ (88) when he politely refuses to buy a souvenir. In an incident when a crowd of squaddies play a riotous game of football with melons stolen from an Egyptian trader’s handcart, Joe sits on his motorbike, apart, resisting an impulse to get involved and feeling a pang of guilt. Finally he helps the Egyptian to collect the melons that have not been destroyed in an act that helps to redeem him from the impression of being

¹⁵⁰ Katherine Stansfield, ‘Interview with Stevie Davies’, *New Welsh Review* 98 on-line, Winter 2012, <https://www.newwelshreview.com/article.php?id=390#pagetop>, accessed 2 March 2015.

utterly racist, revealing a man who is occasionally capable of sympathy that does not comply with the bigotry of his tribe - though such individuality is not evident with regard to his homophobia and his notions of gender.

Although we are told at the outset that Joe feels inferior to Ailsa, his view of the role of women, and of women's emotions and interests, is traditionally patriarchal, in mind, heart and body. The Prelude shows Ailsa as an independent, single working woman in London, enjoying the 'boundless possibilities' of her escape from 'dull Shropshire' (4), but her marriage to Joe after a whirlwind wartime romance requires her to resume a more restricted lifestyle in Egypt. While Joe is at work on the airbase, Ailsa remains at home in married quarters, looking after their daughter, preparing meals, shopping, washing clothes, 'content with her lot, patient with her limits' (111). While this appears to be mutually agreed, Davies makes it clear that the limits are defined by Joe and that the power lies in his hands. Shortly before arrival in Egypt, when Mona suggests that she and Ailsa should keep in touch as friends, Ailsa is unable to admit that her life is conditional upon her husband's approval, thinking but not saying: '*If my husband lets me. Which he can't and won't...*' (75). At first, the couple share feelings that promise 'perpetual romance' (115), Ailsa experiencing joy at Joe's return from work at the end of the day, Joe sensing his own domestic dependence on Ailsa. It is a time of performative compromise, when they fit into conventional roles and enjoy what Ailsa later recognises as 'a theatre in which Ailsa Birch played a menial role as Mrs Joseph Roberts' (213). It is a short-lived show. The jealousy born of possessiveness insinuates itself into Joe's masculine psyche when he thinks of her previous boyfriends and of a look that he sees her exchange at the port with Ben Serafin-Jacobs, 'meltingly' (121). The idea that runs through his mind - 'Share Ailsa he couldn't' (122) - is derived from a patriarchal assumption of ownership and control, that the choice is his to make. This is the jealousy of Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale*, and of Othello, when every look, gesture, word is

read as an indication of guilt. He cannot conceive of Ailsa being independently minded in any way and when she tells him in response to interrogation that 'thought is free', his reaction is, 'What the dickens do you mean by that, woman?' (128). The gendered term of address that replaces her given name indicates his objectification of his wife into the generic 'woman' as his conventionality surfaces.

His masculine identity as dominant husband and lover comes under threat when the stab of jealousy grows into a conviction that Ailsa is having an affair with Ben and he seeks to restore his male authority by demanding greater compliance from her. In terms of the narrative tensions of the novel, Davies gradually intensifies the emotional pitch of a number of strands of the plot, each having an impact on the complexity of the other: as Joe's hatred of Ben grows, the animosity between the British military and the local Egyptians of Ismailia escalates; Ailsa's friendship with Mona deepens, and Joe's drinking increases; with the deterioration of Joe and Ailsa's relationship, he becomes more influenced by the colonialist prejudices, language and behaviour of friends and Air Force colleagues; and the political ties between Egypt and Britain are strained to breaking-point. In every direction, the boundaries are being crossed, with Ailsa becoming more independent and Joe struggling to maintain a sense of moderation, and the personal, the gendered and the political interweaving powerfully

