

‘Pursuing God’

Poetic Pilgrimage and the Welsh Christian Aesthetic

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to identify a distinct Welsh Christian Aesthetic within Welsh poetics between 1730 and the present day. It is not a comprehensive survey of Welsh poetics. Rather, this work focuses on particular trends within a large corpus of religious verse and documents how changing theologies and/or beliefs actually influence the artistic output. It identifies and examines the characteristics of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic as well as adopting a shaping metaphor of pilgrimage to explore the nuances within it.

The shaping metaphor of this study is the pilgrimage: poets are imagined as making religious pilgrimages through a particular landscape. Each chapter charts a different territory which the poets pass through. The first territory is the Calvinistic Mysticism and the early establishment of the Aesthetic during the eighteenth and very early nineteenth centuries. The second territory is the terrain of the nineteenth-century Nonconformist Nations, and the chapter documents the complexities and changes in the Aesthetic. The third territory is that traversed by two Modernist poets in the twentieth century who backtrack and re-engage with an earlier religion whilst using a new idiom. The fourth territory is a contemporary terrain which explores the pluralism which is possible within the Aesthetic by focussing on four very different poets.

As these pilgrim poets travel, they produce poetry that reflects their spiritual experiences or, indeed, their lack of them. These territories are metaphorical; however, they intersect with one another, as well as intersecting with both the theologically-charged and terrestrial landscape of Wales. Having explored the changing territories, the thesis concludes with a definition of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.

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INTRODUCTION

Charting the theologically-charged space of Wales

This thesis aims to identify a distinct Welsh Christian Aesthetic within Welsh poetics. The ‘established’ and ‘dissident’ hegemony of Calvinistic Nonconformist culture (which intensified following the Calvinistic Methodist Revival of c.1730) provided the crucible for this *national* Aesthetic to form.¹ However, I argue that this was a phenomenon which ultimately transcended the boundaries of traditional Nonconformist denominationalism and became an artistic manifestation of an older Celtic Christianity.

This thesis also identifies and analyses the characteristics of this Aesthetic. As already alluded to, the theologies that influenced its making were much broader than the dominant Calvinistic strand of Welsh Methodism. Welshness and Christianity share a long association that predates Calvinism.² Therefore, it is a Welsh *Christian* Aesthetic and not necessarily a *Calvinistic* or even a *Nonconformist* Aesthetic. The form, metre, language, and content of the poems are influenced by this theological context.

This is not a comprehensive survey of Welsh poetics. Rather, this work focuses on particular trends within a large corpus of religious verse and documents how changing theologies and/or beliefs actually influence the artistic output. Therefore, the rationale for

¹ It should be noted that Nonconformity is an umbrella term which embraces a plethora of Christian convictions as well as a collective social attitude. The denominations can be traced back to the seventeenth-century dissenters who left the Church of England and laid ‘the foundation of Welsh Nonconformist culture’. However, many of the founding fathers of Calvinistic Methodism remained within the Church of England. Therefore, Nonconformity is a multivalent term: a form of religion, a state of mind, and even a revolutionary attitude. See John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 280 and pp. 302-303. In this thesis ‘Nonconformity’ denotes the culture, practice, and religion which did not conform to the established church. Meanwhile ‘nonconformist’ denotes that radical social attitude which is not necessarily religious.

² See Denis Morgan, ‘Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Wales’, *Religion, State and Society*, 27: 3-4 (1999), 327-342 and the second chapter of this thesis.

choosing the particular poets was based on providing a cross-section of religious poetry which was influenced by the different Christian traditions.³ It should be noted that this thesis does not consider other religions in Wales because it argues that Christianity – in its many forms – was and remains the most influential of all the religions.⁴ It does, however, provide a possible interdisciplinary model for further studies in different cultures where multiple theologies or religions may exist.

‘For Pilgrymes are we alle.’⁵ – The Ancient Metaphor

Perhaps the best-known Welsh religious poet of the twentieth century, R. S. Thomas (1913-2000), suggested that ‘the world needs the unifying power of the imagination’ and that the two things ‘which give it best are poetry and religion’.⁶ Poetry, for Thomas, was ‘how the communication of religious experience best operated’.⁷ Both discourses use metaphor – a religious idiom which is, as Thomas once described, ‘deciduous’⁸ – a language which is

³ For example, a notable and purposeful gap in this thesis is the absence of David Jones’s poetry. His poetry is beyond the bounds of this thesis because his inclusion would have skewed the work towards Catholicism seeing that Saunders Lewis is widely used.

⁴ Cai Parry-Jones has recently considered the important influence of Judaism in Wales. For a history of the Jews in Wales, see Cai Parry-Jones, *The Jews of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017). For a more literary history see Jasmine Donahaye, *Whose People? Wales, Israel, Palestine* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012). Also see Grahame Davies (ed.), *The Chosen People: Wales and the Jews* (Bridgend: Seren, 2002). For an account of Islam in Wales, see Grahame Davies, *The Dragon and the Crescent* (Bridgend: Seren, 2011). Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Jody Mellor have recently written about the migration and settlement of Yemenis in Cardiff, 1939-1970. See ‘The early history of migration and settlement of Yemenis in Cardiff, 1939-1970: religion and ethnicity as social capital’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38:1 (2013), 176-191.

⁵ William Langland, *Piers Ploughman*, ed. by Thomas Wright (London: Reeves and Turner, 1887), Part XI, l. 7044, p. 216.

⁶ See R. S. Thomas, ‘Introduction’ in *The Penguin Book of Religious Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), pp. 7-11 (p. 9).

⁷ Thomas (ed.), *Penguin Book of Religious Verse*, p. 9.

⁸ ‘Postscript’, in R. S. Thomas, *H’m* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 22.

multivalent and continuously renewed.⁹ In a television interview with John Ormond, Thomas stated that:

My work as a poet has to deal with the presentation of imaginative truth. Christianity also seems to me to be a presentation of imaginative truth. So that there is no conflict, there's no necessary conflict between these two things at all [...] People, no doubt, are worried by the use of the word imagination, because imagination to many people has a fictional connotation, fictional overtones. Of course, I'm using the word imagination in its Coleridgean sense, which is the highest means known to the human psyche of getting into contact with the ultimate reality; imaginative truth is the most immediate way of presenting ultimate reality to a human being.¹⁰

The role of the poet, then, according to Thomas, is to present imaginatively 'the ultimate reality'.¹¹ With Thomas's words in mind, I decided to adopt a shaping metaphor in this thesis which I believe is the most creative and illuminating way of approaching the poetry. In his autobiography, *Neb | No-One*, Thomas even presents us with the most ancient and helpful of metaphors:

Life is a pilgrimage, and if we have not succeeded in coming a little nearer to the truth, if we do not have a better comprehension of the nature of God before reaching the end of the journey, why was it that we started on the journey at all?¹²

For Thomas, this pilgrimage, or life even, invites a necessary 'comprehension of the nature of God'; here, he seems to be identifying the very essence of religious poetry. For Thomas, both

⁹ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 55: 'Many of the central doctrines of traditional Christianity can be grammatically expressed only in the form of metaphor.'

¹⁰ R. S. Thomas in John Ormond, 'R. S. Thomas: Priest and Poet', A Transcript of John Ormond's film for BBC Television, broadcast on April 2nd, 1972', *Poetry Wales*, 7:4 (Spring 1972), 47-57 (pp. 53-54).

¹¹ Thomas (ed.), *Penguin Book of Religious Verse*, p. 9.

¹² R. S. Thomas, 'No-One' in *Autobiographies*, ed. and trans. by Jason Walford Davies (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), pp. 25-109 (p. 106).

poetry and religion, and religion and poetry are involved in comprehending the nature of God.¹³

For the purpose of this study, then, I want readers to imagine poets making religious pilgrimages through a particular landscape.¹⁴ Each chapter is a different territory which the poets pass through. As they travel, they produce poetry that reflects their spiritual experiences or, indeed, their lack of them. These territories are metaphorical; however, they intersect with one another, as well as intersecting with both the theologically-charged and terrestrial landscape of Wales. As Dorian Llywelyn writes in his study of Welsh spirituality:

Place as a concept is far more than a material description of territory, since it involves relationship with the divine, with particular societies and with individuals, all of whom have a temporal, intrahistorical aspect [...]
Place and identity – individual, communal and national – relate to each other intimately, and any attempt to describe an ethnic Welsh spirituality must include both.¹⁵

What Llywelyn is referring to here is the whole concept of Wales; he argues, convincingly, that the construction of its territory, landscape, nationhood, people, and aesthetics is infused with theology. The Greek word *θεολογια* (theology) simply means ‘an account of the gods’.¹⁶ Wales is a country where many accounts of the Christian Divine have been told, heard, and have subsequently influenced the people, and the landscape wherein they dwell.

This introduction will now chart the contours of this terrain – a terrain complicated by the presence of a bilingual culture, a myriad of religious affiliations and denominations, as

¹³ Ormond, ‘R. S. Thomas: Priest and Poet’, p. 53: ‘And, in any case, poetry is religion. Religion is poetry’.

¹⁴ The word ‘pilgrimage’ derives, via the French *pèlerinage*, from the Latin *peregrinus*, ‘foreign’, and *per ager*, ‘going through the fields’ – it is the action described rather than the goal. See Ian Reader, *Pilgrimage: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 20.

¹⁵ Dorian Llywelyn, *Sacred Place: Chosen People: Land and National Identity in Welsh Spirituality* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 7.

¹⁶ See ‘theology’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

well as secularization, agnosticism, and atheism. We begin by following an English pilgrim from the 1950s as he cycles through the countryside. This may seem like a tangential beginning to this study of Welsh poetry and religious culture. However, the relevance of this English poet will become clearer as we follow him. On his journey, he comes across an old church and he decides to look inside.

‘Church Going’ and the ‘Unignorable silence’

In *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, Pericles Lewis uses Philip Larkin’s ‘Church Going’ (1954) as an illustration of the persistent presence of religion in modern writing.¹⁷

Once I am sure there’s nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now, some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence¹⁸

That ‘stuff / Up at the holy end’ (ll.5-6) haunts the speaker as he perambulates around the site; most of all, it is that ‘tense, musty, unignorable silence’ (l.7) which seems to demand his attention throughout. Writing in the 1950s, Larkin seemed sceptical of that Arnoldian vision that poetry would take over the ‘power’ left over by organised religion.¹⁹ Lewis argues that

¹⁷ Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 1.

¹⁸ Philip Larkin, ‘Church Going’ in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), pp. 58-59 (p. 58, ll. 1-9). All further references to this poem are from this edition and are included parenthetically in the main body of the essay.

¹⁹ See Matthew Arnold ‘The Study of Poetry’ in *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1913 [1880]), pp. 1-55 (pp. 2-3).

the ‘melancholy, long, withdrawing roar’ of the ‘Sea of Faith’, that Matthew Arnold heard on Dover Beach in the middle of the nineteenth century, continued to sound, ‘even among the ostensibly faithless Western elites, for at least a hundred years’.²⁰ If God did die in the nineteenth century, then ‘he had an active afterlife in the twentieth’.²¹ Lewis concludes that the ‘secularization thesis’ fails to fully explain the dormant religiosity in the Modernist canon.²² He writes:

The Modernists felt that the old gods had deserted them, and they sought new gods in unorthodox places – and sometimes even in orthodox ones. Works like *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and *To the Lighthouse* all share an impulse towards the re-enchantment of the world; they express the desire for a new form of spiritual experience independent of the Christian God and appropriate for the modern age.²³

Concepts like ‘unorthodox’ and ‘orthodox’ places, a ‘re-enchantment of the world’, and ‘new forms of spiritual experience’, will re-appear again and again in this thesis as we seek to explore and define a distinctively *Welsh* Aesthetic. But they are also concepts which Larkin creatively addresses in a very *English* way in ‘Church Going’.

In the poem, the sardonic speaker cycles towards one of those ‘orthodox places’. This awkward pilgrim is ‘Wondering what to look for’ (l.21). Hatless, he removes the cycle-clips with ‘awkward reverence’ (l.9); but the fact that he removes them in the first place is in itself fascinating. Some primordial impulse within him – heightened by the very act of Church Going – produces a step-by-step ritual in the first two stanzas:

²⁰ Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, p. 1.

²¹ Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, p. 25.

²² See next section.

²³ Pericles Lewis, ‘Modernism and religion’ in Michael Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 178-196 (pp. 193-194).

1. 'I step inside' (l.1)
2. 'I take off / My cycle-clips' (ll. 8-9)
3. 'Mounting the lectern' (l.13)
4. 'I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence' (l. 17).

This ritualistic behaviour becomes a necessary distraction. Is this pilgrim trying to numb his mind by keeping himself busy? The lectern scene in the second stanza does sound like a charivari or a voice-over, filling up that unbearable and 'unignorable silence'. After all, in mounting the lectern, the speaker is literally turning his back on 'the holy end' with its 'tense' and 'musty' atmosphere:²⁴

Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. (ll. 13-16)

Nevertheless, the power of the word is inescapable; the words are animated and anthropomorphised even when they are uttered by a supposed unbeliever. Ironically, the speaker's commentary on the end of religion is even more pronounced because of the echo's reverberation; there seems to be a lack of control as the word carries on through the empty church, ringing beyond the confines of the poem's stanzas. In a way, the 'unignorable silence' is briefly 'snigger[ing]' here; God has the last (or maybe not so final) laugh.

The deadly hesitation or silence that follows 'Here endeth' reflects the melancholic tone of 'The Madman' section in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (1882):

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean

²⁴ I assume here that the church's architecture and layout follow a traditional pattern where the altar is in the apse (sanctuary) whilst the lectern is positioned in the chancel. If the speaker stood at the lectern, then he would have his back to the altar.

ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?²⁵

Nietzsche was presumably talking about the eclipse of various forms of ‘the sacred’ here rather than a singular attack on the Judeo-Christian God. ‘Here endeth’ is therefore an anxious, Nietzschean proclamation. Larkin even echoes this philosophical passage in the fourth stanza when he wonders what the future will hold for these crumbling temples for that ‘unignorable silence’ (l.7), God:

Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
 But superstition, like belief, must die,
 And what remains when disbelief has gone? (ll. 32-35)²⁶

According to both Nietzsche’s madman and Larkin’s speaker, ‘what remains’ are these churches – ‘the tombs and monuments of God’.²⁷ However, the ‘remains’ have potential for resurrection. The speaker suddenly wonders, what on earth is going to replace ‘disbelief’? The church seems to hold some mysterious power which it receives from ‘the dead, and from its long association with central functions of human (or animal) life around which [the] sacraments have arisen’:²⁸

And that much can never be obsolete,
 Since someone will forever be surprising
 A hunger in himself to be more serious,
 And gravitating with it to this ground,
 Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
 If only that so many dead lie round. (ll. 58-63)

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Section 125: The Madman’ in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft / The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974 [1882]), p. 181. My emphasis.

²⁶ My emphasis.

²⁷ Nietzsche, ‘The Madman’, p. 181.

²⁸ Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, p. 2.

Ultimately, the sacraments have arisen from words in a process of semiosis. The artist, like a wise quarryman, always returns to the oldest quarry: the Church (or rather ecclesiastical and biblical language). Larkin grudgingly accepts that the richest material is still there (l.32).

Perhaps, rather than the dramatic Nietzschean ‘death of God’, this poem is still that conscious battle with what J. Hillis Miller called ‘the disappearance of God’.²⁹ But the language remains. In the Welsh context, Dylan Thomas famously dedicated his poems in a note hewn from that same religious language of praise and damnation:

I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: ‘I’d be a damn’ fool if I didn’t!’ These poems, with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written for the love of Man and in praise of God, and I’d be a damn’ fool if they weren’t.³⁰

In this brief note, we can see how ‘doubts’ and ‘confusions’ are coupled with an old belief in God. Like Larkin, many poets – especially in Wales – seem to ‘step inside’ (l.2) this old site, whether they like it or not.

But this stanza in ‘Church Going’ is much richer than it first seems. Although primarily showing the important relationship between language and religion, it may also, subliminally, reveal the fundamental tenets of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. We can now ask: why are Welsh poetic pilgrims also drawn to this metaphorical church?

Firstly, there is ‘A hunger’ (l.60). Surely, this is what Lewis calls the ‘desire for a new form of spiritual experience’.³¹ The line is reminiscent of the recurring food metaphors

²⁹ See J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000 [1965]), p. 1.

³⁰ Dylan Thomas, ‘Note’ in *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London: J. M. Dent, 1959 [1952]), p. viii.

³¹ Lewis, ‘Modernism and religion’, pp. 193-194.

throughout St Augustine's *Confessions*: 'My hunger was internal, deprived of inward food, that is of you yourself, my God'.³² This hankering after an experiential form of religion – something new and fresh – is evident in all of the chapters. It is a religion which goes beyond the stagnant forms and rituals of conventional structures such as Anglican 'Church Going' or Nonconformist 'Chapel Going'.

Secondly and thirdly, there is gravitation towards 'this ground' (l.61) and a reference to the 'many dead [that] lie around' (l.63). The social geographer Yi-Fu Tuan coined a neologism to describe human attitudes to place: *geopiety*.³³ This Aesthetic seems to be *geopious*, defined as:

A special complex of relations between man and nature. 'Geo' [...] is the soil and by extension land, country and nation [in our case, Wales]. Piety means reverence and attachment to one's family and homeland and to the god who protects them [...] Geopious feelings are still with us as attachments to place, love of country and patriotism.³⁴

Wales is a *geopious* space. It is a country marked by centuries of Christendom; this affects the physical landscape, the metaphorical territories, and the hearts and minds of the pilgrims. Religious sites such as churches, chapels, groves, temples, stone circles, meeting halls, temperance halls, tin tabernacles, fields, *llannau*, hermitages, monasteries and cathedrals all attest to the sacred mark on the land. This territorial attachment is fused with the reverence towards the poets' ancestors – both familial and poetic. They are drawn to them even though their ancestors have long since passed away.

³² Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1991]), p. 35.

³³ See Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Sacred space: explorations of an idea' in *Dimensions of Human Geography: Essays on Some Familiar and Neglected Themes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper 186, 1978), pp. 84-99 and Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Geopiety: a theme in man's attachment to nature and to place' in *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geography*, ed. by David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 11-39 (p. 11).

³⁴ Tuan, 'Geopiety: a theme in man's attachment to nature and to place', 11ff.

This thesis interrogates these general tenets, or characteristics, of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic which are mentioned in the last stanza of Larkin's poem. To summarise, these are:

1. A hunger for experiential religion,
2. A *geopious* attachment to the land,
3. An attachment to ancestors.

I would also add an important fourth characteristic which lies at the heart of any Christian experience and which 'Church Going' interrogates:

4. The paradoxical relationship between *faith* and *doubt*.

Christianity is a faith based on paradox; therefore, any Christian aesthetic will include this characteristic. The Apostle John wrote:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.³⁵

A righteous God of grace gives life by the atoning death of a sinless, guiltless sacrifice. The Welsh Christian Aesthetic stems from that famous biblical statement which encapsulates the religious poet's ancient predicament:

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.³⁶

Belief is always coupled with doubt. What is certain is that 'Church Going' is a poem that remains relevant for every study of religious poetry and a worthy starting point for this thesis, especially its last stanza. Moreover, the reader is licensed to use the final stanza like this

³⁵ John chapter 3: verse 16. All further biblical references, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the King James Authorised Version.

³⁶ Mark 9:24.

because the poet uses the first-person plural – a grammatical shift which gives the speaker’s private and personal meditations a universal character.

The ‘Secularization Theory’ or ‘New Forms of the Sacred’?

What then is the secularization theory and how relevant is it for this thesis? Having introduced the Aesthetic and read ‘Church Going’, it is important to repudiate the dominance of this theory. As we see in Larkin’s poem, the church, although empty, still has a profound effect on the passer-by. The German sociologist Max Weber defined the process of ‘secularization’, or ‘gradual unbelief’, as ‘the disenchantment of the world’.³⁷ But this is not a straightforward process. Indeed, Weber’s theory of rationalization at ‘once upholds and radically revises the connection between secularism and modernity’.³⁸ On the one hand it demonstrates the rejection of supernatural belief but on the other hand, Weber argues that the same beliefs persist, in disguised form, in modern and ‘so-called’ secular contexts.³⁹ In a broad scheme, however, the nineteenth century remains as the age of faith and its crisis, whereas the twentieth century appears to have accepted that *Gott ist tot* (God is dead).

This scheme was challenged by the American philosopher Charles Taylor (b.1931) who viewed the twentieth century as the ‘age of authenticity’ – rather than an age of gradual unbelief – in which the kinds of experience that formerly had been the province of organised

³⁷ See Max Weber, ‘Science as a Vocation’ in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1948), p. 155.

³⁸ Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, p. 26.

³⁹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992[1904-05]), p. 78.

religion shifted to private life and idiosyncratic expression.⁴⁰ This process of privatization indicates that the ‘sacred’ persisted through new and different forms. According to Taylor:

The religious life of practice that I become a part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this.⁴¹

For Taylor, whether one believes or not (and what one believes), metamorphoses from a given to a choice. In any case, this choice caused anxiety amongst the poets.⁴² It is important to remember that outright belief or outright unbelief were not the only two options for the literary intelligentsia at the end of the nineteenth century. As we will see in the second chapter, the decline of biblical literalism and the advancement of theological liberalism meant that orthodox Christian doctrines could be watered down and adjusted. But, like the secularization thesis before it, theological liberalism eventually came under attack. The twentieth-century theologian H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) would summarise liberal theology in his famous sardonic phrase: ‘A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without justice through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross’.⁴³ In a way, the attack on modern, liberal theology is one example of how the ‘sacred’ persisted through new and different forms. One result of this attack was a *re-evangelicalisation* alongside the formation of new denominations, like Pentecostalism. This went side-by-side with the statistical decline of general church attendance.⁴⁴ These paradoxical phenomena – of the

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 473-504.

⁴¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 486.

⁴² Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, p. 38.

⁴³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, quoted in Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 784.

⁴⁴ See table 1.

‘sacred’ persisting in new forms alongside general decline – were not confined to one area or era.⁴⁵

For example, in Wales, at the beginning of the twentieth century, an evangelical revival occurred between the years 1904-1905.⁴⁶ This was what M. Wynn Thomas calls the ‘ghost dance’ of Welsh Nonconformity; nevertheless, it was also the first in a wave of what I call a *re-evangelicalisation* of British Christianity.⁴⁷ After the First World War, theologians and preachers such as D. Martyn Lloyd Jones (1899-1981)⁴⁸ and John Stott (1921-2011)⁴⁹ vehemently repudiated liberal theology and propagated Evangelicalism as a dominant force in both free and Anglican churches. Meanwhile, we cannot ignore the fact that the Welsh denominational chapels were (and still are) in paradoxical decline (see table 1).

⁴⁵ In the United States, a distinguished group of sixty-four theologians defended orthodox conservative doctrine when they published *The Fundamentals* between 1910 and 1915. The volumes defended orthodox Protestant beliefs and attacked higher criticism, liberal theology, Roman Catholicism, socialism, Modernism, atheism, Christian Science, Millennial Dawn (whose members were sometimes known as Russellites but which later adopted the title of Jehovah’s Witnesses), Spiritualism, and evolutionism. Other theologians and philosophers such as Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984), R. C. Sproul (1939-2017) and John McArthur (b.1963) are heirs to this earlier wave of re-evangelicalisation.

In Europe, a similar vein of re-evangelicalisation occurred. Karl Barth’s *The Epistle to the Romans* (1919) reinstated the traditional view of God’s transcendent nature and human sinfulness in a ‘theology of crisis’; he developed this after the so-called death knell to religion, the First World War. Another notable Calvinist theologian, Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) from the Netherlands, developed the disciplines of Systematic Theology and apologetics. He was following in the footsteps of other earlier influential Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977).

⁴⁶ See Eifion Evans, *The Welsh Revival of 1904* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1969) and Kevin Adams, *A Diary of Revival* (Seoul: Crusade for World Revival, 2004).

⁴⁷ M. Wynn Thomas, ‘Evan Roberts: The Ghost Dance of Welsh Nonconformity’ in *The Nations of Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), pp. 214-256.

⁴⁸ Lloyd-Jones was a Harley Street doctor who became an influential preacher between the years 1927-1981. He returned to the Bible as the inspired Word of God in the face of intense opposition from the liberal, denominational hierarchies. He served in Sandfields, Port Talbot but he is most well-known for his ministry at Westminster Chapel, London.

⁴⁹ John Stott was an Anglican priest at All Souls Church, Langham Place. He was one of the leaders of the worldwide evangelical movement and one of the authors of the Lausanne Covenant (1974). In 2005, he was named one of *Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People*.

Table 1 Total Church Attendance in Wales 1980-2015⁵⁰

Wales	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Church in Wales	108200	100100	85000	71900	62300	56800	50600	42000
Baptist	47900	42500	34700	27300	22500	19000	13800	11700
Catholic	75800	72200	58300	50200	43800	37500	34100	28000
Methodist	27000	23900	19500	17200	15600	13900	13200	11100
Presbyterian Church of Wales	55600	46100	35100	29500	23800	19400	15900	12600
Union of Welsh Independents	34800	31000	24400	19900	16300	13300	10900	8400
Other Churches	46500	48000	43500	40400	39500	40400	38200	35900
TOTAL	395800	363800	300500	256400	223800	200300	176700	149700
% of population	14.1	12.9	10.6	9.0	7.7	6.7	5.8	4.8

In thirty-five years, church attendance dropped from 14.1% to 4.8% in Wales. These statistics would seemingly support the secularization hypothesis and render the *re-evangelicalisation* as an additional movement in Thomas's sacred ghost dance. But recent polling from YouGov (2016) showed that 28% of a sample of 1595 British people believed in God or some higher power, 20% believed in some form of spiritual power and not necessarily God and 14% were unsure.⁵¹ That means that 38% did not believe in God or any higher power. These statistics would actually support Taylor's view of the 'sacred' persisting through new and different

⁵⁰ 'British Religion in Numbers', see <http://www.brin.ac.uk/> [Accessed: 09/07/2018]. 1980, 1985 data first published as Table 2.23.2 in Religious Trends 3, from which adult figures taken from 2.14.3 in Religious Trends No. 2, 2000/2001 and children's figures taken in *General Prospects for Wales* (Bible Society and MARC Europe: 1983) p. 28; *Challenge to Change* (Bible Society: 1995), Table A3. 1990-2005 figures taken from Table 2.23.4 in Religious Trends No 4, 2003/2004. 2010, 2015 data projected and first reported in Religious Trends 7, Table 2.24.2.

⁵¹ See <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html> [Accessed: 12/07/2018]. *The Times* commissioned YouGov to run an online poll among a sample of 1,595 adults on 18-19 December 2016. Belief in God or a higher spiritual power was expressed by 28%, four points less than in February 2015, while avowed disbelief had risen over the same period from 33% to 38%. A further 20% believed in some sort of spiritual power but not in God and 14% were unsure what to think. Disbelief peaked among 18-24s (46%) and men (50%).

forms: ‘Most non-practising Christians in Europe believe in God. But their concept of God differs considerably from the way that churchgoing Christians tend to conceive of God’.⁵²

Wales is a landscape ridden with churches and chapels – a theologically-charged space, saturated with the architectural vestiges of past belief. A Welsh Government study on ‘Faith in Wales’ (2008) estimated that Wales has roughly twice as many worshipping congregations per head of population as the rest of Great Britain. There are over 4,400 congregations; one for every 670 people in Wales.⁵³

If read through this Welsh lens, Larkin’s sardonic portrait of the church as a space that may be let ‘rent-free to rain and sheep’ subliminally associates religion with Wales:

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places? (ll. 19-27)

The religious landscape of Wales is full of derelict chapels and churches which are slowly being ruined by the rain. Indeed, many of these sites are both rural and remote, attesting to the social changes which have occurred between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries; namely the industrial revolution and the rural de-population that followed.⁵⁴

⁵² See ‘Being Christian in Western Europe’, *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/> [Accessed: 12/06/2018].

⁵³ Over 98% of these are Christian Churches. ‘Faith in Wales’, Welsh Government Report, p. 7. <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/080331-faith-wales-counting-communities-en.pdf> [Accessed: 17/04/18].

⁵⁴ Figure 1 is a church that I know quite well. I used to play in its derelict ruins as a child.



Figure 1 - Llandyfeisant Church, Llandeilo

‘Church Going’'s ironic title suggests that the church and all its vestiges are about to disappear. In Wales, and indeed Britain as a whole, religion has not followed Larkin’s prediction even if we take the figures in table 1 into account. In the 2011 Census, Christianity was the largest religion, professed by 33.2 million people (59.3 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom).⁵⁵ The second largest religious group were Muslims, with 2.7 million people (4.8 per cent of the population).⁵⁶ 14.1 million people – around a quarter of the population in England and Wales – reported that they had no religion in 2011.⁵⁷ As we can see in table 2, England and Wales remain ‘nominally’ religious countries. Conversely, Wales had the highest proportion of people reporting no religion, at nearly a third of the

⁵⁵ Peter Stokes, ‘Introduction’ in ‘Full Story: What does the Census tell us about religion in 2011?’ *Office for National Statistics* (2013), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/fullstorywhatdoesthecensus2011/2013-05-16> [Accessed: 17/04/2018]. 2001 figures are based on Census 2001 (April 2001) results rather than Census mid-year population estimates.

⁵⁶ Stokes, ‘Full Story’, Introduction.

⁵⁷ Stokes, ‘Full Story’, Introduction.

population.⁵⁸ 58% of the Welsh population called themselves ‘Christian’ whilst 32% were ‘No Religion’.

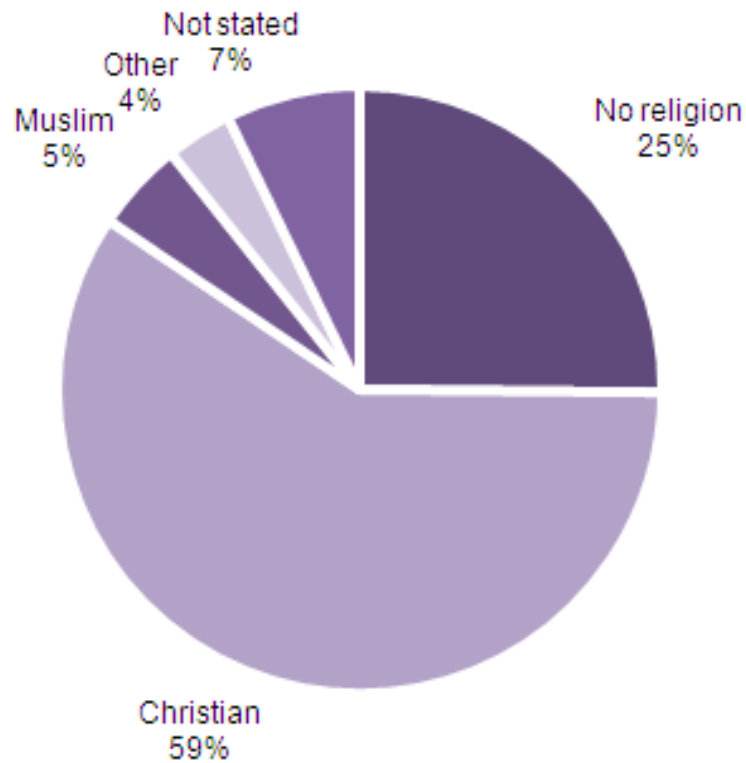


Table 2 - Religious Affiliation in England and Wales 2011. Source: ONS

⁵⁸ Emma White, ‘Section 4: Religious Affiliation across the English Regions and Wales’ in ‘Religion in England and Wales 2011’, *Office for National Statistics* (11th of December, 2012), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioninenglandandwales2011/2012-12-11> [Accessed: 17/04/18].

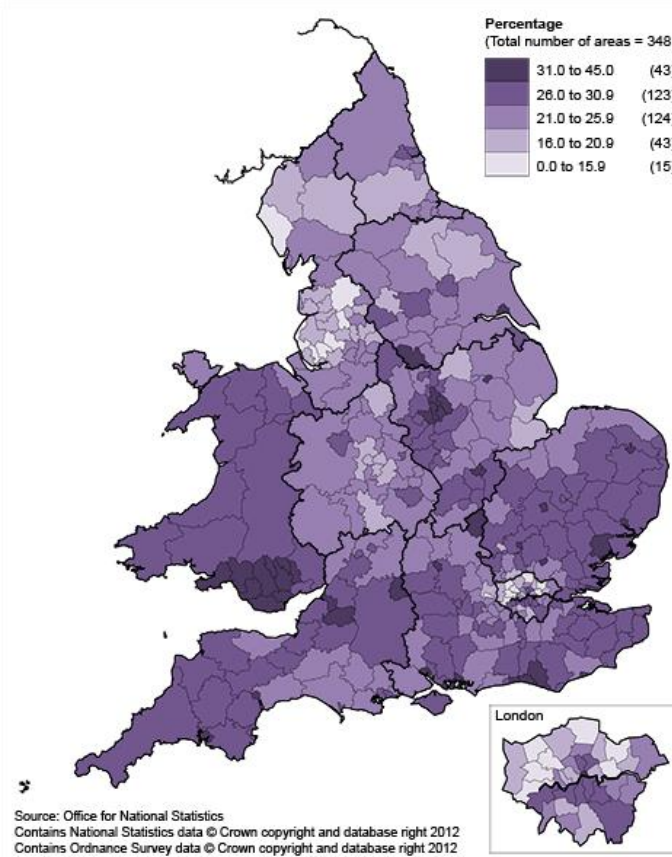


Table 3 - Population reporting no religion, 2011, England and Wales local and unitary authorities

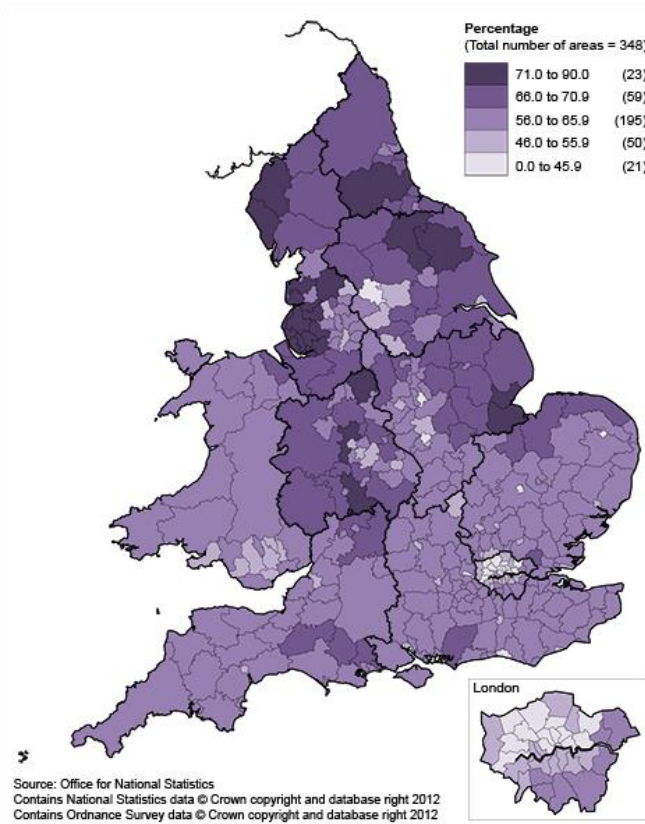


Table 4 - Christian population, 2011, England and Wales local and unitary authorities.

In table 3, we see the percentage of the population of England and Wales reporting no religion. Visually, the darker colours suggest that Wales is not as religious as England. But factors such as smaller populations, concentration of population, and definition of ‘religion’ need to be taken into account. Table 4 shows the percentage of the population that call themselves ‘Christian’.

The American Sociologist, Robert Wuthnow warned about the danger of polling when it comes to belief:

Polling has taught us to think about religion in certain ways that happen to be convenient for conducting polls. The questions tap a few aspects of belief and behavior that can be tracked as trends and rarely provide opportunities to hear what people actually think. Polling’s credibility depends on a narrow definition of science and an equally limited understanding of the errors to which its results are subject. Its legitimacy hinges mostly on predicting elections and making news.⁵⁹

Wuthnow notes how response rates to polls (he is talking here about think tanks like the Pew Center and not necessarily government studies and censuses) have declined precipitously. They cannot be used as an accurate source for documenting, or even challenging, secularization.

However, these government statistics are important because they seem to support what Grace Davie has called ‘belief without belonging’ rather than supporting Weber’s general notion of inevitable secularization – an important concept for an Aesthetic which is not necessarily associated with church attendance.⁶⁰ Europeans no longer associate their faith

⁵⁹ Robert Wuthnow, ‘In Polls We Trust’, *First Things* (2015), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/08/in-polls-we-trust> [Accessed: 12/07/2018].

⁶⁰ See Grace Davie, ‘Belief without Belonging: Is this the future of religion in Britain?’, *Social Compass*, 37:4 (1990), 455-469.

consciously with buildings or institutions. Belief in the supernatural, according to Eugene Subbotsky in his study of folk religion and magic, ‘becomes mostly subconscious’.⁶¹

Subbotsky’s theory suggests that a populace can subconsciously adhere to an older theology or belief system; a similar explanation may lie behind the continuance of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. Throughout this thesis, we will explore how older theologies can consciously and subconsciously influence the poetics of a culture.

The Spiritual Turn

Having called the dominance of the Secularization theory into question, it is important to note that the Welsh Christian Aesthetic does support the notion of Pericles Lewis’s sacred ‘re-enchantment’ which manifested itself in British art following the First World War.⁶² A number of artists shared with T. S. Eliot that ‘profound need for something they felt had been lost from the world, something which would have to be replaced – belief.’⁶³ Joseph Pearce notes that it was G. K. Chesterton’s ‘coming out’, in his *Orthodoxy* (1908), which ‘heralded a Christian revival which, throughout the twentieth century, represented an evocative artistic and intellectual response to the prevailing agnosticism of the age’.⁶⁴ These literary figures belonged to different Christian denominations and churches. For Evelyn Waugh, who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1930, conversion was both an artistic and a spiritual phenomenon:

⁶¹ See Eugene Subbotsky, ‘The Belief in Magic in the Age of Science’, *Sage Open* (January 2014), 1-17 (p. 12). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014521433> [Accessed: 12/06/2018].

⁶² Lewis, ‘Modernism and religion’, p. 194.

⁶³ Richard Johnstone, *The Will to Believe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.94.

⁶⁴ Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), Kindle Edition, location 55-57. Besides Chesterton, its leading protagonists included T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, Siegfried Sassoon, Hilaire Belloc, Charles Williams, Evelyn Waugh, and Graham Greene.

Conversion is like stepping across the chimney piece out of a Looking-Glass world, where everything is an absurd caricature, into the real world God made; and then begins the delicious process of exploring it limitlessly.⁶⁵

Waugh's desire for a heightened realism is reflected in Wales as well. Saunders Lewis's conversion to Catholicism in 1932-33 was the first sign of a simultaneously spiritual/artistic turn, or return, to God in Welsh literary circles. This radical change in Lewis's life was both a spiritual and aesthetic conversion, influenced by his fascination with Wales's place within the European tradition – a link, he argued, that was severed by the Protestant Reformation and the Acts of Union in the sixteenth century.⁶⁶ Whilst studying the Calvinistic Methodist hymn writer William Williams Pantycelyn (1717-1791), Lewis experienced some form of epiphany: the Calvinistic Methodists were no longer adhering to the beliefs, especially sin and judgement, which had shaped the theology and literature of redemption fronted by Pantycelyn.⁶⁷ Lewis's return to orthodox Christianity (albeit Roman Catholicism) would be a pre-cursor to further spiritual turns in Welsh literary circles. Gwenallt, David Jones, Glyn Jones, and Pennar Davies were also part of this Christian return in the 1930s. These were not all Catholics but, as we will see in subsequent chapters, there was a conscious and sometimes unconscious return to the older, more orthodox Christian doctrines of their ancestors. Gwenallt and Glyn Jones returned to Calvinism whilst Pennar Davies looked beyond the influence of Calvin to an older, Pelagian Wales.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Michael de-la-Noy, *Eddy: The Life of Edward Sackville-West* (London: Bodley Head, 1988), pp. 237-8.

⁶⁶ See Saunders Lewis, *Braslun o Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg hyd 1536* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1932).

⁶⁷ In 'Llythyr Ynghylch Catholigiaeth' (A Letter about Catholicism), Lewis attacks liberal Protestantism for its unwillingness to acknowledge the centrality of the Doctrine of Sin and the Divine person of Jesus in its theology and literature.

This ‘re-enchantment’ was far from being universal in the literary world, however; by the 1930s, Christianity had become the *bête noire* to many writers and painters. Virginia Woolf was devastated when T. S. Eliot converted to Anglo-Catholicism in 1928:

I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He has become an Anglo-Catholic believer in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is. I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God.⁶⁸

Woolf links belief in God and church-going with a dead past; the orthodox God and his followers are ‘dead to us all’. Eliot was seemingly nonconforming to the general tide of secularization within the English intelligentsia. Woolf’s morbid proclamation of Eliot being ‘dead to us’ would have been uttered many times by many artists concerning those estranged ‘others’, who were retaining or re-discovering belief in the Christian God. But this death knell appeared to be the necessary precursor for Pericles Lewis’s notion of ‘re-enchantment’ – a paradoxical rebirth which resulted in artistic production.

Indeed, two later radical theologians, Thomas J. J. Altizer (b.1927) and William Hamilton (1924-2012), saw the death of God as not strictly negative, but rather, permitting the emergence of His full revelation:

The Christian should welcome the total secularization of the modern world on the ground that it is only in the midst of the radically profane that man will again be able to recapture an understanding of the sacred.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Virginia Woolf, letter to Vanessa Bell, February 11th, 1928, no.1858, in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975-80), vol. III, pp. 457-8.

⁶⁹ John Elson, ‘Theology: The God is dead Movement’, *Time Magazine*, (October 22nd, 1965). This article would later be followed by the more famous ‘Is God dead?’ cover story for *Time Magazine* on April 8th 1966 also written by John Elson.

Thus, Altizer saw the collapse of Christendom and the onset of a secular world without God as necessary preludes to the rediscovery of the sacred. In this context, perhaps Larkin, in ‘Church Going’, whether he knows it or not, is actually also writing about the eventual rediscovery of the sacred or, what Lewis calls, this ‘re-enchantment’.⁷⁰ Perhaps this recapturing of the sacred is that ultimate ‘compulsion’ (l. 55) in Larkin’s final stanza. Secularization can no longer be regarded as a straightforward narrative, but rather, as the historian Callum G. Brown puts it: ‘Secularization theory [itself] is now a narrative in crisis’.⁷¹

Survey of the Field – Welsh Poetry and Religion

This next section will briefly survey what critics have said to date about Welsh poetry and religion. Generally, most Welsh- and English-language criticism focuses on individual poets (or a cluster of poets from a particular period) rather than arguing for an overarching Welsh Christian Aesthetic.⁷² The primary reason for avoiding this theory is the very differences which make Wales’s religious poems so unique; these are usually linguistic differences or theological ones. Furthermore, any attempt to argue over an aesthetic, pattern, or tradition of poetry is usually highly informed by the critic’s own religious conviction.⁷³

⁷⁰ Lewis, ‘Modernism and religion’, p. 194.

⁷¹ For a good analysis of the Secularization Theory see Pericles Lewis, ‘God’s Afterlife’ in *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, pp. 26-31 and Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 30.

⁷² Recently, for example, Alan Llwyd has written an extensive study on Gwenallt. See Alan Llwyd, *Gwenallt: Cofiant D. Gwenallt Jones 1899-1968* (Talybont: Lolfa, 2016). In English, M. Wynn Thomas has written an extensive study on R. S. Thomas. See *R. S. Thomas: Serial Obsessive* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

⁷³ For example, Saunders Lewis and Roman Catholicism, and Bobi Jones and Calvinism.

Welsh-Language Poetry

The Christian concern of much Welsh-language poetry has always been a 'given'; critics have tended to focus their attention on individual poets rather than tracing the overarching relation between Welsh poetry and religion. Certainly, the topic is adequately covered in some periods in Welsh history. Much has been written about Welsh poetry and religion in the medieval period. J. E. Caerwyn Williams's classic study *Canu Crefyddol y Gogynfeirdd* (1977) was one of the first works which focussed on the uniqueness of Welsh Catholicism in these early poems.⁷⁴ Catherine A. McKenna's *Medieval Welsh Religious Lyric* (1991) built on Williams's early work and revealed the fascinating evolution of Welsh religious lyric between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁷⁵ Poets like Cynddelw (1155-1195) wrote praise poems to God whilst later poets like Gruffydd ab yr Ynad Coch (d.1282) wrote more personal lyrics which sought an emotional, religious response from the hearer/reader.⁷⁶ It is evident from these critical works that a shifting theology did manifest itself in the poetics. Oliver Davies's *Celtic Christianity in Early Medieval Wales* (1996) documents the theology of the Middle Ages alongside its religious prose and poetry.⁷⁷ Davies explores the origins of the earliest Welsh 'spiritual' tradition in the fusion of Celtic primal religion with primitive Christianity and traces some considerable Irish influence. These specific Celtic 'spiritual' emphases are examined in the religious poetry of the Black Book of Carmarthen, the Book of Taliesin and the Poets of the Princes. Although falling outside the chronological parameters

⁷⁴ See J. E. Caerwyn Williams, *Canu Crefyddol y Gogynfeirdd* (Swansea: University College Swansea, 1977).

⁷⁵ See Catherine A. McKenna, *Medieval Welsh Religious Lyrics: Poems of the Gogynfeirdd, 1137-1282* (Belmont: Ford & Bailie, 1991).

⁷⁶ For a study of the style of these poets' religious verse see Barry James Lewis, 'Adeiladu Cerdd: Cyfuniadau Geiriol yng Nghanu Crefyddol y Gogynfeirdd', *Llên Cymru* 24 (2001), 33-51 and 'Trafod Barddoniaeth yn yr Oesoedd Canol: Y Traddodiad Mawl a Chrefydd', *Dwned* 8 (2002), 9-34.

⁷⁷ Oliver Davies, *Celtic Christianity in Early Medieval Wales: The Origin of the Welsh Spiritual Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996).

of this study, the characteristics of these earlier religious poems support the theory that an over-arching Welsh Christian Aesthetic exists.

Perhaps the most influential literary critic and poet to work on this earlier period was Saunders Lewis. Whilst writing his *School of Welsh Augustans* (1924), Lewis recognised how the output of Welsh poets before the Reformation, contained the *philosophia perennis* of Catholic Christendom. Lewis expounded the ethos of that pre-Reformation ‘tradition’ of Welsh *Catholic* poetry but avoided the idea of a wider Christian Aesthetic. The literary renaissance that occurred between 1435-1535 was what Saunders Lewis first termed *Y Ganrif Fawr* (The Great Century) in his survey of medieval Welsh literature which appeared in 1932, singling out this period as the ‘finest flowering’ of an unbroken Welsh literary tradition stretching back a thousand years.⁷⁸ The era of poets such as Lewis Glyn Cothi (1420-1490), Gutun Owain (1456-1497), Dafydd Nanmor (1450-1490), Guto'r Glyn (1435-1493) and Tudur Aled (1465-1525) represented for Lewis a ‘golden age’ of Welsh literature, suffused with a ‘spirit of confidence and faith in Wales’ before the final loss of Welsh independence.⁷⁹ Lewis regarded the poetry of the *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* (Poets of the Gentry) as ‘the core of the literary canon’ and its high point.⁸⁰ He believed that it was when Wales was made part of England under the Tudors, that ‘it was dealt a mortal blow’, and entered a new, grim age in which ‘the civilization of Wales wasted away and declined’.⁸¹ This saw the destruction of ‘the order of the old Welsh life [...] the old religion of the Welsh people was supplanted also,

⁷⁸ Lewis, *Braslun o Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg*, ch. 7; cf. Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), pp. 247-68 and pp. 414-60.

⁷⁹ Lewis, *Braslun o Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg*, p. 123.

⁸⁰ Tudur Hallam, *Canon ein Llên* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 148.

⁸¹ Saunders Lewis, *Egwyddorion Cenedlaetholdeb: Principles of Nationalism*, B. Griffiths (trans.) (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975 [1926]), pp. 2-3 and Katharine K. Olson, “‘Y Ganrif Fawr’? Piety, Literature and Patronage in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Wales”, *Studies in Church History*, 48 (2012), 107-123 (p. 111).

and instead of order and civilisation there came upon Wales darkness and anarchy'.⁸²

According to Lewis, this led to an artistic anarchy as well as a political one.

The possibility of a Welsh Christian Aesthetic built from the numerous strands of Christianity does not correspond with Lewis's view of *Y Ganrif Fawr*, which, for him, was the pinnacle of Welsh civilization and artistic creation. Even William Williams Pantycelyn (1717-1791) – the great Calvinistic hymn-writer of Wales – was re-moulded in Lewis's vision. In 1927, Lewis's *Williams Pantycelyn* portrayed the sweet singer of Wales as a 'romantic who was to be bracketed with Rousseau into a pioneer of sexual psychology and into an ecclesiastical statesman of the subtlest kind who sought through the *seiat brofiad* of Methodism to restore the ancient heritage of confession and ghostly counselling'.⁸³ Lewis's controversial work on Pantycelyn was one of the most ambitious pieces of literary criticism ever to appear in the Welsh language, even though its attempt to catholicise Pantycelyn was, and remains, problematic.⁸⁴

Next to Lewis, the Welsh critic who engaged with the interconnection of religion and poetry the most was R. M. (Bobi) Jones (1929-2017). Jones's critical oeuvre argued for a distinctively Welsh *Calvinistic* Aesthetic. In his work on the 'Theology of Culture' | *Diwinyddiaeth Diwylliant* called *Palu'r Ardd* | *Digging the Garden*, he argues that the structure of Augustinian/Calvinist theology formed the backbone of Welsh thought and

⁸² Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'His Politics', in A. R. Jones and G. Thomas (eds.), *Presenting Saunders Lewis* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), pp. 23-79 (p. 49).

⁸³ Saunders Lewis, *William Williams Pantycelyn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991 [1927]) and Pennar Davies, 'His Criticism' in Alun R. Jones & Gwyn Thomas (eds.), *Presenting Saunders Lewis* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), pp. 93-105 (p. 93).

⁸⁴ See E. Wyn James's review of *Williams Pantycelyn* at www.gwales.com. Lewis believed that even literary critics should be employed in creating literature.

literature from the sixth century onwards.⁸⁵ Similar ideas were developed in his earlier *Llên Cymru a Chrefydd* | *Welsh Literature and Religion* (1977) where he portrayed the thematic continuance and religious patterns from Taliesin to Pantycelyn.⁸⁶ Even atheistic works, he argued, were shaped and conditioned by a fundamental drive towards ‘purpose’ and ‘value’:

Eto, pa mor seciwlar neu anghredinol neu ‘wrthgrefyddol’ bynnag font, y mae pob gwaith llenyddol, beth bynnag yw ei bwnc, wedi’i gyflyru gan ymagwedd sylfaenol tuag at bwrpas neu werthoedd.⁸⁷

These values, or aims, he saw as being rooted in universal Christian truths which were manifested in the ordered structure of literary works like Pantycelyn’s oeuvre. Whilst agreeing with Jones’s identification of a strong (even dominant) Calvinistic element in the Aesthetic, this study goes beyond Jones and identifies the importance of *other* theologies and multiple Christian convictions in the formation of a Welsh *Christian* Aesthetic, rather than a purely *Calvinistic* one. Like Lewis, Jones’s periodization of Welsh literature and related

⁸⁵ See R. M. Jones, *Palu'r Ardd: Diwinyddiaeth Diwylliant* (no date.), <http://www.rmjones-bobjones.net/llyfrau/palurardd.pdf> [Accessed: 26/05/2018], p. 192:

O ran credoau cytûn a chyffredinol canolog, ymddengys i mi fod gan Fodel A/C bresenoldeb parhaol digyfaddawd yng Nghymru drwy'r blynyddoedd. Mae'r diwylliant Cymraeg hefyd yn ei hyd a'i led yn darparu digon o fodd i brofi'r egwyddorion ar waith yn ymarferol. Dyma'r lle y cafwyd asgwrn cefn uniongred y meddwl Cymraeg. Hyderaf y cawn weld mwyfwy o barodrwydd i wynebu'n onest ac yn gyhyrog bresenoldeb syniadaeth gyfoethog Gristnogol hyd yn oed wrth efrydu Hanes Diwylliant.

My translation:

As for the agreed, general and central beliefs, it appears to me that the Thomist/Calvinist model has an uncompromising and continual presence in Wales throughout the years. Welsh culture has it within its means to prove the principles practically. This is where the backbone of the Welsh orthodox mind is located. I am confident that we will see an increasing readiness to face honestly and robustly the presence of Christian thought even when studying the History of Culture.
All further translations of Jones’ work are my own.

The A/C model that he refers to here is what Alvin Platinga in his book *Warranted Christian Belief* calls the Aquinas/Calvin model which was one of the most important presences in Western religious philosophy. See Alvin Platinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸⁶ R. M. Jones, *Llên Cymru a Chrefydd* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1977), p. 13.

⁸⁷ Jones, *Llên Cymru a Chrefydd*, pp. 590-95: ‘Indeed, however secular or atheistic these works are, every piece of literature, whatever its subject is infused with a fundamental disposition towards purpose or values.’ My translation.

assumptions has been shaped by his personal political, religious and social perspectives and must be viewed in the light of these perspectives.

Other critics in the Welsh language have followed Lewis and Jones in their exploration of Welsh Poetry and religion. In 1991, the poet John Gruffydd Jones wrote about ‘Y Gristnogaeth Greadigol’ | ‘Creative Christianity’.⁸⁸ He noted how modern Welsh poetry was still saturated with Christian allusion and sentiment.⁸⁹ He named Tilsli, Gwilym R. Jones, Eirian Davies, John Roberts, Alan Llwyd, and Bryan Martin Davies as poets who were actively writing poetry in light of their personal Christian convictions. In 1993, Medwin Hughes edited a collection which included some of these Welsh-language poets who adhered to what he called, ‘yr awen Gristnogol’ | ‘the Christian muse’.⁹⁰ The short essay which introduces *Blodeugerdd Barddas o Gerddi Crefyddol* (1993) is, perhaps, the work which comes closest to an articulation of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic that I could find. Hughes stands back and views the panorama of Welsh Christian poetry, noting the differing theologies before presenting the poetry in a chronological manner. According to Hughes, religious poetry is an artistic articulation of the mysterious relationship between God and man.⁹¹ This is a relationship which is evident in the thirteenth century as well as the twentieth:

⁸⁸ John Gruffydd Jones, ‘Y Gristnogaeth Greadigol’, *Y Cristion* (May 1991), 5-6 (p. 5).

⁸⁹ Jones, ‘Y Gristnogaeth Greadigol’, p. 5: ‘Peidiwn ag anghofio fod barddoniaeth gyfoes yn fwrlwm o’r Gristnogaeth greadigol.’ | ‘We must not forget that modern poetry is full of creative Christianity’.

⁹⁰ See Medwin Hughes, ‘Introduction’ in *Blodeugerdd Barddas o Gerddi Crefyddol* (Llandybie: Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 1993), pp. xi-xx.

⁹¹ Hughes, ‘Introduction’, p. xii: ‘Camp y bardd yw cyfleu mewn iaith gyffredin hanfod y berthynas rhwng Duw a dyn.’

Dengys [...] gyfoeth a grym yr awen Gristnogol ar ddiwedd yr ugeinfed ganrif a pherthynas iaith a diwinyddiaeth wrth luneiddio profiadau ffydd.⁹²

This statement is in response to the religious poetry of Bobi Jones, Geraint Gruffydd, W. R. Rhys Nicholas, Donald Evans and Alan Llwyd. Hughes argues for a Christian continuance rather than a secularisation in Welsh poetic art.

All of these critics identify the *importance* of the Christian tradition but do not adequately delve into the *diversity* of Christian experiences which accompanied the craft. Furthermore, political or religious bias often shapes the artists considered in these critical works. For example, many do not read Welsh-language poetry alongside the rich array of English-language poetry by Welsh writers which were produced at the same time. This comparative and inclusive approach is necessary if we are to understand the rich nuances of Welsh religious verse.

The English critic (and Anglican priest), A. M. Allchin identified some interesting cross-overs between these two great linguistic traditions and religious poetry. The existence of a powerful poetic tradition characterised by praise was addressed by Allchin in his *Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition* (1991). Identifying the Welsh poetic tradition as predominantly one of praise, Allchin importantly noted that:

Praise, like all worship [...] is that which is due to God. All other forms of praise directly, or more often indirectly, refer back to him.⁹³

⁹² Hughes, 'Introduction', p. xx: 'This poetry reveals the richness and power of the Christian Muse – as well as the relationship between language and theology in portraying faith experiences – at the end of the twentieth century'.

⁹³ A.M. Allchin, *Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), p. 4.

This study acknowledges, like Allchin, that Wales' secular praise poetry eventually refers back to God – its instigator. However, although Allchin does discuss apophatic poetry in his epilogue, he does not go so far as to say that a Welsh Christian Aesthetic encompasses poetry of doubt, and even, poetry of unbelief. Allchin provided the background to discussions in this thesis about R. S. Thomas and the complex praise he undertook in his poetry. But, most importantly, Allchin could see the continuance of this rich Christian tradition in both English and Welsh poetry.

English-language Poetry

At the same time as Allchin was writing his book, Wales saw the emergence of literary criticism which focused on the rich cultural heritage of Welsh writing in English.⁹⁴ Gwyn Jones, Raymond Garlick, Roland Mathias, Meic Stephens, Raymond Williams, and Glyn Jones were all pioneers of this new criticism which emerged after Saunders Lewis's provocative lecture entitled 'Is there an Anglo-Welsh Literature?' which he gave to the Guild of Graduates of the University of Wales in 1939.⁹⁵ One would have expected that these critics would have grappled with the religious themes that had dominated the Wales that they had known and were writing about. Concerning poetry, much criticism – even in those earlier

⁹⁴ See <https://www.awwe.org/a-short-history.html> [Accessed: 18/07/2018]: 'The Association for Welsh Writing in English was formed in 1984, following a series of meetings between lecturers in the constituent colleges of the then University of Wales with the aim of stimulating the reading, study and teaching of Welsh writing in English. At that point, while Welsh writing in English was being taught by individual academics in the various colleges, there was no organisational structure by means of which these academics could confer and plan for the development of the future of this field of study. The members of staff who were involved with the venture at that early stage included: Tony Brown (Bangor), James A. Davies (Swansea), Wyndham Griffiths (Aberystwyth), Desiree Hirst (Swansea), Belinda Humfrey (Lampeter), John Pikoulis (Cardiff) M. Wynn Thomas (Swansea), Ned Thomas (Aberystwyth), J. P. Ward (Swansea), Ioan Williams (Aberystwyth). The Association formalised itself as 'The University of Wales Association for the Study of Welsh Writing in English' and then (as colleagues from Trinity College Carmarthen and the new University of Glamorgan became involved) as 'The Universities of Wales Association for the Study of Welsh Writing in English'; the present, simpler form came into being in 1996'.

⁹⁵ According to Garlick, that event 'marks the beginning of serious Anglo-Welsh studies'. See Raymond Garlick, 'Is there an Anglo-Welsh literature?' in *Literature in Celtic Countries*, ed. by J. E. Caerwyn Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971), pp. 195-207 (p. 195).

days – tended to avoid religious themes. According to the discerning Tony Conran, in his pioneering study *The Cost of Strangeness* (1982):

Anglo-Welsh poetry has been mainly the product of a petty bourgeoisie sufficiently anglicised to be useful to the ruling class, and yet still Welsh enough to remember with mixed feelings of guilty regret, affection and sometimes hatred, its long tutelage to the womb-like caste of the chapel-elect [...] It seeks to supersede both the old Wales of the Chapel and its new-found masters, the English or totally anglicised big bourgeoisie. But as yet it has neither the authority of power nor that of style. And its own heart hankers for both God and Mammon, and is afraid of both.⁹⁶

Similarly, Anglo-Welsh criticism has sought to ‘supersede [...] the old Wales of the Chapel’.

Conran dedicated his book to Glyn Jones who, in his own seminal work of 1968, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, admitted that there was a notable absence in its pages:

A question I have not explored to the extent I perhaps should have done is the important one of the relation between language and religion as far as the Anglo-Welsh are concerned [...] Few, as far as I know, have retained any important connection with the religion of the community in which so many of them were brought up, i.e. nonconformity. The question arises as to the part played by the rejection of formal religion in the production of the Anglo-Welsh, in a country where the chapels have been the custodians of the language and of a distinctive way of life [...] Did those Anglo-Welsh who lost their Welsh and their Welshness do so because they abandoned the traditional religion of their families? Or were they constrained to reject a whole way of life, including nonconformity, because of their ignorance of or indifference to the language? I am not sure that general answers can be given to these questions. When one deals with a matter as personal as religious belief perhaps one has to examine cases individually to arrive at correct answers.⁹⁷

Jones, like all the other critics, was conscious of the important link between religion and poetic language in Wales, but the fear of over-generalisation, as we see in the quotation above, meant that those questions which Jones asked remained unanswered. There is an uneasy tone to this quotation which reflects an uneasiness relating to the nature and genesis

⁹⁶ See Anthony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982), p. 164.

⁹⁷ Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (London: J. M. Dent, 1968), p. 206. Henceforth abbreviated as *DHTT*.

of Welsh writing in English, which, according to Conran and Jones, lay in the ‘womb’ of the chapel. It should be noted that Jones himself did not ‘reject formal religion’ and his poetry (see chapter 4) is a rich example of how Welsh writing in English – and arguably its criticism – can never be divorced from ‘its long tutelage to the womb-like caste of the chapel-elect’.⁹⁸ Furthermore, Jones identified a critical trend when he wrote that in order to deal with poets’ belief, it is necessary to examine cases individually. Studying individuals is like focussing on a single piece of jigsaw which is, of course, vital and necessary. But if critics always focus on the single piece, they will never be able to step back and enjoy the grand vista of the completed puzzle.

In the 1990s, Conran developed those ideas he explored in *The Cost of Strangeness* by identifying and naming two strands of modern Welsh culture which complemented and competed with one another – this was an important step in the discussion regarding religion and poetry. The first strand he terms *buchedd* culture, using the Welsh word which means a special sort of society – Glyn Jones’s ‘way of life’ or ‘ethos’ rooted in Methodism.⁹⁹ The second strand he identified was *traddodiad*, or ‘tradition’, ‘the ancient culture of Wales, rooted in a devotion to locality and kin, history and myth, finding its main expression in Welsh language and literature’.¹⁰⁰ Conran highlighted the importance of Christianity but argued that Idris Davies (1905-1953) was the last of the *buchedd* poets. He did not address the possibility that these traditions – namely *buchedd* and *traddodiad* – may have subliminally remained in the psyche of the poets. In fact, this thesis argues that a subtle

⁹⁸ Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness*, p. 164.

⁹⁹ Anthony Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p.1: ‘It [Anglo-Welsh poetry] derives from a special sort of society, which I shall call the *buchedd* from a Welsh word meaning a ‘way of life’ or ‘ethos’.’

¹⁰⁰ Paul Robichaud, *Making the Past Present: David Jones, the Middle Ages and Modernism* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), p. 49.

combination and not a *distinction* between *buchedd* and *traddodiad* contributed to the unique Welsh character of this Aesthetic.

A part of this combination of traditions manifested itself in the uniqueness and importance of Welsh Nonconformist dissent. M. Wynn Thomas's magisterial study, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit* (2010), pioneered the study of literature and Nonconformity in Wales.¹⁰¹ He showed how Welsh Nonconformity was both a generator and a hindrance to art through a detailed analysis of the work of a range of modern Anglophone Welsh writers, including Dylan Thomas and Glyn Jones; more often than not, poets' reaction to Nonconformity's hegemony could be viewed as the very birth pangs of the great tradition of Welsh writing in English.

M. Wynn Thomas, in truly Arnoldian fashion (and in the typically secular trend of Welsh writing in English), suggested that Nonconformist religion was displaced by new creative writing. There is a tendency in the book, however, to look at the artists from outside rather than from within. According to David Bebbington, 'the chapel culture needs to be examined primarily from its own point of view' and not from that of the so-called 'spoiled preachers' who left the chapel.¹⁰² The truth is, as Thomas's opening chapter shows, Nonconformity and its theologies seeped into the minds of both artist *and* critic in Wales. I argue that Nonconformity is not a mere shadow, as Thomas's title suggests, but rather a persistent presence in Welsh poetics. My argument, therefore, is that Nonconformity (or indeed Christianity more generally) was not displaced at all but rather persisted in new forms. Magisterial as *In the Shadow of the Pulpit* is, it does not delve into denominational

¹⁰¹ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*.

¹⁰² Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 154.

differences or theology in any depth.¹⁰³ There needs to be a deeper understanding of the theologies that went into the making of the Aesthetic.¹⁰⁴ My study attempts to chart the diversity and nuances of Welsh Christian experiences, institutions, and theologies and seeks to demonstrate how that diversity is manifested in literary production.

Apart from M. Wynn Thomas's work, modern criticism of Welsh poetry tends to avoid religious themes. Recent criticism proves this trend. For example, Daniel G. Williams's edited collection, *Slanderous Tongues* (2010) mentions an 'inherited tradition' (using Raymond Williams's vocabulary) but none of the essays reflect the tensions between an *inherited* Nonconformity and an *emerging* poetry.¹⁰⁵ Matthew Jarvis's *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (2008) and his edited book *Devolutionary Readings: English-Language Poetry and Contemporary Wales* (2017) also fail to engage adequately with the importance of sacred space, Christian thought, and the central role Nonconformity plays even in a so-called 'post-Christian' reading of Welsh poetry.¹⁰⁶ The front cover of *Devolutionary Readings* depicts Kathryn Le Grice's painting of Swansea with the striking blue chapel in its centre. Ironically, that symbolic centre-piece is notably absent in the criticism.

¹⁰³ Thomas does acknowledge this to an extent when he entitles his first chapter 'A Bluffer's Guide to Welsh Nonconformity'.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas makes some theological errors in his work. For example, Martin Luther did not believe in transubstantiation (p. 22) but consubstantiation, while Anabaptists were not the same as Baptists (p. 23).

¹⁰⁵ See Daniel G. Williams, *Slanderous Tongues: Essays on Welsh Poetry in English 1970-2005* (Bridgend: Seren, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ See Matthew Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008) and *Devolutionary Readings: English-Language Poetry and Contemporary Wales* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017)



Figure 2 - Kathryn Le Grice, *Swansea (Blue Chapel II)*, 2015

There is one notable exception to the general neglect of religion in the criticism of Welsh writing in English. R. S. Thomas's central interest in questions of religion can hardly be ignored but he tends to be viewed as an anomaly or even a throwback in this regard by the critics. He mischievously forces them to engage with his complex theology through a religious poetic which demands the secularist's attention. Some critics have sought to corral this 'sacred anomaly' and pull Thomas's poetry back into the secular fold of Welsh writing in English; John Barnie argued that R. S. was not a religious poet at all but an 'atheist manqué'.¹⁰⁷ Once again, political or religious bias often shapes how the artists are considered in such critical works. R. S.'s poetry reveals a more complex *agon* with the *Deus absconditus* (the hidden God) – whether he was a believer or an unbeliever is, in one sense, irrelevant, because his poetry – as we will see in this thesis – articulates both experiences. A whole area

¹⁰⁷ See John Barnie, 'Was R. S. Thomas an Atheist Manqué?' in *Echoes to the Amen, Essays after R.S. Thomas*, ed. by Damian Walford Davies (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 60-75.

of Thomas criticism has emerged which explores the complex theological strands in his work. Recently, Dewi Z. Phillips, Elaine Shepherd, Richard McLauchlan, William V. Davis, Rowan Williams, Patrick Toal, and I, have contributed to this growing critical oeuvre.¹⁰⁸

There is, therefore, a notable absence in the critical field relating to Welsh poetry and religion. Critics cannot avoid the fact that a great number of Welsh poets writing in both languages have written religious verse. These poets need to be looked at side-by-side. In a sense, this study re-acknowledges Conran's 'old Wales of the Chapel' as well as answering some of the linguistic questions that Glyn Jones suggested at the end of *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*. Wales is a theologically-charged space and the conscious and subconscious dealings with the Christian religion cannot simply be eradicated from the criticism simply because the critics *believe* that God is irrelevant or dead.

Wider Literary Criticism

I will conclude this survey by noting some other important trends relating to theology and poetry in wider literary criticism. A large corpus of critical work surrounding the Welsh Metaphysical Poetry of George Herbert (1593-1633) and Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) already exists. R. A. Durr, Donald Dickinson, Barbara Lewalski, L. L. Martz, J. F. S. Post, David Reid, Philip West and Ceri Sullivan are just some examples of critics who have

¹⁰⁸ See Dewi Z. Phillips, *R. S. Thomas: Poet of the Hidden God* (London: Macmillan, 1986); Elaine Shepherd, *R. S. Thomas: Conceding an Absence: Images of God Explored* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Richard McLauchlan, *Saturday's Silence: R. S. Thomas and Paschal Reading* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017); William V. Davis, *R.S. Thomas: Poetry and Theology* (Baylor, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007); Rowan Williams, 'Suspending the Ethical: R.S. Thomas and Kierkegaard' in *Echoes to the Amen, Essays after R.S. Thomas*, ed. by Damian Walford Davies (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 206-219; Patrick Toal, "'Playing the old anthropomorphic game': R.S. Thomas's 'Middle Period' and the Rhetoric of Theological (Im)Possibility", *Almanac: A Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English*, 15 (2010-11), 112-38; and Nathan Llywelyn Munday, "'Ann heard Him speak, and Pantycelyn': The Unexpected Relationship between R. S. Thomas and the Calvinistic Methodists", *International Journal of Welsh Writing in English*, 5:1 (2018) (1-37) doi: [DOI]: 10.16995/ijwwe.5.3 [Accessed: 06/04/2018].

engaged with these two Welsh poets.¹⁰⁹ These studies do not particularly highlight the *Welsh* elements in these poets' religious work. However, other notable critics have drawn attention to Vaughan's poetry in conjunction to the Welsh landscape and *Welsh* beliefs/theology.¹¹⁰ On the whole, many of these critical works touch on the idea of a 'spiritual tradition' established in their respective eras, but they avoid asserting, or even suggesting, the existence of a Welsh Christian Aesthetic which continues to the modern day.

Much work has already been done concerning a so-called sacred 're-enchantment' in wider twentieth-century literature.¹¹¹ Joseph Pearce's *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief* (1999) and Ian Ker's *The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961* (2003) examine many of the principal writers of the Catholic revival in English literature. Ker's book especially shows how the seeds of a sacred 're-enchantment' were sown in the nineteenth century. He begins the book with John Henry Newman's (1801-1890) conversion in 1845 and ends with Evelyn Waugh's completion of *The Sword of Honour* trilogy in 1961. Newman's conversion (much like Saunders Lewis's conversion in

¹⁰⁹ See Donald, Dickinson, *The Fountains of Living Waters: The Typology of the Waters of Life in Herbert, Vaughan, and Traherne* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); R.A. Durr, *On the Mystical Poetry of Henry Vaughan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Typology and Poetry: A Consideration of Herbert, Vaughan and Marvell', in Earl Miner (ed.), *Illustrious Evidence: Approaches to English Literature of the Early Seventeenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: 1975), pp. 45-47; Louis L.Martz, *The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne and Milton* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964) and *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study of English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969); Jonathan F.S. Post, *Henry Vaughan: The Unfolding Vision* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); David Reid, , *The Metaphysical Poets* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Ceri Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of the Conscience in Donne, Herbert and Vaughan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Philip West, *Henry Vaughan's Sillex Scintillans: Scripture Uses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁰ For example see Stevie Davies, *Henry Vaughan* (Bridgend: Seren, 1995); M. Wynn Thomas, "'In Occidentem & tenebras': putting Henry Vaughan on the map of Wales" in *Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 7-44 and Belinda Humfrey, 'Prelude to the Twentieth Century' in *Welsh Writing in English*, ed. by M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003). Also see Helen Wilcox's critical work: <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/languages-literatures-and-linguistics/staff/helen-wilcox/en#publications> [Accessed: 01/08/2018].

¹¹¹ It should be noted that this is a phenomenon within the wider critical field which has been called the 'religious turn'.

Wales) heralded an artistic and intellectual response to the increasing agnosticism of the age, influencing many other Englishmen to ‘come out’ as Catholics over the next one hundred years.¹¹² Ker concludes that Catholicism became for these intellectuals and artists both an imaginative lens and a source of artistic inspiration. Similarly, this thesis aims to show how numerous theologies – not just Catholicism – experienced a re-vivification during the same period and subsequently influenced literary production. The Catholic turn in England was not an isolated affair; the Welsh experience (as we will see in chapters one, two and four) sees a renewed *Welsh* interest in Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, and Christian Mysticism.

Following on from Ker, Stephen Medcalf has argued that Christian ‘conversion’ was an important concept associated with poetry in the first half of the twentieth century.¹¹³ Looking at T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), David Jones (1895-1973) and W. H. Auden (1907-1973), he argued that ‘conversions were fundamentally involved with their geniuses as poets’.¹¹⁴ However, Medcalf fails to acknowledge the immense Welsh influence on Jones’s thought and poetry. Saunders Lewis was frequently in correspondence with David Jones.¹¹⁵ These comparative links are important to make because they provide a British (rather than solely English) background to the sacred ‘re-enchantment’ in twentieth-century literature.

¹¹² Ker identifies three distinct periods of English literature: Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins in the Victorian period, Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton in the Edwardian period, and Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh in the modern period of the 1930s through to the 50s.

¹¹³ See Stephen Medcalf, ‘Eliot, David Jones, and Auden’, in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 523-542 (p. 523).

¹¹⁴ Medcalf, ‘Eliot, David Jones, and Auden’, p. 523.

¹¹⁵ See. [N]ational [L]ibrary of [W]ales, CF1/5, David Jones’ Letters to friends. In their letters, they often stated how the Roman Catholic Mass made sense of everything. Eliot, too, was very close to David Jones, referring to him as ‘Davy’, ‘Dai’ and in one of the letters replacing the secretary’s typed ‘David’ with ‘Davy’ in ink. For Eliot, see NLW, CT1/2, T.S. Eliot to David Jones, 10 September 1943, 26 September 1951 and 24 February 1948.

Moreover, Medcalf rightly draws our attention to ‘conversion’ but does not go into any depth in its definition. A ‘conversion’ is a multivalent term which varies from a conservative evangelical rebirth which denotes the turning of sinners to God ¹¹⁶ – or theologically, God turning sinners to himself – to a more intellectual affirmation of a divine being.¹¹⁷ Work has been done elsewhere concerning the relationship between conversion and poetry. In Early Modern and Medieval literary studies, a recent ‘turn to religion’ in criticism has seen numerous works on the relationship between the two, namely Molly Murray’s *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature* (2009) and Charlotte Clutterbuck’s *Encounters with God in Medieval and Early Modern English Poetry* (2005). However, the importance of conversion in the modern era is not as well-recorded. Neither has anyone delved into the Welsh ideas of conversion | *tröedigaeth* and its effects on poetry. The first, third and fourth chapters will discuss the notion of ‘conversion’ in the lives of English-speaking and Welsh-speaking poets, interrogating whether the Welsh Christian Aesthetic contains a unique expression of what is often deemed spiritually ineffable and whether *troëdigaeth* was one of the generators of poetic genius.

From the specifics of spiritual conversion to the more general refutation of secularization, this work re-evaluates the secularization hypothesis in Welsh poetics as a whole. In 2009, Cleo McNelly Kearns argued that:

Modern artists [...] were probably more aware of the serious theological and religious issues underlying [Modernism’s] new art and aesthetic and more engaged with these matters, than the literary and cultural critics who followed them.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ See *OED*, ‘Conversion’, definition 9.

¹¹⁷ *OED*. Its over-arching definition is simply: ‘Turning in position, direction, or destination’.

¹¹⁸ Cleo McNelly Kearns, ‘Modernism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 164-179 (p. 173).

Kearns writes about the religious experimentalism of modernists like Eliot, Yeats, and Pound.¹¹⁹ More importantly, she also alludes to those artists who did not depart from Christianity or its traditional forms of representation.¹²⁰ Pericles Lewis, as seen above, also emphasised the insufficiency of labelling the Modernist movement as purely secular.¹²¹ His recent work, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (2010), built on Charles Taylor's earlier work *Varieties of Religion today* (2002).¹²² As previously mentioned, Lewis suggested that many of the Modernists sought 'new accounts of the sacred' both in unorthodox and orthodox places.¹²³ Kearns, Lewis, and Taylor call for a 're-evaluation' of literature's relationship to the sacred; this general call is one of the main cues for this study.

Unfortunately, neither Kearns nor Lewis fully explores the nuances of those 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox' places. There tends to be a focus on Anglo-American theology which avoids the complex theological, social, and linguistic variations that exist outside those dominant cultures. These critical works stimulated my own ideas about Wales and how its theologically-charged space is an ideal location for an exploration, or a 're-evaluation', of the fascinating relationship between Christianity and poetry.

¹¹⁹ Kearns, 'Modernism', pp. 175-177.

¹²⁰ See Kearns, 'Modernism', p. 175: 'Thus many major figures in the modern arts, while avant-garde in orientation, were far more antagonistic to modernist revisionism in religion than might be supposed – or at least to modernist revisionism in its more reductive and unimaginative forms. Indeed, a surprising number of these figures remained or became close to traditional pre-modern forms of religious belief and practice'. See footnote 64.

¹²¹ See Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (2010).

¹²² See Lewis, 'Modernism and religion' and *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*. Also see Taylor, *Varieties of Religion today*.

¹²³ Lewis, 'Modernism and religion', pp. 193-194.

Methodology

This thesis deploys an enabling metaphor in order to approach its territory and thereafter uses a mixed methodology, drawing on a number of different disciplines. Firstly, theology is an important disciplinary field which informs this study of literature. Theology is consulted as a para-text to the poetry; these poems are inseparable from the theological and social contexts in which they were written. However, whilst viewing these non-literary and literary texts side-by-side, I do not view the poetry as mere documents of historical discourse. Aesthetic value is maintained and theological texts merely contextualise and inform our reading of a theologically-charged poetics.

Whilst many theological ideas were consulted and found to be illuminating, the works of two theologians are particularly central. It comes as no surprise to learn that John Calvin (1509-1564) is the most important and influential of theologians when it comes to Wales.

According to David Ceri Jones:

The teachings of John Calvin, and Reformation thought and values more generally, have played a formative role, not only in the religious development of early modern Wales but also on many aspects of its intellectual, political and cultural life. It was an influence mediated at first through a select band of sixteenth-century Protestants, a similarly small and elitist Puritan movement in the seventeenth century, the much more populist evangelical revival which had its origins in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, and a nonconformity that, by the mid-nineteenth century, held a dominant influence over much of mainstream Welsh society.¹²⁴

One might say that Calvin's theology is 'in the DNA' of modern Wales and arguably, 'in the DNA' of its poets as well. He was the principal developer of a system of theology which is

¹²⁴ David Ceri Jones, 'Calvinistic Methodism and the Reformed Tradition in Eighteenth-century Wales' in Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin and Robert Armstrong eds., *Christianities in the Early Modern Celtic World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 164-178 (p. 164).

outlined in his famous *Institutes of Christian Religion (Institutio Christianae Religionis)*.¹²⁵ His theology of Divine Predestination, Original Sin, Justification by Faith alone, and the Sovereignty of God would shape European Protestantism for five hundred years after his death. But before Reformed theology could influence Wales, the Welsh needed the Bible in their own tongue. D. Densil Morgan begins his *Theologia Cambrensis* (2018) with the translation of the Bible into Welsh in 1588 – an act which would fuse theological discourse with the Welsh language for five hundred years and initiate Welsh Protestantism.¹²⁶ This translation was part of a wider Reformation project which provided the Scriptures in the vernacular, giving the Welsh a ‘biblicized faith’ which would be the foundation for a ‘Protestant Culture’.¹²⁷ I argue that this Protestant culture and these Reformed doctrines recorded by John Calvin would influence the Welsh Christian Aesthetic and continue to influence Welsh poetry and criticism to this day.

Next to Calvin, a lesser-known theologian and thinker from the Netherlands called Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) should also be mentioned. Kuyper insisted that human artistry was a gift given by, and pleasing to, God, whether or not the artist is a confessing Christian.¹²⁸ According to Kuyper, there is no such thing as truly secular, or religiously independent, art.¹²⁹ This is to say more than simply that no one works in a vacuum.¹³⁰ It is to

¹²⁵ It was first published in Latin in 1536 (at the same time as Henry VIII’s Dissolution of the Monasteries), French in 1541, with the definitive editions appearing in 1559 (Latin) and 1560 (French).

¹²⁶ See D. Densil Morgan, *Theologia Cambrensis: Protestant Religion and Theology in Wales, Volume 1: 1588-1760* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018), pp. 1-10.

¹²⁷ Morgan, *Theologia Cambrensis*, p. 6.

¹²⁸ For Bobi Jones on Kuyper, see *Palu’r Ardd*, pp. 89, 153, 182.

¹²⁹ The highest artistic instincts were natural gifts given by God (the primary imagination) to humanity – whether they believed in him or not. These gifts flourished by virtue of the doctrine of *common grace*. Kuyper used the example of the pagan Greeks and how it was they – unregenerate pagans – who had given art its fundamental laws. See Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered at Princeton University under the Auspices of the L. P. Stone Foundation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931; repr. 1978, 1983, 1987 and 1998), pp. 160-161.

state that all art is ultimately derived from God. I have found Kuyper's contributions to the study of theology and art highly illuminating, especially in his Neo-Calvinist formulation of the principle of common grace in the context of a Reformed world-view.¹³¹ His notion of a Calvinistic context which produced Dutch visual art informed my own construction of the theologically-charged space of Wales.

This is a space where theology has a continual influence, whether it is in the poetry or in literary criticism. David Jasper, in 'The Study of Literature and Theology' (2009), reveals how *theological* language continues in literary criticism as well. He uses the eminent Marxist theorist Terry Eagleton as one of his examples:

Now if [...] Victorian English studies did indeed emerge out of the 'failure of religion', it ought to be noted that one of [Eagleton's] more recent works, *After Theory* (2003), is saturated with *theological* language, though it is not the theology of the Church and Christian tradition as such. Indeed, it is a theology that arises from the corpse of organized religion, though its vocabulary is familiar, and it begins with the work of poets and playwrights.¹³²

¹³⁰ Kuyper chose the Dutch School of art to exemplify this point, arguing that Calvinism formed the context within which the Dutch Masters worked. It was the doctrine of Election that influenced the Masters' perceptions of the world they sought to represent. According to Peter Heslam, 'the doctrine of election by free grace had encouraged Dutch artists to portray the hidden importance of the seemingly small and insignificant'. See Peter S. Heslam, 'A Theology of the Arts: Kuyper's Ideas on Art and Religion', in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of his Life and Work*, ed. by Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), pp. 13-29 (p. 24).

¹³¹ For the original Dutch versions, see Kuyper, *Het Calvinisme en de Kunst: rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat der Vrije Universiteit op 20 October 1888* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1888). Perhaps his most influential and important contribution were his *Lectures on Calvinism*. Kuyper also dealt with this subject at length in the following publications: *Encyclopaedie der heilige godgeleerdheid*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1894), III, pp. 331-38, 341-43; *De gemeene gratie in wetenschap en kunst* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1905); *Pro Rege, of het Koningschap van Christus*, 3 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1911-12), III, pp. 470-580. *Het Calvinisme en de kunst* is the most important as far as the relationship between Calvinism and art is concerned. For English translations, see www.reformationalpublishingproject.com [Accessed: 21/08/2018].

¹³² David Jasper, 'The Study of Literature and Theology', in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 15-33 (p. 25).

The idea of a dormant language which re-emerges ‘from the corpse of organized religion’ has influenced my own readings of poets like Glyn Jones in the third chapter. The passage that Jasper refers to is Eagleton’s discussion of the prophet Isaiah and the poetry of the Hebrew prophets:

Take, for example, a revolutionary document like the Book of Isaiah. The poet who wrote this book opens with a typically anti-religious bout of irascibility on the part of Yahweh, the Jewish God. Yahweh tells his people that he is fed up with their solemn assemblies and sacrificial offerings [...] and counsels them instead to ‘seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow’.¹³³

Eagleton continues with a discussion of ‘a materialist morality’ as illustrated by *King Lear*, concluding on a significantly theological note: ‘Only when this paranoid monarch accepts that he stinks of mortality will he be *en route* to redemption.’¹³⁴ The critical language here is theological: ‘Protestantism and its theology, it seems, is far from dead’.¹³⁵

As well as theology, other disciplines such as geography and the sociology of religion are drawn upon in this thesis and form part of the mixed methodology. One of the more obvious characteristics of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic is the important role the Welsh landscape plays in its formation and maintenance. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel coined the term *geomodernism* to signal a locational approach to modernism’s engagement with cultural and political discourses of global modernity.¹³⁶ It is my view that this ‘self-consciousness about positionality’ transcends their examples of “modernist” experiments.¹³⁷ The Welsh

¹³³ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 174.

¹³⁴ Eagleton, *After Theory*, p. 182.

¹³⁵ Jasper, ‘The Study of Literature and Theology’, p. 25.

¹³⁶ Laura Winkiel and Laura Doyle (eds.), ‘Introduction’ in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 1-14 (p.3).

¹³⁷ Winkiel and Doyle, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

Christian Aesthetic is an aesthetic which is self-conscious about its Welsh positioning as well as sharing that paradoxical global horizon, however local the poets' settings. The Christianity of the Aesthetic means that the poets' 'voic[e] is refracted through the local-global dialectic of inside and outside, belonging and exile in ways that disrupt conventional poetics'.¹³⁸

This 'self-consciousness' of positionality leads us to one of the fathers of humanistic geography, Yi-Fu Tuan (b. 1930) and his previously touched upon writings on *geopiety*.¹³⁹ For Tuan, *geopiety* shows how the intertwining of people and place are fundamental in religious systems. Such ideas about sacred landscape and space are also present in Welsh literary criticism. Damian Walford Davies explores Gerard Manley Hopkins's palimpsestic 'Dominical'¹⁴⁰ of 1877 in *Cartographies of Culture* (2012) where a (psycho-) cartographic approach constructs a 'conceptual place' as the object of geopiety.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Dorian Llywelyn's important work, *Sacred Place: Chosen People: Land and National Identity in Welsh Spirituality* explores this geopietistic cultural nationalism further.¹⁴² My thesis argues that these notions of *geopiety*, coupled with Llywelyn and Davies's ideas about 'sacred space', actually contribute to the distinctiveness of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. Llywelyn mentions the uniqueness of Welsh spiritual experience:

What is unique, I believe, about this spirituality is a sense of nationhood *and* of belonging to the land. A Welsh sense of holy place is inseparable from a sense of belonging to a specific community of people – both those who, synchronically, are part of the same culture, and those from whom, diachronically, the tradition has been inherited. This is a spirituality

¹³⁸ Winkiel and Doyle, 'Introduction', p. 3.

¹³⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Sacred space: explorations of an idea', pp. 84-99 and 'Geopiety: a theme in man's attachment to nature and to place', 11ff.

¹⁴⁰ A 'dominical' is a thirty-minute practice sermon during the evening meal.

¹⁴¹ See Damian Walford Davies, *Cartographies of Culture: New Geographies of Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p. 49.

¹⁴² See Llywelyn, *Sacred Place: Chosen People: Land and National Identity in Welsh Spirituality*.

experienced by modern speakers of a Celtic language, and whose mix of the religious with the political, the aesthetic with the ethnic means that it is not easily included if at all in ‘Celtic Spirituality’.¹⁴³

Llywelyn adds that: ‘in the development of wider spiritualities of place and of nationhood, Wales has a valuable part to play’.¹⁴⁴ I argue that a grasp of the pluralism of theologies in Wales will add to Llywelyn’s vision of Wales being a kind of cultural model/case study for understanding wider spiritualities from across the globe.

Sociological concepts such as globalization and ‘sacred space’ have been utilised in work by the American sociologists Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedman Marquardt.¹⁴⁵ Written in the American context, their work shows how religion still operates even in the most ‘unexpected ‘secular’ spaces’.¹⁴⁶ Like my thesis, they look at a variety of Christianities. Each case study offer poignant illustrations of the complex interplay of religion and globalization in its economic, political, and cultural dimensions. My idea of ‘theologically-charged spaces’ was also inspired by the image they use in their work of nomads transplanting their faith in a kind of ‘sacred re-territorialisation’ from one country to another.¹⁴⁷ Although my image is metaphorical, I view Wales as a tapestry of different Christian traditions where, ultimately, Christianity still operates in the most unorthodox places.

¹⁴³ Llywelyn, *Sacred Place: Chosen People*, p. xi.

¹⁴⁴ Llywelyn, *Sacred Place: Chosen People*, p. xi.

¹⁴⁵ Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedman Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion across the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁶ Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁷ Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*, pp. 51-54. See also Laura Wainwright’s PhD thesis which talks about a ‘mystical’ reterritorialization in *New Territories in Modernism: Anglophone Welsh Writing 1930-1949* (Cardiff University, 2010), p. 125: ‘He [Eliot] is primarily concerned, however, with pursuing a kind of mystical reterritorialization within a sacred, timeless state or imagined realm’. This work has since been published as *New Territories in Modernism: Anglophone Welsh Writing 1930-1949* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018).

Close reading is at the heart of my methodology. In a way, close reading may be viewed as a kind of biblical exegesis with a literary twist. Characteristic of my approach to close textual analysis is that particular words are focussed upon, drawing out their origin, their repetition and their devotional and theological meanings. Translation is also vitally important. Just as a biblical scholar would refer to the original language, I too look at the Greek and Hebrew originals of the biblical words used, as well as quoting the original Welsh texts of the poems studied.

* * * * *

Artists' concerns about faith transcend the simple dichotomy between I do, or I do not believe in God. The poets cannot escape the idiom, the theology, the dormant hunger for belief, and a deep-set craving for structure. The poets may have felt that the old God had deserted them, and they did seek new gods in unorthodox places. However, it seems that most of them were plodding back to the orthodox places, just as Larkin's speaker does in 'Church Going'. Chapter by chapter, we will follow these pilgrims as they pitch their metaphorical tents in a land which is 'let' 'rent-free to rain and sheep'; they are waiting, as it were, for an encounter with the Divine.

The journey begins, topographically, in the landscape of experiential Mysticism with the great Welsh poet Ann Griffiths (1776-1805). In chapter one, I analyse the influence of Griffiths' oeuvre which still reverberates within Welsh culture and argue that she stands alongside William Williams Pantycelyn (1717-1791) at the centre of this emerging, and rather distinct, Welsh Christian Aesthetic which – in this period – is moulded by the dominant Calvinistic theology of the age. The Aesthetic at this time is grounded in

experiential religion. Praise versus doubt, individual versus society, belief versus unbelief; these paradoxes and *agones* characterise a new idiom born out of Calvinistic Mysticism.

In the conclusion of the first chapter, I observe how modern poetic responses demonstrate the continuing importance of Ann in a long tradition of praise but also reveal the paradoxical importance of the tradition of doubt. Poets like Mererid Hopwood (b.1964), Sally Roberts Jones (b.1935), Rowan Williams (b.1950), and R. S. Thomas (1913-2000) prove that Ann's poetry gave rise to later religious writing. Her verse inspired poets and thinkers who were looking for a fresh idiom heightened by a new experience, whether that is spiritual, linguistic, or existential. Ann Griffiths – the Calvinistic Mystic – is a central figure in this thesis; she is a muse located in the past, but re-located in every territory that our poetic pilgrims traverse through.

In the second chapter, the pilgrims traverse the highs and lows of the 'Nonconformist Nation'. This territory is mainly located in the nineteenth century when Nonconformity became the established form of religion in Wales. The chapter begins by arguing that the Nonconformist hymn is an essential and distinct part of the emerging Welsh Christian Aesthetic since Ann Griffiths and Pantycelyn, in the first chapter, were also hymn writers. The chapter then approaches the hymns (and some other religious poems) in both a literary and a theological manner, arguing that they are not only vital to understand the social implications of denominationalism or religious sectarianism, but they also illuminate the different theologies that shaped and affected the poetry which followed.