In particular, their lovemaking becomes a contested emotional field. From the reciprocity of being an experience that is, in Ailsa's eyes at least, 'this joy that was power and also loss of power, and the rage of hunger that was its own satisfaction' (197), their sexual appetite for each other becomes insatiable, so that Joe wonders: 'Was it normal to want your wife again as soon as you'd loved her? The moment your climax had exploded, an empty ache' (300). His concern with the apparent paradox of insatiability and normality places him in danger of losing his male authority by falling under the sexual dominance of his wife. The critical incident occurs when Ailsa takes a fancy to an expensive Egyptian carpet in the souk

as Joe watches her: 'His gaze embraced her and all her longings. Is there something, anything you want? I will give it to you. I and only I will satisfy you' (307). The gift his male gaze offers her is the restitution of his absolute possession. Although they cannot afford it, Joe buys the carpet then persuades Ailsa to have sex on the carpet against her will, the extended foreplay 'relieving her of choice,' and taking her to a climax in which she 'reared, shuddered and let out an ugly cry which, as she pulsed, went on and on, filling her with shame' (311 - 312). It is as if the carpet represents a map or territory in which Joe invades Ailsa and colonises her, taking absolute control of her responses, hurting and humiliating her, a mirror-image of the British colonial subjugation of Egypt. In so doing, Ailsa becomes sexually objectified, seeing herself as Joe sees her, apparently enjoying masochistic pleasure, her sense of shame arising from what Sandra Lee Bartky explains as 'the distressed apprehension of oneself as a lesser creature'.¹⁵¹ Soon afterwards, Ailsa's shame turns to guilt as she thinks, '*I am not that sort of girl. It's not how I was brought up*' (313, italics in the original), alienated from her identity and from her own body, her defences weakened. For Joe's part, he converts the apparent gratification into revulsion and condemnation when he reflects upon it:

Joe recoiled from the woman's shamelessness. She should have resisted him. It was all very well to say, *But we are married, what's wrong with that?* It could not be right. Some things were not natural. He could not imagine Mam and Dad behaving like that on the parlour floor. Who had taught Ailsa these tricks, and when? (335)

In this series of accusations which, it could be said, have the brand of Eve in Eden on them, Ailsa is again objectified as 'the woman' and Joe blames her rather than acknowledge his own involvement. He denies her sense of shame and resorts to a vague opinion of what is 'natural' based upon speculation about his own parents, reaching back to the hearth. Finally, the disgust is converted into a reinforcement of his jealousy so that his belief that she has had sex with someone else intensifies his sense of her otherness,

¹⁵¹ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990) p. 87.

With his masculinity challenged by his interpretation of Ailsa's sexual appetite, Joe finds himself wavering between trying to be rational and sexual insecurity. On the one hand he remains circumspect, sensible: 'He would not reproach her. She was his wife. She was Ailsa. Decent through and through. Of course she was. That would never alter' (338); but shortly afterwards he succumbs to penile envy and anxiety, resuming his accusatory mode: 'How big was the bastard's cock? She liked kissing cock. Oh aye, he knew. He had been amazed to discover the things she liked doing. He knew her thoroughly. He knew what grossness she was capable of' (342). Caught in this paradox of trust and disgust, he seeks to assume masculine control by telling Ailsa that he is sending her and their daughter back to Britain because he blames the 'East' - Egypt and 'the Jacobs couple' - for what he sees as her aberrant behaviour. It is ironic that having joined the R.A.F. to escape the deprivations and violence of his upbringing, he views 'home' as the place where their relationship will be protected and restored, conducted in the way that he approves of. He experiences in Egypt something of what Bhabha, speaking of discourses of 'nationness', calls, 'the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other.'¹⁵² Despite Ailsa's resistance and her threat of divorce, he takes single-handed decisions to organise their return to Britain – managing the situation, like Tommy in *The Rice Paper Diaries* - and refuses to compromise, claiming patriarchal superiority: 'I'll speak to you any way I want to speak, woman. You got that? Any way I fucking like [...] Just fucking do as you're told' (369). At such moments, when he is challenged, Joe performs the version of masculinity that comes quickest to hand, supremacist, dictatorial, abusive, once again effacing Ailsa's individual identity by calling her 'woman'. However, when he is able to step over the reductive binaries and boundaries of gender stereotypes, he arrives at points of self-awareness and negotiation, as on the occasion when, after an argument, they look at each other, abashed

¹⁵² Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) p.2.

and embarrassed, 'trying to disown the squalor of what they'd said' (371) and he concedes that she has a point, that his argument is flawed.