Perhaps the most important theme which unites the whole chapter is an ideological shift which manifests itself in both society and theology, and therefore, in the hymns too.

According to M. Wynn Thomas:

As the nineteenth century progressed, emphasis within Welsh Nonconformity shifted from a preoccupation with the spiritual state of *the individual* to a concern for the welfare of *the collective*.¹⁴⁸

This observation gives the framework to my analysis of the nineteenth-century texts. My intention is not to address the whole poetic corpus, but rather to search out those patterns, the theological trends, and the social issues that indicate this shift towards the ‘collective’ which also had implications for nation-building: the Nonconformists of Wales became the people of Wales.

The third chapter then considers that ‘active afterlife’ of nineteenth-century Welsh Nonconformity in Wales by looking at two very different poets whose ‘immediate ancestors’ belonged to that period of ‘disenchantment’ – the end of nineteenth-century Wales. These poetic pilgrims are Gwenallt (1899-1968), who wrote in Welsh, and Glyn Jones (1905-1995) who wrote in English. At first, both these poets ‘sought new gods in unorthodox places’.¹⁴⁹ They even dared to seek Him out in more orthodox places as well. Most of the denominations had abandoned Calvinistic theology by the beginning of the twentieth century. What this chapter suggests is that the theology nevertheless persists in the poet’s psyche as a kind of theological unconscious; their poetry subliminally addresses and sometimes adheres to certain doctrines, such as the doctrines of grace, the doctrine of sin, and especially the doctrines of salvation. This chapter suggests that, although these two twentieth-century poets

¹⁴⁸ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 32. My emphasis. It is important to note that Calvinism is actually preoccupied with the redemption of ‘the elect’ (which is a collective phrase) but within that framework personal salvation is emphasised. When referring to ‘spiritual state’, theologically, Thomas means ‘personal salvation’ not a totally solipsistic doctrine.

¹⁴⁹ Pericles Lewis, ‘Modernism and Religion’, p. 193.

belonged to a very different context, they wrote within, and indeed adopted, the same Welsh *Calvinism* established and adhered to by Ann Griffiths and Pantycelyn.¹⁵⁰ There is a sense that literary inheritance as much as individual conviction is important here, so that the older doctrines which nurtured and established the writings of Griffiths and Pantycelyn persisted into the twentieth century.

The fourth chapter both problematizes the Welsh Christian Aesthetic and clearly defines it by looking beyond the so-called ‘Calvinistic’ era in Wales (c. 1730 onwards) to earlier, or other, Christian influences.¹⁵¹ The chapter acknowledges that the *Calvinistic* Aesthetic may not be a wholly sufficient label for an aesthetic phenomenon which is far older than John Calvin (1509-1564), whose theology was, after all, an elaboration of the earlier Augustinian thought that developed during the Reformation. Therefore, whilst not forgetting the pivotal importance of Calvinism in this discussion, this fourth chapter leads to the conclusion that Welsh religious poetry is drawn from more pluralistic forms of Welsh Christian thought.

Four poems by four poets are considered. These samples attest to the rich pluralism of Welsh Christian experience, whilst also recognising the common thread of Christian doctrine. Christian theology has always focused on the worldwide church whilst also providing room for the expression of individuals, cultures, and specific nations. Aesthetically, this produces a paradox. Welsh religious poetry attests to individual experience but also to the collective and social experience connecting modern and ancient poets. This chapter acts as a culminating

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter 1.

¹⁵¹ It is difficult to date a so-called ‘Calvinistic’ era but from 1730 onwards Calvinistic Methodism – a truly national movement – began to dominate Welsh culture. For an excellent account of the influx of Calvinistic thought in Wales see David Ceri Jones, ‘Calvinistic Methodism and the Reformed Tradition in Eighteenth-century Wales’, pp. 164-178.

overview of some other territories through which the Welsh poetic pilgrim traverses. The four poets discussed are Anne Cluysenaar (1936-2014), Saunders Lewis (1893-1985), Pennar Davies (Davies Aberpennar) (1911-1996) and, finally, R. S. Thomas (1913-2000).

* * * * *

Therefore, let us join these poets as they make their religious pilgrimages through the theologically-charged space of Wales. We begin in nineteenth-century Montgomeryshire. A young girl called Ann is an unlikely heroine. Somewhere, and at some time in her early twenties, this fiery young woman is about to hear God speaking to her. She hears Him speaking through the Bible which, for her, is the living word. Jesus Christ is the lover of her soul and her experiential lively Christian pilgrimage is about to produce poetry.

CHAPTER 1

‘Ann heard him speak’¹⁵²: Ann Griffiths (1776-1805) and Calvinistic
Mysticism

In his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, C.S. Lewis states that:

In the religious life man faces God and God faces man. But in the epic it is feigned, for the moment, that we, as readers, can step aside and see the faces of both God and man in profile.¹⁵³

Yet this ‘stepping aside’ and ‘seeing’ the profiles becomes problematic when it comes to Ann Griffiths’ poetry because her verse is a part of her own personal religious experience – an experience (and a poetry) which have yet to be fully fathomed by the literary critic.¹⁵⁴ A. M. Allchin (the scholar who was largely responsible for introducing Griffiths to the English-speaking world) suggested that ‘it would certainly be over-simplifying matters to suppose that the hymns were simply ‘given’ in [...] moments of ecstatic experience’.¹⁵⁵ Her ‘ecstatic experiences’, while arguably unique to her, were also a part of her Calvinistic Methodism, or rather, Calvinistic Mysticism – a particular religious form and life that heavily influenced her

¹⁵² R.S. Thomas, *The Minister in Song at the Year’s Turning* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1960), p. 78, l. 22.

¹⁵³ C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 132-133.

¹⁵⁴ A.M. Allchin, ‘Diwinydd a Chyfrinydd’ in Dyfnallt Morgan (ed.), *Y Ferch o Ddolwar Fach: Darlithoedd Gregynog 1976* (Caernarfon: Gwasg Gwynedd, 1977), pp. 43-55 (p. 55). Allchin uses Waldo Williams’s couplet to describe the depth of Ann’s life and poetry:

Beth yw byw? Cael neuadd fawr
Rhwng cyfyng furiau.

What is living? It is a grand hall
Between tight walls.

‘Oddi mewn i derfynau cyfyng ei hoes fer, bu i Ann ddarganfod mewn gwirionedd neuadd fawr. A gallwn ninnau, drwy ei gwaith sydd yr un mor gyfyngedig o ran ei faint allanol, ddarganfod neuadd fawr anfesuradwy ei thrysorau, man cyfarfod nefoedd a daear, amser a thragwyddoldeb’. | ‘Within the tight confines of her short life Ann discovered a great hall. We too, through the limited work which we have, discover an unmeasurable great hall of treasures, a meeting place between heaven and earth, time and eternity’.

¹⁵⁵ A.M. Allchin, *Ann Griffiths* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), p. 12.

poetic output. She became a holy figure ecumenically revered in Wales as a saint. Allchin observed that:

Her stature is to be measured against the great and unquestioned figures of the Church's history, a St Theresa of Avila or a Julian of Norwich, a St Symeon the New Theologian, or a St Seraphim of Sarov.¹⁵⁶

Her theological clarity and her popularity with Welsh congregations position her side-by-side with that other great hymn-writer William Williams Pantycelyn (1717-1791), another national icon.

Nobody has fully addressed the fact that Ann Griffiths is a figure whose work has influenced and is still influencing, twentieth- and twenty-first- century readers and poets in Wales. The aim of this chapter is to contextualise Ann's work by re-addressing and defining early pre-1811 Methodism before analysing the full significance of what one journalist has called the 'priceless archaeological fragments' of Ann's words.¹⁵⁷ If Jan Montefiore's *Feminism and Poetry* (2004) takes subjects 'usually considered marginal as the centre not only of a study but also of an aesthetic', the same could be said of Ann Griffiths.¹⁵⁸

Montefiore is referring to women's poetry; I am placing Ann, a woman poet, at the centre of a Christian aesthetic within Welsh poetics.

'Feminist historicists' like Margaret J.M. Ezell have argued against those modern prejudices that devalue early unprinted literature, like Ann Griffiths's work, as 'amateur

¹⁵⁶ Allchin, *Ann Griffiths*, p. 64.

¹⁵⁷ Brian Pedley, 'When sweet hymns rang forth from the valleys', *The Times*, (6th of August 2005).

¹⁵⁸ Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Poetry* (London: Pandora, 2004 [1987]), p. 1.

trifling'; Ezell, and others, have emphasised the important place of coterie circulation.¹⁵⁹ Ezell's work specifically looks at manuscript circulation where writing and reading continue without publication.¹⁶⁰ This chapter reads Ann's poetry as *part of* rather than a *product* of her spiritual experiences as well as engaging with the rich Methodist coterie that erupted in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Having done this, we can then move on to the effect, and Ann's influence, on later poets.

Calvinistic Methodism

Ann Griffiths (née Thomas) was born in Dolwar Fach farm in the parish of Llanfihangel-yng-Ngwynfa, near the market town of Llanfyllin in Montgomeryshire in 1776. She became mistress of Dolwar Fach at 17 years of age, following the death of her mother in January 1794. Her father died ten years later, in February 1804, leaving her and her brother John to run the farm. Friends and family knew her as 'Nansi Thomas' and she only became 'Ann Griffiths' when she married Thomas Griffiths in October 1804. On their marriage, Thomas came to join Ann and her brother at Dolwar Fach. Ann died one week after giving birth to a child in 1805. She was 29 years old.

John Hughes's 1847 memoir and Morris Davies's 1865 biography are the two principal sources for what we know about her life. However, as Dorian Llywelyn and Derec Llwyd Morgan both point out, their accounts

Need to be read through the filter of nineteenth-century religious mores. For example, Hughes's description of her youth as being "rather wild and idle"

¹⁵⁹ See Margaret J.M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1987) and *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore MA: John Hopkins University Press, 1993). Sarah Prescott, 'Archipelagic Coterie Space: Katherine Philips and Welsh Women's Writing', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 33:2, (Fall, 2014), 51-76.

¹⁶⁰ See Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore MA: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

may be no more than a pious convention stressing the transformation wrought by her conversion.¹⁶¹

Morgan is referring here to Morris Davies's description of her youth in his 1865 biography:

[...] lled wyllt ac ysgafn ydoedd hi yn ei hieuenctid – braidd yn blaenori ar enethod y gymydogeath yn ei hoffder o ddifyrwch a chwareuaeth. Dywed un o'i hen gydnabyddiaeth, yr honn sydd etto yn fyw:- “Yr oedd Ann Thomas yn rhemp am y nosweithiau chwaraeu; un dôst oedd hi am ddawnsio.” Yr oedd hi yn naturiol o dymer fywiog; yr ydoedd, hefyd, yn ddawnus, ond arferai ei dawn yn aml i siarad am grefydd, ac am Ymneillduwyr a Methodistiaid.’¹⁶²

Davies is referring to the instance when Ann mocked the Methodists as they pilgrimaged, like ‘Mohammedans’, to Bala. It appears to the modern reader that he portrays the pre-converted Ann in a negative sense. However, the tone of the work suggests that Morris Davies wants to portray a passionate figure. Indeed, E. Wyn James reminds us that Ann was a ‘young woman who was witty and mischievous by nature, full of zest, single-minded, meticulous, passionate and impulsive’.¹⁶³ Derec Llwyd Morgan goes out of his way to emphasise her ‘normality’ but he fails to accept that Davies and Hughes are merely documenting where Ann's passionate affections were now directed – Christ.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Dorian Llywelyn, “The Fiery Blessed Ann”: Experience and Doctrine in the Spirituality of Ann Griffiths’, *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 9:2 (Fall, 2009), 217-240 (p. 219) and Derec Llwyd Morgan, ‘Ann yn ei Dydd’ in Dyfnallt Morgan (ed.), *Y Ferch o Ddolwar Fach* (Llanberis: Gwasg Gwynedd, 1977), pp. 81-99 (p. 83).

¹⁶² Morris Davies Bangor, *Cofiant Ann Griffiths* (Dinbych: Gee a’i Fab, 1865), p. 29: ‘She was rather wild and idle in her youth – she preceded the other local girls when it came to her fondness of playing around. One old neighbour, who is still alive, said: – “Ann Thomas was excessive when it came to merry-making; she loved her dancing”. Naturally, she was very lively; she was also very talented, but, she would use that talent to mock religion, especially Dissenters and Methodists’.

¹⁶³ E. Wyn James, ‘Cushions, Copy-Books and Computers’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 90:2 (2014/2015), 163-183 (p.166) and “Eneiniad Ann a John”: Ann Griffiths, John Hughes, a Seiat Pontrobert’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 2003, 10 (2004), 115-116.

¹⁶⁴ Morgan, ‘Ann yn ei Dydd’, p. 83.

The central fact of Ann's life, and her poetry, was her religious conversion. In brief, she was on her way to Llanfyllin's Easter fair when she heard Benjamin Jones, Pwllheli preaching. According to tradition:

Cafodd Ann Griffiths y fath ddwysbigiad yn ei chalon nes y torrodd allan i orfoleddu, er creu anhwylysdod mawr i'r pregethwr a'r gynulleidfa; ac i Robin Puw (fel ei gelwid) ei chymeryd hi yn [sic]ol i gyfeiriad Llanfihangel, tra yr oedd hithau yn crïo ac yn gweiddi, "Diolch byth – yr wyf wedi fy achub."¹⁶⁵

Ann 'spoke out'. It is interesting to note that both preacher and congregation were disturbed by her outburst. Spiritual outbursts were not uncommon and women actively participated in the chorus of *Amens* and *Hallelujahs*. On the one hand, the disturbance could be read as a moment when the male preacher is no longer central whilst a woman takes centre stage – speaking out becomes a transgressive act. Similar themes saturate revival accounts and creative works written during other religious revivals in Wales such as Allen Raine's *Queen of the Rushes* (1906), a novel set during the 1904-05 Revival. According to M. Wynn Thomas, religious revivals were a 'socially disruptive licence' for women to 'speak out' against the patriarchy of 'nineteenth-century Nonconformist religion.'¹⁶⁶ Raine favours the *status quo*; therefore, the female who speaks up in the public sphere of the chapel is portrayed negatively as a product of excessive religion or even a form of rebellion.¹⁶⁷ Katie Gramich notes how Raine expounds this through the juxtaposition of 'passive women with the active, the voiceless with the vociferous' embodied in the voiceless Gwenifer and talkative Nance.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Lewis Jones (Rhuddenfab), 'Adgofion Hen wr: Tröedigaeth Ann Griffiths, yr Emynyddes', *Y Geninen*, 30:4 (October 1912), 273-274: 'Ann experienced such a pricking of the conscience that broke out in rejoicing even though it was hindering the preacher and the listening crowd; Robin Puw (as he was called) took her back towards Llanfihangel whilst she was crying and shouting, "Thank goodness – I have been saved."'

¹⁶⁶ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 3 and p. 62.

¹⁶⁷ Katie Gramich, 'Introduction' in Allen Raine, *Queen of the Rushes: A Tale of the Welsh Revival* (Dinas Powys: Honno Classics, 1998 [1906]), p. 20 and Katie Gramich, 'The Madwoman in the Harness-loft: Women and Madness in the Literature of Wales' in Katie Gramich and Andrew Hiscock (eds.), *Dangerous Diversity: Changing Faces of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 20-33 (p.26).

¹⁶⁸ Gramich, 'The Madwoman in the Harness-loft,' p. 26.

Whilst Nance is praying in the prayer meeting for her husband's conversion (rather than 'getting her husband's supper'¹⁶⁹), a look of 'dumb misery' erupts on the face of Gildas, her husband.¹⁷⁰ The patriarch is silenced in an act of visible defiance. Perhaps the same look of 'dumb misery' was on Benjamin Jones's face as Ann spoke up during the Easter Fair. On the other hand, this event may also be read in the historical context of the Easter Fair itself. The witness says that she became a 'hindrance', suggesting that the preacher might have felt spiritually attacked. He was there to evangelise and proclaim the gospel to sinners. He would probably have welcomed genuine outbursts, but, if they were a prolonged distraction, or merely competing with his message, then there is no doubt that he would have been unamused seeing that the other 'hell-bound sinners', as he would have seen them, were being distracted from hearing the good news of salvation. Whatever occurred in that market place, it is after that experience that Ann finds her voice.

According to R.S. Thomas's speaker in *The Minister*, 'Ann heard [God] speak' and composed around 73 stanzas as a result of that conversion experience. The survival of Griffiths's work is thanks to Ruth Evans and her husband, the Revd. John Hughes, Pontrobert (1775-1854) who were both close friends of Ann. (Seven of the eight surviving letters Ann wrote are addressed to John Hughes.) Ann seems to have composed her verses mentally, only writing some of them down in a fragmentary way.¹⁷¹ Her illiterate maid, Ruth Evans – who would later marry Hughes – learnt the verses by heart. She then recited them to her husband, who subsequently transcribed them. Ruth Evans's memorization, according to Allchin, is a

¹⁶⁹ Raine, *Queen of the Rushes*, p. 141.

¹⁷⁰ Katie Gramich, 'Dehongli'r Diwygiad: Ymateb Awduron Cymreig i Ddiwygiad 1904-05,' *Taliesin*, 128 (2006), 12-32 (p. 13). She describes the influential role of women during the Revival including preaching, praying and their vast contribution to its organization.

¹⁷¹ Llywelyn, "The Fiery Blessed Ann", p. 218.

‘good example of the persistence of oral tradition at the beginning of the nineteenth century’.¹⁷² Ann’s verses then found their way into Methodist hymnals and became extremely popular when adapted to congregational singing. Early hymnal editors changed jarring images, so-called theological imprecision and ‘corrected’ grammar so that it was not until 1905, with O.M. Edwards’s *Gwaith Ann Griffiths*, that the original hymns (as transcribed by Hughes) became available again. However, the reader must be aware that the hymns have been received through the agency of two people other than the author even though the letters seem to validate the fidelity of the text.

Ann did not appear as female psalmist, halo-topped, eyes uplifted, as she emerged from her mother’s womb.¹⁷³ But she did possess a little more than mere energy and vigour. She was part of a close-knit family and community, nurtured in poetic tradition, which trained her up in word-craft. According to Morris Davies:

Byddai hen drigolion Llanfihangel yn ymddifyru llawer mewn gwneyd ac adrodd englynion, cywyddau, ac awdlau, a chanu cerddi a charolau. Harri ap Harri, o Graig y Garth, oedd eu hathraw prydyddol yn yr oes dan sylw; a mynych y byddai efe, ei ddysgyblon, a’i gydnabyddiaeth, yn anerch eu gilydd ar gynghanedd ddifyfyr.¹⁷⁴

Ann already belonged to a rich poetic coterie based around her parish. John Morgan, Mold, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, describes Llanfihangel and Pontrobert at the time

¹⁷² A.M. Allchin, *Ann Griffiths: The Furnace and the Fountain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987), p. 9.

¹⁷³ Jane Aaron, *Pur fel y Dur: Y Gymraes yn Llên Menywod y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 7: ‘Ni chrafangodd unrhyw Gymraes ei ffordd allan o’r groth mewn het uchel ddu a chenhinen yn ei rhuban. Yn hytrach, cyrhaeddodd heb ddim yn perthyn iddi ond egni a dyhead’| ‘No Welsh woman ever clawed herself out of the womb wearing a black top hat and a leek in her ribbon. Rather, she arrived with nothing except for her gasping energy’. Hovering behind Aaron’s image is Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal declaration in *The Second Sex* (1949): ‘On ne naît pas femme: on le deviant’. See Book 2, Pt. 4, Ch.1.

¹⁷⁴ Davies, *Cofiant Ann Griffiths*, p. 18: ‘The old inhabitants of Llanfihangel amused themselves by composing and reciting *englynion*, *cywyddau*, *awdlau*, singing verses, and carols. Their bardic teacher back then was Harri ap Harri from Graig y Garth; he would frequent the houses of his pupils and neighbours, who greeted each other in impromptu *cynghanedd*.’

as possessing: ‘ryw awyr o farddoniaeth [a oedd] yn rhedeg trwy bobpeth, a phawb yn teimlo oddiwrth ei hysbrydiaeth’.¹⁷⁵ Harri ap Harri’s pupils would greet each other in verse and meet together regularly for a *talwrn* (poetic contest) or *Eisteddfodau*. Dolwar Fach itself became an important cultural centre. The manuscript held in the National Library called *Llyfr Dolwar Fach* (The Dolwar Fach Book) contains various poems by those congregating poets including Twm o’r Nant, Huw Morus, and Harri Parri, Craig y Gath. In the book, Ann and her brother have even written their own names next to the date 1796, the year that he was converted and she entered what the Methodists called the *Chasm* [or Pass] of *Conviction* ‘Bwlch yr Argyhoeddiad’.¹⁷⁶ The existence of this book testifies to the fact that Ann was trained in ‘word-craft’ long before her conversion.¹⁷⁷ Importantly, these communal patterns did not cease when Ann’s family converted to Methodism but adapted and evolved.

¹⁷⁵ John Morgan Y Wyddgrug, *Trysorfa*, 1898, p. 360: ‘There is a poetic atmosphere surrounding everything and everyone feels its inspiration’.

¹⁷⁶ *Llyfr Dolwar Fach*, National Library of Wales, Cwrtmawr Manuscripts: 1491B, p.103.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Maynard (Bobi) Jones, *Cyfriniaeth Gymraeg* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), p. 137: ‘Nid ymarferiad ffwrdd-â-hi a di-gefndir oedd ei thriniaeth hi o eiriau. Roedd ganddi glust a oedd wedi’i hen hyfforddi mewn prydyddiaeth draddodiadol a datblygedig’. | ‘Her treatment of words was not a slap-dash practice without any contextual background. She had a well-trained ear in traditional and established forms of poetry’.



Figure 3 - Map of Ann Griffiths's Country

Although the individual has always been cited as being the primary factor in Methodist doctrine, in practice, it was a communal religion, relying on social ties based around a common experience. Ann was born into a charged socio-religious atmosphere of communal 'revival'. It is very easy to lose sight of what it meant to be a Methodist in the late eighteenth century during the revival. When I use the term 'Welsh Calvinistic Methodism', I am referring to the 'experimental or experiential religion and a way of life' rather than the Presbyterian denomination founded in 1811 (officially formed in 1823). The early Welsh 'Methodists' were different from their English counterparts because the Welsh were generally Calvinistic in theology, emphasising the sovereignty of God, predestination and election of the saints in the theology of redemption. It is also important to note that Methodists were Church-people and not dissenters per se; they were Nonconformists unhappy with the condition of Anglicanism in Britain. The spiritual awakening in the 1730s and 1740s was led from within the church by figures such as Daniel Rowland (1711?-90), Howel Harris (1714-73) and William Williams, Pantycelyn (1717-1791). Although there was a particularly strong Welsh element to Calvinistic Methodism, David Ceri Jones has recently

emphasised that the Welsh factions were part of a larger, international awakening, heavily influenced by Englishmen like George Whitfield (1714-1770).¹⁷⁸ Jones has also explored the complexity of Methodist identity and how it operated on a number of levels from the local society (the *Seiadau*) to the international Protestant movement. What connected these local/national networks was a print and manuscript culture fuelled by letter-writing, sermons, hymns and journals. Ann Griffiths was part of this movement; her hymns and letters became catechising tools as well as modes of religious worship and contemplation.

Montgomeryshire was a centre of a particular Methodist religious revival in the period. In the spring of 1796, a revival broke out in Pontrobert itself. (The Methodist congregation subsequently moved from Pen-llys to Pontrobert during that period 1796-97.) The revival was led by powerful preachers like John Elias who came to Llanfair Caereinion (see Figure 3) on the 11th April 1796; according to his biographer, Edward Morgan,

[John Elias] went when about twenty years old to an Association in Llanfair Caereinion, in Montgomeryshire, and he was appointed to commence the meeting with prayer. [...] Though the inhabitants of that place were in general revilers and persecutors of religion, and preaching then might be attended with the loss of property and life, yet the prayer of Elias was accompanied with such power from above, and so much owned, that ‘all around me [...] were in tears as well as myself; indeed we trembled as if we were going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ’.¹⁷⁹

This account is typical of revival scenes: prayer, preaching, great conviction of sin, judgement, promises of forgiveness as well as the swelling emotions of the onlookers. But as the quotation intimates, persecution also became an important factor in the Methodist life –

¹⁷⁸ David Ceri Jones, *'A Glorious Work in the World': Welsh Methodism and the International Evangelical Revival, 1735-1750* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 57.

¹⁷⁹ Edward Morgan, *John Elias: Life and Letters* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), p. 34.

something which Ann herself allegedly took part in before her conversion.¹⁸⁰ This often derived from Anglican resentment at the ‘scandalous irruption’ of a movement within its own church.¹⁸¹ Governmental suspicion and public fear also contributed to the wave of persecution. Andrew Winckles and Moira Dearnley have written about the growing public tensions in the 1790s and the similar opposition that both Nonconformists and radicals encountered.¹⁸² The Established Church opposed and persecuted ‘the radical’, especially as the idea of the platform became a central, core image intimating a spirit of general dissent intertwined with a strong oral culture.



Figure 4 - John Thelwall and John Elias

¹⁸⁰ She mocked the Methodists as they went to Bala. See. Davies, *Cofiant Ann Griffiths*, p. 26: ‘Un tro, wrth sylwi ar bobl yn myned i gymdeithasfa y Bala, dywedai yn wawdus: – “Dacw’r pelerinion yn myned i Mecca:” mewn cyfeiriad at bererindodau y Mahometiaid i ymweled â phrif gyssegrfa y au brophwyd’.

¹⁸¹ See George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Everyman’s Library 1992 [1859]), p. 18.

¹⁸² Andrew Winckles, ‘Hunting the Wesleyan Fox? Toleration, Sermon Preaching and the Public Sphere’, <http://18thcenturyculture.wordpress.com/2011/11/08/hunting-the-wesleyan-fox-toleration-sermon-preaching-and-the-public-sphere/> [Accessed: 05/04/18] and Moira Dearnley, *Distant Fields: Eighteenth-Century Fictions of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001). See especially chapter 7: ‘God has called us into Wales’: *The Spiritual Quixote* by Richard Graves’.

The ‘Seditious Meeting [Gagging] Acts’ of 1795 covered a spectrum of gatherings including the dissenting meeting house, mass radical rallies and even preaching because public meetings were now restricted to fifty persons. Figure 4 (above) encapsulates the tradition of painting the radical with his right arm erect and standing on a raised wooden and covered platform; one notices how similar John Elias (right) is to the political radical John Thelwall (left). The pulpit and platform were closely connected because they were stages for the performance of a strong oral culture. This meant that preacher and radical were both classified as those who needed ‘gagging’ or ‘shutting up’. The historian Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has called Welsh-language Nonconformity ‘the biggest protest movement of the time’ whilst Gwyn Alf Williams, a historian of a very different political affiliation, famously coined the term ‘the craggy chapels of radicalism’ housing their dissenting clergy.¹⁸³ Dissenters, Nonconformists and revolutionaries were all seen as radicals and were heavily monitored by the state. Persecution and dissent is an aspect of Methodism which may give a better contextual background to some of Ann’s hymns.

One of the aspects of early Methodism that was viewed with highest suspicion was the *Seiat Profiad* (Society or experience meeting). Ann became a member of the Pontrobert *Seiat* in 1797 whilst John Hughes (her spiritual counsellor and friend) had already become a member of the Penllys Society in 1796 (this had been formed c.1772). The local Societies, or experience meetings, provided a ‘fellowship in which the new spiritual life and experience of

¹⁸³ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, ‘Introduction’ in Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones, *People and Protest: Wales 1815-1880* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), p.6 and Gwyn A. Williams, ‘Locating a Welsh working class: the frontier years’, in David Smith (ed.), *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Modern Wales, 1780-1980* (London: Pluto, 1980), p.16.

the people could be safeguarded and developed'.¹⁸⁴ The emphasis was on their personal experiences of the Almighty in the past and especially in the present:

Each member gave an account of God's dealings with him or her, and reported on any remarkable experience, and also their sins and lapses, and so doing compared notes with one another in these respects [...] Here, the emphasis was on daily life and living, the fight against the world, the flesh and the Devil, and the problems that arise inevitably in the Christian's pilgrimage through this world of sin.¹⁸⁵

Eryn M. White has done extensive research on the *seiadau* in South Wales, especially in regard to the importance of women in these meetings.¹⁸⁶ More women generally attended the *Seiat* than men.¹⁸⁷ In Dialogue IV of William Williams Pantycelyn's *Cyfarwyddwr Priodas | The Marriage Instructor* (1777), Pamffila, in dialogue with Efangelius, says: 'mae mwy o fenywaid yn professu nag sydd o wrywaid'.¹⁸⁸ Daniel Rowland even asked a woman to open in prayer in 1741 in the Llandyfaelog *Seiat*. White emphasises that women were able to share their experiences alongside men.¹⁸⁹ In George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Dinah Morris is an example of a woman not only taking part but leading as a lay preacher.¹⁹⁰ Although Wesleyan Methodism was not as common in Wales (women preachers were much more common in English, Wesleyan Methodism), Dinah Morris is based on Elizabeth Evans – George Eliot's Welsh aunt. Women were definitely not peripheral in these *Seiadau*.

¹⁸⁴ Martyn Lloyd Jones, 'Introduction' in *The Experience Meeting* (London: Evangelical Press and Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1973), p. 5.

¹⁸⁵ Lloyd Jones, 'Introduction', p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ See Eryn Mant White, *Praidd Bach y Bugail Mawr: Seiadau Methodistaidd De-Orllewin Cymru* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1995).

¹⁸⁷ White, *Praidd Bach y Bugail Mawr*, p. 81.

¹⁸⁸ Garfield H. Hughes (ed.), *Gweithiau William Williams Pantycelyn*, Volume II (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), p. 298.

¹⁸⁹ White, *Praidd Bach y Bugail Mawr*, p. 83.

¹⁹⁰ See Eliot, *Adam Bede*, chapters 2 and 3.

Comparing notes experientially and literally was an important part of the Methodist experience meeting. The letters between Ann Griffiths and John Hughes Pontrobert were no private correspondence; they were meant to be read in the *Seiat* (like the letters and epistles in the Bible). Likewise, some of the hymns would also have been shared and sung in the meetings. Allchin notes that Ann's aesthetic was the belief that these hymns were given, 'not for herself alone, but for all the members of the community to which she belonged'.¹⁹¹ She shared some of her hymns with Ruth and one hymn is quoted in Letter VIII to Elizabeth Evans following the Pauline tradition.¹⁹² In other letters, Ann, like the Apostle Paul, sends greetings to other 'saints' in various churches. Ann says: 'Mae Ruth yn dymuno ei chofio yn garedig atoch' which is written in the same style as the Pauline greetings.¹⁹³ On the one hand, her work is extremely personal but aspects of her oeuvre are, as Llywelyn argues, 'social documents, intended to encourage Griffith's circle of religious intimates'.¹⁹⁴ Sharing and singing hymns was not unusual. In Pantycelyn's *Drws Y Society Profiad /The Door to the Experience Meeting* (1777) there is a direct reference to singing. In the fourth dialogue between Eusebius and Theophilus, there is mention of sung praises, catechizing and comforting as long as it 'pleases Him'.¹⁹⁵ Singing became an important part of the gatherings especially when the spiritual temperature was low:

If catechizing is not seen to be progressing with enlightenment,
warmth and life, it is better to spend the time in singing and praying, or

¹⁹¹ Allchin, *Ann Griffiths*, p. 14.

¹⁹² 1 Timothy 3:16. In Paul's letter to the young Bishop of Ephesus, Timothy, Paul suddenly bursts into hymn:

God was manifest in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
seen of angels,
preached unto the Gentiles,
believed on in the world,
received up into glory.

¹⁹³ See Romans 16.

¹⁹⁴ Llywelyn, "The Fiery, Blessed Ann", p. 227.

¹⁹⁵ Lloyd Jones, 'Introduction', p. 31.

in some exercise that will promote conviction, instruction and comfort.¹⁹⁶

As early as 1742, some hymns can be found in an early booklet entitled *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r Societies neu'r Cyfarfodydd Neilltuol a ddechreusant ymgynnull yn ddiweddar yn Nghymru* | *The Foundation, Results and Rules of the Societies or Particular Meetings which have recently been established in Wales*. The booklet mainly comprises hymns written by men such as Howel Harris, Daniel Rowland, Herbert Jenkins, and Morgan John Lewis which suggests that hymns were a central part of the *Seiadau* from their beginning.

These meetings also became the local powerhouses of a larger, international movement. One might argue that it took over from the poetic evenings that produced *Llyfr Dolwar Fach*. The *Seiat* might be viewed as a coterie where an arguably 'Welsh' religious aesthetic was practised. Recent archipelagic criticism enables us to revise our expectations of so-called peripheral poets like Ann Griffiths. For example, Sarah Prescott's work on literary coterie has changed our conception of what we perceive as marginal 'female literary production' in the poetry of Katherine Philips.¹⁹⁷ Her work reveals how:

[Phillips'] coterie practice spanned social and literary groups in England, Wales, and Ireland at different points in time. That is, in the simplest geographical sense, her coterie practice can be seen as archipelagic in that it covered three nations and moved across and between them.¹⁹⁸

Griffiths's work shows how so-called 'coterie practice' may be seen within the confines of a nation as well. It is also archipelagic for, as David Ceri Jones has argued, communication in the Evangelical world cut across national and denominational boundaries, with Welsh

¹⁹⁶ Lloyd Jones, 'Introduction', p. 31.

¹⁹⁷ Sarah Prescott, 'Archipelagic Coterie Space: Katherine Philips and Welsh Women's Writing', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 33:2 (Fall, 2014), 51-76.

¹⁹⁸ Prescott, 'Archipelagic Coterie Space', p. 53.

Methodism influencing the wider evangelical movement and the ‘international evangelical community fundamentally affect[ing] the character and shape of Welsh Methodism’.¹⁹⁹

Ann’s hymns and letters though primarily personal and diary-like, were also ‘a form of parenthesis, a ministry to a group in which, given her literary skills and her spiritual gifts, she rapidly became a leading figure’.²⁰⁰ The *Seiat* became a religious and literary coterie where hymns were created and shared.

Methodist Language

Before moving towards an analysis of Ann’s words, we must understand what the Methodist view of language actually was. According to Ana Barro: ‘Conservative Catholic dogma tends to repudiate language – written language in particular – as somehow contaminated and a distraction from pure perception, from the essence of spirit’.²⁰¹ Protestantism, too, ‘assumes a traditional theo-linguistic scheme, inherited from the Church fathers through the Christian ages, whereby spiritual experience as signified precedes and exceeds its material embodiment’.²⁰² Indeed, the American theologian and first wave revivalist Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) states that ‘the ‘idea’ must be distinguished from its signifiers, which as ‘sounds and letters are external things’.²⁰³

However, the Biblical tradition does speak of ‘given’ language. According to the philosopher Gordon H. Clark,

¹⁹⁹ David Ceri Jones, *A Glorious Work in the World*, p. ix.

²⁰⁰ Llywelyn, “‘The Fiery, Blessed Ann’”, p. 221.

²⁰¹ Ana Barro, ‘Language and Mysticism in the ‘Spiritual Canticle’ by St John of the Cross’ in Philip Leonard (ed.), *Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 3-24 (pp. 4-5).

²⁰² Shira Wolosky, ‘The Metaphysics of Language in Emily Dickinson (As translated by Paul Celan) in Philip Leonard (ed.), *Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 25-45 (p. 31).

²⁰³ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), pp. 156-158.

Language did not develop from, nor was its purpose restricted to, the physical needs of earthly life. God gave Adam a mind to understand divine law, and he gave him language to enable him to speak to God.²⁰⁴

The primary role of language, then, was to communicate with God and for God to communicate with us; Ann believed this. In Hymn XIX, she talks about the living God ‘bywiol Dduw’ being found in the word, namely, The Bible: ‘Credu’r Gair sy’n dweud amdano’.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, the Hebrew נְשָׁמָה (*něshamah*), or ‘breath’ (as in the second chapter of Genesis²⁰⁶), connects vital breath with language itself – both are given. The ultimate symbol for this is Christ, the divine λογος (*Logos*) whereby God revealed himself to man as ‘the Word’, the pinnacle of divine reason and creative order.²⁰⁷ According to the Bible, then, all language is given before its material embodiment. Clark notes that ‘Christianity is based on revelation, not experience’ and that all other experiences (whether mystical or not) must be grounded in the revelatory word.²⁰⁸ God, being rational and omnipotent, adequately expressed his truth in words and showed us himself through *the* Word. The Bible is the material embodiment of what God has to say to us; it is ‘God-breathed’ θεόπνευστος (*theopneustos*) through men by the Holy Spirit just like *the* Word is the embodiment of God himself.²⁰⁹ Therefore, for Ann, the Bible was the inerrant, complete and finished revelatory word of God.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Gordon H. Clark, *Language and Theology* (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1980), p. 139.

²⁰⁵ Ann Griffiths, Hymn XIX in E. Wyn James (ed.), *Flame in the Mountains: Williams Pantycelyn, Ann Griffiths and the Welsh Hymn* (Talybont: Lolfa, 2017), p. 194. All subsequent references to Griffiths’s hymns and letters are to this edition and are referenced parenthetically throughout the main body of the chapter. ‘Believing the word that talks about Him’.

²⁰⁶ Genesis 2:7: ‘And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.’

²⁰⁷ A Greek philosopher named Heraclitus first used the term Logos around 600 B.C. to designate the divine reason or plan which coordinates a changing universe.

²⁰⁸ Clark, *Language and Theology*, p. 141.

²⁰⁹ See 2 Timothy 3:16.

Separate from the Bible, the Methodists also believed in God-given language, not God-breathed, but words which had their source from the stirrings of the Spirit. Pantycelyn noted in his preface to *Theomemphus* that the work ‘issued from my spirit like water from a spring or like a web from the spider’s body’ – that spring being the indwelling Holy Spirit.²¹¹ The body is a temple *ναός* (*naos*) which is a word for the central part of the sanctuary, the source or spring, where God dwells (1 Cor. 3:17). Clark spells this out:

Man is not something in which somewhere God’s image can be found along with other things. Man is the image. This, of course, does not refer to man’s body. **The body is an instrument or tool man uses.** He himself is [...] the spirit God breathed into the clay, the mind, the thinking ego.²¹²

The body is an instrument or a tool – a pen. God is creator, primary imagination and all men (being in the image of the Primary Imagination) are able to create with language. Importantly, the Methodist believed in *eneiniad* – a word denoting how God spiritually anoints, gives unction, or blesses a Christian’s use of language. For example, preaching, hymn-writing, bearing witness about Christ are all embraced by the notion of *eneiniad*. In his introduction to *Ffarwel Weledig, Croesaw Anweledig Bethau / Farewell Seen, Welcome Unseen things* (1763-69), Pantycelyn urges hymn-writers not to write unless ‘their souls are near heaven, under the breezes of the Holy Spirit; and that the Spirit will be ready to bless their work’.²¹³

²¹⁰ James, ‘Cushions, Copy-Books and Computers’, p. 168: ‘To them [the Methodists], it [the Bible] was revealed truth, the inspired and infallible Word of God, the final authority in all matters pertaining to faith and conduct’.

²¹¹ Eifion Evans, *Pursued by God: A Selective Translation with notes of the Welsh religious classic Theomemphus by William Williams Pantycelyn* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1996), p. 57 and 1 Corinthians 3:17.

²¹² Clark, *Language and Theology*, p. 139. My emphasis.

²¹³ William Williams Pantycelyn, ‘Rhagymadrodd yr Awdur i *Ffarwel Weledig, Groesaw Anweledig Bethau: Neu Rhai o Hymnau o Fawl i Dduw a’r Oen*’ in N. Cynhafal Jones (ed.), *Gweithiau Williams Pantycelyn, Volume II* (Newport: W. Jones, 1891), p. 193.

Ann Griffiths was under those breezes. Allchin's comments regarding how it would be over-simplifying matters to suppose that Griffiths' hymns were simply 'given' in such moments of ecstatic experience' ironically over-simplifies Methodism itself.²¹⁴ Griffiths' hymns document different spiritual experiences throughout her Christian life, not merely her passionate ecstasies. According to Ann's biographer, Morris Davies:

Cyfansoddodd braidd ei holl hymnau, medd ei nith, Mrs. Williams, pan fyddai rhywbeth neillduol ac arbenig [*sic*] yn gorphwys ar ei meddwl; a byddai yr emyn bob amser yn dwyn nodwedd ei hysbryd ar y pryd, a byddai yn teimlo mwynhad wrth ollwng allan ei theimladau yn y dull yma.²¹⁵

This testimony from a family member suggests that the hymn depended on her spirit at the time, which was not always that of religious ecstasy. This suggestion is supported by the evidence of the hymns themselves, in which the speaker is at one point lapped in a Sea of wonders (XV) and at other times in a state of weakness (III). The Methodist life could be hard and 'her verses express peaks and troughs of elation and desolation'.²¹⁶ Her hymns give us access to higher experiences of love which are described as best she can whilst they also give us the everyday wrestling with self, Satan, and the World. Therefore, when studying Ann Griffiths' language and her choice of words, we are not only gaining an insight into her life, but also looking into the very core of Methodism itself.

Surveying the relationship between Methodist spiritual experience and creative output is not straightforward. R.M. Jones has expressed the view that Saunders Lewis's thoughts on

²¹⁴ Allchin, *Ann Griffiths*, p. 12.

²¹⁵ Davies, *Cofiant Ann Griffiths*, p. 74: 'According to her niece, Mrs. Williams, Ann composed almost all her hymns when something specific and wonderful would settle upon her mind; the hymn would always articulate the state of her spirit at the time, and she would feel enjoyment whilst letting out her feelings in this manner.'

²¹⁶ Llywelyn, "The Fiery, Blessed Ann", p. 223.

Williams Pantycelyn would have been better applied to Ann Griffiths' more private, and arguably, more 'Romantic' verse. Saunders Lewis writes:

Paham y sgrifennai? Nid er mwyn melyster na diddanwch, ond er mwyn
'traethu mas ei brofiadau ... [ond] paham y ceisiai fynegi ei brofiad? ...
 [Am] **fod mynegi profiad yn rhan o'r profi , yn foddion i feddiannu'r**
profiad yn llawn. Dywed pobl weithiau fod ganddynt yn eu pennau syniadau
 dyfnion a mawr, er na allant eu mynegi. Ond pe byddai'r syniadau ganddynt,
 fe'u rhoddent mewn geiriau [...] Y gwir yw mai prin a niwlog yw
 gweledigaeth y mwyafrif mawr. Bodlonant ar farnu: ceffyl yw hwn, dyma
 ddyn, mae hwn yn drwm, het lwyd yw honno. **Ond fe sylla'r artist, a syllu'n**
hir oni welo, a gweld yn llawn. A'i weledigaeth yw ei fynegiant. Trwy
 fynegi peth fe'i deil yn bendant ac yn fanwl o flaen ei feddwl. Y mae'n
 meistrolï a meddiannu ei brofiad.²¹⁷

Lewis argues that writing down is an act akin to actually speaking or expressing the experience – the artist's experience is completed in its expression. E. Wyn James notes of Ann Griffiths' work that 'the first person singular is supreme; the Bible and biblical references and allusions are applied directly to her life and thought and experiences'.²¹⁸ By expressing the experience in a clear and articulate manner, it is almost a confirmation of its authenticity. Ann's poems are moments of articulation or, as Davies, her biographer, notes, of 'letting out'. This 'letting out' is not a sporadic outburst but the repetition of the Christian's primary experiential encounter with God at conversion. Upon what terms was salvation offered to Ann? According to Pauline theology:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in
 thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For

²¹⁷ Saunders Lewis, *Williams Pantycelyn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991 [1927]), pp. 33-35. (My emphasis) 'Why did he write? Not for pleasure or delight, but in order to set out his experiences ... [but] why did he want to express his experience? ... Because expressing experience is part of the experience, a means of possessing the experience in its entirety. Some people say that they have great ideas in their heads even though they cannot fully express them. However, if they truly had these ideas they would put them into words [...] The truth is that most people's visions are rare and unclear. They enjoy making judgements: this is a horse, here is a man, this is heavy, that is a grey hat. But the artist gazes, gazes for a long time, until he sees fully. His vision is expression. By expressing something he holds it in a precise and detailed way in the forefront of his mind. He masters and possesses his experience.'

²¹⁸ James, 'Cushions, Copy-Books and Computers', pp. 168-69.

with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.²¹⁹

This confession does not end at conversion:

It is with the mouth that confession is made – confession to God in prayer and praise, confession to men by owning the way of God before others. And this is said to be *unto* salvation, because it is the performance of the condition of that promise.²²⁰

Multivalent ‘confession’, or articulation, is part of Ann’s experiences as well. However, Lewis’s idea that articulation is the vision (‘A’i weledigaeth yw ei fynegiant’) does not suffice for those experiences which Griffiths did not write about or even transcended language.

The idea of language being transcended leads us on to feminist criticism. Jane Aaron sees in Griffiths’s verse something of the feminine practice of writing associated with *Écriture féminine*’s ‘free play of meanings within the framework of loosened grammatical structures’.²²¹ For Hélène Cixous, the feminine practice of writing was a product of female physiology: ‘your body must be heard’.²²² This would be an idea which Julia Kristeva built on by presenting her two aspects of language – the symbolic and the semiotic – in which the ‘unconscious of the text’ is a visionary female world, where ‘the female writes with her

²¹⁹ Romans 10:9.

²²⁰ Leslie F. Church, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the whole Bible, Genesis to Revelation* (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1960), p. 577.

²²¹ Jane Aaron, ‘Welsh and Anglo-Welsh Women’s Writing’ in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women’s Writing 1776-1837*, ed. by Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), pp. 111-127. Also see Peter Barry *Beginning theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 122. The term is that of the French theorist Hélène Cixous, from her essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’.

²²² Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen in *Signs*, 1:4 (Summer, 1976), 875-893 (p. 880).

body'.²²³ Aaron, building on Cixous and Kristeva, draws out interesting ideas about religious experiences which transcend language due to what she calls 'female modes of response':

The whole apparatus of logical and conceptual thinking, including language itself, was overthrown in the process; as we have seen, the experience was more likely to find expression through groans, cries, and physical demonstrations than through conceptual utterance.²²⁴

These 'physical demonstrations' are evident in Griffiths's hymns. In Hymn XXII, Griffiths imagines: 'Cusanu'r Mab i dragwyddoldeb' | 'I shall kiss the son forever' (XXII) whilst in Hymn XXI, the hands of Almighty God are always upon her:

Ei law aswy sy'n fy nghynnal	His left hand upholds
Dan fy mhen yng ngwres y dydd,	My head in the heat of the day,
A bendithion ei ddeheulaw	And the blessings of his right hand
Yn cofleidio'm henaid sydd (XXI)	Embraces my soul. ²²⁵

Griffiths's use of images from The Song of Solomon imbues her poetry with a distinctly feminine quality; the verse suggests, moreover, that she is writing about *her* experiences with *her own* body.

Cixous described her discovery of the writing of Clarice Lispector as a 'revelation', analogous to a religious experience.²²⁶ Cixous never fully defines this but by using the word 'revelation' suggests something which is 'given' or 'revealed'. Aaron had a similar 'revelation' when she read Griffiths, seeing it as a prime example of female writing in the sense of *Écriture féminine*. The body becomes the site and root of experience (including

²²³ Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981) p. 256.

²²⁴ Aaron, 'Welsh and Anglo-Welsh Women's Writing', p. 116.

²²⁵ My translation.

²²⁶ Elena Carrera, 'The Fertile Mystical Maze: from Derrida's Dry Theological Gorge to Cixous's Dialogic Disgorging' in Philip Leonard (ed.), *Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 94-112 (p. 97).

spiritual experience) which goes against the traditional Cartesian belief in the division between body and soul. Nevertheless, Biblical Hebrew often refers to ‘the soul’ as being a ‘living being’ or a ‘breathing creature’ נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*) – not only a spiritual entity, but the body and spirit in one *breathed upon* being (Genesis 2:7). In Hymn XXIV, Ann’s being is both spiritual and feminine at the same time:

Gwna fi fel pren planedig, O! fy Nuw,
Yn ir ar lan afonydd dyfroedd byw,
Yn gwreiddio ar led, a’i ddail heb wywo mwy
Ond ffrwytho dan gawodydd dwyfol glwy.
(XXIV)

O my God! Make me a planted tree,
Verdant by those living riversides,
Stretching out its roots, its leaves not withering but fruit-
bearing,
Watered by the flow from those divine wounds.

The hymn is based on the first Psalm where the godly man is depicted as a ‘tree planted by the rivers of water’.²²⁷ Christ is shadowed whilst Ann seems to blossom under the showers of his ‘leaking’ wounds. The verse pulsates with the energy of sexual, spiritual, and physical imagery all moulded together. As Aaron notes, the “‘jouissance’ of mystical experience’ finds jubilant expression here, especially with the emphasis on liquidity.”²²⁸ In *Ce Sexe qui n’en est pa un*, Luce Irigaray insists on the association ‘between femaleness and liquidity which can seem shapelessness, the fluidity of women’s identity, and the need to accept the changeable movement of liquids as appropriate metaphors for female discourse’, going on to add:²²⁹

²²⁷ Psalm chapter 1, verse 3.

²²⁸ Aaron, ‘Welsh and Anglo-Welsh Women’s Writing’, p. 119.

²²⁹ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, p. 148.

Woman never speaks evenly. What she utters is flowing, fluctuating.
Deceptive [“flouant”, punning on “fluent”]. And you cannot hear her, except
 by losing the “right” and “literal” meaning.²³⁰

The “right” and “literal” meaning of the words of the psalm would be the image of a faithful Christian *male* planted by God (see section on ‘Pren’). But Ann, though infusing her language with her own female bodily experience, can never totally lose those “right” meanings because they are sourced from scripture. The ‘changeable’ nature of her metaphors, and the fluidity of the words used, reflect the multivalent nature of the Scriptures she read; Ann believed in a ‘living word’ which could say something different to her every time she read it. Furthermore, her choice of language gives us access to her “*flouant*” and “fluent” tapestry of spiritual experiences which incorporate both her physical and spiritual being.

This kind of feminist reading does reveal something about Ann’s style of writing, but it is inadequate for a full understanding of the meaning of the poems. To focus wholly on gender misses the point of Ann’s poetry (and Biblical texts such as the Song of Solomon) – for sexual imagery is a similitude attesting to the difficulty of articulating spiritual experience. Ann is trying to describe something which transcends sexual pleasure; she starts with God, rather than the experience itself. Sex is a sacred gift which becomes a means of articulating another wonderful experience – the spiritual relationship between the poet and God. Therefore, Ann’s hymns are not even a sublimation of her sexuality as Aaron suggests; on the contrary, sex serves as a similitude to Griffiths’ religious experience as a Christian woman. These experiences do not ‘shatter language’ but do change it fundamentally because

²³⁰ Luce Irigaray, ‘La Mécanique des fluides’ in *Ce Sexe qui n’en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), pp. 116-7. Translated by Elena Carrera.

the poems and letters become ‘sacred and authoritative generator[s] of meaning’, mystical activities that are both *part* and *product* of the experience.²³¹

In order to further understand these experiences, it is important to understand Ann’s God. Allchin, as an Anglican, clarifies this in an essay on Mysticism when he notes that this ‘understanding’, whether of Ann’s God or of ‘what Ann experienced’, ‘is not gained by the reading of books’ or merely having intellectual knowledge.²³² Allchin warns scholars that ‘a purely academic approach to such writing [as Ann Griffiths’ hymns] is likely, in the end, to leave us feeling unsatisfied’.²³³ Bobi Jones, an evangelical scholar, goes even further and boldly argues that only a Christian, an *experienced* Christian to be precise, can truly understand Ann’s hymns:²³⁴

Cristnogion profiadus yw’r rhai sy’n mynd i ddeall gwaith Ann Griffiths orau: nhw sy’n medru **cyd-brofi** gyda hi ystyr ei geiriau, a **chyd-ryfeddu** gyda hi yn ei phrofiadau [...] Fe all y darllenydd seciwlar o Gymro gael rhyw flas pell ar wefr Ann, ar *panache* ei defnydd trawiadol o iaith, ar dân cafalîr ei dychmyg. Ond y Cristion yn unig sy’n medru ymateb i lawnder arwyddocâd ei geiriau.²³⁵

In a way, the listener must be prepared to be awe-struck at Ann’s God; this is something that is very difficult for a critic to do. A literary critic cannot ‘experience’ everything encountered in a literary work, and in order to see Ann and God in profile, one must be able to keep a distance. However, the critic may sometimes approach the subject by stepping as close as he

²³¹ Irigaray, ‘La Mécanique des fluides’, pp. 116-117.

²³² Allchin, ‘Ann Griffiths: Mystic and Theologian’, p. 56.

²³³ Allchin, ‘Ann Griffiths: Mystic and Theologian’, p. 56.

²³⁴ When he says experienced Christian he is not setting out some kind of hierarchy which comes with age. He is referring to the Christian who has trodden the same experiential paths as Ann.

²³⁵ Jones, *Cyfriniaeth Gymraeg*, p. 169: ‘Experienced Christians are the ones that are going to understand Ann’s work best: they are the ones who can experience, with her, the meanings of her words, and, like Ann, be awe-struck in her experiences [...] The secular Welsh reader may distantly taste something of Ann’s radiance, her *panache* in the striking use of language, and the cavalier fire of her imagination. But only the Christian can respond to the full significance of her words.’

can to Ann and her God. He may even break the rules, as Ann so often did with her poems, and approach her work as if he himself is facing the same God.

This chapter will now focus on a close reading of Ann's work, examining the re-occurring words and themes in Ann's language of encounter. Charlotte Clutterbuck's recent study of encountering God in Medieval and Early Modern English poetry is a helpful model for approaching religious poetry of other periods and cultures.²³⁶ Referring to poetry of the medieval period, Clutterbuck argues that language is used to construct a sense of encounter with the Divine; she highlights the use of dialogue and the ways in which 'poetic narrative and language intertwine', momentarily bridging 'the abyss between the soul and God' and achieving a 'transcendence that allows it to speak with almost unabated force to the modern reader'.²³⁷ In her first chapter, she deals with the 'language of encounter' which documents an interpersonal encounter with God whilst avoiding idolatry by 'depicting this moment of encounter as incomplete, as fleeting, or as merely a potentiality'.²³⁸ By looking at Ann's choice of words we can actually study the spiritual experiences of Calvinistic Methodism. The words, and concepts, examined are: *Rhyfedd*, *Syllu*, *Gwrthrych*, *Pren*, *Ffynnon*, and *Ffwrneis*.

Rhyfedd | Strange/ Wondrous

The adjective 'rhyfedd' ('strange' or 'wondrous') is an important word in Griffiths' oeuvre. Saunders Lewis noted that it was the word which recurred most often in her poetry.²³⁹ By

²³⁶ See Charlotte Clutterbuck, *Encounters with God in Medieval and Early Modern English Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

²³⁷ Clutterbuck, *Encounters with God*, pp. 4-6.

²³⁸ Clutterbuck, *Encounters with God*, p. 30.

²³⁹ Saunders Lewis, 'Ann Griffiths: A Literary Survey' in E. Wyn James (ed.), *Flame in the Mountains*, pp. 138-159 (p. 147).

following this single word we can start to delve into Ann's theology and begin to make out that curious profile that supposedly faced God. In literary criticism, the convention is to refer to 'the speaker' when discussing the 'I' of the poetry itself. However, because the letters, in my opinion, prove the autobiographical nature of the hymns, I abandon that convention in the analysis that follows and assume that Ann herself is always the speaker.

'Rhyfedd' is a multivalent word in the Bible and in Ann's poetry too. On one level, it articulates Ann's wonder at her own conversion. According to Llywelyn, 'Griffiths's hymns convey a grasp of and a fascination with the deep rationale of the scheme of salvation'.²⁴⁰ The first two hymns seem to document her particular conversion experience, with a reference too in Hymn XX. Being 'born again', or 'being converted', is the crux of 'Experiential Religion', a term usually associated with Mysticism, which in its original and medieval form implies Thomas Aquinas's '*Cognitio Dei experimentalis*' or a 'personal experience of God and reflection upon it'.²⁴¹ The Methodists believed that one had to experience in an individual sense the salvation from sin to be found in Christ:

This [the conversion experience] involved personal accountability and guilt for sin, the realization of an eternal dimension to existence and destiny, an

²⁴⁰ Llywelyn, "The Fiery, Blessed Ann", p. 229.

²⁴¹ 'Mystical Theology' in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I. Packer (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester and Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), p. 448 and Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Volume 7 (London, 1971), p. 15. Translated as an 'Experiential knowledge of God'. For the provenance of this phrase, see Brian Patrick McGuire (trans.), *Jean Gerson: Early Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), pp. xv and 352. The relevant notion in Aquinas's work is to be found in the *Summa Theologiae*, II.2, quaestio 97, art. 2 arg. 2, in his 'refutation of the premise that "it is not a sin to tempt God"' (Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 5). Here, as Schäfer explains, Aquinas 'distinguishes between two forms of knowledge of God's goodness (*bonitas*) or will (*voluntas*), one speculative (*speculativa*) and the other affective or experiential (*affectiva seu experimentalis*) . . . [I]t is only through this affective-experiential way that [a believer is] allowed, according to Aquinas, to prove God's will and taste his sweetness.' For the passage under discussion here, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Benziger Bros. Edition, 1947) Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, pp. 3666–7, www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.pdf, [accessed 22 June 2017]; for the Latin version, see 'Sancti Thomae de Aquino Summa Theologiae Secunda Pars Secundae Partis a Quaestione XCII ad Quaestionem C', Corpus Thomisticum, www.corpusthomicum.org/sth3092.html, [accessed 22 June 2017].

amazement at God's provision of forgiveness, reconciliation and acceptance to the believer in Jesus Christ.²⁴²

Being 'in Jesus Christ' was what Calvin calls the *unio mystica* meaning that there is no salvation for any Christian unless he is mystically united to Christ.²⁴³ Martin Luther re-discovered that it was by God's own righteousness that we are made righteous:

[The Christian] is justified by faith, not by his own achievements but because Christ bestows upon him the merits that he [Christ] has won through his victory over sin, death, the law and the devil [...] so justification is a forensic declaration of pardon which in no way depends on human merit.²⁴⁴

The French theologian John Calvin then emphasised the crucial work of the Holy Spirit, which enables the sinner to actively exercise this given faith, but also regenerates him into new life – a life which meant a personal union with Jesus Christ.²⁴⁵ The 'individual's experience' and 'personal accountability' became fundamental in Methodist soteriology²⁴⁶ – the twin emphasis on God's grace and personal experience was 'nothing less than New Testament Christianity' for Ann, as it was for William Williams, Pantycelyn.²⁴⁷ She was not a unique mystic (in her eyes) but one of many who had been united to God in Christ and who had personally experienced grace. She responds to her own conversion with marvel in Hymn II especially when she realises her sinful nature:

Pechadur aflan yw fy enw,

Sinner is my name and nature,

²⁴² Eifion Evans, *Bread of Heaven* (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 2010), p. 38. My emphasis.

²⁴³ John T. McNeill (ed.) and Ford Lewis Battles (trans.), *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion in Two Volumes* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Book 3, Chapter 11, Question 10: 'What is the nature of our union with Christ?', pp. 736-737.

²⁴⁴ *New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 565.

²⁴⁵ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion of 1536*, ed. and trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 57.

²⁴⁶ Soteriology is the study of religious doctrines of Salvation.

²⁴⁷ Evans, *Pursued by God*, p. 9.

O ba rai y penna'n fyw;
Rhyfeddaf fyth, fe drefnwyd pabell
 Im gael yn dawel gwrdd â Duw. (II)²⁴⁸

Fouler none on earth can be;
 In the Presence here – O wonder! –
 God receives me tranquilly²⁴⁹

Here, she uses the verb ‘Rhyfeddaf’ to denote the sinner’s response to grace. Like Paul, she sees herself as ‘chief of sinners,’ a label that Pantycelyn also applies to himself.²⁵⁰

Dros bechadur buost farw
 Dros bechadur, ar y pren²⁵¹

For a sinner, you died
 For a sinner, crucified

Pantycelyn is amazed that God died for *a* sinner. But he is even more amazed to discover that *a* sinner could be *this* sinner:

Dwed i mi, ai fi oedd hwnw
 Gofiodd cariad rhad mor fawr?

Tell me now! Was I that sinner?
 Tell me if, for me, he died?

This is an almost Kierkegaardian concept of ‘self-knowledge’, or ‘knowing ‘I’ – a subjective involvement in the soteriological process. Ann is a part of this subjective involvement.

Unlike Pantycelyn, whose gaze is fixed on the cross, Ann is thinking one step ahead – she is thinking of Christ, not as the dying, helpless man, but as the Great High priest who is also a priestly tentmaker: ‘fe drefnwyd pabell’| ‘He arranged a tent’. Ann is looking at what the cross leads to in this life, not just in the life to come – the cross means that she can have communion (which the tent symbolises) with the Trinitarian God *now* as well as *later*, drawing on the promise in the second chapter of Ephesians which refers to the privilege of

²⁴⁸ My emphasis.

²⁴⁹ Translation by H. A. Hodges. All further translations of Ann Griffiths, unless otherwise stated, are by Hodges. See James (ed.), *Flame in the Mountains*, p. 165.

²⁵⁰ 1 Timothy 1:15: ‘This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.’

²⁵¹ William Williams Pantycelyn, ‘Hymn CCCCLXXXIII’ in *Gweithiau Williams Pantycelyn*, vol. 2 (Newport, Monmouthshire: W. Jones, 1891), p. 225. All further references to Pantycelyn’s work, unless otherwise stated, are from this edition and are referenced parenthetically throughout the main body of the chapter.

the Believers ‘who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ’.²⁵² This tent of meeting is also mentioned in Hymn XX where a frightening God sits down but his face is peaceful: ‘llawn o hedd’. In the first stanza of Hymn II, she zooms in upon this primary encounter by using the phrase ‘Dyma’, or ‘Here is’, which is immediate and present, echoing the climactic parallelism of Hebrew poetry:²⁵³

Dyma babell y cyfarfod,	Here within the tent of meeting
Dyma gymod yn y gwaed,	Is the blood that can atone,
Dyma noddfa i lofruddion,	Here the slayer’s place of refuge,
Dyma i gleifion feddyg rhad;	Here a healer’s power made known;
Dyma fan yn ymyl Duwdod, (II)	Here a place, hard by the Godhead, ²⁵⁴

The repetition (as well as her use of the Welsh poetical technique *dyfalu*) of the adverb ‘Dyma’ allows Ann to list the implications of being brought near to God (which is the crux in the fifth line) – it is a meeting place, a place of atonement, a city of refuge (Joshua 20), a place of healing (Luke 5:31) with Christ as provider in the present tense. This is somewhere where the sinner can make his nest: ‘I bechadur wneud ei nyth’. Ann is so immersed in Biblical language and imagery that allusions are never actually made – these references become contextual to her own experience. The context here is the eighty-fourth psalm concerning the blessedness of the saint’s proximity to the Deity. Both Ann and the Psalmist refer to the tabernacle first: ‘How lovely is your tabernacle (or tent of meeting), o Lord of Hosts!’²⁵⁵ She then meditates on the third and fourth verse of the psalm which talks about nesting within God’s altars, i.e. as near to the Godhead as possible:

²⁵² Ephesians 2:13.

²⁵³ Parallelism is one of the foundations of Hebrew poetry. In English, it registers most obviously as a balanced repetition. Example of climactic parallelism can be found in Psalm 29.

²⁵⁴ Hodges (trans.), *Flame in the Mountains*, p. 165.

²⁵⁵ Psalm 84: 1.

Dyma fan yn ymyl Duwdod
 I bechadur wneud ei nyth,
 A chyfiawnder pur Jehofa
 Yn siriol wenu arno byth. (II)

Here a place, hard by the Godhead,
 For the sinner's nest to lie,
 While the righteousness of heaven
 Smiles on him perpetually.²⁵⁶

Psalm 84 reads:

Yea, the sparrow hath found an house
 And a swallow a nest for herself,
 Where she may lay her young,
Even thine altars
 O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.²⁵⁷

The Psalmist heard and saw the birds nesting in the nooks and crannies above the altar whilst the rituals and sacrifices were going on.²⁵⁸ This is the context of her (and the Psalmist's) wonder. It is a *strange* ('rhyfedd') image after all. David envies the birds' proximity to Jehovah. He wants to live and die near the altar too; or rather, he wishes to be closer to God.

Pantycelyn imitates the Psalmist's longing:

P'am, Arglwydd, caiff yr adar mân	Why, Lord, may the little birds
I wneud ei trigfan dawel	make their quiet dwellings
O fewn dy dŷ, a minnau'n mhell	in your house, and I afar
O'th sanctaidd babell araul? (WWP CCLXX)	from thy sacred pleasant tent? ²⁵⁹

There is both irony and paradox in this image of the birds in the altar. In the Old Testament, being close to God could be deadly. In Exodus 33, God says that if a man saw His face, he would die. Griffiths portrays the idea of the condemning law and the just and righteous God in Hymn XXII by the use of biblical topography:

²⁵⁶ Hodges (trans.), *Flame in the mountains*, p. 165.

²⁵⁷ Psalm 84: 3-4.

²⁵⁸ It is probable that David wrote this psalm. See William S. Plummer, *Psalms: A Critical and Expository Commentary with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975 [1867]), p. 792.

²⁵⁹ My translation.

Pan fo Sinai i gyd yn mygu
A sŵn yr utgorn uwcha' ei radd (XXII)

When all of Sinai smokes
And the noise of the trumpet is at its loudest

Sinai symbolised the condemning law (one of Griffiths' great themes) whilst Calvary symbolises 'wonder' and salvation: '**ryfeddodau** / Iechydwriaeth Calfari' in the sixth stanza. But God can never be taken lightly. On Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement), the High Priest wore bells at the bottom of his robe so that the people knew that if atonement was made they would hear bells approaching, meaning that God had been merciful.²⁶⁰ Even God's name was too sacred and ineffable for the Jews so it had to be supplemented with the Tetragrammaton YHWH. In letter VII, Ann expresses the knowledge that God could kill her:

Dyma fy ngwaith yn aml wrth orsedd gras: **rhyfeddu**, diolch, a gweddio.
Rhyfeddu fod y Gair wedi cael ffordd rydd i drin cyflwr y fath adyn damniol,
llygredig, llawn o bob twyll â myfi, heb fy lladd.²⁶¹

Her response of 'wonder' is not only directed at the atonement or the Godhead but expresses relief that she is not damned. Those bells are now ringing around the hem of Christ's robe, the great high-priest (Hebrews 9:24), as he entered the sanctuary of Heaven. Their ringing spreads the sound of redemption. The 'hem of Jesus' healed that woman with the issue of blood in Matthew 9; now the blood of atonement becomes the cause of divine satisfaction, providing reconciliation between a penitent sinner and a righteous God.

Returning to Hymn II, the altar is actually a life-giving space as well as the place where the blood of atonement was sprinkled. The 'Lord of Hosts' allows the 'wenol wirion']

²⁶⁰ Exodus 28:33-35: 'And beneath upon the hem of it thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about. And it shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not'.

²⁶¹ My emphasis: 'This is often my task at the throne of grace: **wondering**, giving thanks, and praying. **Wondering** that the Word should have found a way to treat the condition of such a damnable, corrupt and guileful wretch as I, without slaying me.'

‘the silly swallows’ (WWP CCLXX) to dwell in him. Ann, like the Psalmist, wishes to nest in these intimate places. But she cannot do so if she remains a sinner. She can only do so in Christ who is ‘the propitiation’ for her sins and her ‘righteousness’:²⁶²

Caf fynd i wledda tros y terfyn In Christ the Word I’ll pass the barrier,
Yng Nghrist y Gair heb gael fy lladd (XXII) Climb, and feast, nor fear to die²⁶³

This statement is another reason for wonder – she is not killed by the righteous God. ‘Heb gael fy lladd’ mirrors the statement from letter VII. There is life in the Word as promised in John 1: ‘In Him was life’.²⁶⁴ When we understand this, then we see how the sinner can nest so close to a Holy God and receive his smile: ‘Yn siriol wenu arno byth’ | ‘Cheerfully smiling upon him forever’. She repeats this joy in Letter II written on 17th February 1801:

Rwyf yn llonni wrth feddwl fod rhyddid i bechadur sôn cymaint am Iesu Grist
 wrth orsedd gras, y nefoedd **yn gwenu** ac uffern yn crynu. (II)²⁶⁵

Perhaps Hymns I and II, and letter II, were written during the same spiritual experience. The three pieces talk about Heaven’s smile and the longing for a proximity to God:

O! am gael aros dan ddiferion y cysegr hyd yr hwyr a chydabod mai gwerth
 gwaed ydynt. Hyn a fo yn dropio bechaduriaid i’r llwch. O! am fod wrth draed
 ein Duw da tra bôm yn y byd. (II)²⁶⁶

This desire to be close is articulated in Hymn I: ‘O am bara i lynu wrtho’| ‘O to cling forever to Him’ and in Hymn II: ‘Af a syrthiaf wrth ei draed’| ‘I’ll go and fall before his feet’. That

²⁶² 1 John 2:2.

²⁶³ Hodges (trans.), *Flame in the Mountains*, p. 201.

²⁶⁴ See John 1.

²⁶⁵ ‘I am cheered by the thought that a sinner is free to speak so much of Jesus Christ before the throne of grace, with heaven smiling and hell trembling.’

²⁶⁶ ‘O to remain under the drops of the sanctuary until the evening, and to acknowledge that they have been purchased by blood. This would make sinners drop to the dust. O to be at the feet of our good God as long as we are in the world.’

person is smiling; she knows this because her spiritual eyes can see his smile, meaning that she is close to God. This divine smile in the first stanza of the second hymn is directed at someone. We assume that this is a symbolic figure, *the* sinner rather than the poet because it should read ‘Yn siriol wenu arni fyth’ denoting the feminine. But, theologically, when God sees the sinner he sees Christ’s righteousness.²⁶⁷ Therefore this is the reason for her use of the masculine ‘arno’. Ann is overwhelmed by this very living Saviour who is active in bringing her to God. At the same time, she is doing something – the verb is used for a reason. The first and second stanza almost plays out the great theological paradox (which is both an *agon* and a co-operation) between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. ‘Yn yr Iesu’ mirrors Paul’s constant repetition of ‘in Christ Jesus’. For example, the tent has already been prepared whilst the atoning blood has been shed before the hymn moves on to the sinner whose response should be that of ‘wonder’ or ‘marvel’; here is ‘Rhyfedd’ again. She cannot comprehend how the sacrifice and the priest are mysteriously one: ‘Duw a dyn yn gweiddi ‘Digon! / Yn yr Iesu, ‘r aberth hedd’.²⁶⁸ Christ’s shout of ‘It is finished’ is also eternally answered by God and man who shout ‘Enough!’ The blood is sufficient, and the sacrifice is acceptable; atonement *has* and *is* made for Ann. This shout of triumph juxtaposes with the previous line about a quiet meeting between herself and God. Ann wonderfully piles image upon image, biblical texts on top of one another, combining New and Old Testaments with her own experience of encounter. This quiet meeting in the tent echoes the ‘still, small voice’ that Elijah heard or the whispers that the prophet Samuel perceived in the Sanctuary/ tabernacle; she now is an heir of the prophets who had these quiet, mystical experiences of God.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Isaiah 61:10 speaks of the ‘robe of righteousness’ and being clothed in salvation.

²⁶⁸ Hymn II, ‘Man and God shout ‘Enough!’ / In Jesus, our propitiation’.

²⁶⁹ Elijah experiences God in the still, small voice in 1 Kings 9: 11-13 and God speaks quietly to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3.

In the second stanza of Hymn II, she is amazed that this tent of meeting has been prepared for her; in the third stanza, she enters this tent *in* Christ: ‘Myfi a anturiaf yno yn eon’ echoing Pantycelyn.²⁷⁰

Myfi anturia’n awr yn mlaen	I am striving forward still
Heb alwad is y ne’,	Summoned from the courts above
Ond bod perffeithrwydd mawr y groes	And the great perfection of the cross will
Yn ateb yn fy lle. (WWP CCCLXXIII)	Answer in my place.

She enters through that door mentioned in Hymn 1 (also referred to in letter VII): ‘O’m blaen mi wela’ ddrws agored’ | ‘I see an open door before me’. Christ is both the door, and mysteriously the way too: ‘Ffordd a’i henw yn **Rhyfeddol**’ (IV) | ‘A way whose name is Wonderful’ – this is not the mystic way but it is Ann realising that Christ is all. He is ‘**the Way, the Truth and the Life**’ and ‘Rhyfeddol’.²⁷¹ As Ann enters this humble tent, the reader realises that she is actually entering a palace. Ann conjures up the Book of Esther where a young Jewish Queen in the Court of King Xerxes is bidden to come forth; his sceptre is stretched forth and her life is spared.²⁷² Ann equates this scene to her own conversion. She should not be able to approach the King because he is holy and she is that ‘Pechadur aflan’ | ‘Unclean Sinner’ but because of the atonement she is able to go forth: ‘Af ymlaen dan weiddi ‘Maddau!’ | ‘I’ll proceed shouting ‘Forgive!’’. Her confidence here is strange and can only be explained in the fact that she is made righteous by God himself.

²⁷⁰ Hebrews 4: 16: ‘Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace’.

²⁷¹ John 14:6 and Isaiah 9:6: ‘And His name shall be called Wonderful’.

²⁷² The Book of Esther documents how nobody could come into the King’s presence unless the sceptre was stretched forth. Esther boldly risks her life to intercede on her people’s behalf and the King of Persia shows mercy.

As already hinted, the word ‘rhyfedd’ transcends a mere reaction of marvel at conversion. Perhaps one of Ann’s greatest hymns is number XXII which, according to Saunders Lewis, is one of the greatest religious poems of Europe, which epitomizes all her themes and paradoxes ‘[y mae’n] crynhoi ei holl themau a’i pharadocsiau hi’:²⁷³

<p>Rhyfedd, rhyfedd gan angylion, Rhyfeddod fawr yng ngolwg ffydd, Gweld Rhoddwr bod, Cynhaliwr helaeth, A Rheolwr pob peth sydd, Yn y preseb mewn cadachau, A heb le i roi’i ben i lawr, Ac eto disglair lu’r gogoniant ‘N ei addoli’n Arglwydd Mawr.</p>	<p>Wonder is what the angels’ eyes hold, wonder: The eyes of faith, too unbelieving in the strangeness, Looking on him who makes all being gift, Whose overflowing holds, sustains, Who sets what is in shape, Here in the cradle, swaddled, homeless, And here adored by the bright eyes of angels, The great Lord recognised.²⁷⁴</p>
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The poem begins with angels, re-calling Hymn VI where Ann states:

<p>O am gael ffydd i edrych Gyda’r angylion fry I drefn yr iechydwriaeth Dirgelwch ynddi sy²⁷⁵</p>	<p>O for the faith to see with angels’ gaze and stare into the workings of salvation in all its mystery!²⁷⁶</p>
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Ann is overwhelmed in both hymns at the plan of salvation, especially at the Incarnation when God the Son, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, is ‘contracted to a span, / incomprehensibly made man’²⁷⁷: ‘Dwy natur mewn un person’ | ‘Two natures in one person’

²⁷³ Saunders Lewis, ‘Ann Griffiths: Arolwg Llenyddol’, *Trafodion Anrhydeddus Gymdeithas y Cymmrodorion*, (1965): Part 2, 244-56 (p. 254): ‘[y mae’n] crynhoi ei holl themau a’i pharadocsiau hi’.

²⁷⁴ Translation by Rowan Williams.

²⁷⁵ My emphasis.

²⁷⁶ My translation.

²⁷⁷ Charles Wesley, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* (London: William Strahan, 1745), number 5:

Let earth and Heaven combine,
 Angels and men agree,
 To praise in songs divine
 The Incarnate Deity,

(VI). Llywelyn points out that ‘considering the dishonour done to God in the Fall, she [Ann] speculates that the very fact of Incarnation must be as startling in heaven as it is on earth’.²⁷⁸ Instead of giving us an earth-view, once again Ann goes beyond and sits herself next to the angels who, out of time, can view the plan of redemption from the Fall right to Calvary. The idea of ‘golwg ffydd’, the sight of faith, is interesting here. What Ann is saying in these two hymns is that the angels worship aright (as does she) shouting ‘Rhyfedd, Rhyfedd’ but they also *look* aright. The key to this fascinating image of Ann sitting side-by-side with the angels (but also envious of their supposed vision) is 1 Peter 1:12: ‘things which angels desire to look into’. These ‘things’ refer to the gospel, or good news, the eternal plan of redemption orchestrated from heaven. They have seen it all unfold from Eden to Calvary but they long to know more about Jesus and his plan of salvation, even though it is not relevant to their state. Ann is basically saying ‘how much more should I long to look, delve, dig into *my* salvation when it involves *me*’. She longs for their sight. In a way, it is having the perspective of eternity but also feeling its relevance: *sub specie aeternitatis* ‘under the aspect of eternity’ and *Cognitio Dei experimentalis* ‘experiential knowledge of God’, at the same time. Lewis is correct to note that this verb *rhyfeddu* (to wonder), with the adjective *rhyfedd* (wonderful) and the noun *rhyfeddod* (wonder) all convey her own personal responses to Christ’s visitation *then* and *now*. But it is more than just her response. In Hymn XXII she repeats the adjective ‘wonderful, wonderful’ imitating the angels’ response but she is also aware that ‘Rhyfedd’ sometimes denotes their Master’s name:

Canys bachgen a aned i ni,
Mab a roddwyd i ni,
A bydd y llywodraeth ar ei ysgwydd Ef:

Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.

²⁷⁸ Llywelyn, “The Fiery, Blessed Ann”, p. 229.

A gelwir Ei enw Ef,
Rhyfeddol, Cynghorwr, y Duw Cadarn,
 Tad Tragwyddoldeb, Tywysog Tangnefedd.²⁷⁹

The adjective becomes a noun in this text – Wonderful, capital W, is one of Christ’s names פֶּלֶא (pele’) which is a masculine noun. Both adjective פִּלְיָא (pil-iy) and noun פֶּלֶא (pele’) have their root word in the verb פָּלַא (pala’) which denotes a work of wonder. In the book of Judges, Samson’s father encounters a theophany (a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus) and this scene occurs:

And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, “What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?”
 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, “Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it *is* secret [or wonderful]?”
 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon the rock unto the LORD: and *the angel* did wondrously [or ‘wondrous thing’]; and Manoah and his wife looked on.²⁸⁰

The theophany never actually says his name but only performs a ‘wondrous thing’ which is never revealed to us; only Manoah and his wife experience it. In Hymn VI, Ann uses the word secret or ‘dirgel’, whilst in Hymn XXI she uses the word ‘rhyfedd’ or ‘wonderful’. Interestingly she captures the original meaning of the Hebrew adjective פִּלְיָא (pil-iy). The adjective is used because the name itself is ineffable. Letter VII also uses the word ‘dirgelwch’ | ‘secret’: ‘Annwyl Frawd, mae rhwymau mawr arnaf pa medrwn ddweud yn dda am Dduw, ac i fod yn ddiolchgar iddo am ddim o ‘gymundeb â chymdeithas y dirgelwch’ | ‘Dear Brother, I am under great obligation, if I could, to speak well of God, and to be grateful to him for a degree of communion in ‘the fellowship of the mystery’ (VII). Language fails; she struggles to describe the experience. The spirit of the original Hebrew, and the seventh

²⁷⁹ Isaiah 9:6: ‘For unto us a child is born, / Unto us a Son is given; / And the Government will be upon His shoulder. / And his name will be called / **Wonderful**, Counsellor, Mighty God, / Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ My emphasis.

²⁸⁰ Judges 13: 17-19.

letter, is also captured in Hymn XII which chooses not to name the object of her desire, only saying ‘Fe’| ‘Him’:

Rhyfedda fyth , briodas-ferch	O wonder always, happy bride,
I bwy yr wyt yn wrthrych serch;	To whom thou art in love allied;
O! cenwch, waredigol hil,	Ye ransomed seed, his wonders tell,
Rhagori y mae Fe ar ddeng mil. ²⁸¹	Who o’er ten thousand doth excel. ²⁸²

This is a commandment for brides, the church, and the individual Christian, to sing about that ‘masculine noun’, the Bridegroom, because of his work of redemption. The word ‘rhyfedd’ captures something of Ann’s ineffable experience whilst opening up some of the key theological concepts that are fundamental in understanding the rest of her oeuvre.

Syllu ar y Gwrthrych | To Gaze on the Object

Ann’s experiences were Christ-centred, and they continued after her conversion. Christ is described as both precious and indispensable, showing his vital place in the personage of the Trinity. In a pilgrim-hymn, Griffiths encourages the weak pilgrim to look up and see the Lamb, who is both the propitiation and the mediator for the faithful believer:

Yr Oen yn gweini’r swydd <u>gyfryngol</u>	Christ, the Lamb administrating his mediation,
Mewn gwisgoedd llaesion hyd y llawr. (III)	Robed in vestments trailing low. ²⁸³

The word ‘cyfryngol’ or ‘mediating’| ‘intercessory’ is vital in the Calvinistic vocabulary; this word differentiates a true Christ-centred experience of God from all other forms of mysticism. Subjective communion with God (wrought by an objective union) is portrayed through the words ‘Syllu’| ‘Gaze’ or ‘Gweld’ | ‘to see’ linked with the idea of

²⁸¹ My emphases.

²⁸² Hodges (trans.), *Flame in the Mountains*, p. 185.

²⁸³ My translation.

‘contemplation’ and indicates spiritual knowledge and clarity as well as worship. New sight and clearer vision is a biblical *topos*. When the blind received their sight, they were usually spiritually enlightened too, seeing Christ for who he truly was (Mark 10:52). The whole point of mediator is that Ann can look at him as ‘worthy object’ (XIII) – another biblical *topos*. John 3 talks about the serpent that Moses erected in the wilderness which the people were to look at for their salvation when stung by poisonous snakes – Christ says that the crucified Son of Man is like that erected serpent (*gwrthrych*) and he is to be looked at (*syllu*).²⁸⁴

The gaze is directed at an object, ‘*gwrthrych*’. This word ties the objective and the subjective whilst also opening up interesting ideas about ‘the gaze’ itself. Ann looks at the ‘*gwrthrych*’ from different perspectives (best exemplified in Hymn XXII). She looks now, as she composes in the present tense, at a mediator, pleading for her in heaven. She also looks back, looks forward, and looks *sub specie aeternitatis* (from the perspective of eternity) – the ‘angels’ sight’ which was touched upon in the last section.

Hymn III talks about looking in the present tense: ‘Cwyd dy olwg, **gwêl yn awr**’.²⁸⁵ She is talking to herself here. Who is she looking at? ‘Yr Oen yn gweini’r swydd gyfryngol’.²⁸⁶ How can the sacrifice also be the High Priest and the mediator? She answers this in the third verse:

O! ddyfnderoedd iechydwrïaeth,
Dirgelwch mawr duwioldeb yw,
Duw y duwiau wedi ymddangos

O the deeps of our salvation!
Mystery of godliness!
He, the God of gods, appearing

²⁸⁴ John 3:13-16. No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

²⁸⁵ Lift your gaze, behold him now.

²⁸⁶ The Lamb himself is interceding.

Yng nghnawd a natur dynol-ryw (III)

In our fleshly human dress²⁸⁷

The second line mirrors Paul's hymn/creed (1 Timothy 3:16) when he states 'Great is the mystery of Godliness'.²⁸⁸ The image of the sacrifice/Priest defies reason and gives Ann a glimpse of self-sacrifice and the enormity of the Trinitarian mystery through the mystical relationship between priest and sacrifice – separate roles performed by the same divine person. But it is also the paradox of the God-man which draws her present sight because nobody can see God and live (Exodus 33:20) but she can look at the God-man:

O! f'enaïd, gwêl addasrwydd
Y Person dwyfol hwn (VI)

O! My soul, see the sufficiency
Of this divine Person²⁸⁹

She then studies and gazes at the Person:

Mae'n ddyn i gydymdeimlo
Â'th holl wendidau i gyd,
Mae'n Dduw i gario'r orsedd
Ar ddiafol, cnawd a byd. (VI)

True man, in all thy weaknesses
He truly feels for thee;
True God, o'er world, flesh, Satan
He reigns victoriously.²⁹⁰

Only a man could actually live perfectly and die the death whilst also empathising with humanity; but only God could be that unblemished sinless sacrifice.

²⁸⁷ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 167. Alternative translation:

Oh the depth of our salvation,
Great the Mystery of Godliness!
He, the God of gods, appearing,
In our fleshly human dress

²⁸⁸ Interestingly, **μυστήριον** (*mystērion*) literally means 'hidden thing' or 'secret' which brings the previous section to mind.

²⁸⁹ My translation.

²⁹⁰ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 175.

The theme of a ‘looked at’ mediator can be found in the book that had a profound influence on Ann and her brother, Richard Baxter’s *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, translated into Welsh in 1790.²⁹¹ According to Baxter:

Gan mai Duw yw **gwrthrych** uchaf ein meddyliau, felly y mae **syllu** arno,
llefaru wrtho, a dadlau ag ef, yn dyrchafu’r enaid ac yn cynhyrfu’r serchiadau
yn fwy nag un rhan arall o fyfyrdod.²⁹²

Baxter’s idea of a supreme object echoes on in Griffiths’s hymns. In Hymn XIII, Ann sees Jesus standing among the myrtles, like Zechariah, when he saw Jesus mounted upon a red horse in the midst of a shady grove.²⁹³ His presence amongst the myrtle trees indicates Christ’s presence amongst his church:

<p>Wele’n sefyll rhwng y myrtwydd Wrthrych teilwng o fy mryd; Er mai o ran, yr wy’n adnabod Ei fod uwchlaw gwrthrychau’r byd: Henffych fore Y caf ei weled fel y mae. (XIII)</p>	<p>There he stands among the myrtles, Worthiest object of my love; Yet in part I know his glory Towers all earthly things above; One glad morning I shall see him as he is.²⁹⁴</p>
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We know it is Christ because he is described in a similar way to that theophany that appeared to Joshua; Christ appears like ‘the captain of the host of Israel’.²⁹⁵ The myrtle grove is both dark and shady representing the melancholic state of the Jewish church at the time. Ann cleverly plays with this biblical imagery. In Zechariah, Christ rides a red horse denoting that

²⁹¹ Jones, *Cyfriniaeth Gymraeg*, p. 141.

²⁹² Richard Baxter, *Tragwyddol Orphwysfa’r Saint*, trans. by Thomas Jones (Shrewsbury: 1790), pp. 294-5. Seeing that God is the highest object of our minds; gazing upon him, talking to him, reasoning with him, elevates the soul and stirs our affections more than any other form of meditation.

²⁹³ Zechariah 1.

²⁹⁴ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 187.

²⁹⁵ Joshua 5.

the law is still active and that his conflict, at Calvary, is still before him. In Isaiah 63, the mighty hero (Christ) is depicted as wearing red apparel having ‘trodden the wine-press alone’. But in Revelation 6:2, Christ rides a white horse denoting his victory – no more atoning blood is needed – he wears a crown and carries a bow. Ann sees him thus:

Rhosyn Saron yw ei enw,	He’s the beauteous Rose of Sharon,
Gwyn a gwridog, teg o bryd;	White and Ruddy, fair to see;
Ar ddeng mil y mae’n rhagori	Excellent above ten thousand
O wrthrychau penna’r byd. (XIII)	Of the world’s prime glories he. ²⁹⁶

Under the gospel, rather than the law, he is white and worthy of her gaze. He is the Rose of Sharon **חַבַּת־שֵׁלֶת** (*chabatstseleth*), a symbolic biblical flower which only appears twice in the Bible – Song of Solomon 2:1 and Isaiah 35:1. Isaiah refers to the desert blooming like this rose whilst the Song of Solomon tags this flower to the Bride and Bridegroom who represent Christ and his church. When gazed upon in the present, life is graciously provided and the desert – whether Wales or the sinner’s heart – starts to bloom.

Ann is also looking back. In the third stanza of Hymn XXII, she sees the cross:

Efe yw’r Iawn fu rhwng y lladron,	He was the atonement between the robbers,
Efe ddiodefodd angau loes (XXII)	He suffered such an agonising death ²⁹⁷

Looking back is not such a dominant theme in her hymns because past events remain relevant, continuing to work in the present – that is why she employs ‘angels’ sight’ where she views the whole trajectory of redemption history rather than simply looking back. In the next stanza, she returns to the present tense:

²⁹⁶ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 187.

²⁹⁷ My translation.

O! f'enaidd, gwêl y fan gorweddodd
Pen brenhinoedd, Awdur hedd (XXII)

O! My soul, see the place where King of kings
And Author of peace laid down his head.²⁹⁸

This is not the past; 'Look at the place his head **used** to lay'. The sigh 'O' is usually followed by an instruction where to direct her gaze. She is encouraged and overwhelmed at the empty tomb because Christ, having defeated death, is no longer lying there. Her experience is just like those other women who came to the tomb; Ann is among them, looking at the empty space with her mind's eye.²⁹⁹

Her gaze is then directed forward. In Hymn VII, she longs for a time when her mind's eye will settle on Christ without distraction:

Caf weld fy meddwl, sy yma'n gwibio
Ar ôl teganau gwael y llawr,
Wedi ei dragwyddol setlo
Ar wrthrych mawr ei Berson Ef. (VII)

When my mind, that here goes wandering
After the mean toys of the earth,
Finds its undistraught devotion (When it eternally settles)
To his person henceforth given (on the great and worthy person/object)³⁰⁰

The future gaze is perfect because there are no distractions. In Hymn XXII, she looks forward to seeing him in the flesh: 'Gweld Duw mewn cnawd', without the use of her imagination 'heb ddychymyg [...] ar ei ddelw'n llawn'.³⁰¹ This will be eternal: 'tragwyddol syllu ar y person' (XXIII). Whatever tense is used, the gaze is usually directed at Christ:

²⁹⁸ My translation.

²⁹⁹ Matthew 28:6: 'Come see the place where he lay'.

³⁰⁰ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 187. My revisions.

³⁰¹ My translation: 'Without imagination [...] on his full image.'

O am syllu ar ei Berson,
Fel y mae Fe'n ddyn a Duw. (XIV)

O to gaze upon his person
as he is, both man and God.

Tragwyddol syllu ar y person (XXIII)

Eternally gazing on the person.

In the first couplet, she muses on that person in a short theological statement about the Trinity echoing the Athanasian Creed. Interestingly, as Llywelyn points out:

Despite her devotion to the Covenant of Grace effected on the Cross, she evidences no interest in the bloody matter of crucifixion. Rather, she seeks to 'gaze upon his person, who is human and divine,' 'delighting' in him as human while worshipping him as God'.³⁰²

Gazing upon his person is not just surveying his physical appearance, nor is it merely a survey of his attributes. Llywelyn suggests that Griffith's 'notion of vision and knowledge is relational' bringing us back to blind Bartimaeus whom we considered at the beginning of this section; seeing is literally believing.³⁰³

But there are times when she cannot, or does not seem to, see him. For example, in letter III, she talks about 'absenoldeb gwedd wyneb' | 'the absence of the visible countenance' which hints at experiential absence. But when she does see him, he is usually looking back. She muses in Letter II on the time when Jesus looked at Peter after he had denied him:

Fy meddwl yw fod pob gair segur, a phob ysgafnder ysbryd, a phob ymddygiad ag sydd yn ymddangos yn groes i sancteiddrwydd efengylaidd, yn cwbl wadu nad adwaenom Iesu Grist. Ond yn wyneb ein mawr drueni, mor

³⁰² Llywelyn, "The Fiery, Blessed Ann", p. 228.