The political and personal, the colonial and gendered, are brought into dramatic collision by Davies as the novel moves towards its climax, framed by the announcement that Egypt decides to abrogate the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty so that British forces in Egypt will be considered an 'enemy army'. Although colonial occupation requires strict military discipline, off-duty heavy drinking is tolerated and the novel depicts several situations when the behaviour of inebriated servicemen towards Egyptian men and women is abusive. It is sadly ironic that Joe starts to imitate his father by taking to drink, with the result that when he joins his colleagues in the Mess, he becomes caught up in their collective detestation of Arabs, intent on wreaking havoc: 'The bastard wogs had torn up the Treaty. That made them fair game'. Weapons are acquired, a vehicle stolen and they career off around town in search of prey: '*Get the golliwogs, get them, get them*' (389). Aroused by the inflammatory political situation, the rampant disorderliness of his friends and the chance arrival at the home of Ben and Mona Serafin-Jacobs, all of Joe's jealousies and prejudices channel into a single violent quest to re-possess Ailsa, mistakenly thinking that she is at the social event that is taking place. Informed by a violent mixture of class-hatred, racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia, he sees a 'roomful of fucking degenerates' (391). Davies implies that Joe is perhaps not entirely guilty in his action of shooting an officer and wounding an Egyptian child by using the alleged misunderstanding of the Derek Bentley case that occurred at around the same time. The officer asks for the gun that Joe is holding and Joe 'lets him have it.' Joe has overstepped all boundaries - of drink, military behaviour, erroneous jealousy and prejudice - in an attempt to retrieve his relationship with Ailsa. In exercising, or performing, a form of assertive, violent masculine behaviour and using that familiar symbol of male potency - a gun - he finds himself out of his depth, the odds stacked against him. There is a tragic quality to

this, a working class tragedy, which both Ailsa and Mona recognise, rescuing a degree of dignity for Joe in the final phase of the novel. As Ailsa appeals in vain for clemency, she sees him as being, in some ways, a victim of the structures he identified with: 'Joe had aimed his revolver not at an individual but at the edifice of Empire. At deference. At rank. How utterly ironic this was, Ailsa thought' (405).

In Said's terms, Joe's behaviour, and indeed his masculinity, is based upon a set of 'semi-mythical constructs' which are without 'any ontological stability': although of lower status, he resembles Tommy Jones in *The Rice Paper Diaries* as a character whose identity depends on the joint powers of colonialism and patriarchy. Removed from Wales and finding themselves in 'the East' - or on the geographical fringes of the East - in locations of fracture and crisis, they endeavour to perform their masculinity and their Britishness with greater intensity and inflexibility. They try to resist the liberties of mind, feeling and body that their wives come to expect by clinging to concepts of male authority and social *mores* that no longer have the purchase with which they were formerly endowed. Rhydderch and Davies present them as men who are out of place and out of time: the traditional power structures to which they adhere - of gender relationships, and of the British Empire - are crumbling, and the construct of European imperialism is being dismantled; new maps, new boundaries, new powers are being created; the sands are shifting.

CONCLUSION

On the one hand literature is a reflection of current views and values [...] On the other hand literature could serve to shape social and political opinion by giving concrete verbal form to feelings and aspirations which might otherwise have remained at an inchoate level in the minds of many readers.

Aung San Suu Kyi.¹⁵³

In the collection of essays written while she was under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi expresses the view that literature can provide a mirror to contemporary society and has the potential to help shape the feelings and hopes of the future. While she does not distinguish here between individual literary works and bodies of literature or between individual readers and a larger readership, her underlying assumption appears to embrace all of these. Alberto Manguel approaches the issue with a different slant:

All true readings are subversive, against the grain [...] reading helps us maintain coherence in the chaos. Not to eliminate it, not to enclose experience within conventional verbal structures, but to allow chaos to progress creatively on its own vertiginous way. Not to trust the glittering surface of words but to burrow into the darkness.¹⁵⁴

To this might be added the idea that reading is a process of negotiation and reciprocity in which individuals or social groups bring their values and aspirations to bear upon their responses to texts, as do the texts to their readership, so that, as Manguel says, 'our reading, much like our sexuality, is multifaceted and fluid'.¹⁵⁵ As a male reader, writer and researcher, I am sure that my reading of novels written by women is conducted through the filter-lens of the 'multifaceted' constructions of heterosexual masculinity that I have assimilated in life, however nuanced I would like to think it; and even if I were able to abide by Manguel's additional dictum that 'the ideal reader reads all literature as if it were anonymous',¹⁵⁶ my reading of the interaction of female and male characters in novels would still be influenced by a gendered viewpoint, however much my interpretation and responses

¹⁵³ Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear* (London: Penguin Books, 2010; first pub 1991) p. 157

¹⁵⁴ Manguel, *A Reader on Reading*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁵ Manguel, p. 27.

¹⁵⁶ Manguel, p. 152.

were informed by feminist or other theoretical approaches. On the other hand, both my critical writing about texts written by women and my creative production of texts can aim to reflect an aspiration - shared by many other men, I am certain - to cut against the grain of traditional hegemonic masculinity: an aspiration for a de-patriarchalised world of negotiated relationships.

In writing *Root and Branch*, my imaginative impetus in presenting Daniel Griffiths' relationships with three women - his Welsh grandmother, his French partner and his female Burmese friend - was to explore a dynamic in which patriarchal authority is not a weapon to which he resorts; and of which he would be quickly disarmed by the women in his life were he inclined to try. The strongest guiding influence for Daniel is Gramps, a surrogate father who is the source of principled values and behaviour rooted in his experiences of life in the Valleys - including his friendship with Alun Lewis - and in his experiences in the Burma Campaign in 1944, both of which can be seen as sites of traditional male privilege, though Gramps does not particularly display any attachment to such a version of masculinity. While Daniel recognises the relevance of the moral codes with which he has been inculcated, he is aware, too, of the social and cultural changes that have taken place over time, and that the shape of the world - its powers, values and roles - has been re-drawn. His Gran has led a domesticated life with Gramps in Cwmaman, but neither his partner, Louise, nor their friend, the Burmese political activist Naw Say, would ever accept such restrictions in their lives, being more confident, self-defining women though perhaps not as canny as Gran. On the other hand, all the younger characters in the novel, both in Wales and in Burma, experience a certain sense of loss as a result of their deracination: Louise leaving her home in France to live with Daniel; Naw Say and Maung being on the run as political activists; and Daniel ending up at the estuary in the Irrawaddy Delta looking out 'at the limitless waters of river

and sea', knowing that there is probably no home in Cardiff to which he can make a welcome return.

In the six decades between the end of the Second World War and the early years of the twenty-first century, the shifts taking place in the political, social and personal relationships between women and men, both in what we call 'real life' and in its literary representations, have run parallel with the decline of European imperialism. The pressures to achieve release from patriarchal domination and from imperial control appear to come from similar drives, the desire for greater independence and self-determination, accompanied by a stronger sense of identity and self-confidence. On both counts, the outcome involves the restructuring of relationships brought about by a process of conflict and resistance or by one of negotiation - or by a combination of all three. The cultural transformation that is both a force of propulsion in these processes and a consequence of them is not without its difficulties. Liberated from patriarchal definitions, feminists have been confronted by the normativity of the term 'woman' and what Susan Stryker refers to as 'the basic questions of the sex/gender distinction, and of the concept of a sex/gender system, that lie at the heart of Anglophone feminism',¹⁵⁷ as well as the difficulty of avoiding the imposition of Western, or Northern, cultural concepts of feminism on those developed in other parts of the world. Similarly, the problematic political and cultural issues are exemplified by Jane Aaron and Chris Williams when they ask of post-devolutionary Wales:

Is the new political climate conducive to Welsh cultural regeneration, and, if so, is there a danger that such regeneration will seek to impose a hegemonic and uniform understanding of *authentic* Welshness on what appears to be a plural society capable of exercising situational identities?¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Susan Stryker, 'Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question' in *Third Wave Feminism, A Critical Exploration*, Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, eds. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004 – Second Edition, 2007) p.59.

¹⁵⁸ Jane Aaron and Chris Williams (eds.), 'Preface' to *Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005) p. xvi.

Are homogeneity and plurality irreconcilably at odds? How do we prevent one form of authority and uniformity being replaced by another?