³⁰³ Llywelyn, "The Fiery, Blessed Ann", p. 228.

werthfawr yw meddwl am y gair hwnnw: ‘Yr Arglwydd a drodd, ac a edrychodd ar Pedr’.³⁰⁴

Even though Ann may not ‘be looking to Jesus, the Founder and perfecter of her faith’; he *has* been and *is* looking at her.³⁰⁵ Theologically, she is thinking about predestination and how Christ chose her before the foundation of the Earth. She is also musing on the Calvinist doctrine of *Irresistible Grace* whereby the saving grace of God is effectively applied to those whom he has predetermined to save, and he will eventually overcome their resistance. In Letter V, Christ is described with fiery eyes even when his physical eyes are closed in death:

Mae’n syndod i’ m meddwl pwy oedd ar y groes: yr Hwn sydd â’i lygaid fel fflam dân yn trieddio trwy’r nefoedd a daear ar yr un moment yn methu canfod ei greaduriaid, gwaith ei ddwylo.³⁰⁶

The whole letter is about Ann’s sight and how she battles with letting visible things take precedence in her mind. In both these letters, Christ is looking back at her; she is having glimpses of being face to face with her Saviour. In the Song of Solomon, the same thing happens. Solomon (representing Christ) tells the Shulamite (interestingly the feminine form of שולמית (*shēlomoh*)) ‘Turn your eyes away from me, for they overwhelm me’.³⁰⁷ This is not a one-sided gaze but both are overcome by each other’s gaze. In chapter 5 of the Song, Solomon gazes at her and she describes him as having ‘Dove’s eyes’ before he is finally overcome, or moved, by the eyes of his bride who looks at him with utter devotion.

³⁰⁴ Griffiths, Letter II: ‘I think that every idle word, and all levity of spirit, and all behaviour which appears contrary to gospel holiness, is a total denial that we know Jesus Christ. But in the face of our great wretchedness, how precious it is to think of that word: ‘The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.’”

³⁰⁵ Hebrews 12:2.

³⁰⁶ Griffiths, Letter VII: ‘To my mind it is a marvel who was on the cross: he whose eyes are as flame of fire piercing through heaven and earth at the same moment unable to see his creatures, the work of his hands.’

³⁰⁷ Song of Solomon 6:5.

‘The Male Gaze’ is a concept developed by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ where she posits that gender power asymmetry is a controlling force in cinema and constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses. ‘Looking’ is usually the male role whilst the female is an ‘object’. This is illustrated in poems like Christina Rossetti’s ‘In an Artist’s Studio’ (1856) where the woman (probably in this case, Lizzie Siddal, portrayed in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s studio) is the object:

A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,
A saint, an angel; – every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light ³⁰⁸

‘She’ becomes a painting, and the male artist deliberately paints her gaze which is always directed towards him. On earth, gaze is ineluctably gendered. Ann’s female gaze is romantic and bold; she is not passive. In Hymn XIII, she goes beyond the prophetic portrayal of the myrtle grove scene – i.e. Christ being present. Ann builds on this idea of a woodland area and transforms the Captain of the Host of Israel into *her* beloved, standing amongst the trees. What emerges is a lovers’ tryst heightened by a female gaze that ‘overcomes’ God – bringing Ann and God closer together. Ann takes possession of the gaze and God, in the person of Christ, becomes a beautiful and desirable object; he truly is, as the Bible says, ‘the fairest of ten thousand’:³⁰⁹

Beth sy imi mwy a wnelwyf
Ag eilunod gwael y llawr?
Tystio’r wyf nad yw eu cwmni
I’ cystadlu â Iesu mawr:

What have I to do henceforward
With vain idols of this earth?
Nothing can I find among them
To compete with his high worth.

³⁰⁸ Christina Rossetti, ‘In an Artist’s Studio’ in Dinah Roe (ed.), *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 49.

³⁰⁹ Song of Solomon 5:10.

O! am aros
Yn ei gariad ddyddiau f'oes. (XIII)

Be my dwelling (O! To stay)
In his love through all my days.³¹⁰

She does not want to leave him but longs to stay in his loving embrace. They are so taken up with one another that time is no longer an issue. The Bible uses marriage and sex as symbols of the intimate relationship the church and its members can have with the godhead – the union and consummation between Bride and Bridegroom. Ann's gaze is a 'female gaze'; as a woman, she is able to conform to the biblical illustration. This goes beyond Freud's *scopophilia* (sexual pleasure derived from watching), for she uses sexual glances as similitudes to a higher spiritual gaze which can be either female or male. It starts with God, not with sex; this is the realm of divine sight – a loving gaze that transcends *eros*; she is trying to articulate an *agape* gaze in the second stanza of Hymn XIV:³¹¹

Ymddifyrru yn ei Berson
A'i addoli byth yn Dduw. (XIV)

Gaze with joy upon his Person,
And unceasingly adore. (and worship him
ever as God.)³¹²

She adores him as a person (she calls him 'husband' in the previous line) but he is always God and she must worship him as such. However, in the myrtle tryst of Hymn XIII, Ann and Christ interchange as both subjects and objects as they stare at each other. During this process, something happens to her as a Christian. In Hymn V, her soul looks like Christ's: 'Addurna'm henaid ar dy ddelw' – she is slowly, through sanctification, becoming like him.³¹³ The author of Hebrews describes this process as we 'look to Jesus, the founder (or

³¹⁰ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 187.

³¹¹ The Bible talks of love and distinguishes it as the four types of Greek love. (**Ερως** - Eros) denotes an erotic passion whilst (**ἀγάπη** - agape) indicates the unconditional love of God and the devotion of a human to the Divine.

³¹² Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 187.

³¹³ 'Clothe my soul in your own likeness'.

author) and perfecter of our faith'.³¹⁴ In the Song of Solomon, the King is as overwhelmed with his bride as the bride is with the bridegroom; Christ seems to be delighting in Ann and *perfects*, or completes, her:

Rhyfedda fyth, briodas-ferch,
I bwy yr wyt yn wrthrych serch (XII)

O wonder always, happy bride,
To whom thou art in love allied³¹⁵

Solomon שולמית (*shēlomoh*) and Shulamite שולמית (*Shuwlammiyth*) are part of one another – their names are derived from שלם (*Shalam*) which means to be at peace. Christ and Ann are also at peace; they are both ‘gwrthrych serch’ | ‘the object of love’ to one another. This is a spiritual gaze that transcends gender – a balanced act based on an active subjective communion.

Pren | The Tree

The tree, and all its symbolic features, repeatedly appears in Ann’s oeuvre. Llywelyn is right to emphasise that the cross itself is not the focus (which it might be for Catholic mystics) but the action wrought upon it and the spiritual consequences are what matter to Ann.³¹⁶ As she looks with that ‘angels’ gaze’, she does not see a cross but the tree and its malleability as both a theological and poetical image. By tracing the word ‘pren’ we can continue to trace her mind’s eye.

The first tree encountered is not Calvary but the trees found in Eden. Matthew Henry articulates Ann’s theology regarding these two trees. His explanation gives us access to all the images of trees that Ann uses in her oeuvre:

³¹⁴ Hebrews 12:2.

³¹⁵ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 185.

³¹⁶ Llywelyn, “The Fiery, Blessed Ann”, p. 228

There was the tree of life in the midst of the garden, which was chiefly intended to be a sign and a seal to Adam, assuring him of the continuance of life and [...] immortality [...] upon condition of his perseverance in this state of innocency and obedience. Of this he might eat and live. Christ is now to us the tree of life.

There was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [...] The distinction between all other moral good and evil was written in the heart of man by nature; but this, which resulted from a positive law, was written upon this tree [...] God set before him good and evil, the blessing and the curse. These two trees were as two sacraments.³¹⁷

The two trees were ‘sacraments’ signifying spiritual truths like that other later tree, the cross. Ann is aware of what they represent as they loom in the background of Hymn XI. The first stanza refers to the Vale of Weeping and a journey reflecting Adam and Eve’s banishment from Eden. As this representative figure weeps, she comes to the Rock where blood and light are produced. There is still no mention of trees; Calvary is merely hinted at:

Yng nglyn wylofain bydd fy ymdaith
Nes im weled dwyfol waed
O’r Graig yn tarddu fel yr afon,
Ynddo yn wynion myrdd a wnaed;
Golau’r Maen i fynd ymlaen,
Sef Iesu yn gyfiawnder glân. (XI)

I shall tread the Vale of Weeping
Till the blood divine is seen
Pouring from the Rock, a river
That has made ten thousand clean;
If his light pierce the night
I shall find my way aright.³¹⁸

The word ‘Rock’ is cleverly used to make us think of both the topography of Golgotha (upon which we know that the tree of Calvary is erected) and Christ ‘the Rock’ on whom Ann’s salvation depends. She then looks up in the second stanza and instead of seeing a rugged cross she sees the tree of life – Christ and cross fuse, arms outstretched, metamorphosing into a blooming sylvan image:

³¹⁷ Henry, *Commentary*, p. 6.

³¹⁸ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 185.

Iesu Grist, gwir Bren y Bywyd,
Hwn yw cyfiawnder pur y saint (XI)

Jesus Christ, true Tree of Life
And the saints' pure righteousness.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is only physically hinted at in the last couplet when Ann discards, along with Adam and Eve, the flimsy fig leaf clothing they made for themselves to cover their shame because of eating the fruit of that tree. But Christ provides; the saint literally 'wears Christ' who has become their righteous dress, shade, and cover from the burning sun (a symbol of God's holiness):

Ei gleimio'n ail, a'm cadarn sail,
Yn lle gwag obaith ffigys-ddail. (XI)

Boldly there, I'll repair,
No more useless fig leaves wear.³¹⁹

Christ re-appears as the tree of life, providing cover for the guilty, naked soul.

The idea of 'shading' and 'resting' under this tree is a Hebrew topos. Ann engages with the image. In Song of Solomon 2:3, the Bridegroom (symbolising Christ) is described as being like an apple tree:

As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.³²⁰

The apple tree also appears in a verse by one of Griffiths's contemporaries, Mary Owen of Cwmavon (1796-1875):

Iesu Siriol Rhosyn Saron,
Gwin a gwridog hardd ei liw,
Tecach yw na meibion dynion,
Lili y dyffrynoedd yw,
Pren afalau hardd ei flodau
Gwych aroglau ym mhob man,

Jesus, happy Rose of Sharon,
White and ruddy, fair to see
Fairer than the sons of men
Lily of the Valley is he.
He is an apple tree in blossom
Spreading aroma everywhere

³¹⁹ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 185.

³²⁰ Song of Solomon 2:3

Gwir winwydden nefol ffrwythlon,
Byth i loni f'enaïd gwan.

Heavenly vine ever fruitful,
Ever gladdening my weakened soul.³²¹

Christ is the apple tree who gives off an aroma of grace, shade from the sun, and is beautiful to behold. The idea of a hot sun and the protagonist needing shade is also an image that Solomon's father, David, used in his poetry. In Psalm 121, the word *צל* (*tseḷ*) means 'shade' or 'shadow' which God himself provides from the sun which 'smites' in the sixth verse. Ann sees this as an illustration of propitiation; Christ, like a shade-giving tree, comes between us and the brilliance of God's holy rays *שמשה* (*shemesh*) meaning 'brilliant sun' that burnt Christ on Calvary. In Hymn XXIX, her whole life is lived under that shade:

Mi gerdda'n ara' ddyddiau f'oes
Dan gysgod haeddiant gwaed y groes.
(XXIX)

I'll walk slowly throughout my life
Shadowed by the merit of Calvary's blood.³²²

She lives under the shadow of a crucified saviour and his blood covers her. But Christ is not a lifeless tree. In Hymn XXI, Ann returns to the scene in Song of Songs chapter 2. The branch-like arms of a crucified Jesus are injected with life before embracing her like the bridegroom:

Ei law aswy sy'n fy nghynnal
Dan fy mhen yng ngwres y dydd,
A bendithion ei ddeheulaw
Yn cofleidio'm henaïd sydd (XXI)

His left hand upholds
My head in the heat of the day,
And the blessings of his right-hand
Embraces my soul.³²³

His hands give blessing like those sweet apples on the branches. This is a scene between lovers 'becoming one flesh';³²⁴ Solomon and the Shulamite; Christ and church; Christ and

³²¹ My translation.

³²² My translation.

³²³ My translation.

³²⁴ Genesis 2:24

Ann. His presence, in itself, shades her humanity from the burning sun. She can now, as Hymn XIV says, ‘llechu’n dael dan ei gysgod’| ‘Calmly hide beneath his shadow’.

Perhaps Ann’s most notable use of trees is the first stanza of Hymn XXIV. The language is fluid, bold and authoritative whilst remaining sensual and sensitive. In the first Psalm, David muses on the character of a godly person [man] who ‘delights’ in תּוֹרָה (*towrah*) the law, or word, of the Lord:

He is like a tree
Planted by streams of water
That yields its fruits in its season,
And its leaf does not wither.³²⁵

God’s words in Jeremiah 17 confirm David’s desire:

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.
He is like a tree planted by water,
That sends out its roots by the stream,
And does not fear when heat comes,
For its leaves remain green,
And is not anxious in the year of drought,
For it does not cease to bear fruit.³²⁶

Both verses speak of a well-rooted tree, drawing its strength from streams of grace. Ann’s hymn is in dialogue with God whilst carefully imagining [not adding] her own situation alongside the first Psalm. Ultimately, this hymn is a prayer that she too would be spiritually ‘fruitful’, helped when trials come, because she too delights in the word of God. However, instead of ‘He is like a planted tree’, she is a planted tree, overflowing with sap. Ann does not merely conform to the simile; her stanza seems to evolve and grow from simile to actual sensual experience:

³²⁵ Psalm 1

³²⁶ Jeremiah 17

Gwna fi fel pren planedig, O! fy Nuw,
 Yn ir ar lan afonydd dyfroedd byw,
 Yn gwreiddio ar led, a'i ddail heb wywo mwy
 Ond ffrwytho dan gawodydd dwyfol glwy. XXIV

O my God! Make me a planted tree,
 Verdant (sappy) by those living riversides,
 Stretching out its roots, its leaves not withering
 but fruit-bearing,
 watered by the flow from those divine wounds.³²⁷

She performs the role of a female ‘New Testament’ Psalmist in this stanza – David’s poetry is re-uttered through the lips of a Christian woman post-Calvary. The difference between the Psalm and her hymn is the last line which includes blood, water, and wounds. This tree is bursting with sap and fruit because of Calvary, i.e. if David could delight in the law, how much more should Ann delight in the gospel. What results is spiritual confidence: ‘Gwna fi’| ‘Make me’ she says to God, not only a living tree, but a tree bursting with life and love. She is a confident interlocutor because her theology allows her to be; she has access; she can come ‘boldly to the throne of grace’ because she has a ‘great High Priest’ who has given her this access seen by her use of the imperative form of the verb.³²⁸ She wishes to be ‘full of sap/verdant’ – an image where the tree overflows with liquid, bringing David’s twenty-third Psalm to mind: ‘My cup runs over’.³²⁹ This is her plea: that she will be filled with grace and that the Holy Spirit will give her such growth that she will keep on growing and growing until she reaches heaven. The tree is watered in a twofold way – by the rivers of grace and by the atoning blood of Jesus.

In Psalm 1, the tree by the river would likely have been an olive tree; this is a tree that has been up-rooted and re-planted by God in order for it to grow. Aaron talks about ‘a sense of self merging fruitfully with the environment’ when discussing this hymn, so much so, that

³²⁷ My translation.

³²⁸ Hebrews 4:16.

³²⁹ Psalm 23.

‘human ego identity is willingly lost’.³³⁰ However, the hymn seems to be portraying a ‘blossoming of’ rather than ‘a loss of personal identity’ and it is God that is the instigator and provider via the river and the wounds of atonement. Aaron tends to oversimplify the Old Testament God as being harsh and patriarchal, but this is not an accurate image of Ann’s God in this hymn.³³¹

The body does seem to be the site of this spiritual experience. Ann’s arms are outstretched like a penitent and the sheer physicality of the stanza appears to be totally sexual. But, once again, this is similitude rather than straightforward eroticism. However, as a woman, Ann transmits the bride/bridegroom idea better than many of her male counterparts. The Bible chooses to portray the Church as a woman and it is only logical and fitting that a tradition based on the experiential and relational bond between Christian and Saviour blossomed in the imagination of a female poet.

Fountains and Furnaces

Ann Griffiths supposedly never saw the sea.³³² However, her poetry is full of liquidity in reference and in form. Fountains, seas, springs, lakes, rivers, rain, and blood flow throughout her oeuvre, featuring as prominently as furnaces, fires, light, and heat – in fact, the fountain and the furnace are very close to one another. In Letter IV to John Hughes, Ann writes that the spiritual warfare is as ‘hot as ever’ and that her enemies are located both within and without. The context is a temptation or trial which she describes as furnace-like – ‘y ffwrnes’. She also refers to fountains in this letter whilst musing on the doctrine of purification and

³³⁰ Aaron, ‘Welsh Women Writers’, p. 118.

³³¹ Aaron, *Pur fel y Dur*, p. 53: ‘Neges yr emynyddesau Cymreig yw fod y ferch, yn ogystal â’r mab, wedi ei hachub rhag gwarth a chosb yr hen oesoedd patriarchaidd gan addewidion y Testament Newydd.’/ ‘The message of these Welsh female hymn-writers is that the woman, as well as the man, has been saved from the shame and punishment of the old patriarchal age by the promises of the New Testament.’

³³² Lewis, ‘Ann Griffiths: A Literary Survey’, p. 154.

yearning after holiness. In concluding, she states: ‘diolch byth am fod y ffwrnes a’r ffynnon mor agos i’w gilydd!’³³³ This statement is multivalent and gives us insight into the depth of Methodist spiritual experience which involved fountains and furnaces and sometimes it was hard to differentiate when ‘all things work together for good [even the furnaces] for those [the Methodists] who are in Christ Jesus.’³³⁴

Hymn III shows how Ann develops the idea of water theologically and experientially. The first stanza begins in the present tense. A weak and frail pilgrim is battered by the storms of life. (The reader’s mind should be drawn to the episode of the disciples fishing in the stormy Sea of Galilee whilst Christ is asleep below deck in Mark 4). The pilgrim is then commanded to look to the mediator whose presence ‘calms’ the spiritual waves. Water, or rainfall, is used to describe the difficulties of life, especially death, the final enemy. In letter V, similar meteorological imagery allows us to read the letter alongside the hymn. The fiery rays of the sun of temptation are mentioned alongside wind and floodwater – all describing her personal pilgrimage. In Hymn XXIII, Mark 4 is invoked again when the pilgrim finally comes to cross ‘the river’, i.e. to die:

<p>Os rhaid wynebu’r afon donnog, Mae Un i dorri grym y dŵr, Iesu, f’ Archoffeiriad ffyddlon, A chanddo sicr afael siŵr (XXIII)</p>	<p>If I must face that choppy river, There is One to break the power of the wave, Jesus, my High Priest, is faithful, And his hold is strong and sure.³³⁵</p>
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Water is negative here since it denotes death. But Christ has conquered the power of death (I Corinthians 15:55) and he stands between us and, not only God, but the storm of death itself. Griffiths, in the last line, evokes another nautical scene on Galilee when Christ walked on

³³³ ‘And thanks always that the furnace and the fountain are so close to each other!’

³³⁴ Romans 8:28

³³⁵ My translation.

water and Peter jumped out of the boat to meet him.³³⁶ Whilst gazing on Christ, he could also walk on water; when he looked at the waves, he started to sink. Peter shouted out: ‘Lord, save me’ and Jesus immediately reached out his hand and saves him before he drowns. Christ is also active in Hymn XIII, commanding the vessel and steering the pilgrims through the sea: ‘Dyma ei beilat ar y môr’ | ‘Here’s their pilot on the deep’. Letter V sums up all the feelings she pours out into the hymns: ‘Annwyl frawd, y peth mwyaf neilltuol sydd ar fy meddwl yw y mawr rwymau sydd arnaf i fod yn ddiolchgar i’r Arglwydd am fy nal yn wyneb y gwyntoedd a’r llifddyfroedd’.³³⁷

In Hymns XXI and X, Ann uses the image of heat in the phrase ‘gwres y dydd’ | ‘the heat of the day’. Life is described as burning and hot. In XVII, although she feels the heat of the sun and the fiery shafts of light, she is shaded by Solomon’s canopy. This is a God that remains with her whether life feels like a storm or a heatwave. In Hymn XX, she says that he remains with her, unchanging, even when the elements are ever-changing: ‘Gyda mi mewn tân a dŵr’ | ‘With me in fire and water’. Heaven, then, is a place where there is no sun which can ‘smite her by day’ – a phrase referring to all the difficulties of life: ‘Byw heb wres na haul yn taro’.³³⁸ Hymn XXIII wonderfully changes the storms and rivers of death and the burning sunshine into ‘pure rivers of life’ and the light divine in ‘rays unclouded’ coming from God himself.

In the second stanza of Hymn III, Griffiths takes us to the Lake of Bethesda, whose waters had curative powers. This water is totally different from that described in the first

³³⁶ Matthew 14.

³³⁷ ‘Dear brother, the most particular thing that is on my mind is the great obligation I am under to be grateful to the Lord for upholding me in the face of the winds and the floodwaters.’

³³⁸ ‘Heat and sun will no longer smite my life’.

stanza because it is a very still lake. Similarly, in John 5: 1-9, the pool is completely tranquil until stirred by an angel. When so stirred, the first person who steps in will be healed:

Cofiwch hyn mewn stad o wendid,
Yn y dyfroedd at eich fferau sy,
Mai dirifedi yw'r cufyddau
A fesurir i chwi fry;
Er bod yn blant yr atgyfodiad
I nofio yn y dyfroedd hyn,
Ni welir gwaelod byth nac ymyl
I sylwedd mawr Bethesda lyn. (III)

Think on this when to your ankles
Scarce the healing waters rise –
Numberless shall be the cubits
Measured to you in the skies.
Children of the Resurrection,
They alone can venture here;
Yet they find no shore, no bottom
To Bethesda's water clear.³³⁹

As the pilgrim enters these healing waters he thinks that he is too late – the water is used up; how can there be sufficiency for all the children of the resurrection? In the next stanza, she proclaims: 'O! ddyfnderoedd iechydwrïaeth' | 'O! The depths of salvation', which is sufficient because it is made up of blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side. This is a lake where a sinner can come and be cleansed – it has no limit or bottom to it. It is possible that Ann would have been familiar with Augustus Montague Toplady's (1740-1778) hymn, 'Rock of Ages', which mentions the 'double cure':

Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save me from its guilt and power.³⁴⁰

The water purifies the soul from the guilt of sin whilst the blood atones, taking away the power of death. In Hymn VII, she talks about being literally 'soaked in blood': 'ei drochi yn y gwaed'. In the Greek, 'Bethesda', **Βηθεσδά**, literally means 'house of mercy' from **בית** (*bayith*) and **חֶשֶׁד** (*cheched*) where the sinner can come in Hymn VIII and be bleached white: 'amser cannu' | 'a time to be bleached/cleaned' in 'ffrydiau iechydwrïaeth fawr' | 'Salvation's

³³⁹ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 185.

³⁴⁰ Augustus Montague Toplady's 'Rock of Ages' first appeared in *The Gospel Magazine* in 1775.

mighty fountains' mentioned in Hymn IX. William Cowper's (1731-1800) 'There is a Fountain' might also have been familiar to Ann:

There is a fountain filled with blood
 Drawn from Immanuel's veins
 Where sinners plunge beneath the flood
 Lose all their guilty stains.³⁴¹

Both water and the blood are involved in the work of purification.

Having experienced the stormy waters of life, the cleansing waters of purification, and the blood of atonement, Griffiths now turns to another expanse of water known as the 'sea of wonders'. The fourth stanza of Hymn III partly refers to a mystical phenomenon similar to the vision that the prophet Ezekiel experiences:

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through.³⁴²

The waters indicate the gospel of Christ, going forth from Jerusalem, symbolically gushing from that final altar, Calvary. But perhaps, like Ezekiel himself, Ann expands this nautical image. Although she is looking forward to a time of 'rest eternal', her descriptions toward the

³⁴¹ William Cowper, 'Praise for the Fountain Opened' in Richard Conyers (ed.), *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns, from Various Authors: For the use of Serious and Devout Christians of all denominations* (London: Clement Watts, 1772), pp. 187-188 (p. 187).

³⁴² Ezekiel 47: 1-5. This quotation is taken from the *English Standard Version*.

end of the stanza indicate some form of mystical, spiritual event which she experienced herself in life:

<p>O! ddedwydd awr tragwyddol orffwys Oddi wrth fy llafur yn fy rhan, Ynghanol môr o ryfeddodau Heb weled terfyn byth, na glan; Mynediad helaeth byth i bara I fewn trigfannau Tri yn un; Dŵr i'w nofio heb fynd trwyddo, Dyn yn Dduw, a Duw yn ddyn. (III)</p>	<p>Blessed hour of rest eternal, Home at last, all labours o'er; Sea of Wonders never sounded, Sea where none can find a shore, Access free to dwell forever Yonder with the One in three; Deeps no foot of man can traverse, God and man in unity. (Or 'Man in God, God in man'.)³⁴³</p>
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The key here is the phrase 'byth i bara' | 'lasting forever' indicating that she had glimpsed or tasted the mystical experience in the last couplet. Having dipped in the waters of purification, there are times when she is overwhelmed by the gospel – it feels as if she is waist-high but it only lasts a while. These experiences are God-filled; God seems to inhabit her whole being: 'Man in God and God in man'. These moments are glimpses of the future consummation between Bride and Bridegroom, when she will be united forever to the Godhead in that Sea of wonders underneath the rays of divine and unburning light.

Having analysed Ann Griffiths's language, we have seen how theological clarity and experiential religion feature heavily in the poetical process. Her poetry was a *part of* rather than a *product of* her spiritual experiences and, one may argue, that poetry also was an important *part of* Calvinistic Methodism. Both Pantycelyn and Griffiths have a central position in what appears to be a distinctive Calvinistic aesthetic within Welsh poetics. However, Ann's role as a female 'New Testament' Psalmist portrays her not only at the centre of a poetic aesthetic but of a spiritual, social and religious movement that would shape

³⁴³ Hodges (trans.), *Flames in the Mountains*, p. 167.

Modern Wales. Ann, in a way, became a mouthpiece, the literal ‘bride of Christ’, who articulated the experiential dealings with Christ better than any man had done. If God had chosen the female bride to portray his church, then it is no surprise that it was a woman that could embody and engage with that metaphor most effectively.

Modern Responses

Many notable Welsh poets have engaged with Ann Griffiths’s poems, either in translating them or in responding to Ann as a person. They have attempted to reconstruct her life, about which, in reality, we know very little, and in so doing have created a range of more or less fictional Anns, largely ignoring the context and theology behind her poetry. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Welsh-language poets like Cynan (1895-1970), T.H. Parry-Williams (1887-1975), and Gwenallt (1899-1968) all formed their own poetic ‘Anns’ because they realised her important position as a mother figure to the modern Welsh poet:

Aeth Ann y Dr. Parry-Williams yn Ann Griffiths gan Gwenallt, ac yn Santes Ann gan Cynan. Enghraifft dda efallai o broses canoneiddio. Os yw'r Dr. Parry-Williams yn ei soned ac yn ei ysgrif yn tueddu i gyffredineiddio Ann Griffiths, ei dieithrio oddi wrth ei phobl ei hun a wna Cynan drwy ei gosod ymhlith y Seintiau.³⁴⁴

Cynan closes his sonnet ‘Y Santes Ann’ with: ‘O Ann Fendigaid, eiriol trosom ni’/ ‘O blessed Ann, intercede on our behalf’ – Ann becomes a kind of Virgin Mary figure: a being above all others who has personal and privileged access to the Divine.³⁴⁵ Robert Rhys argues that such views were products of an ‘Ann Griffiths cult’ that has existed from the nineteenth-

³⁴⁴ Gwilym Bowyer, ‘Ann’, *Y Traethodydd*, Volume CXI (xxiv), 1956, 478-481: ‘Dr Parry-Williams’s Ann became Gwenallt’s Ann Griffiths before turning into Cynan’s Saint Ann. This is a good example of canonisation. If Dr Parry-Williams tends to over-normalise Ann Griffiths in his sonnet and essay then Cynan managed to estrange her from her own people by setting her amidst the Saints.’

³⁴⁵ Cynan, ‘Y Santes Ann’ in William Morris (ed.), *Cofio Ann Griffiths* (Caernarfon: Y Gymanfa Gyffredinol, 1955), p. 9.

century onwards.³⁴⁶ Two extreme views became dominant as a result. On the one hand, Ann became this ‘other’, higher saint whose holiness could never be understood because she became a figure on a pedestal above the other Nonconformists. Her Calvinism was hushed up and she was (and still is, to some extent) portrayed as a quasi-Catholic mystic, closer to St Theresa of Avila than her co-Methodists.³⁴⁷ Aaron has rightly noted that literary criticism too has portrayed Ann like the ‘token’ woman, veiling all the other women poets writing at the time; her religious experiences were also portrayed as being higher than one could expect from women: ‘she was the sacred exception’.³⁴⁸ Secondly, attempts were made to explain Griffiths in primarily psychological terms.³⁴⁹ Like Bellini’s sculpture of St Theresa, poets and critics have argued over the sublimated sexuality within this passionate young woman’s verse. These two views are not sufficient for seeing either God or Ann in profile. ‘Biography does tend to prevail over the poems’ and Ann is lost in her own cult.³⁵⁰

However, in 2003, E. Wyn James edited an important digitalisation project in Cardiff University where 3,000 pages of Ann’s work, and scholarly articles relating to her work, were freely made available online. This was perhaps the most important modern response to

³⁴⁶ Robert Rhys, ‘The Life and Hymns of Ann Griffiths’ in *Heath Magazine*. <http://www.heath-church.org/documents/Ann-Griffiths-web.pdf> (Accessed 22/02/2016).

³⁴⁷ The poet David Jones compares Ann to the German mystic and poet Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824) especially in their contemplation of the Passion. In a letter to A. M. Allchin on September 11th, 1967 he says: ‘I suppose had Ann Griffith’s brief life been lived not in the uplands of Powys but in some land such as that of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity of the Dijon Carmel whom you mention in your letter as being near Ann in thought, she might be now known as Beata Anna de Dolwar – or however they’d say ‘of Dolwar’ in liturgical Latin! anyway Anna Wenfydedig o Ddolwar or something of that sort in the tongue of the land – don’t know.’ Quoted in Allchin, *Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition*, pp. 87-89.

³⁴⁸ Jane Aaron, *Pur fel y Dur: Y Gymraes yn Llên Menywod y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 37.

³⁴⁹ The 2005 musical *Ann!* demonstrates this.

³⁵⁰ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, p. 5.

Ann Griffiths. www.anngriffiths.cf.ac.uk gives easy access to all. There are three main sections:

One provides electronic resources for the study of Ann Griffiths and her work, a second section gives access to the digitalized items on the Cardiff University Library catalogue, while a third section is devoted to edited texts of her hymns and letters in the original Welsh, together with English translations by H.A. Hodges.³⁵¹

After its initial launch, the website attracted an average of 3000 hits a month ‘rising steadily to around 11,000 hits a month by January 2007’.³⁵² In early August 2005 (the bicentenary of her death), the website peaked at over 16,000 hits, showing the growing popularity of her work. James rightly notes that ‘by ‘going electronic’, the text of Ann Griffiths’s hymns has gone full circle from being a text in an unstable oral environment to being one in an unstable electronic environment’.³⁵³ However, similarly, their availability reflects something of the spirit of the *Seiat* because Ann is still sharing, and people are still responding to her today.

Most modern responses have been poetic ones. This section will now examine a sample of such responses by four poets who have, in my opinion, written the best.³⁵⁴ Mererid Hopwood (b.1964) and Sally Roberts Jones (b.1935) are two women poets who respond to Ann as woman, poet, mother, sister, mystic and Christian. R.S. Thomas (1913-2000) and Rowan Williams (b.1950) are two male clergyman poets who respond to her beliefs, her

³⁵¹ James, ‘Cushions, Copy-Books and Computers’, pp. 175-176.

³⁵² James, ‘Cushions, Copy-Books and Computers’, pp. 175-176.

³⁵³ James, ‘Cushions, Copy-Books and Computers’, pp. 175-176.

³⁵⁴ Others have responded to Ann Griffiths in poetry. A myriad of Welsh language poems appears in various periodicals. Cynan and Gwenallt write in William Morris’s *Cofio Ann Griffiths* (Caernarfon: Llyfrfa’r Cyfundeb, 1955). L. Haydn Lewis, John Edward Williams, Aled Islwyn, Meiriona Williams, Roger Jones, D. Moelwyn Williams, J.A. Thomas, Emrys Roberts, Leslie Jones, Gwilym Fychan, Eigra Lewis Roberts and many other anonymous poets (for full bibliography, see appendices). In addition, Menna Elfyn’s ‘An- an sy’n hysbys’ is an important poem which addresses the anonymous woman poet and uses Ann as a symbol for all of them. See *Eucalyptus – Detholiad o Gerddi / Selected Poems 1978-1994* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1995).

youth, her iconic stature in Christendom. These four modern responses show how Ann has been the source of a paradoxical poetics of faith as well as of doubt.

Mererid Hopwood (b. 1964)

Mererid Hopwood's poem 'Ond' ('But') seems to be in dialogue with Ann herself. The speaker calls Ann 'Fy chwaer hoff' | 'My favourite sister' rather than 'mam' | 'mother' which Jane Aaron claimed she was for many women writers.³⁵⁵ The poem fuses Ann's biography with images from her oeuvre whilst also engaging with some of the key theological and social issues that mattered to Ann. In essence, this is a poem about doubt, mystery, and unbelief.

To begin with the speaker muses on, and uses, Ann's language of paradox throughout the poem, especially in the use of the word 'Ond' | 'but'. Paradox is seen as being an aspect of that 'female writing' because of changeability and malleability of meaning. 'Both/and' rather than 'Either/Or', is, according to Aaron, 'a feminine way of seeing' in accordance with Nancy Chodorow's ideas about a woman's subjectivity being more 'continuous with that of others and more permeable in its ego boundaries than a boy's more detached and separate sense of himself'.³⁵⁶ The first stanza presents a speaker who sees an Ann willingly losing her ego:

Yn lân, lân, rhoist mewn leiniau
 inni stori dy dristáu,
 rhei mewn geiriau'r dagrau du,
 rhei'r cur mewn llythyr caru,
a hanes colli'r hunan
 i Iesu Grist yn groes grân.³⁵⁷

To be clean, clean, you placed your
 grieving story in lines for us,
 placing in words your blackened tears,
 placing your pain and **how you lost your self**
 to Christ, cross-grained –
 all, in a love letter.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ Aaron, *Pur fel y Dur*, p. 38: 'Bu Ann Griffiths yn fam lenyddol ac yn ysbrydoliaeth i lawer awdures.' / 'Ann Griffiths became a literary mother and an inspirational figure for a host of women writers'.

³⁵⁶ Nancy J. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 207.

³⁵⁷ Mererid Hopwood, 'Ond' in *Nes Draw* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2015), pp. 32-33. My emphasis.

The speaker talks to an unresponsive Ann using her own ‘feminine’ language of paradox.

Perhaps Hopwood sees Griffiths’s hymns as letters to a modern reader, personal letters to her as woman and poet. In a side note she writes:

Mae gan Ann Griffiths lythyr at Elizabeth Evans sy’n dechrau:
‘Anwylaf Chwaer yn yr Arglwydd. Yn ôl eich dymuniad ysgrifenaïs yr
ychydig leiniau hyn atoch.’³⁵⁹

This is not a random piece of information. The idea of letters, replies, and lines are important themes which structure the poem. The speaker, like Elizabeth Evans, wants to understand Ann spiritually. In a way, ‘Ond’ is an imaginary response to Ann written from the twenty-first century. The speaker is part of that literary coterie/*Seiat* tradition, writing a few lines about her experiences as a literary, and arguably spiritual, sister. The words ‘lân, lân’ reflect the opening subject of Letter VIII which talks about the ‘Ysbryd Glân’| The Holy Spirit:

Garedig chwaer, y peth mwyaf neilltuol sydd ar fy meddwl yn
bresennol fel mater yw mewn perthynas i dristau’r Ysbryd Glân.³⁶⁰

In a way, the speaker is not concerned with *why* Ann is saddened but she is amazed at her ability ‘cwbl goes i natur’| wholly unconventional, of being paradoxically happy in such misery:

Rhoi mewn geiriau’r dagrau du,	placing in words your blackened tears,
Rhoi’r cur mewn llythyr caru	placing your pain and how you lost your self

The first stanza then directly deals with this letter which turns out, as with most of Ann’s writings, to be love letters to Jesus Christ. Hopwood, like Griffiths, is able to pun with

³⁵⁸ My translation. My emphasis.

³⁵⁹ Hopwood, ‘Ond’ in *Nes Draw*, p. 33: ‘Ann Griffiths wrote a letter to Elizabeth Evans which begins: ‘Dearest Sister in the Lord. According to your wishes, I have written these lines to you’.

³⁶⁰ Griffiths, Letter VIII: ‘Dear sister, the most outstanding thing that is on my mind at present as a subject has to do with grieving the Holy Spirit.’

phrases like ‘yn groes grân’ | ‘against the grain’ meaning against one’s inclination but also, like in Hymn XI, the mention of ‘groes’ | ‘cross’ places Calvary in the background. Hopwood also introduces the idea of identity: ‘colli’r hunan’| ‘losing self’ but, cleverly, we see how this could actually mean a gaining of self – a new being, reborn from the matter of the old creature.

This is where Hopwood’s butterfly image is very important. The butterfly has long been a symbol for Christ’s resurrection as well as the resurrection of all believers.³⁶¹ In the fifth stanza, she calls Ann ‘iâr fach yr haf’| ‘butterfly’. On one level, this reflects Ann’s short life span. However, the importance is in the phrase – ‘croes i natur’. Although the speaker is quoting Hymn IV, she is playing with the ideas the phrase presents. The poem turns nature upside down by taking the butterfly born in the second stanza:

Yn nawns dy ddeffro , Nansi,	In your waking dance, Nansi,
Mor rhydd oedd d’adenydd di,	your wings were so free,
Dawns mor wyllt a nos mor hir	such a wild dance after such a long night
Ac awel greddf mor gywir	fuelled by a strong breeze
Yn dy wthio hyd eithaf	that pushed you to the utmost –
Y bore aur a’i wrid braf.	then, the golden morn, with its pleasant glow.

and seemingly cocooning her in the third:

Rhoi dy enaid tanbaid di’n	putting your fiery soul’s
adennydd mewn cadwyni.	wings in chains.

The speaker puts the butterfly back in the cocoon. Or rather, Ann is involved in a transaction where ‘bright wings’ and ‘merry fairs’ are swapped for the Word ($\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$) and *words*.

Hopwood portrays this transaction as a kind of Faustian pact whereby Ann is given words in exchange for her entire life:

Yn lle byw, cael Duw yn dad	Instead of living, having God as father
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³⁶¹ For an excellent discussion on butterflies and Christian art see Vazrick Nazari, ‘Chasing Butterflies in Medieval Europe’, *Journal of the Lepidopterists’ Society*, 68:4 (2014), pp. 223-231 (p. 229).

A geiriau glân ei gariad

With his clean words of love

The reader knows that Ann will re-emerge for a short while in brighter colour because she is still called butterfly in the last stanza. In the first version of the poem in *Taliesin*, the speaker goes into more detail regarding this ‘cocooning’:

puro, sgrwbo i Iesu Grist
dy Dduw, ac nid o ddewis
deisyf ei law yn gawell
a throi’r byd i gyd yn gell³⁶²

refining and scrubbing for Jesus Christ
your God, not from choice
but you took his hand and became caged
in a world that had become a cell

There are powerful images here in the cut text. The speaker muses on housework and combines the action of scrubbing to a form of spiritual purification whilst Christ is quasi-jailer and the world his cell. However, cutting these lines strengthens the poem. The image of chained-up wings is more ambivalent and does not feel like a personal attack on Christ from the speaker. The shift focusses on the butterfly image and allows the reader to imagine the multivalent meaning of ‘captivities’ rather than making Christ a patriarchal antagonist. In ‘Ond’, the speaker cannot understand how a butterfly with such free wings can be reborn in a brighter, supernatural, and unnatural way – how can ‘no-life’ in the worldly sense be injected with so much vigour and passion spiritually. She yearns for Ann’s words and spiritual life. Because everything is topsy-turvy, this Faustian character does not desire worldly pleasure and knowledge but spiritual ‘pleasure’ and knowledge. The speaker would give her all:

Ond Ann, rhown i f’adenydd,
A rhoi’r ffair i rannu’r ffydd,
A gwn y carwn ganu
I Dduw am gael gwyn o ddu.

But Ann, I’d give my wings
and the fair to share your faith,
I’d probably love to sing
to God for creating white from all the black.

³⁶² Mererid Hopwood, ‘Er mai cwbl groes i natur yw fy llwybur yn y byd’, *Taliesin*, 120 (Gaeaf 2003), 51-52. This version has an additional stanza.

The speaker would give everything up to be able to make ‘white’ from ‘black’ – the ultimate paradox. She would willingly give up the ‘fair’ (symbolising worldliness and popularity) for Ann’s faith, which she cannot comprehend. One thing the speaker does not give up is the complex poetic form of the *Cywydd*. In a way, the poem is self-referential in that it is written in the highly restrictive ‘cage’ of this *Cywydd* form.³⁶³ We know that Ann was able to compose poetry in Welsh strict metre, *cynghanedd*.³⁶⁴ However, Ann was not bound to the metre, as has been discussed earlier; her verse is free and fluid. The speaker of ‘Ond’ chooses to write a *Cywydd* which is made up of rhyming couplets, each couplet consisting of lines of seven syllables ending alternately with a stressed and an unstressed syllable, and each line containing the complex and strict alliterative patterning of *cynghanedd*. Perhaps the speaker does this to reflect her ‘unchanged’ spiritual position. This is confirmed in three negative statements, which may be viewed through the lens of the *via negativa*, or as simple, honest confessions of unbelief:

Ni allaf (l.23)

Ni rannaf (l.27)

Ni welir (l.28)³⁶⁵

The idea of ‘sight’ here wonderfully corresponds with Ann’s ‘Syllu’ theme. The speaker does not ‘see’ nor ‘understand’ Ann’s faith; therefore, she can never be in Dolwar Fach – that seat of experiential poetry.

³⁶³ Similar ideas are addressed in William Wordsworth’s sonnet about sonnets ‘Nuns Fret Not at their Convent’s Narrow Room’ [1807] where the speaker is ‘bound/ Within the Sonnet’s scanty plot of ground’. See William Wordsworth, *The Works of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 250.

³⁶⁴ Ann’s *englyn* together with those by her father were first published in her biography by Davies, *Cofiant*, pp. 17-19.

³⁶⁵ ‘I can’t’, ‘I don’t share’, ‘I can’t see’.

Sally Roberts Jones (b.1935)

Sally Roberts Jones is another female poet who responds to Griffiths. Her poem, 'Ann Griffiths,' is a dramatic monologue spoken by Ann written in rhyming couplets of iambic tetrameter.³⁶⁶ The figure of Ann is not fixed in the poem; she is almost spirit-like, pregnant, and paradoxical. We are introduced to an Ann who is both humble and strong-willed. 'I stake my claim' (l.1) is contrasted with lines such as 'My words are air' (l. 3). Indeed, she seems to conform to that young woman who was 'witty and mischievous by nature, full of zest, single-minded, meticulous, passionate and impulsive':³⁶⁷

In little time I stake my claim
To all the panoply of fame.
My words are air, their manuscript
Forgetful flesh, a bony crypt
To lay these stillborn creatures in.

'Little time' talks about her short life, the creative outburst, as well as the brevity of temporal existence. In Letter VII, Ann says to Hughes: 'And this from your unworthy sister who is swiftly travelling through a world of time to the world which lasts forever'.³⁶⁸ In the second stanza the poet calls Griffiths' work her 'poor gift' (l. 8). The flesh is decaying and the 'bony crypt' of her body has 'stillborn creatures' inside (ll.4-5). Her own child, Elizabeth, who was born in July 1805, but died within a fortnight, is alluded to. But these 'creatures', plural, are also Ann's poems – delicate, precious, and fleeting as stillborn children. 'My words are air' is a neat paradox indicating their oral transmission – they are both evanescent and still living and breathing. It is a moving first stanza, which seems hopeless.

³⁶⁶ Sally Roberts Jones, 'Ann Griffiths' in Meic Stephens (ed.), *Poetry 1900-2000* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007), pp. 438-439.

³⁶⁷ James, 'Cushions, Copy-Books and Computers', pp. 166.

³⁶⁸ 'A hyn oddi wrth eich annheilwng chwaer sy'n cyflym drafaelw trwy fyd o amser i'r byd a bery byth'.

However, Jones masterfully imitates Ann in her art. When reading the first stanza, you expect to see the word ‘crib’ instead of ‘crypt’ (l. 4): ‘a bony crypt / to lay these stillborn creatures in’ (ll. 4-5). Like the Virgin Mary, her words are placed in a ‘crypt’ just like Christ (the Word) was placed in the crib. That crib *might as well have been* a crypt, seeing that he would die. One of the gifts that the wise men bring him is the gift of myrrh which would eventually anoint his corpse; the wise men as well as his mother knew what would befall Christ. The nativity theme continues, and is confirmed, in the second stanza:

This foolishness of light intent
I turn to praise, my patterns meant,
Poor gift, for Him by whose free gift
My life is bought; the seasons sift
Away my youth, my fear, my sin.

The word ‘foolishness’ is paradoxically hinting at acquired wisdom since the speaker has turned ‘to praise’ (l.7). She is a ‘wise woman’ coming to that crib with the gift of praise. She brings a ‘Poor gift’, mirroring Christina Rossetti’s ‘A Christmas Carol’:

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a Shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,—
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.³⁶⁹

She does her part by praising. ‘My life is bought’: it is no longer hers in a way because of that ‘free gift’ of ‘this babe I bear within’ (l. 15) which mirrors another carol which prays that Christ ‘be born in me today’.³⁷⁰ What she bears within is not just that ‘pure’ babe’ which

³⁶⁹ Christina G. Rossetti, ‘A Christmas Carol’ in *Goblin Market, The Prince’s Progress and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1888), p. 222.

³⁷⁰ O little town of Bethlehem. The inclusion of carol-like language is highly relevant in the context of Ann Griffiths. She, too, was brought up in the *Plygain Carol* tradition.

would die, but Jesus who is the reason that her ‘soul is singing’, and her poems will never fall silent (ll.14-15).

The first line of each new stanza is then paradoxically contrasted in the rest of the stanza. For example, in the second, ‘foolishness’ is paradoxically turned into wisdom. In the third, she is a ‘gentle creature’ tamed like an animal before that name is memorialised ‘in polished oak and brass’ and an eternal ‘soul’ is actually (ll. 12-13) un-tamed. In the fourth stanza, her songs have disappeared like burning ‘ash’ but then her spirit remains as it were: *literally* in heaven, and *figuratively*, in poets like Jones and other female poets who are composing ‘fresh music’ (l.19):

My songs as light as ash are spent;
My hope’s elsewhere, a long descent
In flesh and land – and yet the air
Stirs with fresh music, calls me where
Intricate webs of words begin.

Lord, let me not be silent till
All earth is grinding in your mill!

Katie Gramich rightly points out that ‘[Jones] stakes her claim to be one of Ann’s heirs’.³⁷¹ This is a poem about women who have the spirit of Ann within them. Silence is negatively portrayed whilst *speaking out* and words are portrayed in a divine hue. The idea of staking a claim, a patriarchal and quasi-imperial image, is wonderfully reversed into a liberating motif which characterises the whole poem. Ann’s bold confidence, seen in her usage of imperatives when addressing God, is translated by Jones, ‘coming boldly’ as a woman as well as a poet.³⁷²

³⁷¹ Katie Gramich, ‘Welsh Poetry since 1945’ in Edward Larrissy (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Poetry, 1945-2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 163-177 (p. 170).

³⁷² Ann’s use of imperative is especially seen in Hymn X.

Rowan Williams (b.1950)

Ann Griffiths is not just an icon for women poets. Men who hold to her beliefs have written extensively on her.³⁷³ However, responses from outside the Nonconformist fold seem to produce the best poetry.³⁷⁴ In 2003, Rowan Williams re-introduced Ann Griffiths to the English-speaking world. A translation of ‘Yr Arglwydd Iesu’ (translated by Williams as ‘I Saw him Standing’) was sung at his enthronement as the Archbishop of Canterbury. Williams is a poet but does not see himself as a ‘religious poet’ per se but as a poet to whom religious things matter “intensely”.³⁷⁵ It should be noted from the outset that Rowan Williams’s poem goes beyond being just a translation. Williams’s excellent translation is a new poem which is both a response and a counterpoint to Ann which takes us into the mind of the theologian archbishop:

Under the dark trees, there he stands,
there he stands; shall he not draw my eyes?
I thought I knew a little
how he compels, beyond all things, but now
he stands there in the shadows. It will be
Oh, such a daybreak, such bright morning,
when I shall wake to see him
as he is.³⁷⁶

The first couplet is completely different in tone to Ann’s:

Wele’n sefyll rhwng y myrtwydd

³⁷³ Both E. Wyn James and the late R.M. Jones, evangelical Christians who personally adhere to Calvinistic theology, have written extensively on Ann’s work.

³⁷⁴ A. M. Allchin (1930-2010) was an influential and important Ann Griffiths scholar. He was also an Anglican priest.

³⁷⁵ Kate Kellaway, ‘The Poems of Rowan Williams – the musings of God’s quiet messenger’, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/18/poems-rowan-williams-review-musings-gods-quiet-messenger> [Accessed: 03/05/16].

³⁷⁶ Rowan Williams, ‘I Saw him Standing’ in *The Poems of Rowan Williams* (Oxford: Carcanet, 2002), p. 84.

Wrthrych teilwng o fy mryd;
 Er mai o ran, yr wy'n adnabod
 Ei fod uwchlaw gwrthrychau'r byd:
 Henffych fore
 Y caf ei weled fel y mae. (XIII)

Ann begins with 'Wele' – there is a certainty of gaze. Williams looks at the trees and his eye moves down, and he does not actually say that he sees Christ; he just states, in quite an objective way, that he is there, twice. The great paradox of Williams's own theology is the fact that God is near, but hard to grasp.³⁷⁷ The title of a recent work on his theology is 'Christ the Stranger', an oxymoron, but an indication of the experiential difficulties a Christian can encounter. Benjamin Myers points out that 'looking' is an important aspect in Williams's work. The question in the couplet almost asks will he or will he not draw my gaze? Is he really there? There is no question mark in Ann's poem. The speaker then looks ahead to the time when he will fully understand; Heaven is enlightenment in the sense of future knowledge rather than Ann's utter devotion in the present.

In the second stanza of Williams's translation, the speaker calls Christ 'my friend' before fleshing out Ann's description of Christ:

He is called the Rose of Sharon, for his skin
 is clear, his skin is flushed with blood,
 his body lovely and exact; how he compels
 beyond ten thousand rivals. There he stands,
 my friend, the friend of guilt and helplessness,
 to steer my hollow body
 over the sea.

Ann's second stanza piles image upon image in the old technique of *dyfalu*, slowly showing us He whom she has seen without overly describing his appearance:

Rhosyn Saron yw ei enw,

³⁷⁷ Benjamin Myers, *Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams* (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

Gwyn a gwridog, teg o bryd;
 Ar ddeng mil y mae'n rhagori
 O wrthrychau penna'r byd;
 Ffrind pechadur,
 Dyma ei beilat ar y môr.

Williams's repetition of 'his' and 'he' emphasises the physicality of the man Jesus. There is more human than divine in the description of Christ – a full, fresh and very living Jesus in comparison to his 'hollow body' which may refer to a dead corpse, the speaker's soul, or even a process which needs to happen. The word 'hollow' is important in Williams's theological oeuvre:

The dread of self-deceptive fantasy is, in fact, the engine of Williams's work [...] It drives him to think of the spiritual life not as a wholeness but as a sort of stripping bare, until finally nothing remains but an absence, the hollow centre of the human self, the dark night of desire. In short, the problem of fantasy leads him to envisage Christian faith as one enormous pattern of asceticism and kenosis.³⁷⁸

Williams, in using the word 'hollow', may refer to the process whereby one may see Jesus standing. He is not referring to death at all but an emptying of self which is required if Christ will draw our eyes. Otherwise, the speaker is sexually, physically and spiritually infatuated with the 'masks and fetishes' of the third stanza:

The earth is full of masks and fetishes,
 what is there here for me? are these like him?
 Keep company with him and you will know:
 no kin, no likeness to those empty eyes.
 He is a stranger to them all, great Jesus.
 What is there here for me? I know
 what I have longed for. Him to hold
 me always.

³⁷⁸ Myers, *Christ the Stranger*, pp. 107-108.

‘Great Jesus’ is not who he actually longs for; Ann wishes to remain *in* Christ’s love. The speaker here longs for an embrace which will follow kenosis, the self-emptying, which we, like Christ, must be willing to do. He has had enough of the masks which portray Christ. In the last but one line, the full-stop is an interesting gap. The eye reads ‘I have longed for Him’ but the speaker stops and thinks before saying ‘Him’. This is very different from Ann’s statement at the end of Hymn XIII: ‘O! am aros / Yn ei gariad ddyddiau f’oes’| ‘O! to stay / In His love throughout my existence’. Williams actively strips Jesus bare. In the previous stanza he focussed on flesh and blood. In this stanza we have reached the skeleton: ‘no kin, no likeness to those empty eyes’. He is thinking about the death, the skull of Jesus, Golgotha – the place where God the Son died – Calvary, the ‘place of the Skull’.³⁷⁹ That full stop is a contemplative sigh, a leap of faith toward the belief in the Resurrection which would be the enabling factor for Christ ‘to hold / me [the speaker] always’.

Christ is also a very different person in ‘Hymn for the Mercy Seat’, a translation of Ann Griffiths’s Hymn XXII.³⁸⁰ The main difference between original and translation is the title that Williams chooses. Hymn XXII is written by a woman totally overcome by the person of Jesus Christ, whilst the translator honours the theology of the mercy seat. The mercy seat was the covering of the ark where the blood of atonement was sprinkled:

Between the butchered thieves, the mercy seat, the healing,
The place for him to test death’s cost (ll. 17-18)

Where is Christ? The focus is on the seat – the place rather than the person. Christ is God’s way of healing as he sets out in the last stanza:

I shall lift up the name of that God

³⁷⁹ Luke 23:33.

³⁸⁰ Rowan Williams, ‘Hymn for the Mercy Seat’ in *The Poems of Rowan Williams* (Oxford: Carcanet, 2002), p. 82.

Sets out to be a mercy seat (ll. 49-50)

The word ‘atonement’ is left out because Williams is drawn by the concept of the cross itself. The very absence of Christ proves a presence just like the name of Jesus is charged and an indication of God’s satisfaction. ‘Apophatic’ or ‘negative’ theology was the subject of Williams’s doctoral study in 1975. Therefore, it is no surprise that the cross is vacant. The cross is primarily a ‘revelation of God’s identity’ rather than a place of wrath.³⁸¹ Concepts like propitiation and atonement are not evident, whilst mercy and healing are emphasised.

The subjective involvement in Griffiths’s poem is emphasised in the third stanza which is accompanied by Hodges’s translation:

Efe yw’r Iawn fu rhwng y lladron,	He between a pair of robbers
Efe ddiodefodd angau loes,	Hung, our Making-good to be;
Efe a nerthodd freichiau ei ddiennyddwyr	He gave power to nerve and muscle
I’w hoelio yno ar y groes;	When they nailed him to the tree;
Wrth dalu dyled pentewynion,	He, his Father’s law exalting,
Ac anrhydeddu deddf ei Dad,	Paid our debt and quenched our flame;
Cyfiawnder, mae’n disgleirio’n danbaid	Righteousness, in fiery splendour,
Wrth faddau yn nhrefn y cymod rhad. (XXII)	Freely pardons in his name.

The emphasis on the person is seen in the repetition of the word ‘efe’|‘he’. The speaker in Williams’s translation shifts the focus from the person to the mercy seat itself. In stanza 5, Ann says ‘Diolch byth’| ‘Thank goodness’ whilst the translation says ‘Thanksgiving’. The translation is fascinated with the *concept* of mercy rather than the *divine person* of Christ. Ironically, Christ literally becomes an object; he is no longer just a ‘person’ but he is the mercy seat. He becomes the site of encounter – a place, an idea, as well as a person. Perhaps Williams is trying to avoid the erotic overtones of Ann’s work by addressing concepts rather than focussing solely on Jesus.

³⁸¹ Myers, *Christ the Stranger*, p. 17.

Williams's translations are poems in their own right. Perhaps, what is most interesting is the shift in meaning between Ann's poems and his translations. There is an obvious theological shift from a Christ-centred theology to a God-centred theology verging on the apophatic, rather than Ann's cataphic emphasis.³⁸² Furthermore, the gender of the speaker is changed. Ann Griffiths becomes a male speaker because the language is less fluid, intimacy is reduced, paradoxes are weaker, images are changed, and repetition opens doors of analytical and doubtful inquiry. There is also a degree of irony present in the last stanza:

Admitted now to share his secret, that his blood and hurt
 Showed once, now I shall kiss the Son
 And never turn away again. And never
 Turn away. (ll. 53-56)

His soul is a 'finished likeness', something which Christ's 'blood and hurt' revealed – discovery of self via Calvary. But then he even questions eternity, will Christ turn away? Also, will I ever turn away from him? Williams's translations show how faith is often accompanied by doubt and how Ann's poetry is a stimulating influence upon poets who do not necessarily conform to her theology.

R.S. Thomas (1913-2000)

Such questionings state an important characteristic of modern responses to Ann Griffiths, that is, the responses that produce the best poetic output are that of doubt, uncertainty, unbelief, and scepticism. R.S. Thomas was another doubting poet in dialogue with Griffiths. Ann first appears in his oeuvre alongside Pantycelyn in 'The Minister' (1953) as a representative of a literary and spiritual tradition that existed before the dual threat of the 'populist, bourgeois

³⁸² 'Cataphic' theology uses *positive* terminology to describe the Divine in contrast to the *negative* terminology of 'apophatic' theology.

form of religious nonconformity' and Anglicisation.³⁸³ In this radio poem, Thomas contrasts two types of religion – the liberated spirituality in nature and the restrictive, Nonconformist religion that is deaf to the 'sweet theories' of nature's 'tunes' which 'John Calvin never heard' (*Collected Poems*, p. 46, ll. 29-31). The eponymous minister is Elias Morgan, whose name is an amalgamation of two 'big preachers'.³⁸⁴ Morgan briefly hears nature 'singing' (l. 28) but he inures himself to the seductions of Nature so that when 'flowers bloomed beneath the window' (l. 36), he 'pulled them up; they were untidy' (*CP*, 47, l. 4) symbolising his lifeless existence.

As a contrast to Morgan, the poem's narrator links Ann Griffiths and Pantycelyn with the idea of a passionate, subjective involvement in faith. The narrator daydreams in a free indirect style, mythologizing and collecting religious experientialists in a semi-imagined Wales where the hymn-writers are suddenly located.³⁸⁵

O, but God is in the throat of a bird;
Ann heard him speak, and Pantycelyn.

God is in the sound of the white water
Falling at Cynfal. God is in the flowers
Sprung at the feet of Olwen, and Melangell
Felt his heart beating in the wild hare.
Wales in fact is His peculiar home,
Our fathers knew Him.

(CP, 43)

³⁸³ William V. Davies, *Miraculous Simplicity: Essays on R.S. Thomas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), p. 62. A detailed analysis of R.S.'s relationship with William Williams Pantycelyn can be found in Munday, "'Ann heard Him speak, and Pantycelyn': The Unexpected Relationship between R. S. Thomas and the Calvinistic Methodists", *International Journal of Welsh Writing in English*, 5:1 (2018). doi: [DOI]: 10.16995/ijwwe.5.3 [Accessed: 06/04/2018].

³⁸⁴ R.S. Thomas, 'The Big Preachers' in Tony Brown and Jason Walford Davies (eds.), *Uncollected Poems* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2013), p. 120. John Elias (1774-1841), the so-called 'Pope of Anglesey', and Dafydd Morgan, Ysbyty Ystwyth (1814-1883) the leading preacher of the 1859 revival.

³⁸⁵ Justin Wintle, *Furious Interiors: Wales, R.S. Thomas and God* (London: Harper, 1996), p. 78.

This quasi-Pantheist, ecumenical portrait of God fuses Ann's experience with pagan myths, Catholic hagiography and the 'brittle' past (*CP*, 37) of Wales. This mythic portrayal of Wales is closer to nature than the modern country – she is also a land where one would have *experienced* God. But, in the same poem, the speaker mysteriously changes Ann, Olwen and Melangell, into men with the word 'fathers': 'Our fathers knew Him' (l. 27) when in line 21 he mentions both Ann and Pantycelyn. Interestingly, in the later poem 'Dead Worthies' (1987), the speaker does it again with an allusion to the apocryphal work Ecclesiasticus 44:1 ('Let us now praise famous men'):

Where is our poetry
but in the footnotes?
What laurels for famous
men but asterisks and numbers?³⁸⁶

The fact that the first 'man' that the speaker mentions is 'Branwen (Refer below)' suggests that the speaker might be trying to draw attention to this transformation. The line break is hard between the third and fourth line, meaning that the word 'men' is emphasised in a sardonic and sarcastic manner. Ann appears in the third stanza of 'Dead Worthies' before the speaker gives his own footnote within the poem; he explains Ann as a:

handmaid of the Lord,
giving herself to the
Bridegroom, still virgin.

(ll. 13-15)

This idea of the giving of the self removes Ann from the 'Worthies' because it is the Bridegroom that speaks through her. I have argued elsewhere that Thomas was haunted by a strong precursor poet in the form of Pantycelyn, whilst Griffiths did not inspire that filial

³⁸⁶ R.S. Thomas, 'Dead Worthies' in *Welsh Airs* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987), p. 47.

‘anxiety of influence’ in Thomas because she was a woman.³⁸⁷ Nevertheless, as Bobi Jones suggests, she was an important presence in his work:

Ann Griffiths was R.S.’s conscience, the spirit he brought forth in Manafon through to Eglwys Fach before reaching Llŷn; she represented a mystical tradition which was totally different from the one R.S. professed...He envied her success in keeping to her course even in the worst of storms.³⁸⁸

He might envy her success, but he still writes two poems specifically about her, something he never did in response to Pantycelyn. In ‘Ann Griffith’, the speaker wears the mantle of some biblical narrator presenting us with God’s own words:

So God spoke to her,
 she the poor girl from the village
 without learning. ‘Play me,’
 he said, ‘on the white keys
 of your body. I have seen you dance
 for the bridegrooms that were not
 to be, while I waited for you
 under the ripening boughs of
 the myrtle. These people know me
 only in the thin hymns of
 the mind, in the arid sermons
 and prayers. I am the live God,
 nailed fast to the old tree
 of a nation by its unreal
 tears. I thirst, I thirst
 for the spring water. Draw it up
 for me from your heart’s well and I will change
 it to wine upon your un-kissed lips.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ Munday, ‘Ann heard Him speak’, p. 26.

³⁸⁸ See R. M. Jones, ‘R.S. Thomas a’r Genedl’, *Barddas*, 199 (1993), pp. 18-19: ‘Ann Griffiths oedd cydwybod R.S. Thomas, y bwgan a gododd ef ym Manafon ymlaen drwy Eglwys Fach [sic] i Llŷn; sef cynrychiolydd traddodiad cyfriniol pur wahanol i’r un a arddelai ef ei hun... Cenfigennu a wna ef tuag at ei llwyddiant i ddal ei chwrs yn gyson er gwaethaf stormydd.’

³⁸⁹ R.S. Thomas, ‘Ann Griffith’ in *Laboratories of the Spirit* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 29.

The poem wonderfully imitates Ann's biblical language. It takes us to the Song of Solomon, presenting 'Ann Griffith' as the Shulamite for the first seven lines, before placing her in her own context in Montgomeryshire. The poet transports us to Zechariah and the myrtle grove before taking us back to Wales again. He takes us to Calvary before backtracking to the scene where Christ encounters the woman at the well and ends with a reference to the marriage in Cana where Christ changed water into wine.

What did Ann hear? At first glance, the line: 'Play me [...] on the white keys of your body' (ll. 3-5) sounds like a patriarchal command from the Deity. But the reader only assumes that because the voice of a seemingly patriarchal narrator calls her 'the poor girl from the village' (l. 2). The 'white keys of your body' may refer to the physicality and power of Ann's poetry, which is compared with the 'white keys' of a keyboard instrument. Musically this is 'major' rather than 'minor' music; positive hymnody in contrast to so many other Welsh hymns which are well-known for being played in the minor keys, i.e. the *black* keys. In 'Fugue for Ann Griffiths', this is confirmed by the line: 'Your similes / were agricultural and profound' rather than 'thin hymns of / the mind'.³⁹⁰

The voice of patriarchy soon breaks because God seems as dependent on Ann as she is on him. God says that 'these people [referring to the Welsh] know me / only in the thin hymns of / the mind, in the arid sermons / and prayers' (ll. 9-12) whilst her language is described as 'spring water' (l.16) drawn from 'heart's wells' becoming wine upon her lips, combining two accounts where Jesus was sitting down with women (he sat on the well with the Samaritan (John 4) and with his mother in Cana (John 2)). Thomas combines the idea of the miraculous in Ann's poetry by presenting the image of 'unkissed lips' – a vivid indicator

³⁹⁰ R. S. Thomas, 'Fugue for Ann Griffiths' in *Welsh Airs* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987), p. 53.

of a natural, oral culture to which Ann belonged as well as her virginal, saint-like status. ‘Ann Griffith’ is a poem in dialogue with Ann’s writing, imagining an encounter between God and his bride. She remains silent and one feels that perhaps the poet is using Ann as a springboard towards understanding God. The voice of the poem is not dissimilar to Hopwood’s ‘Ond’. ‘I thirst, I thirst’ may be read as a longing similar to that the speaker in ‘Ond’ articulates.

But it is lack of experience or speaker’s envy, as in Hopwood’s poem, that drives R.S.’s most powerful poetic treatment of Ann. ‘Fugue for Ann Griffiths’ is a complex poem with its ten prosodically varied sections. Justin Wintle rightly draws our attention to the two time differentials: ‘the gap between then and now, the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and the present, and the gap between temporal time and eternal time, time outside time’.³⁹¹ The one constant thread is the presence of Ann herself. The poem begins by looking at an environment and whether it affects the likelihood of experiencing God. The ‘twentieth century sky’ could easily be mistaken for the ‘peace / of the nineteenth’ (ll. 4-6) because the ‘cables and pylons’ lining the modern sky reflect the cable-like threads produced by an arachnid-like Ann dancing a tarantella:

See her
at the dance, round
and round, hand
in hand, weaving
invisible threads. (ll.29-33)

As mentioned in Davies’s biography, the pre-converted Ann loved dancing which Thomas describes as the ‘earlier dancing / of the body’.³⁹² Thomas does not see a cessation of dancing but a change in dance partner. The phrase ‘hand / in hand’ suggests prayer-like gesture or

³⁹¹ Wintle, *Furious Interiors*, p. 403.

³⁹² Davies, *Cofiant Ann Griffiths*, p. 29.

even God holding her hand as he dances with her.³⁹³ ‘Invisible threads’ could also suggest that Ann is puppet-like, dancing to the will of the Bridegroom who is waiting for her under the Myrtles; this fits perfectly with Hopwood’s first edition of her poem where she states ‘ac nid o ddewis’| ‘not from choice’. Even so, Ann is ahead of the speaker, who I believe is Thomas, ‘that traveller up learning’s / slope’ (l.48). Where is she? She is experientially closer to God: ‘She is ahead of you on her knees’ (l.49). Ann is portrayed like a spirit, an eternal pilgrim figure who, although ‘decomposed / is composed again in her hymns’ (ll. 50-51) – although the pun the poet uses is especially poor. Thomas then portrays her differently – she is a ‘figure-head of a ship’ (l.59), leaning faithfully over the ‘fathoms / of anguish’ (ll.67-68) of the existential or experiential ‘rough seas’ (l.65), Christ being the pilot of her soul. This image is reflected, or contrasted, in another poem ‘Waiting’:

now, leaning far out
over an immense depth, letting
your name go and waiting,
somewhere between faith and doubt,
for the echoes of its arrival.³⁹⁴

Both pilgrims, in ‘Fugue’ and ‘Waiting’ are ‘leaning far out’ but their company is not the same. Ann is accompanied by ‘a trinity of persons’ who keep her on course whilst the speaker in ‘Waiting’ asks similar questions to Rowan Williams’s speaker: ‘Face to face? Ah, no / God’ (*F*, 32, ll.1-2) – questioning and answering in an ambiguous manner. As I have discussed elsewhere, the ‘trinity of persons’ steering Griffiths is both God and the stars.³⁹⁵ She gazes at Jesus ‘her lover’ whilst Thomas looks at the ‘great absence’ (*F*, 48, l. 1) which

³⁹³ There is an echo here of William Carlos Williams’s ‘The Dance’: ‘In Brueghel’s great picture, The Kermess, / the dancers go round, they go round and / around’... See William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume II 1939*, ed. by Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 2001), p. 58.

³⁹⁴ See R.S. Thomas, ‘Waiting’ in *Frequencies* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 32.

³⁹⁵ See Munday, ‘Ann heard Him speak’, p. 22: ‘In the context of navigation, the three persons might refer to the three stars in Orion’s belt– Zeta, Epsilon and Delta.’

‘is like a presence’ (l. 2) and does not see God. Similarly, in the poem ‘Night Sky’, ‘Godhead / is the colonisation by mind / of untenanted space’ (F, 18, ll. 7-9), God remains the ‘no / God’ (F, 32, ll. 1-2) of ‘Waiting’, they call out a name ‘looking / in your direction’ (F, 32, ll. 11-12); Thomas’s pilgrim is looking into the dark rather than into the light. Again, he, like Williams, are pilgrims on the *via negativa*.

The experience of Griffiths and Thomas are very different. ‘Fugue for Ann Griffiths’ states that Ann encountered the ‘One / with his eye on her’ (ll. 35-36) and the fact that ‘she saw him’ (WA, 51, l.1) suggests an experiential success that Thomas seeks and fails to achieve; this is characterised by the poignant line: ‘[a] forgiveness / [that is] too impossible to believe in’ (55, ll. 1-2). Ann sees Jesus as lover. For Thomas, Jesus ‘is a face / gathering moss’ (WA, 54, ll. 10-11), ‘a myth’ (l. 12) which is slowly being forgotten because his voice is getting quieter— ‘the effect of the recession of our belief’ (WA, 54, l. 15). Christ is a concept placed on the ‘wrong end / of the spectrum under the Doppler / effect’ (ll. 12-15), which results in a silence.

Their different experiences are manifested by the multivalent sylvan images that reappear throughout the ‘Fugue’. Ann sees Christ ‘under the branches,’ which brings Hymn XIII back to our minds. This reference is made possible by Ann’s *experiencing* of two further trees. Firstly, the tree of Calvary whereby ‘that forgiveness / too impossible to believe in’ (55, ll. 1-2) was acquired by the sacrificial and atoning death of Jesus Christ. The second is her own tree, possibly of language, on which she is crucified daily because of her experiential agony during the composition of her hymns. Thomas sees the deciduous green tree (WA, 55, l. 7) of language renewed constantly. Every hymn she wrote was a kind of oxymoronic experience because her ‘flesh [was] trembling’ (WA, 54, l. 35) ‘at the splendour of [...] forgiveness’ (WA, 55, l. 1). This is Thomas’s contribution to the paradoxes of Ann’s poetry.

Both poets were sufferers. Ann is a suffering poet because of her constant musing on the death of her Saviour. She is depicted as a spirit in rapture, a pilgrim-soul, ‘her face, [a] figure-head of a ship / outward bound’ as the spirit of Wales (WA, 51) recalling the Dolanog carving of Ann like a nautical figurehead.³⁹⁶ She is portrayed as a kind of crucified effigy on the front of a ship before fusing into a ‘bone bough / at eternity’s window’ (WA, 54) suggesting that Griffiths becomes a part of the green tree of her own poetry. The experiential agony of an absent Saviour, meditation on the scenes of Golgotha, and writing about the agonies of *her* Saviour enables the formation of a Kierkegaardian poet: an ‘unhappy [wo]man who hides deep anguish in [her] heart’ to create poetry, for the ‘lips are so formed that when the sigh and cry pass through them, it sounds like lovely music’.³⁹⁷ The evolving metaphor of the tree is the greatest success in the poem. Ann Griffiths sang at ‘eternity’s window’ (WA, 54, l. 35) and saw Christ ‘stand / under the branches’ (WA, 51, ll. 1-2) of ‘the myrtle’ (WA, 50, l. 14). She experienced God in a way that Thomas sought to imitate:

I have waited for him
under the tree of science
and he has not come.

(ERS, 89)

Thomas’s pilgrim is not only a ‘slow / traveller’ (F, 18, ll. 16-17) but remains lost because he simply cannot hear ‘the one who called’ (WA, 55, l. 6) and directed Ann. The tree that Thomas goes to has ‘boughs / [that] are of plastic’ (l. 9) implying artificiality. Christ remains a stranger in Thomas’s poem whilst Ann is a silent, ghost-like figure who, like God, is always ahead of Thomas – out of reach.

³⁹⁶ This effigy, based on contemporary descriptions, is in the Ann Griffiths Memorial Chapel (opened in July 1904) at Dolanog, a village near her home. For a reproduction, see ‘Ann Griffiths (1776–1805)’, *Gwefan Ann Griffiths Website*, Cardiff University, www.anngriffiths.cardiff.ac.uk/, accessed 22 June 2017. See Munday, ‘Ann heard Him speak’, p. 26.

³⁹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, p. 1.

Conclusion

These modern responses showcase the importance of Ann in the tradition of praise but also in the tradition of doubt. Her poetry has given rise to religious writing which seeks to transcend orthodoxy, and continues to do so. Her verse is an inspiration to poets and thinkers who are always looking for a fresh idiom heightened by an experience, whether it is spiritual, linguistic, or existential. This chapter has shown how Ann stands at the centre of what seems to be a distinct *Calvinistic* aesthetic within Welsh poetry. It has also shown the lasting influence of her words, her mystical experience, and her position as mother, sister and inspiration to many contemporary poets – whether they are religious or not. Calvinistic Mysticism was a phenomenon which powerfully manifested itself in late eighteenth-century Wales and, I argue, it heralded a modern poetic that remains with us to this day.

CHAPTER 2

‘Gravitating [...] to this ground’ – Traversing the Nonconformist Nation[s] (c. 1800-1914)

*The Methodist revival gave Welsh prose and verse a separate character, a new idiom...
...the greatest Welsh lyrics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are certainly hymns.
Their grandeur and intellectual power make them major poetry. These are national
characteristics that a literary historian, be he Christian or unbeliever, must in loyalty to
objective truth maintain.*³⁹⁸

Saunders Lewis, ‘Welsh Literature and Nationalism’

*To understand a nineteenth-century Welshman, and indeed for a twentieth-century Welshman
to understand himself, it is essential to know to which denomination or religious sect his
immediate ancestors belonged.*³⁹⁹

Emyr Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition*

The previous chapter focussed on the phenomenon called ‘Calvinistic Mysticism’ and located Ann Griffiths at the centre of what seems to be a distinct Calvinistic aesthetic which shaped Welsh poetics in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Wales, heralding a modern religious poetic that, I argue, remains with us to this day. Griffiths’s poetry transcended orthodoxy by finding a fresh idiom, heightened by spiritual, linguistic, and existential experiences. The leading Griffiths scholar, A.M. Allchin, concluded that, though her work is idiosyncratic, it is also paradoxically typical, for a common denominator in Welsh verse is a tradition of praise.⁴⁰⁰ However, the first chapter’s analysis of the work of Griffiths revealed that a tradition of praise ran alongside a tradition of doubt, or an individual’s personal wrestling with God. The nineteenth century seems to see a drifting away from this experiential aesthetic towards a kind of millenarianism which sees a radical shift from spiritual to social – the balance between praise and doubt was being disrupted.

³⁹⁸ Saunders Lewis, ‘Welsh Literature and Nationalism’, in *Presenting Saunders Lewis*, ed. by A.R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), p. 142.

³⁹⁹ Emyr Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1983 [2000]), p. 101. .

⁴⁰⁰ See Allchin, *Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition*.

Ann supposedly belongs to one of Tony Conran's two strands of modern Welsh culture. The first is *buchedd* culture which means a special sort of society, a 'way of life' or 'ethos' rooted in Methodism.⁴⁰¹ The other strand is *traddodiad*, or 'tradition', 'the ancient culture of Wales, grounded in a devotion to locality and kin, history and myth, finding its main expression in Welsh language and literature'.⁴⁰² Malcom Ballin summarises *buchedd* – the tradition which Ann seems to belong to – by locating it with the people:

The *buchedd* originated in Welsh Non-conformity. It includes the culture of eisteddfodau and serious choral music, seen as welling up from the people (especially in male-voice choirs) closely associated with a sense of stable and warm family life, and a well-developed proletarian consciousness.⁴⁰³

Ballin notes that music – which would have been predominantly religious – was one of the building blocks of that culture. In discussing Idris Davies and the end of that culture, Conran notes what the 'two great initiation rites' of that culture were:

The revival meeting, with its hymns and sermons on the one hand, and on the other the solitary soul wrestling with the scriptures. The relation between the two is the polarization that produced the *buchedd* in the first place. A Pantycelyn hymn is in its nature an embodiment of that polarization – an expression of individual longing for fulfilment and meaning that is yet sung as an expression of social solidarity and uplift.⁴⁰⁴

Arguably, this balanced relation between the individual and the collective nurtured that Calvinistic aesthetic. On the one hand, the hymns of Pantycelyn and Griffiths reflect the

⁴⁰¹ Conran, *Frontiers*, p.1: 'It [Anglo-Welsh poetry] derives from a special sort of society, which I shall call the *buchedd* from a Welsh word meaning a 'way of life' or 'ethos'. In this third aspect, it is more like poetry in English written by Americans. American society, like Welsh, was consciously without an upper-class, deliberately egalitarian, puritanical in morals, a product of cultural revolution following the breakup of established social patterns'.

⁴⁰² Paul Robichaud, *Making the Past Present: David Jones, the Middle Ages and Modernism* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), p. 49.

⁴⁰³ Malcolm Ballin, *Irish Periodical Culture, 1937-1972: Genre in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 148.

⁴⁰⁴ Conran, *Frontiers*, p. 11.

belief in *Unconditional Election*, which states that God chose individuals whom he pleased to bring to knowledge of himself.⁴⁰⁵ But they also reflect the Calvinistic doctrine of *Limited Atonement* (or Particular Redemption) whereby God the Son died for his particular people – the collective. As Conran notes, a Calvinistic Methodist hymn (by Pantycelyn, Griffiths, etc.) ‘is in its nature an embodiment of that polarization’; the form is central in the formation of a poetic aesthetic. This is a form in which the *agones* between praise and doubt, individual and society, belief and unbelief, seem to characterise that new idiom born out of the Methodist phenomenon which Saunders Lewis writes about in his short essay ‘Welsh Literature and Nationalism’.⁴⁰⁶ Lewis argues that the hymn developed into Wales’s ‘national’ poetry in the nineteenth century. His ideas about that new idiom, as well as the central importance of the hymn form, are the foundation stones of this chapter.

The main aim of this chapter is to traverse and to interrogate the so-called Nonconformist Nation in the nineteenth-century and to view its poetic output. This chapter argues that it is not only vital to understand the social implications of denominationalism or religious sectarianism but it is also vitally important to understand the theologies that shaped them and affected the poetry which followed.

Perhaps the most important theme which unites the whole chapter is an ideological shift which manifests itself in both society and theology, and therefore, in the hymns too.

According to M. Wynn Thomas:

⁴⁰⁵ See section on ‘Nonconformist Nation[s]’.

⁴⁰⁶ Lewis, ‘Welsh Literature and Nationalism’, p. 142.

As the nineteenth-century progressed, emphasis within Welsh Nonconformity shifted from a preoccupation with the spiritual state of *the individual* to a concern for the welfare of *the collective*.⁴⁰⁷

The Baptist historian T. M. Bassett confirms this statement,⁴⁰⁸ as does E. Wyn James:

[The nineteenth century saw] an increasing number of hymns relating to the corporate life of the community of believers. This development reflects in part the institutionalizing of denominational life in the course of the century, and in particular the need of the new Calvinistic Methodist denomination for hymns of *public worship* in addition to those of *personal experience*.⁴⁰⁹

These ‘hymns of public worship’ as well as those of ‘personal experience’ reflect Conran’s balanced dichotomy of struggling soul and close-knit community. This balance was tipping towards ‘public’ as the nineteenth century progressed. The poet and critic Alun Llywelyn-Williams helpfully sums up this transition using the changes apparent between the hymns of Pantycelyn (1717-1791) and the later hymns of Elfed (1860-1953), two hymn writers who embody the so-called shift from personal to collective:⁴¹⁰

One should note that society was less complex for Pantycelyn than it was for Elfed. On the whole, it was all to do with emphasis and starting point. Pantycelyn looked at society through the lens of his own experience, his personal experience, direct, subjective, – that was the starting point. When looking at society, he saw its members as a cluster of individuals rather than an impersonal host. He did not see so much a sinful world but a world full of sinners, and he, like Paul, was the chief.’⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 32. My emphasis. It is important to note that Calvinism is actually preoccupied with the redemption of ‘the elect’ (which is a collective phrase) but within that framework personal salvation is emphasised. When referring to ‘spiritual state’, theologically, Thomas means ‘personal salvation’ not a totally solipsistic doctrine.

⁴⁰⁸ T. M. Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea: Ilston House, 1977), pp. 183–4.

⁴⁰⁹ James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 259. My emphasis.

⁴¹⁰ See Section 2.4 for a discussion on Elfed’s hymns.

⁴¹¹ Alun Llywelyn-Williams, ‘Canu Crefydd yr Ugeinfed Ganrif’, *Y Traethodydd*, 57:465 (1952), 161-172 (pp. 163-164). My translation. ‘Dylid sylwi [...] fod cymdeithas dipyn yn llai cymhleth i Bantycelyn nag ydoedd i Elfed, ond mater o bwyslais ac o fan cychwyn yw hyn yn y bôn. Edrych ar gymdeithas yr oedd Pantycelyn trwy ddrych ei brofiad ei hun, ei brofiad personol, uniongyrchol, goddrychol, mewn-dro – dyna’r man cychwyn. Wrth edrych ar gymdeithas, gwelodd ei haelodau, nid fel tyrfa amhersonol, ond fel bagad o unigolion fel yntau. Gwelodd nid byd pechadurus yn gymaint â byd o bechaduriaid, ac yntau, fel Paul, y pennaf ohonynt.’

Conran's *buchedd* cultures, and the Calvinism in its poetry, were fuelled by this emphasis on the individual and society as a cluster of individuals. Llywelyn-Williams documents the shift:

By the end of the previous century, the emphasis begins to shift and is placed on society *rather than* the individual: and as a result, an emphasis on the social gospel rather than the sinner's personal conviction.⁴¹²

Whilst documenting these important shifts, it is vital that we keep in mind Emyr Humphreys' words which I quoted at the beginning of the chapter. The Nonconformist Nation was the crucible that forged the poetry of the twentieth century; two particular examples will be looked at in the third chapter. But we must begin by traversing the denominational hinterland to which their immediate ancestors belonged. The main aim of this survey is not to address meticulously the whole poetic corpus, but rather to search out those patterns, the theological trends, and the social issues that indicate this shift towards the 'collective'.

The Hymn – an evolving form in a changing context

The Form

As Lewis notes, the Welsh hymns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a 'major' form of poetry and they reflect the society that produced them.⁴¹³ The hymn was a major genre in the sense of its ability to express a collective *ethnie* but also its ability to transcend mere aesthetic value and enter the realm of spiritual, psychological, and national value. The choir culture which became a symbol of Wales was nurtured in the chapels. According to Alan Luff, 'the hymn has become the folk-song of the Welsh'; its distinct four-part harmony

⁴¹² Llywelyn-Williams, 'Canu Crefydd yr Ugeinfed Ganrif', p. 164: 'Erbyn diwedd y ganrif ddiwethaf, mae'r pwyslais wedi dechrau symud a'i osod ar y gymdeithas *yn hytrach* nag ar yr unigolyn: ac o ganlyniad ar yr efengyl gymdeithasol yn hytrach nag ar argyhoeddiad y pechadur.'

⁴¹³ Lewis, 'Welsh Literature and Nationalism', p. 142.

(bass, tenor, soprano and alto) became a kind of indicator for an innate ‘Welshness’.⁴¹⁴ E.

Wyn James confirms Luff’s statement:

It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the Welsh hymn, not only to the religious life of Wales, but also to many other aspects of Welsh cultural life and as a badge of Welsh national identity.⁴¹⁵

The hymn, according to James, transcends the mere religious framework. The long evolution of its form cannot be wholly addressed in this chapter.

But what is a hymn? A hymn is, very simply, a ‘song of praise to God’.⁴¹⁶ According to Rivers and Wykes, the hymn is one of the most kinetic forms of poetry; it transcends one religious tradition and becomes an umbrella term for numerous types of praise.⁴¹⁷ The Greek word ὕμνοις (*hymnos*) originally meant a song of praise for gods, heroes and conquerors. New Testament Greek uses other nouns such as ψαλμοῖς (*psalmos*) and ᾠδὴν (*ōdē*) which denote different types of hymns.⁴¹⁸ A psalm, for example, is a sacred piece of music accompanied by a stringed instrument.⁴¹⁹ In Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians, he exhorts them

⁴¹⁴ Alan Luff, *Welsh Hymns and their Tunes* (London: Stainer and Bell, 1990), p. 26. Luff also quotes Gerald of Wales who, in 1188, noted: ‘When they come together to make music, the Welsh sing their traditional songs, not in unison, as is done elsewhere, but in parts, in many modes and modulations.’ p. 86.

⁴¹⁵ E. Wyn James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’ in Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (eds.), *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 229.

⁴¹⁶ *OED*: Interestingly, the Greek noun *hymnos* can refer to a song, poem, or speech. St. Augustine, in his commentary on the 148th psalm, defines the hymn as "a song with praise to God," and this is so far justified that many of the best-known and most popular hymns are derived, directly or indirectly, from the praising psalms. See M. Pauline Parker, ‘The Hymn as a Literary Form’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 8:4 (Summer, 1975), 392-419 (p. 399).

⁴¹⁷ Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes, ‘Introduction’, in *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

⁴¹⁸ See Ephesians 5:19.

⁴¹⁹ The ancient Greek ψαλμός meant a twitching (of the strings of the harp) or the sound of the cithara or harp. In Hellenistic Greek, it denoted a song sung to the harp. A psalm in the Septuagint and New Testament ψάλλειν meant to twitch, twang, or play with the fingers.

to speak to one another in ‘psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs’;⁴²⁰ in exhorting, he also names the different *types* of praise for the modern reader; they all have a common denominator in the concept of Αἰνεῖτε (*ainesis*), without defining the particular object of that praise.⁴²¹

The Changing Context

In the previous chapter, Ann Griffiths’s hymns were seen as a perfect example of hymns belonging to an aesthetic formed and nurtured in a rural pre-industrial context.⁴²² However, the nineteenth century was a period of demographic, democratic, and religious change. The population of Wales grew from just over half a million in 1801 to over a million in 1851, and reached almost two and a half million by 1911.⁴²³ The industrialisation in south-east Wales meant that about 60 per cent of the population were living in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire by 1900.⁴²⁴ Conran’s ‘Welsh way of life’ was being radically disrupted.

Politically, the early *radicalism* of the eighteenth century turned into nineteenth-century *reformism*, which resulted in numerous suffrage reform acts, especially the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884. The 1872 ‘Secret Ballot Act’ was also a significant step towards Liberal Ascendancy in Wales which became the Nonconformist party, even when Labour drew the allegiance of the working class. This shift to the collective also coincided, or

⁴²⁰ λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς [ἐν] ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς, ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ, | Talking to *yourselves* psalms and hymns and songs spiritual [Literal translation].

⁴²¹ Ephesians 5:19.

⁴²² If we were to draw a map and plot the locations of the earlier Welsh hymn-writers, Carmarthenshire, and other rural counties, would have the densest population.

⁴²³ Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 310: ‘Wales had about 500,000 inhabitants in 1770; it had 1,163,000 in 1851. The population doubled in about two generations, an increase which previously had needed twelve generations to accomplish.’

⁴²⁴ Jones, *Faith and Crisis of a Nation*, pp. 5-6.

was intensified, by the rapid progress of the Socialist Movement in Wales. According to M. Wynn Thomas, by the end of the nineteenth century:

The old Nonconformist nation [was being displaced] by a new, emergent, Socialist nation. The Gospel was being replaced by the Social Gospel; working people were turning for guidance and leadership more to the officials of 'New Unionism' than to ministers of religion.⁴²⁵

Thomas is noting a general trend and perhaps this shift was not as clear cut as he suggests.⁴²⁶

It is important to remember that, as Ieuan Gwynedd Jones puts it:

The massive growth of Nonconformity in Wales was itself the most characteristic protest movement of the time. The moral and cultural values of religion made for debate rather than conflict, for consensus rather than confrontation, and respect for legality and the constitution in the pursuit of political ends.⁴²⁷

Jones may be referring to the growth of political liberalism here rather than socialism, but it is still crucial to note, as K.O. Morgan does, that 'nonconformity, not industrialism, was to form the basis of Welsh social and political development'.⁴²⁸

The shift from individual to collective was intensified with the 1847 publication of the *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, one of the pivotal

⁴²⁵ M. Wynn Thomas, *The Nations of Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), p. 219.

⁴²⁶ Other historians have studied the complex relationship that existed between Socialism and Nonconformity in Wales. See Martin Wright, *Wales and Socialism: Political Culture and National Identity before the Great War* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016). See also the work of Andy Croll, Matthew Cragoe, and K.O. Morgan. The best work on the relationship between Nonconformity and Socialism is the work of Robert Pope especially *Building Jerusalem: Nonconformity, Labour and the Social Question in Wales 1906-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998) and "'Pilgrims Through a Barren Land: Nonconformists and Socialists in Wales 1906-1914,' *Trafodion Anrhydeddus Gymdeithas y Cymmrodorion*, New Series, 2000, Vol. 7 (2001), 149-163.

⁴²⁷ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'Introduction' in *People and Protest: Wales 1815-1880*, ed. by Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), pp. 1-6 (p. 6).

⁴²⁸ K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics 1868-1922* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), p. 13.

moments in the history of modern Wales. The ignorance of the three young commissioners meant that educational weaknesses were exaggerated; moreover, they had no knowledge of Welsh language or working-class cultures.⁴²⁹ Furthermore, encouraged by Anglican clergymen, the report discusses the purportedly lax sexual mores of Welsh women and asserts that ‘the immorality of the Welsh was a by-product of their allegiance to the chapel’.⁴³⁰ The Report’s findings were refuted by numerous people including the influential Ieuan Gwynedd (1820-1852) and the lesser known Jane Williams ‘Ysgafell’ (1806-1885).⁴³¹ A new agenda was to ‘codi’r hen wlad yn ei hol’ | to lift the old country out of this scandalous mire. Arguably, along with other factors,⁴³² it was this particular Report that welded the denominations together into a single body bent on advertising its injured virtue: the Nonconformist nation.

The anger and jealousy of the Anglican clergymen who vilified ‘their’ people in the 1847 treachery, attests to the religious changes that happened at the same time as the Blue Books. This episode indicated a bitter split between Anglicans and Nonconformists but paradoxically there was also consensus and uniformity in the same period. Nonconformity was experiencing its golden age; powerful denominations, influential publications, charismatic preachers, and religious revivals (especially the 1859 revival) moulded Wales into a Christian country. The demographic and democratic boost went side by side with the rapid growth of denominational religion. Between 1801 and 1851, the number of Nonconformist chapels grew from 1,300 to 3,800; that is, the equivalent of one chapel

⁴²⁹ See Davies, *A History of Wales*, pp. 379-381.