Over the past thirty years, since the foundation of Honno Press and the publication of books such as *Our Sisters' Land* and *A View Across the Valley*, the historical narrative of Welsh writing in English has been re-mapped to include the vital contribution of women in its making. In tracing the roots of modern literature, the importance of, for example, Amy Dillwyn, Allen Raine, Margiad Evans, Hilda Vaughan and Dorothy Edwards is now firmly established - in Wales at least. But it is in contemporary times that the literary work of women from Wales has branched out exponentially in all directions, not only as writers but also as executives and managers in this sector of cultural industry. The Chief Executive of Literature Wales / Llenyddiaeth Cymru; the Co-Chair of the Association for Welsh Writing in English; the editors of the major literary journals, *Poetry Wales*, *New Welsh Review* and *Planet*; the entire staff and management committee of Honno, as well as the Director of the University of Wales Press and senior editors for Seren, Parthian, Y Lolfa and Cinnamon presses; the Artistic Director of National Theatre Wales; a number of professors of Welsh Literature and lecturers in creative writing in Welsh universities: these roles are all filled by women who are integral to the health of the eco-system that has produced the third flowering of Welsh writing in English, including the work of those women writers named towards the end of Chapter 1 and in the course of this dissertation. There seems to be a momentum that will continue. As recently as June 2016, the three winners of the Terry Hetherington Award for writers under 30 in Wales were women: Mari Ellis Dunning, Christina Thatcher and Rhian Elizabeth. Although writing from Wales remains marginalised in the U.K., with few contemporary writers recognised beyond the border - Sarah Waters and Iain Sinclair probably being the best known, and Gillian Clarke and Owen Sheers having a certain level of profile - it retains an internal dynamic and identity which is being sustained in both English and

Welsh. The male hegemony which prevailed even into the 1990s has been dissolved and women's writing and literary expertise is now a major shaping force in the cultural life of Wales in the twenty-first century.

Given this picture of confident writing by women in Wales, the representation of masculinities in the novels of some of our leading contemporary female authors does not for the most part create a favourable picture of the behaviour and attitudes of men: seen through the female regard of the writers and their women characters, men generally show scant regard to the women, families and communities in their lives.¹⁵⁹ The settings of the texts that I have examined cover a time-span that extends from the 1940s to the present day, the same period that is spanned by the events and characters' memories in *Root and Branch*. To re-cap, *Out of Suez* and *The Rice Paper Diaries* are set in the context of the Second World War and the early 1950s; most of *The Hiding Place* takes place in the 1960s; Rachel Trezise's *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* is set in the 1980s and *Sixteen Shades of Crazy* in 2003; both of Catrin Dafydd's novels and *True Things About Me* by Deborah Kay Davies are set at unspecified times but certainly take place this century. The novels therefore present versions of masculinity across a period of approximately seventy years, through the decline of imperial Britain and the era of post-war re-construction to the subsequent de-industrialisation of Wales and the country's post-devolutionary government. Aaron states that,

When it is [...] a matter of women's lives being shaped by male-imposed concepts, then, to bring about change, women need to acquire a new confidence in the female right to self-definition.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ This applies in numerous other novels by contemporary Welsh women writers, not just those considered in this critical commentary: e.g. *Martha, Jack and Shanco* by Caryl Lewis, trans. from Welsh by Gwen Davies (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007), Holly Howitt's *The Schoolboy* (Blaenau Ffestiniog: Cinnamon Press, 2009), or Alys Conran's *Pigeon* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2016). It is perhaps remarkable that a single short chapter - 'Danville' pp. 65- 69 in Rhian Elizabeth's *Six Pounds Eight Ounces* (Bridgend: Seren 2014) - strikes such a poignant chord when the father of the narrator, Hannah King, is presented as loving, imaginative, sensitive and offering security. The chapter offers a rare glimpse of joy shared between father and daughter.

¹⁶⁰ Jane Aaron, 'Finding a voice in two tongues: gender and colonisation', in *Our Sisters' Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales*, pp. 183-198 (189).

These novels depict substantial social change and this very growth in confidence and self-definition amongst women, while certain adverse characteristics of masculinity are represented time and again as continuing elements of male behaviour, attitudes and values.