⁴³⁰ Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 380.

⁴³¹ Ieuan Gwynedd, *Facts, Figures and Statements in Illustrations of the Dissent and Morality of Wales* (London: Benjamin L. Green, 1849) and Jane Williams (Ysgafell) *Artegall: or, Remarks on the Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (London: Longman, 1848).

⁴³² Such as the ‘Evangelical Consensus’, growing nationalism, and the Welsh language.

opening every week.⁴³³ There was also an evangelical accord, or ‘consensus’, which united the denominations:

It was [a period] characterised by itinerant preaching, regular revivals, and what has been called the ‘Evangelical consensus’, a common theological and experiential ethos – Calvinistic and evangelical – which united the vast majority of Welsh Nonconformists (and many Anglicans) regardless of their denominational affiliation.⁴³⁴

This ‘consensus’ is one important factor which contributed to the so-called Nonconformist nation. But an ‘Evangelical consensus’ does not wholly explain the emergence of a quasi-theocracy in Victorian Wales. As mentioned above, the old radicalism of the dissenters had slowly evolved into reformism. This resulted in a degree of respectability where the Nonconformists became the social conformists in Wales. Part of this respectability was a uniformity which (in all but name) *established* the chapel as *the* established church in Wales.⁴³⁵

Theological changes were also occurring. Initially, the old clash between two fundamental theological convictions, the Calvinists and the Arminians, dominated the arena;⁴³⁶ this was called the ‘Great Arminian Controversy,’ which had been present in the dissenting churches since the early eighteenth century.⁴³⁷ But other theological debates, such

⁴³³ James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, pp. 256-7.

⁴³⁴ James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 257.

⁴³⁵ See Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, p. 102.

⁴³⁶ This branch of theology follows the writings of Jacobinus Arminius (1560-1609), the latinised name of the Dutch theologian Jakob Hermanszoon. They stressed man’s free will in accepting or rejecting salvation, which also meant that one could fall from grace.

⁴³⁷ See: John Morgan Jones and William Morgan, John Aaron (trans.), *The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales*, Volume 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008 [1890]), p. 22: ‘But of all the arguments, that which brought about most quarrelling and resulted in the most grievous consequences was the ‘Great Arminian Controversy’. Arminian views began to leaven the Dissenting churches of Wales about the beginning of the eighteenth century. They were advanced by Mr Thomas Perrot, a tutor in the Dissenting Academy at Carmarthen; or, at least, the large majority of students who studied under him left the Academy as confirmed Arminians.’ It resembled Pelagianism (see chapter 4) and soon developed into Unitarianism.

as ‘The Atonement Controversy’ of the 1830s, the emergence of the Tractarians, the influence of philosophers like G.W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834),⁴³⁸ and the effect of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), shook Nonconformity’s foundations.⁴³⁹

Whilst these factors of change have been noted as obvious causes of gradual secularisation, Dominic Erdozain’s work has drawn attention to the subtle theological shifts that were occurring at the same time as some of ‘big’ battles mentioned above.⁴⁴⁰ Both Jeffrey Cox and Erdozain asked: ‘How does one intellectually deal with decline and vitality when they exist side by side?’⁴⁴¹ Drawing from Charles Taylor’s ideas about secularisation emerging from Christendom itself,⁴⁴² Erdozain suggested that a theological shift from an ‘internal’ concept of *sin* to an ‘external’ concept of *vice* meant that British Evangelicalism created its own ‘mechanism of secularisation’.⁴⁴³ Much of the so-called ‘success’ of Victorian religion was achieved at the cost of the soteriology that ‘had fired the religious boom’.⁴⁴⁴ Evangelicalism was culpable because it started preaching morality, a kind of outward reformation of character, rather than the old focus on a sinner coming as he was to Jesus Christ. Pictorially, this meant that if John Smith wanted to become a Christian, he would

⁴³⁸ They espoused an abstract religion based on human culture where the human spirit of ‘reason’ superseded revelation-based religion.

⁴³⁹ There were far more theological tensions, arguments, and developments in the nineteenth century. Some will be mentioned later on in this chapter.

⁴⁴⁰ See Dominic Erdozain, ‘The Secularisation of Sin in the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62:1 (January 2011), 59-88.

⁴⁴¹ See Jeffrey Cox, ‘Provincializing Christendom: the case of Great Britain’, *Church History*, lxxv (2006), 120-130 (p. 124).

⁴⁴² See especially Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴³ Erdozain, ‘The Secularisation of Sin’, p. 59.

⁴⁴⁴ Erdozain, ‘The Secularisation of Sin’, p. 59.

need to be morally spotless *before* coming rather than coming to Jesus in his sinful state. Erdozain uses the particular shift from Evangelicalism to the temperance agitation as a distillation of this theory.⁴⁴⁵ This shift from a ‘vertical relation’ with God to a ‘horizontal’ one meant that ‘religion and morality [were] confused’.⁴⁴⁶ Erdozain then argues that ‘this internal, nineteenth-century mutation [of theology] rendered subsequent challenges so demanding [...] once sin was socialised and ethicised as ‘vice’, so too was salvation’.⁴⁴⁷ This nuanced approach, whereby the finger of conviction turns from pointing at self to others, had a phenomenal influence on the collective theology of Wales.⁴⁴⁸

This territory is complicated further by being intensely religious and irreligious at the same time; this paradox is documented in R. Tudur Jones’s monumental study, *Ffydd ac Argyfwng Cenedl (Faith and Crisis of a Nation)* originally published in 1981 and 1982. Historians like Russell Davies and John Davies have also drawn attention to the blatant *irreligiosity* of the Victorian era.⁴⁴⁹ John Davies highlights that ‘the irreligious are a lost element in Welsh historiography’ because they left no written record.⁴⁵⁰ However, Jones, like Erdozain, draws attention to the more nuanced subtleties that count as being ‘irreligious’. The lack of Welsh-language education and institutions made the chapel ‘cultural centres’ rather than sacred spaces ‘which people attended because they conducted their affairs in Welsh

⁴⁴⁵ See Section on Temperance.

⁴⁴⁶ Erdozain, ‘The Secularisation of Sin’, pp. 60-65.

⁴⁴⁷ Erdozain, ‘The Secularisation of Sin’, p. 61.

⁴⁴⁸ See Section on Temperance.

⁴⁴⁹ See Russell Davies, *Secret Sins: Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire 1870-1920* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012) and Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 412.

⁴⁵⁰ Davies, *A History of Wales*, pp. 412-416.

rather than through faith in Jesus Christ'.⁴⁵¹ Gradually, the doctrinal foundations which had established the chapels had been abandoned and a cultural veneer of religiosity became a mask for agnosticism and even atheism. In Wales, as we will see in this chapter, these chapel spaces are actually de-sacralized.⁴⁵² I argue that R. Tudur Jones's 'crisis of faith' had its roots in the zenith of Nonconformist religion. Taking my cue from Erdozain's work, this chapter will show how the hymns reveal a shift in the collective theology of the people. Fundamentally, the individual was evolving from that 'struggling sinner' to a more nominal, socially-active 'Christian'.

The Formation of the Denominations and their effect on the 'hymn'

By the nineteenth century, all the major dissenting Christian denominations had been established in Wales.⁴⁵³ The original dissenting churches had been the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists.⁴⁵⁴ Following the Toleration Act of 1689, Trinitarian dissenters were given freedom to worship. Unitarians were not free until the Doctrine of the Trinity Act, 1813. The major denominations that developed from the original dissenting churches were the Calvinistic Methodists (1811), the Congregationalists (1832 and 1872)⁴⁵⁵, and the Baptists (1866). As a result of denominationalism, chapels became 'official' sacred spaces in

⁴⁵¹ Robert Pope, 'Editor's Preface' in R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and Crisis*, p. x.

⁴⁵² Sophie Gilliat-Ray has explored how sacred spaces in public institutions have changed over time. See Sophie Gilliat-Ray, 'From 'Chapel' to 'Prayer Room': The Production, Use, and Politics of Sacred Space in Public Institutions', *Culture and Religion*, 6:2 (2005), 287-308.

⁴⁵³ It is important to remember that some of the other smaller dissenting groups had formed their 'denominations' in the eighteenth century. The Moravians had ordained ministers in Britain since 1753. The Wesleyan Methodists began administering the Lord's Supper in their services in 1795. See Davies, *The History of Wales*, p. 332.

⁴⁵⁴ Some of the earliest churches were the independent church at Llanvaches (1639) and the Baptist church at Ilston, Gower (1649).

⁴⁵⁵ Some English speaking and Welsh speaking congregationalists joined the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1832. The vast majority of Welsh Congregationalists formed the Union of Welsh Independents in 1872. See also Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 282.

Wales and an ideal habitat for the hymn to evolve. Hymns were no longer totally unaccompanied and, by the early nineteenth century, the people could gather in chapel buildings without being persecuted or prohibited by authorities or other religious groups. A rivalry began in which denominations would compete to prove themselves superior to the other sects on everything from the magnificence of the façades of their temple-like chapels to the volume of their book publishing and the excellence of their congregational singing.

The production of denominational hymnbooks and periodicals had an immense impact on hymn production. Religious poems – whether they were sung or not – were mass produced and a rivalry erupted between the denominations. I have included some of these ‘religious poems’ as a sample from the archive of denominational periodicals (yellowed with age) that testify to the immense material output that this nation produced in the period under examination (c. 1800-1914). According to Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, the denominational periodicals were ‘so much a function of religion that it is almost possible to see the printing press as “an extension of the pulpit.”’⁴⁵⁶

The history of the denominational periodicals begins with the Calvinistic Methodists in 1799. *Y Trysorfa Ysprydol* (*The Spiritual Treasury*) was the first religious and denominational magazine to be published in Welsh. *Trysorfa* was the product of the eighteenth-century religious revival and its poetry reflects the idea of individual salvation discussed in the previous chapter. Its editors, Thomas Charles of Bala (1755-1814) and Thomas Jones of Denbigh (1756-1820) noted its aim quite clearly in their introductory

⁴⁵⁶ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, ‘Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales’ in David Smith (ed.), *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales 1780-1980* (London: Pluto, 1980), p. 66.

address: ‘Ein dymuniad hiraethlawn a pharaus yw lles eich eneidiau anfarwol’.⁴⁵⁷ However, the journal was short-lived due to difficulties of distribution and sale and the price of paper made publication a considerable risk.

Following the creation of the Calvinistic Methodist Presbyterian denomination in 1811, further publications soon appeared: *Goleuad Cymru* (The Light of Wales) in 1818 and *Y Drysorfa* (The Treasury) in 1831. The Wesleyan Methodists also established their own magazine called *Yr Eurgrawn Wesleyaidd* (*The Wesleyan Golden Treasury*) in 1809. The Independents (or Annibynwyr) created the first issue of *Y Dysgedydd* (The Instructor) in 1832 whilst the Baptists produced a weekly newspaper called *Seren Gomer* (*Star of Gomer*) from January 1814.⁴⁵⁸

Political upheaval in 1830s Europe and the suffrage reforms in Britain were reflected in the Welsh press. David ‘Brutus’ Owen – a failed Nonconformist minister with the Baptists and Independents – turned to journalism.⁴⁵⁹ He edited two Independent periodicals, *Lleuad yr Oes* (The Moon of these Times) and *Yr Efanglydd* (The Evangelist) before joining the Established Church and editing *Yr Haul* (*The Sun*), a denominational and church periodical established in 1835. This was the same year that *Y Diwygiwr* (The Reformer) was founded, serving the Independents of South Wales.

⁴⁵⁷ See *Y Trysorfa Ysprydol*: ‘Our sincere and constant desire is the welfare (or health) of your undying souls’. The word ‘hiraethlawn’ is interesting. It is as if the writers are looking back, and forward, to a golden prelapsarian age.

⁴⁵⁸ *Seren Gomer* had no official affiliation with the Baptists until 1880.

⁴⁵⁹ That which brought him notoriety in Wales was his letter (under the pseudonym Brutus) in *Seren Gomer*, March 1824, attacking the Welsh language.

Other publications include *Yr Ymofynydd* (The Inquirer) which the Unitarians established in 1847 and *Y Gwyllydydd* (The Sentinel) and *Y Gwladgarwr* (The Patriot, 1833) by the Established Church. Other magazines supported by the denominations were the many temperance magazines which include *Y Dirwestydd* (The Abstainer) which first appeared in 1836, *Y Seren Ddirwestol* (The Temperance Star) in 1837, *Y Dirwestydd Deheuol* (The Southern Abstainer) in 1838, and *Yr Adolygydd* (The Reviewer) which also appeared in 1838. Other non-denominational newspapers and print materials were looked at in order to gain a broad overview of the period. For example, *Y Gymraes* (The Welshwoman) and *Y Frythones* (The Female Cambro-Britain) are two important publications which were aimed at a female readership, and contained both verse and religious material. The rest of the hymns are collected from a range of hymnbooks which themselves acquired over time – and through the organisational skills of the Methodists – a quasi-holy status analogous to Scripture.

Hymn Singing

Preaching had been the focal point in the past but after 1859 the ‘Gymanfa Ganu’ / ‘singing festival’ began to dominate the culture of Wales.⁴⁶⁰ There is no better illustration of the significant shift in the nature of religious worship from the ones or twos singing in farmhouses to that collective gathering of hundreds under the canopies of the newly-erected ornate temples of Nonconformity. Hymn-production took place largely where religious revivals occurred. From the 1780s, as revival influences spread north, so did hymn production (Ann Griffiths, *Pedr Fardd* (1775-1855), and *Ieuan Glan Geirionydd* (1795-1855)

⁴⁶⁰ Ieuan Gwyllt organised the first ‘Cymanfa Ganu’ in Aberdare in 1859. This movement, which had initially been instigated to improve chapel singing, has been described as one of Wales’s ‘most distinctive contributions to the world of music’. In 1895, 280 festivals were held by the denominations in one year. See Rhidian Griffiths, ‘Musical Life in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Glamorgan County History*, VI, ed. Prys Morgan (Cardiff: Glamorgan History Trust, 1988), p. 376 and E. Wyn James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 263. The ‘Cymanfa Ganu’ still occurs today and one is even broadcast every Sunday night on S4C’s *Dechrau Canu*, *Dechrau Canmol*. These singing festivals also occur in North America.

are some examples). However, the South still produced its own stock in the form of the work of Thomas William (1761-1844) from the Vale of Glamorgan and that of David Charles (1762-1834) ‘whose meditative, doctrinal hymns’ are considered by E. Wyn James to be ‘second only to those of Ann Griffiths’.⁴⁶¹ James makes an important point about nineteenth-century hymn-writing when he observes that:

Whereas eighteenth-century hymn-writers frequently published their work in small volumes composed almost entirely of hymns, together with the occasional elegy or religious song, nineteenth-century hymn-writers often first published their hymns in the poetry columns of the burgeoning periodical press and later included them as a section within a volume of their collected poems.⁴⁶²

Pedr and Eben Fardd are good examples of these poets who also wrote hymns.

Another important development was the evolution of the hymn-book which, after 1790, included both the words and the tunes. The first was *Mawl yr Arglwydd / The Lord's Praise* which appeared in 1816. By 1860, fifty collections like this one had been published; each denomination had their own hymnbook and favourite tunes. The Calvinistic Methodists produced theirs in 1869, and the Baptists and Independents did the same by the 1890s. Most of the hymns were Calvinistic in tone. However, the growth of liberal theology and the Social Gospel can be seen in the very structure of the hymnbooks. For example, James notes how the section on ‘Heaven’ in the Calvinistic Methodist hymn-book of 1896 is replaced by a section on ‘Social and National Hymns’ in the 1927 hymnal.⁴⁶³ Rivers and Wykes point out that its journey involved numerous people:

⁴⁶¹ E. Wyn James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 257.

⁴⁶² James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 258. Also see Huw Walters, ‘The Periodical Press to 1914’, in *A Nation and Its Books: A History of the Book in Wales*, ed. by Philip Henry Jones and Eiluned Rees (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1998), pp. 197–208.

⁴⁶³ For a discussion of the hymns in this section of the 1927 hymnal see Robert Pope, ‘Emynau Newid Cymdeithas’, *Y Traethodydd* (2009), 101–20. The 1896 hymnal, *Llyfr Hymnau y Methodistiaid Calffinaidd* (‘The

We find hymns moving from collection to collection and being given the stamp of the individual editor, and the language of the original hymn being modified for theological and literary reasons.⁴⁶⁴

The nineteenth century was a time for modification. This chapter will now seek to analyse the so-called ‘pulling together’, both socially and in the form of pulling hymns together into books, which occurred after 1847. In keeping with the pattern of the previous chapter, I have identified and highlighted some concepts which stood out in my archival research. The concepts to be analysed in the hymns are: the Nonconformist Nation[s], Death and Memory, and Temperance.

The Nonconformist Nation [s]

According to Thomas Rees, of the Congregational Memorial College in Brecon:

No children of any century will be prouder of their flag nor louder in their praise to Him who ordains their times and seasons, than those of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶⁵

Rees is referring here to Wales and the Nonconformist nation, two concepts that ‘were joined so closely that not even a wizard could discern the seam’.⁴⁶⁶ The image that Rees presents is that of a single people, praising a particular ‘God’, in a particular form; all are fundamentally Welsh. As previously noted, by 1890, Wales had become ‘Gwlad y Gân’ | ‘The Land of Song’,⁴⁶⁷ and the hymn was seen as the people’s preferred poetic form. In Eben Fardd’s

Hymn-Book of the Calvinistic Methodists’), was published by the General Assembly of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Connexion. The 1927 hymnal, *Llyfr Emynau y Methodistiaid Calfinaidd a Wesleiaidd* (‘The Hymn-Book of the Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodists’), was a joint publication by the Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodist denominations. See James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 264.

⁴⁶⁴ Rivers and Wykes, *Dissenting Praise*, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁵ Thomas Rees, ‘Y Flwyddyn 1900’, *Celt* (28 December 1900), p. 4: ‘Canrif ardderchog yw hi wedi bod pan gydgyferfydd yr holl ganrifoedd; ni bydd plant un ganrif yn fwy balch o’u baner, nac yn uwch eu clod i’r Hwn sydd yn trefnu yr amserau a’r cyfnodau, nag eiddo y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg.’

⁴⁶⁶ Jones, *Faith and Crisis of a Nation*, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁷ The term was first used around 1876. See John Davies, Menna Baines, Nigel Jenkins, and Peredur L. Lynch (eds.), *Gwyddoniadur Cymru* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 408. In the 1860s, the tonic sol-fa movement revolutionised music in Wales because thousands could now sing to music. In 1872 and 1873, ‘Côr

introduction to his *Hymnau* of 1861, the poet is portrayed as far more useful to the ‘werin’ | ‘folk’ or ‘common people’ by writing hymns rather than giving his time to the complex, strict-metre *cynghanedd*.⁴⁶⁸

However, the ‘Nonconformist nation’ and the idea of a *Nonconformist* God are both problematic concepts. Anthony D. Smith argues that the nation is best looked at through the lens of collective cultural units and sentiments under the rubric of ethnic identities.⁴⁶⁹

Concepts such as ‘form’, ‘identity’, ‘myth’, ‘symbol’ and communication codes are all important when understanding an ‘*ethnie*’ rather than any supposedly primordial concept of ‘nationhood’. Drawing on Smith, M. Wynn Thomas argues that these concepts allow us:

[...] to explore the shared meanings and experiences that bind individuals across the generations into what has been historically proved to be a highly durable form of community, well capable of surviving without the apparatus of statehood. For Smith, it is its distinctive ‘myth-symbol complex’ that constitutes the core of any *ethnie*. And it is this ‘myth-symbol complex’ that acts as the mythomoteur, or generative driving force, of the *ethnie*’s development.⁴⁷⁰

Part of this distinctive ‘myth-symbol complex’ in Wales was a fractured, non-conforming, and in a sense, schismatic religion; this is the shared meaning of Welsh religious experience. After all, Thomas goes on to note that “The Nonconformist nation’ was not solely Methodist

Mawr’, under Caradog (Griffith Rhys Jones), won the Crystal Palace choir competition. It can be argued that the treason of the Blue Books encouraged a whole generation to re-fashion the image of Wales. ‘Gwald y Gân’ was the outcome.

⁴⁶⁸ Eben Fardd (Ebenezer Thomas 1802-1863), *Hymnau* (Dinbych: Thomas Gee, 1861), p. 3. ‘Wrth ystyried leied y mae y werin yn gyffredinol yn ddarllen ar ganiadau caeth, a phryddestau, a’r cyffelyb – gan nad mor grefyddol y byddont – daeth awydd arnaf i gynnig i’w sylw ychydig o HYMNAU, gan ewyllysio trwy hyny helaethu ychydig ar ddefnyddioldeb fy nawn o’r fath ag ydyw, a gwneud fy hun yn fwy gwasanaethgar at ogoniant Duw ac adeiladaeth dyn.’

⁴⁶⁹ See Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁷⁰ M. Wynn Thomas, ‘Morgan Llwyd and the Formation of the ‘Nonconformist Nation’ in *Writing Wales, From the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. by Stewart Mottram and Sarah Prescott (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 111-130 (p. 114).

in character' and its foundations were complex.⁴⁷¹ He argues that the effect of Morgan Llwyd's seventeenth-century Puritan writings pointed:

[...] the mythomoteur of traditional Welsh society in radical new directions. He thereby enabled the long-term development of a new form of Welsh ethnic identity – the eventual emergence, in mature form, of a Nonconformist narrative of Welsh nationhood.⁴⁷²

Perhaps a better word would be 'narratives' of nationhood: this 'myth-symbol complex' of fractured nonconformity which, paradoxically, constituted the core of the ethnies. The mythomoteur in Wales was never one single constitutive myth that gave this ethnic group its sense of purpose; but rather the 'myth-symbol complex' in Wales was this fractured, nonconforming religion, constructed within theologically-charged spaces which never were, or could be, a single outraged body. As M. Wynn Thomas's recent book argues, Wales was, and still is, a plural phenomenon.⁴⁷³ K. O. Morgan also writes that Nonconformity's 'very fragmentation was a sign of strength' – something that would later lead to political dominance.⁴⁷⁴

This fractured 'myth-symbol complex' reflects an older 'non-conformity' which is seen in the legends revolving around the early church in Britain. Initially, the Celtic church did not seem to conform to Rome. Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* speaks of the 'very few' who still retain the 'controls of truth and justice' (*ita cuncta veritatis ac iustitiae*) in Western Britain.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷¹ Thomas, 'Morgan Llwyd and the Formation of the 'Nonconformist Nation', p. 113.

⁴⁷² Thomas, 'Morgan Llwyd and the Formation of the 'Nonconformist Nation', p. 114.

⁴⁷³ Thomas, *The Nations of Wales*, p. 287.

⁴⁷⁴ Morgan, 'Wales in British Politics', p. 11.

⁴⁷⁵ Theodor Mommsen (ed.), *Gildas's De excidio Britanniae*, in: *Chronica Minora Saec. iv, v, vi, vii vol. 3, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, (Berlin repr. 1961), pp. 1-85. <http://www.vortigernstudies.org.uk/arthist/vortigernquotesgil.htm> [Accessed: 17/02/2017]. In the original: *tam*

Perhaps the most well-known instance of Celtic nonconformity is the account of Augustine's Oak recorded in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Angolorum* (Ecclesiastical History of the English People) completed in 731 A.D. Two meetings occurred at Augustine's Oak in c. 602-604 A.D. between the British bishops and Augustine of Canterbury, the representative of Rome who sought Catholic unity.⁴⁷⁶ Bede recounts that the meeting was attended by seven British Bishops and many most learned men from the monastery.⁴⁷⁷ He then tells us that Augustine observed that the British church did many things which were 'contrary to the customs of the universal Church'; it did not 'keep Easter at the proper time' or 'perform the sacrament of baptism [...] according to the rules of the Holy Roman and apostolic Church'.⁴⁷⁸ In the interim between the two meetings, the Britons had consulted an anchorite who advised them to follow Augustine only if he demonstrated the true humility of a man of God and rose to greet them when they arrived for the meeting. On their entrance, however, Augustine remained seated. The Celtic Bishops would not conform to Rome and call Augustine archbishop. According to legend, Augustine cursed 'that perfidious nation' and, as a judgement, the chronicler notes how the Saxons slaughtered a great number of

brevis numerus habentur ut eos quodammodo venerabilis mater ecclesia in suo sinu recumbentes non videat, quos solos verso filios habet | 'They are 'counted in so small a number that, as they lie in her lap, the holy mother church in a sense does not see them, although they are the only true sons she has left'.

⁴⁷⁶ For a good analysis of this event see Martin Grimmer, 'Bede and the Augustine's Oak conferences: Implications for Anglo-British ecclesiastical interaction in early Anglo-Saxon England, *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association*, 2 (January, 2016), 103-119.

⁴⁷⁷ *Quod cum esset statutum, uenerunt, ut perhibent, VII Brettonum episcopi et plures uiri doctissimi, maxime de nobilissimo eorum monasterio, quod uocatur lingua Anglorum Bancornaburg, cui tempore illo Dinoot abbas praefuisse narratur, qui ad praefatum ituri concilium uenerunt primo ad quendam uirum sanctum ac prudentem, qui apud eos anachoreticam ducere uitam solebat, consulentes, an ad praedicationem Augustini suas deserere traditiones deberent.*

⁴⁷⁸ Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), II.2, p. 139. This account reminds me of the later nonconforming Pantycelyn who was summoned to the Bishop. See Thomas Charles on Williams Pantycelyn in John Morgan Jones and William Morgan's *The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales, Volume 1*, trans. by John Aaron (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008), p. 227: 'He [Pantycelyn] used to relate with much humour how he was summoned to the Bishop's court to answer charges of nineteen sins, of all of which he was guilty. Such things as failing to make the sign of the cross when baptizing, failing to read some parts of the service and so on.'

them.⁴⁷⁹ Perhaps this is the first reference to Welsh, Christian Nonconformity. The Celtic church had, after all, been Nonconformist for a long time.⁴⁸⁰

This nonconforming, fractured ‘myth-symbol complex’ manifests itself in the different Celtic tribes that spanned across the Welsh landscape; the Christian parishes with their own saints and traditions; and eventually the denominations, which were tribal in the way that they claimed the Welsh landscape with their colonising buildings.⁴⁸¹ This spirit of plurality seemed to grow out of what Jackie Feldman calls, ‘the poetics and politics of [the poets’] sacred place making’.⁴⁸² Damian Walford Davies has shown how another religious poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), was involved in what Walford Davies calls a ‘(psycho-) cartographic act’ in one of his sermons, where Wales’s very landscape became the holy land.⁴⁸³ This section will now show how the Nonconformist narratives were formed in the womb of theologically-charged spaces. These spaces were partly constructed by the poets and hymn-writers, who all had promised lands written on their imaginations.

‘Beulah’ or the ‘New Israel’

Arguably this notion of a theologically-charged space, or a New Israel, had its roots in the time-period of the previous chapter. We must look back for a moment. William Williams Pantycelyn (1717-1791) – perhaps the most influential religious poet Wales ever produced –

⁴⁷⁹ The account goes on to say that many of ‘that perfidious nation’ were slaughtered by Ethelfrid the Saxon.

⁴⁸⁰ For example, Germanus of Auxerre was sent to Britain in 429 A.D. to combat the Pelagian heresy because Pelagius is thought to have been either Welsh or Irish. See chapter 4.

⁴⁸¹ For example, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion were known as the strongholds of Calvinistic Methodism. Counties like Radnorshire and Pembrokeshire were dominated by the Established Church. Glamorgan was dominated by the Congregationalists.

⁴⁸² Jackie Feldman, ‘Constructing a shared Bible land: Jewish Israeli guiding performances for Protestant pilgrims’, *American Ethnologists*, 34:2 (2007), 351-374 (pp. 351, 354).

⁴⁸³ Davies, *Cartographies of Culture*, p. 49.

believed that God's kingdom was at hand and his post-millennial convictions looked forward to the 'Jubilee' when, as the Savoy Declaration of the Independents notes:⁴⁸⁴

We expect that in the latter days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the Kingdom of his dear Son broken, the Churches of Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.⁴⁸⁵

To many in the nineteenth century, this 'latter day' view was always on the horizon.⁴⁸⁶ The Methodists, especially Pantycelyn, were involved in the creation of what I will call 'Beulah'. In the eighteenth century, religious poetry seemed to be concerned with that spiritual realm which existed between Heaven and Earth. In the Bible, 'Beulah' means 'married', a quasi-spiritual realm mentioned in Isaiah as a renewed Waste Land, a land injected with the Spirit of God, and charged with a sense of the Divine; it is not quite heaven but 'heavenly' and it is the pre-cursor of entering heaven itself.⁴⁸⁷ This description seems analogous to what Llywelyn calls 'sacred place', already mentioned above:

Place as a concept is far more than a material description of territory, since it involves relationship with the divine, with particular societies and with individuals, all of whom have a temporal, intrahistorical aspect.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁴ 'Post-millennialism' is sometimes referred to as 'The Puritan Hope', a belief which led individuals like Pantycelyn to believe that the second coming of Christ would be preceded by the Millennium, when the Christian gospel and social justice would hold sway throughout the earth. See Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971).

⁴⁸⁵ Chapter 26 'Of the Church', Savoy Declaration 1658 <http://www.creeds.net/congregational/savoy/> [Accessed 09/12/2016].

⁴⁸⁶ See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁴⁸⁷ See John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come under the similitude of a dream as originally published by John Bunyan being a facsimile reproduction of the first edition* (London: Elliot Stock, 1878 [1678]), p. 217: 'Now I saw in my Dream, that by this time the Pilgrims were got over the Inchant'd [*sic*] Ground, and entering into the Countrey of *Beulah*, whose Air was very sweet and pleasant [...] Here they were within sight of the City they were going to'.

⁴⁸⁸ Llywelyn, *Sacred Place: Chosen People*, p. 7.

A post-millennial future would be the ultimate sacred space where the chosen people dwell. For many religiously-minded poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Wales was a kind of sacred centre of the world, or what Mircea Eliade calls an *axis mundi*.⁴⁸⁹ To many, the post-millennial view of Wales (as seen in the Savoy Declaration) was fulfilled in nineteenth-century 'Revival' Wales. In Pantycelyn's poetry the Jubilee is near:

Daw amser braf, can's gwawrio bron	A pleasant time is dawning soon
Mae haf-ddydd yr efengyl lon;	The gospel's summer day;
I'r 'nysoedd pell daw'r trysor drud,	Its treasure comes to islands far,
A'i swm â hyd eithafoedd byd. (WWP LI)	Its sound to every way. ⁴⁹⁰

The use of light and dark imagery dominates post-millennial poetry, especially in the motif of a glorious dawn. These are ideas which can be sourced in the prophecy of Malachi where the 'Sun of Righteousness', i.e. Christ, rises with 'healing in his wings'.⁴⁹¹ This is seen in one of Pantycelyn's most famous English-language hymns, published in *Gloria in Excelsis: or Hymns of Praise to God and the Lamb* (1772).⁴⁹² The publication year is important because the 1770s saw the Aurora Borealis in Wales, a sign, according to Pantycelyn, that this 'Jubilee', or a thousand years of light, was near:

O'er those gloomy hills of darkness
 Look, my soul, be still and gaze;
 All the promises do travail
 With a glorious day of grace.
 Blessed jubilee,
 Let Thy glorious morning dawn.

Let the Indian, let the Negro,
 Let the rude barbarian see
 That divine and glorious conquest

⁴⁸⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. by William R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace and World Inc., 1959), p. 20ff.

⁴⁹⁰ My translation.

⁴⁹¹ Malachi 4:2.

⁴⁹² This was Pantycelyn's English collection of hymns.

Once obtained on Calvary;
 Let the Gospel
 Loud resound from pole to pole.

Kingdoms wide that sit in darkness,
 Let them have the glorious light,
 And from Eastern coast to Western
 May the morning chase the night;
 And redemption,
 Freely purchased, win the day.

May the glorious days approaching,
 From eternal darkness dawn,
 And the everlasting Gospel
 Spread abroad Thy holy Name;
 Thousand years
 Soon appear, make no delay.

Lord I long to see that morning,
 When Thy gospel shall abound,
 And Thy grace get full possession
 Of the happy promis'd ground;
 All the borders
 Of the great Immanuel's land.

Fly abroad, eternal Gospel,
 Win and conquer, never cease;
 May Thy eternal wide dominions
 Multiply, and still increase;
 May Thy sceptre
 Sway the enlighten'd world around.

O let Moab yield and tremble,
 Let Philistia never boast,
 And let India proud be scattered
 With its innumerable host;
 And the glory
 Jesus, only be to Thee.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ Hymn XXXVII in William Williams Pantycelyn, *Gloria in Excelsis: or Hymns of Praise to God and the Lamb* (Carmarthen: 1772), pp. 33-34.

The ardent missionary activity of Welsh denominations in the nineteenth century could be seen as having its origin in the post-millennialism of hymns like this. It is difficult for the post-colonial reader to appreciate the theological nature of these hymns without conjuring images of the Indian Mutiny (1857) in our minds. ‘Spiritual colonisation’, which this hymn talks about, seems to justify the criminal activities of the East India Trading Company which literally scattered the ‘innumerable host’ of ‘proud’ India. However, the last stanza mentions ‘Moab’ and ‘Philistia’ – two biblical civilisations associated with idolatry. To Pantycelyn, India’s Hinduism was the modern equivalent. The ‘innumerable host’ refers to their gods and not to the people; he desires that all ‘glory’ should be directed to a very real interlocutor, ‘Jesus’, and not to their idols. Hymns like this one were territorial acts; Pantycelyn is re-drawing, praying, desiring, and imagining a world like Wales filled with gospel light. In September 1795, this hymn was chosen as the opening hymn of the inaugural meeting of the London Missionary Society, and in the same period, it was also sung on board ships taking former slaves from the Americas to a new home in Sierra Leone.⁴⁹⁴ This was not a random choice.

Part of Pantycelyn’s vision of an ‘enlightened world’ was a world where slavery was no more. James has argued that Pantycelyn was one of the pioneers of anti-slavery rhetoric that emerged in the late eighteenth century.⁴⁹⁵ In 1779, Pantycelyn translated and published the first ‘slave narrative’ to be published in English.⁴⁹⁶ His enlightened ideas had already appeared in *Pantheologia, neu Hanes Holl Grefyddau’r Byd* (Pantheologia or A History of All the Religions of the World), an ambitious work of 654 pages which appeared in seven

⁴⁹⁴ James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 246.

⁴⁹⁵ E. Wyn James, ‘Welsh Ballads and American Slavery’, *The Welsh Journal of Religious History*, 2 (2007), 59-86.

⁴⁹⁶ Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’s narrative (originally written in 1772) told of his capture in Africa, his time of slavery in America, how he became a Christian, and his time as a free man in Britain. See William Williams (trans.), *Berr Hanes o’r Pethau Mwyaf Hynod ym Mywyd James Albert Ukasaw Groniosaw, Tywysog o Affrica: Fel y Adroddwyd ganddo ef ei hun* (Aberhonddu: E. Evans, 1779).

parts between 1762 and 1779. The purpose of the work was to enlighten and dispel the ignorance of the monoglot Welshman; it also proves that Pantycelyn was a product of both the Enlightenment and the Evangelicalism of the eighteenth century. In the section on Guinea, Pantycelyn describes the Atlantic Slave Trade before condemning it:

Ac fel y dwedir, mae llawer o'n Planwyr ni yn America heb roi fawr triniaeth well iddynt, gan wneud cyngrair a'i gilydd i beidio gwneud Crist'nogion o honynt, rhag ofn iddynt Ddeall bod y Grefydd Grist'nogol yn gorchymmyn i bawb i wneuthur fel y dymument i eraill wneuthur iddynt hwy; ac yn ganlynol y disgwyliant gael triniaeth fel Dynion, ag sydd ar un Duw ac ar un Crist wedi marw trostynt.⁴⁹⁷

Pantycelyn's vision is a land where all are equal and have come to an understanding of divine grace through Jesus Christ. The whole volume is written in the form of a dialogue between Apodemus the inveterate traveller and Eusebius who is keen to learn from his experiences abroad. Having heard the account of the religion of the American Indians, Eusebius asks: 'Etto un waith, a ydych yn tybied y rhaid i'r efengyl fyned yn ei phurdeb i bob goror i'r wlad eang hon, cyn dyfod Mab y dyn yn ei ogoniant?' | 'Once again, do you think that the gospel in all its purity must go into every part of this immense land, before the Son of man returns in his glory?'⁴⁹⁸ Apodemus has no doubt whatsoever that this question must be answered in the affirmative. In so doing, he prophesises what was to occur in *his* hoped-for nineteenth century:

Nid adwaenir congl o honi, pe bai tri chymaint ag ydyw hi, na chaiff goleuni y gair dywynu i mewn iddo gyda dysgleirdeb anrhaethadwy a gogoneddus, ac efallai nad yw'r proselytaid y mae Eglwys Rufain ac eglwysi eraill yn ei

⁴⁹⁷ The work first appeared as *Pantheologia neu Hanes Holl Grefyddau'r Byd; Sef y Grefydd Baganaid y Fahometanaidd, Yr Iddewig a'r Gristnogol etc.* published in Carmarthen in 1762. The version I used is included in *Holl Weithiau, Prydyddawl a Rhyddieithol, y Diweddar Barch. William Williams, Pant-y-Celyn*, ed. by Rev. J. R. Kilsby Jones (London: William Mackenzie, 1867), pp. 509-650 (p. 517). Translation by E. Wyn James.: 'And as it is said, many of our Planters in America do not treat them much better, agreeing among themselves not to make Christians of them, lest they should understand that the Christian religion commands everyone to do as they would have others do unto them, and that as a result they should expect to be treated as humans, who have the same God and for whom the same Christ died.' As James notes, this section draws heavily from Thomas Salmon (1679–1767), *Modern History: or, The Present State of All Nations* (London: Bettesworth & Hitch, 1739).

⁴⁹⁸ Pantycelyn, *Pantheologia*, p. 530.

wneud yno ond paratoi y ffordd o flaen Haul mawr y Cyfiawnder, gwir oleuni yr efengyl, yr hon sydd rhaid iddi godi â meddyginiaeth yn ei hysgyll; ac nid llawer o le fyddai i feio ar un a dybiai daw amseroedd y bydd yr efengyl i gwmpasu'r ddaear, fel y mae yr haul mawr yn gwneud yr awrhon, ac na's gwelodd yr haul naturiol yma wlad nac ynys na's caiff goleuni yr efengyl ei gwled hi hefyd, os oes trigolion ynddi. Fe wnaeth y nail ei ymdaith fel y llall o'r dwyrain i'r gorllewin hyd yma; pwy a wŷyr na's daw Haul y Cyfiawnder a'i dro i ben gylch y ddaear nes tywynu etto ar dir y dwyrain, a'r hen Jerusalem? ac fel hyny i gyfiawnder y cenedloedd i ddyfod i mewn, ac yna i holl Israel, wedi i air y deyrnas ymddangos ar eu gwlad yr ail waith, i fod yn gadwedig.⁴⁹⁹

This was not Great Britain but 'East to West'; Pantycelyn's vision was 'Beulah', a land, or Earth, wholly married to Jesus Christ. But for now, Wales was one of those blessed territories where the 'light of the gospel' had shone. Wales was the 'land of revivals', a land highly favoured by God, and a 'chosen people' akin to the Israelites of old who had God on their side.⁵⁰⁰

However, even this early realm was contested. The old theological debates were still raging when 'Beulah', this spiritual realm, was being created. Most importantly, who dwelt in 'Beulah'? Who would pass from this earth to the next, and who could be saved? Perhaps the greatest division of opinion was between the followers of John Calvin (1509-1564) who emphasised the Sovereignty of God, Divine Predestination and Election of the Saints in the theology of Redemption⁵⁰¹ and the Wesleyan Methodists who, theologically, tended towards

⁴⁹⁹ Pantycelyn, *Pantheologia*, p. 530. Translated by Eifion Evans: 'Not one corner of it [the world] will be left, even if it were three times the size it is, into which the light of the gospel will not shine with indescribable and glorious brightness, and it may be that proselytes being made there by the Church of Rome and other churches is but preparing the way for the great Sun of Righteousness, the true light of the Gospel, which must rise with healing in its wings, and there is little room to censure one who thinks that the time will come when the Gospel will encompass the earth as the great sun does now; and that this natural sun has never seen a country or island, that the light of the Gospel will not also see, if there are any inhabitants there. Both the Sun and the Gospel have travelled from East to West thus far; who knows but that the Sun of Righteousness will not encircle the earth until it shine again on the land of the East, on old Jerusalem? and so that in this way the righteousness of the Gentiles will be brought in, and then all Israel, the word of the kingdom having appeared in their country for the second time, should be saved'.

⁵⁰⁰ See Llywelyn, *Sacred Place: Chosen People*.

⁵⁰¹ *Divine Predestination*: The belief that God had 'elected' individuals, a particular people, for eternal salvation. See Morgan, *Theologia Cambrensis*, pp. 329-331.

being ‘Arminian’,⁵⁰² stressing man’s free will in accepting or rejecting salvation, which also meant that one could fall from grace.⁵⁰³ Wales was predominantly Calvinistic in its theology at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰⁴ For the Calvinist (like Pantycelyn) it was the ‘chosen’ or the ‘elect’ that were the inhabitants of Zion (both on Earth and in heaven).⁵⁰⁵ For the Arminian, all could and should come to Christ out of their own free will.⁵⁰⁶ The master Welsh hymn-writers of the eighteenth century had all been Calvinistic. Morgan Rhys’s (1716-79) hymns, for example, combine high Calvinism with an ardent belief in post-millennialism:

Helaetha derfynau dy deyrnas,	Extend now thy Kingdom’s vast borders,
A galw dy bobl ynghyd;	And call now thy people inside;
Datguddia dy haeddiant anfeidrol	Reveal now thy infinite merit
I’th eiddo Iachawdwr y byd:	O Saviour, to all that is thine:
Cwypmp anghrist a rhwyga ei deyrnas,	When Antichrist falls, his kingdom too,
O brysied a deued yr awr,	And heavenly Jerusalem descends
Disgyned Jerusalem newydd	We shall see it with our eyes very soon
I weled trigolion y llawr. ⁵⁰⁷	O may that hour come! ⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰² This branch of theology follows the writings of Jacobinus Arminius (1560-1609), the latinised name of the Dutch theologian Jakob Hermanszoon.

⁵⁰³ See Thomas Rees, *History of Protestant Nonconformity in Wales* (London: John Snow, 1861), p. 297; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, ‘The Influence of Arminianism in England’, in *The Puritan Spirit* (London: Epworth Press, 1967), pp. 67-80; the Welsh evidence is discussed on pp. 70-72; Morgan, *Theologia Cambrensis*, pp. 348-355.

⁵⁰⁴ Morgan, *Theologia Cambrensis*, p. 38: ‘The synod [of Dort] bequeathed to the world the ‘five points’ of Calvinism which would become pivotal in Welsh theology for the next two centuries: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints’.

⁵⁰⁵ See Llywelyn, *Sacred Place: Chosen People*, p. 35. He discusses the importance of Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin in the formation of the theology of predestination: ‘The concept of history which Augustine proposes in *The City of God* states that the Kingdom of God is neither identical or intrinsically connected with any form of political government on earth: the chosen individuals are the community of the chosen, the City of God as opposed to the secular city, the state.’

⁵⁰⁶ For the origin of Arminianism see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe’s House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 373-378.

⁵⁰⁷ Hymn LXXV in Morgan Rhys, *Golwg o Ben Nebo ar Wlad yr Addewid* etc. (‘A Prospect from the Summit of Nebo of the Promised Land’) (Carmarthen: 1775), p. 72.

⁵⁰⁸ My translation.

The speaker is addressing Christ in this first stanza. This is a conquering figure portrayed in the language of divine imperialism. The possessive pronoun ‘dy’ | ‘your’ is repeated in the context of his *possessions*: his kingdom, his people, and his merit. This contrasts with the other, the antichrist, who has lost everything. Sight is important in the hymn. For Christ’s glory it is vital that all, both spiritually and physically, will *see* ‘his kingdom come’.⁵⁰⁹ The first stanza gives the reader, or singer, the theme or overview of the hymn like an opening theme in a symphony. The speaker now extends his discussion in the first two lines:

<p>Eheda efengyl dros wyneb Y ddaear a’r moroedd i gyd, A galw dy etholedigion O gyrrau eithafoedd y byd: O brysia’r cyfarfod heb lygredd, Na rhyfel, na chystudd, na phoen, Dydd Jubil yr etholedigion, A chyd-etifeddion â’r Oen.⁵¹⁰</p>	<p>May thy gospel spread o’er the face Of earth and seas, And may it call thine elect From all extremities: O hurry! Pure assembly Without war, tribulation, nor pain, The Elect’s Day of Jubilee, Co-heirs, triumphant, with the Lamb.⁵¹¹</p>
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The emphasis on ‘etholedigion’ | ‘the elect’ highlights the speaker’s wonder at being included in this special assembly. The lines equally focuses on the Lamb and the elect, almost looking at them from different angles:

<p>Gwneir diwedd ar holl demtasiynau Ac ofnau priod-ferch yr Oen, Yr hyn fydd yn farwol a lyngeir Yn haeddiant ei lafur a’i boen; Hi wisgir ag anllygredigaeth, Gŵn gwyn o gyfiawnder y saint, Na fedr y ddaear a’r nefoedd</p>	<p>An end to all temptation And fear of the Bride of the Lamb, These things are swallowed and terminated In the merit of Calvary’s tide;⁵¹² She soon shall be purely adorned In robes of righteousness white, Neither earth nor heaven can ever</p>
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⁵⁰⁹ See ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ in Matthew 6.

⁵¹⁰ Hymn LXXV in Rhys, *Golwg o Ben Nebo*, p. 72.

⁵¹¹ My translation.

⁵¹² Literal: ‘In the merit of his work and pain’, i.e. Calvary.

Fynegi'n drag'wyddol ei braint.

Express their eternal thanksgiving.