We see men who cling to the illusion that patriarchal social structures and relationships can be sustained, resisting the re-shaping of their role, opposing challenges to their authority, seeking to retain control by force of voice or physical and sexual abuse. We see men whose behaviour is unstable, fluctuating between being caring, being needy and being irresponsible; unable to adjust, at a loss as to what is expected of them or how to successfully negotiate their way through the transformed world in which they find themselves. Frankie Gauci's rule of terror in the family home and his use of the belt to enforce his values on his daughters in *The Hiding Place* is little different from the violent intrusion into the narrator's home by the anonymous male character in *True Things About Me*. On the other hand, Frankie's absence from home reflects the absence of Rebecca's father in *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* and Sam Jones' father in *Random Deaths and Custard*, as well as the sudden disappearance of both Arwyn and Aunty Peg's lover, Arthur, in *Random Births and Love Hearts*, and Tommy Jones' total immersion in his work at the office, away from home, in *The Rice Paper Diaries*. The sexual predation of Brian Williams on Rebecca in *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* resembles that of Johnny Frick in *Sixteen Shades of Crazy*, Richard in *Random Births and Love Hearts* and Joe Medora in *The Hiding Place*. The loss of identity and purpose shown by Andy, Marc and Griff in *Sixteen Shades of Crazy* takes a heightened form in Gareth, suffering post-traumatic stress disorder in both *Random Deaths* and *Random Births*, while both Tommy Jones in *The Rice Paper Diaries* and Joe Roberts in *Into Suez* struggle to maintain a balance between their roles in the military and their identities as men in a world where the British imperial flag is at half-mast for its own demise.

In all these representations of masculine behaviour, the writers create, through the regard of their female protagonists, a line of male characters who, whatever their circumstance, resort to deception, manipulation, infidelity and cruelty in their bid to retain the authority and privilege that they assume to be their inheritance by right and by nature of their gender. In all cases, they fail because they are acting according to an outmoded concept of their status and power. On the other hand, the masculine behaviour depicted in this fiction seems to reflect the actuality of patriarchal resistance to change: in Wales, for example, National Assembly statistics estimate that 11% of all women experienced domestic abuse and 3.2% suffered sexual assault in one year¹⁶¹; while, on a broader U.K. scale, journalist Laura Bates can only conclude from the responses to her 'Everyday Sexism' website that,

the steady drip-drip-drip of sexism and sexualization is connected to the assumption [by men] of ownership and control over women's bodies, and how the background noise of harassment and disrespect connects to the assertion of power that is violence and rape.¹⁶²

In this context, the novels present women who, against the odds, gradually acquire the independence and confidence in their own abilities, beliefs and desires to make up their own minds, to challenge and resist male hegemony - especially when, as in *True Things About Me*, it becomes a matter of their very survival.

The issue is problematised, however, by a quirk or anomaly of human behaviour: although there are elements of unreciprocated homo-erotic interest between Sam Jones and Dwynwen in *Random Deaths and Custard* and Mona and Ailsa in *Into Suez*, these are novels that focus essentially on heterosexual relationships in which the quick of desire appears not to keep pace with the rational consciousness of social and personal relations between women and men. For all their understanding and awareness of male disregard and presumption, the female characters are still attracted to men and still embark on quests for emotional and

¹⁶¹ *National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, 2016-2021* (Welsh Government: November 2016) p.10. <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/commsafety/161104-national-strategy-en.pdf>, accessed 12 December 2016

¹⁶² Laura Bates, *Everyday Sexism* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2014) p.19

sexual relationships, sometimes with those who are the most dangerous. Germaine Greer expresses it succinctly: ‘As long as women need relationships with real men more than men need relationships with real women, women are at a disadvantage in sexual negotiations,’¹⁶³ though the term ‘negotiations’ appears rather generous considering the male characters’ attitudes to sex. Under-age, Rebecca is disgusted by her first experience of sex with Jonesy in *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* but appears to show little hesitation in running away with him; while Ellie, Siân and Rhiannon compete and betray each other to have sex with Johnny Frick in *Sixteen Shades of Crazy*, even though they all know that he will simply take them and show no further interest. Having rejected her partner, Richard, Sam Jones succumbs to his seduction despite her wish to be rid of him in *Random Births and Love Hearts*, as does Mary Gauci to Joe Medora in *The Hiding Place* and Ailsa to her husband, Joe, in a more finely shaded relationship in *Into Suez*. In the most extreme situation, the anonymous female narrator of *True Things About Me* makes it clear to the reader that she fully understands that her entire sense of identity is gradually being stripped away but shows no lessening in the urgency of her need as she reciprocates her male predator’s sexual desires. Elements of regret that the female characters feel - ranging from disappointment to self-disgust and self-blame - are shown to act as brakes on their self-confidence and on their belief that they can shape their own lives but eventually they also spur the women on towards different forms of self-determination and reconciliation, often with other women who are important to them: Rebecca with her Gran; Sam with her daughter; Dol with her sisters; Elsa with her daughter, Mari; Ailsa with her daughter Nia, and, at the last, her friend Mona. In each case, though, along with these unions of women, there is a lingering sense of isolation, of individuals drawing strength from their female relationships but having to survive alone.

¹⁶³ Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, p. 234.

The one novel that has not yet appeared in this overview of my reading of the texts is Azzopardi's *The Song House*, which, more than any other, presents a narrative in which an initial patriarchal situation - of elderly, wealthy male employer and impecunious female employee - is subverted by the woman and then willingly re-negotiated by both characters. As they stumble through the uncertainties of attraction and rejection, violence, isolation and the collision of past and present, Maggie and Kenneth take part in a process symbolised by the scene in the garden where they discuss echolocation, a process by which they retain an acute awareness of each other's presence and importance. They have to negotiate literal and metaphorical floods, with the boundaries of gender, generational and class roles being inundated by the feelings that well up from below the surface. Even with the threat of Kenneth's would-be-patriarchal and proprietorial son hanging over them, they arrive at a negotiated readiness to be together, tentative, difficult, but recognising each other's value.

This inter-generational meeting of female and male is also implied as a hopeful possibility between Dol and Louis at the end of Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place* while on the last page of *Into Suez*, when Ailsa visits the grave of Joe, she 'obeyed her heart and threw herself on her front over the earth that covered him, face in the flowers',¹⁶⁴ negotiating a post-mortem reconciliation even while she has also arrived at a harmonious compromise with her second husband, Archie. Finally, although the whole story is not revealed in the time-leap that occurs at the end of *The Rice Paper Diaries*, Elsa and Oscar achieve an enduring, happy relationship in London. For all the frictions and fractures that are depicted in the novels, the reader can glimpse possible junctures of growth between men and women in places where the men accept that their assumed privileges and the authority of their masculinity must give ground if the relationships are to be sustained. Nevertheless, when Rebecca says 'I refuse to believe that this world is now a woman's world' in the Epilogue to *In and Out of the Goldfish*

¹⁶⁴ *Into Suez*, p. 437.

Bowl,¹⁶⁵ it is a view reflected in all the novels - although it would be the subject of another discussion as to whether either gender should claim ownership - that the balance is still predominantly phallogentric and that patriarchal masculinity in its various forms is an ever-present threat or force of resistance to women's self-definition and to the possibility of negotiated relationships in which each pays regard to the other's difference.

It is a limitation of this study of the novels by contemporary Welsh women writers in English that I have examined the relationship between gender and place, gender and language, gender and empire through the representation of masculinities without the benefit of alternative academic readings because so little critical analysis of the texts has been published to date. A number of reviews have appeared in Welsh journals such as *New Welsh Review* and *Planet*, as well as some U.K. national newspapers and journals in the case of Trezza Azzopardi, Deborah Kay Davies and Rachel Trezise, but on the whole there is still a great deal of room for further research into the characteristics and significance of contemporary writers in Wales, female and male. While I have shown that the texts can be viewed in the broader context of feminist theory, there is considerable opportunity for research that will help to shift contemporary writing from Wales away from the margins of British literary study. In particular, the issues raised by this dissertation might lead to examination of how much men's writing has been affected by the challenges raised by women's writing. It seems possible, for example, that in writing *Resistance*, Owen Sheers was consciously seeking to create women characters who were self-defining, prepared to cross boundaries without the permission of men. Are writers such as Niall Griffiths, Christopher Meredith, Tom Bullough, Joe Dunthorne and Tristan Hughes influenced by the female regard in their writing of male and female relationships? If novels do articulate our aspirations, as Aung San Suu Kyi suggests, what versions of masculinity and femininity are

¹⁶⁵ *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl*, p. 149.

other contemporary Welsh writers presenting in the imagined realities of their novels? I must continue to ask the same of myself. The novels that I have given readings of do indeed prioritise female participation and the female condition. In so doing, they present us, as male writers, with the challenge to make a 'continuous effort' to describe the world differently from the one in which the phallogentric narrative is sustained or seen as the given condition. They present us with the challenge to find the female regard within ourselves and in our writing; and to write worlds in which, perhaps, women can see the 'me' in men, too.

Root and Branch

a novel

by

Robert Walton

The novel has been removed from this on-line thesis for commercial reasons. It is lodged in hard copy form in the Arts and Social Studies Library at Cardiff University and in the National Library of Wales.

2017