The stanza focusses on the second couplet in the first stanza: 'Datguddia dy haeddiant anfeidrol' | 'Reveal your infinite merit'. The Church is portrayed as the Bride of Christ in biblical metaphorical convention. The Church is made up of saints who have been washed in the blood and clothed in a robe of righteousness. Temptation, fear and sin are no more because those things were imputed on to Christ, hence his infinite and eternal merit. The hymn finishes with a glimpse of the New Jerusalem which Rhys has imaginatively created in these verses:

Fydd yno ddim byth ond dyrchafu
 Creawdwr yn Dduw ac yn ddyn,
 Y nefoedd i gyd yn ymgrymmu,
 Rhyfeddu a charu'n gytun
 Yr hwn fydd yn eistedd ar orsedd
 Gogoniant yng nghanol y nef,
 Gwyn fyd, medd fy enaid buddiedig,
 Ga'i hedeg i'r man y mae ef.⁵¹³

I shall hear that praise unceasing
 Of Creator – God and man,
 Heaven worships, ever praising
 In unity, wonder, and love.
 He'll sit on that glorious throne
 The glorious centre of all.
 "Oh paradise", says my wealthy soul,
 "May I flee to the place where He is."

The reader is there because the descriptions have been so vivid. The hymn ends with the phrase 'Gwyn fyd' which may mean literally 'white world' or 'blessed' and even 'Gwyn ei fyd' which can be translated as 'would that it were' which makes sense in the last line where the speaker longs to dwell with Christ. His soul 'speaks', following this strange and apocalyptic vision, which has not yet fully come to pass.

Thematically, Rhys's hymns focus on the total depravity of Adam's descendants, the provision made of a Saviour from eternity, and the certainty of heaven despite all the battles and tribulations the Christian must face before he reaches the eternal shore. His post-millennial stance also dominates his hymns, which are gathered in his 1775 collection *Golwg o Ben Nebo ar Wlad yr Addewid* ('A Prospect from the Summit of Nebo of the Promised

⁵¹³ Hymn LXXV in Rhys, *Golwg o Ben Nebo*, pp. 72-73.

Land’).⁵¹⁴ The title portrays the hymn-writer, like the Prophet Moses, perched on the peak of Nebo, looking towards Canaan, which he himself could never enter. In his imagination, the eighteenth century was Nebo, whilst he was constructing a post-millennial view in which the Wales of the nineteenth century would indeed be an earthly Canaan or Beulah. The phrase ‘etholedigion’ | ‘the elect’, shows how it is the Israelites – or in Calvinistic terms: the chosen people of God – who may enter this glorious territory.

This dominance of Calvinistic thought persisted into the nineteenth century.

Calvinistic hymn-writers still emphasised that all were sinners, even the elect. Daniel Rees Pengyrnos writes in 1838:

O ffrydiau pen Calfaria	From Calvary’s streams came flowing,
Daeth allan ddŵr a gwaed	Both water and the blood
I olchi’r rhai aflanaf	To wash the foulest person
A’r duaf un a ga’ d; ⁵¹⁵	And blackest of them all;

But the semi-colon then leads us on to a small but very important detail:

Ryw fyrdd yn hyfryd wyn,	A myriad are made wonderfully white,
Bydd canu byth amdani	The family of Zion’s hill
Gan deulu Seion fryn.	Sing about this forever and ever.

‘Teulu Seion fryn’ | ‘the family of Zion’s hill’ not only refers to the inhabitants of heaven (the Church triumphant) but also the Church militant, the chosen people on Earth. It is God that has chosen his own people to himself, as the Old Testament illustrated with the Israelites.

⁵¹⁴ Morgan Rhys, *Golwg o Ben Nebo ar Wlad yr Addewid* (1775). For details of his publications, see Gomer M. Roberts, *Morgan Rhys, Llanfynydd* (Caernarfon: The Author, 1951), pp. 15–20.

⁵¹⁵ Daniel Rees Pengyrnos, ‘Rhinwedd Gwaed Crist’, *Y Diwygiwr*, III:33 (April, 1838), pp. 114-5.

One of the key tenets of high Calvinism is this notion of predestination. Pedr Fardd

(1775-1845) writes one of the most famous stanzas referring to this doctrine:

Cyn llunio'r byd, cyn lledu'r nefoedd wen,	Far before time beyond creation's dawn
Cyn gosod haul, na lloer, na sêr uwchben,	Before the sun and moon and stars were born
Fe drefnwyd ffordd yng nghyngor Tri yn Un	Salvation's way for sinners, lost, undone,
I achub gwael golledig euog ddyn. ⁵¹⁶	Was counselled forth by God the Three in One. ⁵¹⁷

The speaker muses on that mysterious Council of Eternity where the agenda was man's salvation and how the Trinitarian God, in communion and love, chose his particular people.

He repeats the word 'cyn' | 'before' three times to emphasise that choosing *His* people was *His* triune prerogative.

But not everyone held these beliefs. In 1800, the Wesleyans held a mission in Wales which re-kindled the old Calvinist/Arminian division. This can be seen clearly in the periodicals. In the first issue of the *Eurgrawn Wesleyaidd* in 1809, a poem 'Am helaethrwydd Aberth Crist' | 'Concerning the Extent of Christ's Sacrifice' documents the fundamental theological differences:

Teyrnasu mae JEHOFA nêr,	Heaven's JEHOVAH reigns,
A'i gariad sydd yn uwch na'r sêr:	And his love is higher than the stars:
Holl gyrrau'r byd ynghyd neshewch,	All corners of the world, come near,
Eich holl amheuon ymaith rhowch;	Put away your doubts and fears;
Mae'r Iesu'n galw arnoch oll,	Jesus calls you all,
(Pob perchen enaidaeth ar goll,)	(Anyone who owns a lost soul,)
Heb arian ac heb werth yn rhad,	Without money, without price,
I gael mwynhae 'rhinweddau'i waed.	You can come and enjoy the virtues of the blood.
Felly llefarodd WESLEY gynt,	That's what Wesley proclaimed,
Miloedd yn awr ei dystion y'nt:	Thousands are witnesses to that:
Gwardwr i holl ddynol-ryw -	A Saviour to all mankind-

⁵¹⁶ Pedr Fardd, no. 92 in *Llyfr Emynu y Methodistaidd Calffinaidd a Wesleiaidd* (Caernarfon and Bangor: Gymanfaoedd y Ddwyl Eglwys, 1929), p. 63.

⁵¹⁷ Pedr Fardd, Hymn no. 493, trans. by Edmund Tudor Owen in *Christian Hymns* (Bridgend: Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1977).

Iawn dros bob dyn eu hymffrost yw;
Cyhoeddi yn uchel maent ar led,
Ddyfnderoedd gras i bawb a gred.⁵¹⁸

Atonement for all was their boast;
They proclaim throughout,
The free depths of grace to all who believe.⁵¹⁹

The poem has distinct capitalisation: 'JEHOFA' and 'WESLEY'; God first, then John Wesley (1703-1791). The message is clearly Arminian; notice the words 'holl ddynol-ryw' | 'all mankind' and the charged phrase 'Iawn dros bob dyn' | 'Atonement for all men' which signifies that election is totally irrelevant. Wesley had travelled much in Wales and established societies in Pembrokeshire, Gower, Cardiff, and Breconshire.⁵²⁰ Nevertheless, Wales remained predominantly Calvinistic. The great preachers, or the Calvinistic Methodist Fathers as they were known, were known Wales-wide, rather than in 'pockets' like the other denominations.

Y Smotyn Du | The Black Spot

An example of localised denominational influence is called 'Y Smotyn Du' or the 'Black spot' of rural Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire. This was the derogatory, although geographically accurate, portrayal of a concentration of Unitarianism (or Socinianism) in the sea of Welsh Calvinism. During the eighteenth century not all Baptists, Independents, and Presbyterians welcomed the enthusiasm of preaching and worship which infiltrated their denominations in the later eighteenth century. This was especially true of the non-Calvinists among them. The Unitarian theology can be summarised as the belief that Christ was no more than a man and that human reason was key to salvation. According to James:

⁵¹⁸ Anon., 'Am helaethrwydd ABERTH CRIST' in *Yr Eurgrawn Wesleyaidd* (February 1809), p. 80.

⁵¹⁹ My translation.

⁵²⁰ See A. H. Williams (ed.), *John Wesley in Wales 1739–1790* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971).

The ‘Methodistizing’ of the Independents and Baptists increased the theological tensions within those denominations and between the Independents and the Presbyterians, and speeded up the movement among the non-Calvinists from Arminianism to Arianism to Unitarianism during the second half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.⁵²¹

The Unitarians had a hymn-culture of their own. Edward Williams (1747–1826), better known by his bardic name, ‘Iolo Morganwg,’ was a prolific hymn-writer. He wrote nearly 3000 hymns, three times as many as Pantycelyn, and 300 hymn-tunes as well. 400 of these hymns were printed in two volumes entitled *Salmau yr Eglwys yn yr Anialwch* (‘The Psalms of the Church in the Wilderness’), the first published by Iolo himself, in 1812, and the second posthumously by his son, in 1834. Iolo called Calvinistic Methodism ‘the greatest pest of all true religion’ in Wales, and claimed that in his hymns he sought ‘a more rational manner [...] than that which we find in our numerous volumes of Welsh hymns, where we find nothing but Enthusiastic Rants’.⁵²² Musing on the spread of Methodism, he stated in 1799: ‘The north, by now, is as Methodistical as the south, and the south as Methodistical as hell’.⁵²³ In the first issue of *Seren Gomer*, he includes an ‘imitation’ of an English song called ‘Plato’s Advice’ which concludes:

Gwir fawredd yw hedd a’i hyddawn gariad,
Rhagorau pob cyfiawn
Ei rodle’n briffordd radlawn,
I fywyd gwynfyd a gawn,⁵²⁴

Peace and the love of peace is the greatest splendour,
It excels all virtue
Its path is a generous highway,
To a blessed life we can attain.⁵²⁵

⁵²¹ James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 251. On Arian and Unitarian hymnody to 1811 see Garfield H. Hughes, ‘Emynyddiaeth yr Hen Ymneilltuwyr hyd 1811 [Part 2]’, *Journal of the Welsh Bibliographical Society*, 8:3 (July 1956), pp. 148-168. Two of the four editors of the influential *A Collection of Hymns and Psalms, for Public and Private Worship* (London, 1795), Dr Abraham Rees and Dr Thomas Morgan, were Welsh.

⁵²² Iolo Morganwg, ‘Cynghorion Doethineb’, *Seren Gomer* (1st January 1814), p. 4.

⁵²³ Quoted in Davies, *The History of Wales*, p. 333.

⁵²⁴ Morganwg, ‘Cynghorion Doethineb’, p. 4.

⁵²⁵ My translation.

The way to salvation is peace, not the blood of Jesus Christ. In the preceding stanza, this truth is seen as a way to heaven on earth and heaven after death: ‘Cai’r bedd yn borth i’r nefol fyd, / A mawredd hwn byth i barhau’| ‘The grave is a way to heaven / Where this splendour will last forever’. Unitarian hymns are often centred on philosophical truths or on the single nature of God. In 1847, the Unitarians published their own ‘denominational’ periodical entitled *Yr Ymofynydd*/*The Inquirer* which emphasised this yearning after truth. Its first editor was John Edward Jones (1801-1866) who noted:

Dymunaswn ei wneuthur yn ddigon hysbys a dealladwy, mai un o brif amcanion yr *Ymofynydd*, yw annog a chynorthwyo Rhydd-ymofyniad, a thaer ymchwiliad am y gwir [...] Undodiaid sydd wedi gosod yr *Ymofynydd*.⁵²⁶

This *raison d’être* sets out a vision for a Nonconformist Wales which is radical and free; surely this is the manifestation of Enlightenment thought that was sweeping through Wales. The fact that an area was called ‘y smotyn du’ suggests a form of religious colonisation by the Unitarians, and indeed, a derogatory Methodist slur on their non-Trinitarian neighbours.

Several leading Unitarians established themselves in Calvinistic heartlands. One of these was Thomas Evans (Tomos Glyn Cothi) (1764-1833) who has been called the first specifically Unitarian minister in Wales.⁵²⁷ Evans was a weaver and it was through his travels in Glamorganshire selling cloth that he encountered the poets of that county such as Iolo Morganwg (1747-1826). There is no doubt that Iolo influenced Evans’s theology and it is also known that the English Unitarian theologian, Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), sent him English books when he started his ministry. In 1786, he started preaching in his home county

⁵²⁶ John Edward Jones, ‘Annerchiad i ddarllenwyr yr Ymofynydd’, *Yr Ymofynydd neu gyfrwng gwybodaeth a rhyddymorfyniad i’r Cymry*, 1:1 (September 1847), 1-6 (p. 5). My translation: ‘We wish that it be known and understood that one of the main aims of the *Ymofynydd* is to encourage and support free inquiry when searching into the truth [...] *The Ymofynydd* was established by Unitarians’.

⁵²⁷ See *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*.

and was called by many ‘little Priestley’ because of his enthusiasm for the doctrines set forth by the radical Joseph Priestley (1733-1804). Like Priestley, he advocated equal rights for religious dissenters and supported the French Revolution. Evans’s ‘radicalism’ earned him a place in Carmarthen gaol in 1803 for his revolutionary preaching. In 1811, he published a book of hymns, *Cyfansoddiad o Hymnau* which show how his idea of ‘Beulah’ was a land free from oppression, whether that be from the Calvinists or the Government, and where the Unitarian God is worshipped. Hymn 1 begins with the object of his worship:

Ein Tad yr hwn wyt yn y nef,	Our Father who art in heaven,
Dy enw mawr sancteiddier ef;	Hallowed be thy mighty name;
Deled dy deyrnas yn ei grym,	Thy Kingdom come in power,
Er lladd yn llwyr bob pechod llym. ⁵²⁸	And totally destroy all fierce sins. ⁵²⁹

The language reflects the Lord’s Prayer until the last line. The repetition of the ‘ll’ sound indicates a harshness or an unsettling context when this was written. Many Nonconformists had been persecuted by the state because they were accused of supporting ‘Jacobin’ and ‘Revolutionary’ doctrines.⁵³⁰ The word ‘llym’ which has meanings such as ‘harsh’, ‘fierce’, ‘sharp’ seems to be pointing towards the repressive context of the time; it was after all written during the strict laws against radicalism that had been introduced during the Napoleonic Wars.⁵³¹ God’s kingdom will destroy this unwarranted persecution and bring liberty. To Evans, Wales was under theological, spiritual, and political oppression. His vision of utopia would be a place which followed the teachings of Jesus rather than ‘idolatrous’ worship of

⁵²⁸ ‘Hymn 1’ in Thomas Evans, *Cyfansoddiad o Hymnau, wedi cael ei hamcanu at addoliad cyhoeddus; ac yn enwedig at wasanaeth Undodiaid Cristnogol* (Carmarthen: Jonathan Harris, 1811), p. 1. All further references are given parenthetically throughout the main body of the chapter. The hymn-numbers correspond with page numbers.

⁵²⁹ My translation.

⁵³⁰ Davies, *History of Wales*, p. 340.

⁵³¹ Perhaps this was written with William Pitt’s Gagging Acts in mind. Acts like ‘The Seditious Meetings Act’ of 1795 would have been pertinent to Evans especially when he himself was imprisoned in 1803.

Jesus Christ who, according to the Unitarians, should not be esteemed as co-eternal as the Second Person of the Trinity. He states how Christ himself endorsed the Unitarian religion:

Dywedodd Iesu'n eglur iawn,
Mewn geiriau llawn ddeallus;
Am ei Dad sanctaidd, mai ef yw,
Yr unig Dduw daionus. (XXVIII)

Jesus clearly said of old
Using full and sensible language;
His Holy Father,
Is the only beneficent God.⁵³²

The emphasis on words such as 'Un' | 'One', 'Unig' | 'Only', and 'Undod' | 'Union' appear again and again in the hymnbook. The author is making it clear that there is one God and that there is no Trinity. In Hymn XLVIII, for example, the word 'Un' / 'One' is used in every stanza at least once. Christ is not irrelevant, though. He is the only teacher or the one who reveals the one and true God:

Un yw ein hathraw ni, sef Crist,
Na fyddwn drist o galon;
Arweinydd yw i deyrnas nef,
Canlynwn Ef yn gyson. (XII)

Christ is our one and only teacher,
There's no need to despair;
He leads us in the way to heaven
We should accompany him regularly.

Dwys ddilyn ei esiamplau ef,
Yw'r ffordd i'r nef ddymunol;
A'i lwyr gymmeryd yn ddi-fraw,
Ein unig athraw dwyfol. (XLVI)

By following his example,
That's how you'll get to heaven;
By leaning on him without anxiety,
Our only heavenly teacher.⁵³³

Christ is the one who leads the Unitarian to God. It is through following his example of good works that heaven is attained. It is not the sufficiency of his divine blood in atonement; it is not the redemption wrought on Calvary; it is not the propitiation of his very being which appeases the law of God but rather it is that the example of Christ, if followed, will give the believer access into heaven. However, the language is quasi-Calvinistic; note the use of the

⁵³² My translation.

⁵³³ My translations.

words ‘dwyfol’ | ‘divine’ which actually means ‘sent from God’ not necessarily ‘God’.⁵³⁴

This may be seen as subtle evidence of how Calvinistic language (arguably the dominant aesthetic) even infiltrated the Unitarian hymnbooks.

Unitarianism is a Nonconformist narrative that the Calvinists rejected. Their promised land was not just a place for the elect. For them, it was a place where good works were important. It was a place where all men were welcome – a realm of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*. But it was another narrative formed in the womb of Wales’s theologically-charged space. We are beginning to see that this Welsh Christian Aesthetic is not purely Calvinistic. But, as we discovered previously in this chapter, the spirit of pluralism and this idea of denominational conflict and/or co-habitation was a key factor in the creation of the Nonconformist nations and the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. This was a theologically-charged space partly constructed by the Unitarian hymn-writers, who had a Unitarian promised land written on their imaginations.

Yr Hen Gorlan | The Old Fold

Not all Nonconformists were dissenters from the Church of England. In 1851, 80 per cent of those who attended a place of worship in Wales were Nonconformist, whilst 20 per cent were Anglican. One of the nineteenth century’s most prolific hymn-writers was an Anglican and his name was Morris Williams ‘Nicander’ (1809-1874). He was also a nonconforming Anglican because he belonged to the Tractarians, who emerged from the Oxford movement around 1830. As Frances Knight has pointed out, Welsh Tractarianism was different from English Tractarianism:

⁵³⁴ See Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru, ‘dwyfol’: ‘Yn perthyn i Dduw neu’n deillio oddi wrtho’ | ‘Related to God or coming from Him’.

These Welsh high churchmen did not look to the ancient authority of the early Fathers, as their English counterparts did, but to that of the early British church, the church founded in Wales in the fifth century by St David, which had remained entirely free from English and Roman interference for many centuries. They made much of the “golden age” of the Celtic saints in Wales, and of the authentic and unbroken strand of Catholic Christianity in which they saw themselves as standing.⁵³⁵

Interestingly, his hymns are charged with Methodist spirit and his poems seek to re-draw the map of Wales, or rather, to turn the clock back to that Celtic “golden age”. Indeed, his poetry contributes to this notion of a single religious entity – a nonconforming Anglicanism fuelled by nationalism. Knight draws attention to the ‘intense nationalism’ of Welsh Tractarians, especially in their support of the Eisteddfod. She writes: ‘some clergy who were attracted to Tractarianism may also have been attracted by the rituals, processions, and vestments that were used on these occasions [Eisteddfodau]’.⁵³⁶

Nicander’s hymns were included in many of the Nonconformist hymnals. However, his vision for Wales is best seen in his set of poems which make up *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig* (*The Church Year*), first published in 1843.⁵³⁷ It is loosely based on John Keble’s popular *The*

⁵³⁵ Frances Knight, ‘The Oxford Movement in Wales: A Catholic Revival in a Protestant Land’ in *The Human Tradition in Modern Britain*, ed. by C.J. Litzenberger and Eileen Grath Lyon (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 81-94 (p. 89).

⁵³⁶ Knight, ‘The Oxford Movement in Wales’, p. 90.

⁵³⁷ Morris Williams (Nicander), *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig, Myfyrdodau Priodol i’r Suliau a’r Gwyliau Drwy’r Flwyddyn* (Bangor: Nixon and Jarvis, 1883 [1843]), p. xi: ‘Mewn perthynas i’r llyfryn hwn nid oes achos dywedyd ond ychydig. Yr wyf yn rhwymedig am ei gynllun i Awdwr y *Christian Year*, o’r hwn hefyd y benthyciais ambell un o’r meddyliau. Tybiais y gallai rhywbeth o’r fath fod yn wasanaethgar i Eglwyswyr, yn enwedig rhai ieuainc, yn y dyddiau hyn, pan y mae cymmaint o ddeffrôad yn y wlad ynghylch pethau Eglwysig, pan y mae cariad at yr Eglwys yn cynhesu, a gelyniaeth atti yn ymgynddeiriogi.’ | ‘There is no need to say much concerning this booklet. I am indebted for its structure to the author of the *Christian Year*, from whom I also borrowed some thoughts. I realised that something of this sort could be useful to Churchmen, especially to younger ones, in these days when there is such an awakening in this country concerning Church matters, when love towards the Church is warming, and enmity towards it is intensifying.’ All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically throughout the text. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

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Christian Year, published in 1827.⁵³⁸ In his introduction, Nicander mentions the old Sun of

Righteousness trope:

Mae'r Eglwys yn cyfrif ei blwyddyn, nid wrth droadau haul na lleuad natur,
ond wrth y pryd y cyfododd HAUL CYFIAWNDER i lewyrchu i'r rhai oedd
yn eistedd mewn tywyllwch ym mro a chysgod angau; ac o amgylch Hwn y
mae'r Eglwys, yr hon sy'n dêg fel y *Lleuad*, yn cylchdroi yn ei Gwasanaeth
beunyddiol, a'i *chalendar* hi yw yr *Almanac* Cristionogol.⁵³⁹

This image of a 'natural,' God-ordained religion is an important idea. The first poem in the collection is entitled 'Y Sul Cyntaf yn Advent' | 'The First Sunday of Advent' and fuses ideas about advent, the dawn, as well as a hopeful future for Wales:

O! Henffych, foreuddydd gogoned,
Mae'n hoff gennym weled dy wawr
Yn coffa dyfodiad ein Ceidwad
O'i nefol oleu-wlad i lawr...⁵⁴⁰

O! Hail glorious daybreak,
I adore to see thy dawn
It reminds me of the Saviour's coming,
From his bright heaven to earth...⁵⁴¹

Nicander is tapping into a Welsh tradition where nature reflects a greater spiritual truth (like the Aurora Borealis indicating that the Jubilee was at hand for Pantycelyn.) The fourth stanza of the first hymn is directed at the Welsh themselves:

Deffrown, ynte, bellach, a gwyliwn,
Cyfodwn, na hunwn yn hwy;
Na chysgwn, fel eraill, ar liniau
Pleserau na moethau byth mwy:
Ag arfau'r goleuni ymdaclwn,
Fel milwyr, a pharch yn ein ffydd,
A gwisgwn sancteiddrwydd a chariad,
Hardd wisgiad a dillad y dydd.

We'll wake up, and now, watch,
We'll rise up, and slumber no more;
We won't even sleep, like others, on the lap
Of Pleasure and luxuries anymore
We'll take up the arms of light,
Like soldiers, respecting our faith,
We shall wear garbs of love and holiness
The beautiful clothing of the day.

⁵³⁸ John Keble, *The Christian Year* (London and New York: Longmans Green, 1898 [1827]).

⁵³⁹ Nicander, 'Rhagymadrodd', p. v. My translation: 'The Church calculates its year, not by the movements of nature's sun or moon, but from when the Sun of Righteousness rose and gave light to those who sat in darkness in the valley of shadow and death; and it is around Him that the Church, she who is fair like the moon, rotates in her daily service, and her calendar is the Christian *Almanac*.'

⁵⁴⁰ The tone of the first poem re-calls an earlier Methodist who was known as the 'Bunyan of Wales'; his name was Azariah Shadrach (1774-1844). His homiletic books often included meditations on nature.

⁵⁴¹ My translation. All subsequent translations of *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig* are my own.

Methodist Wales is represented as being asleep whilst true Christians are described as wearing clothes of the day ‘dillad y dydd’, which he calls love and holiness. The poet might be referring to the many bitter theological debates that had occurred in Wales during the nineteenth century. The first rupture was the departure of the Methodists from the Established Church, which Nicander views as both unlovely and unholy. In one of the later poems Nicander addresses all dissenters:

<p>Gadawsoch Dŷ ac Eglwys Ner, Ei winllan bêr a’i Gorlan; Ai da fydd hyn ger bron Duw nef Pan chwilio Ef chwi allan?⁵⁴²</p>	<p>You left the House and Church of heaven The pure vineyard and its fold; What will God say When he searches you out?</p>
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The speaker addresses the dissenters in the language of biblical metaphorical geography, re-drawing the map of Wales as those who are outside the spiritual vineyard (winllan) or the fold (gorlan) – common metaphors for the Anglican Church. The poet capitalises ‘Dŷ’ (House) and ‘Gorlan’ (Fold) referring to the Church as he capitalises Duw (God) and Ef (Him) – there is symmetry and order which is broken by the hard sounding ‘ch’ sound of the uncapitalised ‘chwi’ (you) reflected in earlier words like ‘Gadawsoch’ (You left) and ‘chwilio’ (seek). Quite aptly, the poem has Ezekiel 14: 7 and 8 as an epigraph, which describes God himself setting his face against the man ‘who separates himself from me’. Nicander then describes these various Nonconformists as idolaters and followers of men:

<p>Os oes ymenwi yn beth ffol Ar enwau Paul a Cephas, A yw ymenwi ar enwau <i>llai</i> Yn beth di fai ac addas?</p>	<p>If labelling oneself be a foolish thing With names like Paul and Cephas, Is labelling yourself on lesser names Something faultless and appropriate?</p>
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⁵⁴² Nicander, ‘Yr Ail Sul ar Bymtheg Gwedi’r Drindod’, pp. 121-22.

At this point, in a footnote, he is more specific: ‘Megis enwau Calfin, Wesley, &c.’ This stanza refers to 1 Corinthians 3 where Paul deals with carnality in the church, which is manifested in factional attitudes; some followed Paul, others followed Apollos, and so on.⁵⁴³

He sees Wales, not as a land flowing with milk and honey but as a pagan, idolatrous land which bows down to theological giants rather than to God. The speaker of the poem then proceeds to identify and praise the one true Church:

Un Ysryd sydd, un Tad, un ffydd,	There is only one Spirit, one Father, one faith,
Un Bedydd ac Un Iesu;	One baptism and One Jesus;
Mae’n feddwl trwm, mae’n feddwl trist,	‘Tis a worrying thought, a sad one too,
Wahanu Crist a’i rannu.	To separate Christ in schism.

The conclusion is damning:

Ac os nad ydych yng Nghorff Crist,	If you’re not in Christ’s body
Nid ych yng Nghrist ei Hunan;	You are not in Christ Himself;
Rhaid bod yn hollol yng Nghorff Crist,	Fully be in Jesus’ body
Neu’n llwyr o Grist fod allan.	Or fully out you’ll be.

The capitalisation in the two stanzas emphasises divine authority whilst the repetition of ‘Un’ | ‘One’ highlights the uncompromising hegemony of the Anglican Communion. This poetry re-imagines Wales. It is no longer a land of light but a land which is schismatic and asleep.

Nicander points the finger at the denominations, especially the Calvinistic Methodists, who, in his view, abandoned the Church which had nurtured its very own creed:

Ac yn lle ceisio ei deffroi,	Instead of trying to wake her up
Mae’i phlant yn troi’n anffyddlon	Her children become unfaithful
I gynneu swrn o allorau mân	They set up strange altars everywhere
A dïeithr dân dych’mygion. ⁵⁴⁴	With imaginary strange fires.

⁵⁴³ 1 Corinthians 3:4

⁵⁴⁴ Nicander, Stanza 5, ‘‘Y Pedwerydd Sul ar Hugain Gwedi’r Drindod’’: Yr Eglwys yng Nghymru’, p. 134.

The speaker does not despair. Like his forefather, he looks to a brighter future where unity will reign once more. He uses the picture of a harp with its strings. At the moment there are strings missing but, in stanza 8, he prophesies that the strings will be retuned and not one will be missing:

Bydd etto'n Heglwys cyn bo hir
Yn degwch tir ein tadau,
Yn chware'i thelyn gyd a'i phlant
Heb ynddi dant yn eisiau.

Our Church one day will be
In the land of our Fathers,
She'll play her harp with all her kin,
Not one string will be missing.

Here, it is interesting that the speaker portrays the Church as a harp which can only be played to worship God aright, in hymns, psalms and spiritual songs, when all the strings are intact.

Nicander's is a voice that re-imagines Wales with a retrospective longing to an era before the disruptive agency of dissention.

Building Jerusalem⁵⁴⁵

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Nonconformity changed from being a radical religion into an entity which was both respectable and conservative. As previously noted, the Chapel became the established and respectable church in Wales. Political liberalism was partly responsible for this transformation especially with its Nonconformist heroes: Henry Richard, T.E. Ellis, Mabon, and eventually David Lloyd George dominating the public sphere. Arguably, the increasing Liberal ascendancy in Wales could be attributed to the hegemonic dominance of Nonconformity in national life. Socially, Nonconformity's power

⁵⁴⁵ The title of this sub section is taken from Robert Pope, *Building Jerusalem: Nonconformity, Labour and the Social Question in Wales 1906-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

was rooted in its Welshness as well as its educated clergy.⁵⁴⁶ The sought-after, spiritual realm of ‘Beulah’ in the earlier section metamorphoses into something new in this section; the Welsh were building a religious nation, or rather, a socially constructed paradise of Nonconformist hegemony rather than a spiritual realm on earth.

Continental theological liberalism was the backbone of this nineteenth-century construction project. The influence of ‘Higher Criticism’ (which refers to a group of German biblical scholars centered in Tübingen including Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)) infiltrated British theological colleges.⁵⁴⁷ Their denial of scriptural inspiration meant that they were intellectual descendents of Locke, Hume, Kant, and Hegel.⁵⁴⁸ Theologically, Schleiermacher saw a more subjective apprehension of God (rather than the objective, un-erring position given to scripture in the past). The later theologian, Adolf Von Harnack (1851-1930), established what would become the liberals’ threefold idea of gospel:

1. The Kingdom of God and its coming.
2. God the Father and the infinite value of man’s soul.
3. The demands of a higher righteousness and the command to love.⁵⁴⁹

As a result, as Robert Pope points out:

⁵⁴⁶ See Morgan, ‘Wales in British Politics’, p. 11: ‘Above all, it was the Welsh character of nonconformity in its services and Sunday schools which ensured its dominance’.

⁵⁴⁷ Their ideas were communicated to Britain first by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and then more directly by George Eliot’s translations of Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* (1846) and Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* (1854). For the influx of European thought in Welsh theological colleges see R. Tudur Jones, ‘“O Genefa i’r Bala’: Marchnad Rydd y Diwinyddion’ in *Grym y Gair a Fflam y Ffydd: Ysgrifau ar Hanes Crefydd yng Nghymru*, ed. by R. Tudur Jones and D. Densil Morgan (Bangor: Canolfan Uwch-Efrydiau Crefydd yng Nghymru, 1998), pp. 234-254.

⁵⁴⁸ For Hegel, the universe contained a unity based on the presence of the Spirit in it (*Geist*). This Spirit was involved in ‘the self-unfolding of reason’ where human history was the process of God *becoming*. The importance of *morality* was that anything *immoral* was contrary to this divine *becoming*. The *Geist* would make sure that human society would conform to a higher pattern of living.

⁵⁴⁹ See Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity?* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1901).

Morality, union and personal experience were the main concepts of the gospel for the liberals, distilled in the call to establish mankind's brotherhood on earth under the general Fatherhood of God.⁵⁵⁰

This was a long way from the gospel of salvation from sin that their forefathers had adhered to. A major shift had occurred.

It is commonly believed that these new liberal ideas were late arrivals in Wales. But the seeds were sown a long time before the Welsh theologian John Morgan Jones (1873-1946) – ‘the main exponent of liberal theology in Wales’⁵⁵¹ – brought back his new ideas from Berlin.⁵⁵² In 1860, Lewis Edwards published the seminal work *Athrawiaeth yr Iawn / The Doctrine of Atonement* – an important Calvinistic defence of the Doctrine of Atonement.⁵⁵³ It is not a coincidence that this book appeared a year after Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and the same year as Rowland Williams's *Essays and Reviews* (1860). Williams (1817-1870) – the vice-principal of St David's College, Lampeter – was a ‘higher critic’ in his own right. His works were hugely controversial because they defended the new biblical criticism stemming from Germany.⁵⁵⁴ D. Denis Morgan sees 1860 as a watershed

⁵⁵⁰ Pope, ‘Eymnau Newid Cymdeithas’, p. 105: ‘O ganlyniad, moesoldeb, undod a phrofiad personol oedd y prif gysyniadau yn ôl y Rhyddfrydwyr a chywasgwyd hyn i'r alwad i sefydlu brawdoliaeth dyn dan Dadolaeth gyffredinol Duw dan yr argyhoeddiad mai dyna fyddai'n sefydlu Teyrnas Dduw ar y ddaear.’

⁵⁵¹ R. Tudur Jones, ‘O Genefa i'r Bala’, p. 253: ‘Felly, fe gawn John Morgan Jones yn mynd i astudio o dan Adolf von Harnack ym Mhrifysgol Berlin ac yn dod yn brif ladmerydd ei safbwynt Rhyddfrydol yng Nghymru’.

⁵⁵² John Morgan Jones was a student of Harnack at the University of Berlin.

⁵⁵³ Lewis Edwards, *Athrawiaeth yr Iawn* (Wrexham: Hughes a'i Fab, 1860).

⁵⁵⁴ His later work *The Hebrew Prophets* (1871) argued that the prophets did not foresee the future but rather were reacting to their own contexts. See Rowland Williams, *The Hebrew Prophets during the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871). The famous Evangelical Charles H. Spurgeon noted that ‘the author does not admit that there are references to the Messiah in the Prophets. Whatever he has written, this fatal error deprives it of value. A man writing in this fashion should have been a rabbi in the synagogue, and not a minister among professed Christians.’ See Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Complete Works*, Volume 76.

moment in Wales.⁵⁵⁵ There was a shift from the punitive nature of God towards his Son and Christ being the sacrifice, to Christ as living friend and representative.⁵⁵⁶ As a result of these theological changes, there seems to be a shift towards a collective, moralist, and ultimately social religion.

Whether the common people fully subscribed to the ideas of higher criticism is difficult to tell. We know that these continental ideas had infiltrated the theological colleges which would subsequently train men for the ministry. Scholars like Boyd Hilton, David Bebbington and Dominic Erdozain argue that ‘the softening’ of the old doctrinal bulwarks was occurring throughout Britain:

Moral revulsion [played] an important part in the softening of evangelical Christianity [...] Along with hellfire, liberal theologians of the 1850s and 1860s surrendered the idea that a loving God would inflict excruciating suffering on his Son as a vicarious sacrifice for other men’s sins. Such an action now seemed both unjust and [...] inefficacious.⁵⁵⁷

Once again, the Doctrine of Atonement with its act of ‘propitiation’ was increasingly repulsive. For Bebbington, it was these older Calvinistic doctrines that had acted as ‘the motor[s] of evangelical expansion’.⁵⁵⁸ Erdozain adds that the fuel in that doctrinal motor ‘was the profundity of the Evangelical account of sin’.⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, once the engine and its fuel were gone, Evangelicalism – with its spiritual foundations – evolved into a form of religious moralism not just in Wales.

⁵⁵⁵ D. Densil Morgan, ‘Credo ac Athrawiaeth’ in John Gwynfor Jones (ed.), *Hanes Methodistiaeth Galfnaiidd Cymru, Cyfrol III, ‘Y Twf a’r Cadarnhau c.1814-1914’* (Caernarfon: Gwasg Pantycelyn, 2011), pp. 112-186 (p. 151).

⁵⁵⁶ For a detailed theological analysis see Morgan, ‘Credo ac Athrawiaeth’, pp. 112-186.

⁵⁵⁷ Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 273-281.

⁵⁵⁸ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 21.

⁵⁵⁹ Erdozain, ‘The Secularisation of Sin’, p. 67.

These theological changes are apparent in the hymns of one man in particular. Howell Elvet Lewis ‘Elfed’ (1860-1953) was a Congregational minister who spent most of his time as a minister in King’s Cross, London, but also served as Archdruid in the Eisteddfod.⁵⁶⁰ Elfed said himself that a shift had occurred in hymn-writing:

A hymn is not a solo of the soul, but part of the chorus of a choir which no-one can number or see together – except God.⁵⁶¹

This spirit is seen in the 1927 hymnal in the hymns of Elfed and his contemporaries. E. A. Dingley writes: ‘Rho imi nerth i wneud fy rhan / I gario baich fy mrawd’| ‘Give me the strength to do my part / and carry my brother’s burden’.⁵⁶² In 1889, Elfed said that the need of the day was for hymns ‘that will sanctify [the Church’s] anxiety, that will teach it where to find rest and hope and light’.⁵⁶³ James is right to note that this is a long way away from the ‘passionate rejoicing or deep conviction of sin in the first person singular’ observable in the hymns of Ann Griffiths and others, discussed in the previous chapter.⁵⁶⁴ The first hymn in the 1927 collection’s section on society is ‘Achub ein Gwlad’ which is a line that is repeated again and again in the hymn. Elfed longs for a Christian Wales – a Nonconformist haven:

Rhag colli gras Sabbathau’r nef,	In case we lose the grace of heavenly Sabbaths
Rhag sathru deddfau’n Tad,	In case we trample our Father’s laws,
Gwna rymus waith mewn gwlad a thref,	Do mighty work in town and village,
Ac achub Di ein gwlad. ⁵⁶⁵	And save our land. ⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁰ See *Dictionary of Welsh Bibliography*, <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s2-LEWI-ELV-1860.html> [Accessed: 21/02/17].

⁵⁶¹ In an address on the Welsh hymn to the Union of Welsh Independents in 1923; quoted (in the original Welsh) in Branwen Jarvis, ‘Elfed: Emynydd yn ei Oes’, *Bwletin Cymdeithas Emynu Cymru*, 3:3 (1990–1), 94–107 (p. 96).

⁵⁶² E.A. Dingley, ‘Hymn 707’ in *Llyfr Emynu y Methodistaidd Calфинаidd a Wesleiaidd* | ‘The Hymn-Book of the Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodists’ (Caernarfon: Llyfrfa’r Methodistaidd Calфинаidd, 1927), p. 471.

⁵⁶³ Lewis, *Sweet Singers of Wales*, p. 147.

⁵⁶⁴ James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 267.

⁵⁶⁵ Elfed, ‘Hymn 705’, *Llyfr Emynu 1927*, p. 469.

The shift has occurred. It is not ‘save me’ or ‘save my soul’ but ‘save *our* land’. These sentiments culminate in Elfed’s most famous hymn ‘Gweddi dros ein Wlad’ | ‘Prayer for our Land’.⁵⁶⁷ This is a nationalist hymn written with optimism. The leading theologian at the time, D. Miall Edwards, wrote that the nation was a means of apprehending some special divine goal.⁵⁶⁸ Through *the nation* people could contribute uniquely on the world’s stage for the sake of all humanity:

Gwna’n Sabbathau’n ddyddiau’r nefoedd,	Make our Sabbaths heavenly days,
Yng ngoleuni d’eiriau glân;	In light of thy holy words;
Dyro’r gwllith i’n cymanfaoedd –	Water our congregations with dew
Gwna ein crefydd fel ein cân:	And make our religion like our song:
Nefol Dad, boed mawrhad	Heavenly father, magnify
Ar d’efengyl yn ein gwlad. ⁵⁶⁹	Thy gospel in our land. ⁵⁷⁰

Elfed is praying for the same Beulah that Pantycelyn had also yearned after. But his Beulah is very different; it has radically changed. Christ is no longer central; the hymn expresses a longing that the nation’s religion would be like its singing: communal, loud, and ultimately more a social than a spiritual exercise. The speaker talks about ‘efengyl’ | ‘gospel’ or ‘good news’ but he never clarifies what that good news is. The emphasis here has shifted from the eternal to the temporal with the word ‘gwlad’ | ‘country’ mentioned four times in the three stanzas. Elfed writes hymns which emphasise communal service rather than personal salvation, as this verse demonstrates:

⁵⁶⁶ My translation.

⁵⁶⁷ Elfed, ‘Hymn 718’, *Llyfr Emynau 1927*, p. 478.

⁵⁶⁸ See D. Miall Edwards, *Crefydd a Gwareiddiad: Sef Traethodau ar Faterion Diwinyddol a Chymdeithasol* (Dolgellau: Hughes Brothers, 1921), p. 411.

⁵⁶⁹ Elfed, ‘Hymn 718’, *Llyfr Emynau 1927*, p. 479.

⁵⁷⁰ My translation.

Drwy bob gwybodaeth newydd,
 Gwna ni'n fwy doeth i fyw;
 A gwisg ni oll ag awydd
 Gwasanaethu dynol-ryw.⁵⁷¹

With all our new knowledge
 Help us to be wiser in life;
 And dress us with the desire
 To be of service to humanity.⁵⁷²

‘Gwybodaeth newydd’ | ‘new knowledge’ may refer to scientific, and even theological ‘advancement’ where the new agenda is to serve and love one another. Here, the speaker expresses a hope that we be dressed not in the ‘robes of righteousness’ or the ‘garments of salvation’ but with the ‘desire’ to serve all men. It echoes John the Baptist’s sermon in Luke 3: ‘He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise’.⁵⁷³ Elfed’s hymns ‘reflect the manner in which Welsh Nonconformity had become part of the establishment, with an increasing shift towards formality and respectability’.⁵⁷⁴ Part of that respectability was a shift towards the collective spirit of social service rather than the salvation of the immortal soul.

* * * * *

This second section has looked at the complex formation of the ‘Nonconformist Nations’ – the crucible of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. It has revealed that its *mythomoteur* is actually a fractured or tribal form of Nonconformity. Whilst the Aesthetic may be closely linked to the land, attracted to ancestors, characterised by a paradox between faith and doubt and individual and collective, it is also an Aesthetic characterised by difference and pluralism. One way of proving this is by looking at how the poet’s view of Christ changes or differs. For the Unitarian, he is the teacher. For the Methodist, he is the atoning Lamb of God who shed

⁵⁷¹ Elfed, ‘Hymn 713’, *Llyfr Emynau 1927*, p. 475.

⁵⁷² My translation.

⁵⁷³ See Luke 3:11.

⁵⁷⁴ James, ‘The Evolution of the Welsh Hymn’, p. 266.

his divine blood. For Nicander, he was the ruler of a single un-fractured Church. For Elfed, he is the Brother and moral example; fundamentally, he becomes just one of us.

This chapter will now conclude by looking at two thematic areas where the nineteenth-century shift from the individual to the collective was apparent. Firstly, we will look at some examples of poetry dealing with Death and Memory before moving on to some hymns from the Temperance Movement.

* * * * *

Death and Memory

Death and memory are two concepts that dominate religious poetry in this period. As mentioned in the introduction and demonstrated in the first chapter, an attachment to a particular ancestor or ancestors seems to be one of the major characteristics of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. Throughout history, ‘anfarwoli’ | to commemorate – or, literally, to ‘un-die’ someone – is a Welsh trope that goes back to the poetics of the sixth century.⁵⁷⁵ The role of the bard was to immortalise the dead through language. In the eighteenth century, most Nonconformist poetry portrayed death as a glorious threshold. Christianity is a religion based on one particular death; therefore, it is no surprise that the death of Jesus Christ appears in most hymns. However, death is not always negative and, if it is, it does not remain so for long. Most hymns take the reader to the grave before showing us an empty tomb. Christ is the dying figure, the dead figure, and also the risen, redemptive figure. This section of the chapter will interrogate the theology of death and argues that the shift from individual to collective is an important evolution in the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.

⁵⁷⁵ For the concept of ‘anfarwoli’ see Ifor Williams (ed.), *Canu Aneirin* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970)

The Individual

Most Nonconformist hymns focus on Christ's death. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it is still seen as the central act of atonement. John Elias (1774-1841), the so-called 'Pope of Anglesey', wrote a powerful hymn which begins with a simple child-like question (supposedly asked of him by a young girl in response to one of his sermons): 'Mr Elias, and was it for my sin, that Jesus suffered so?' The hymn is the answer; he says neither yes nor no, but takes the reader or listener on a journey which enables us to actually experience the answer rather than hearing a human response. The translation by Noel Gibbard (1932-) captures Elias's high Calvinist theology of atonement.⁵⁷⁶ It begins with the question:

<p>Ai am fy meiau i Dioddefodd Iesu mawr Pan ddaeth yng ngrym ei gariad ef O entrych nef i lawr?</p>	<p>And was it for my sin That Jesus suffered so When moved by His all-powerful love He came to earth below?</p>
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He then shows us the answer:

<p>Cyflawnai'r gyfraith bur, Cyfiawnder gafodd Iawn, A'r ddyled fawr, er cymaint oedd, A dalodd ef yn llawn.</p>	<p>Thy holy law fulfilled, Atonement now is made, And our great debt, too great for us, He now has fully paid.</p>
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Elias is summing up Paul's doctrine of Redemption seen in Romans 3 in this stanza, focusing on how God is both just and the justifier: 'Cyfiawnder gafodd Iawn' | 'Justice was satisfied (or was atoned)'.⁵⁷⁷ For a thirty-year period from 1810 onwards, Calvinists in Wales were troubled by increasing debates regarding the nature and extent of the atonement.⁵⁷⁸ There

⁵⁷⁶ John Elias, No.199, 'And was it for my sin', trans. by Noel Gibbard in *Christian Hymns* (Bridgend: Evangelical Movement of Wales Press, 1977).

⁵⁷⁷ Romans 3:26.

⁵⁷⁸ The need for atonement arises from the universal sinfulness of mankind and our inability to deal with the problem of our sin. But God in his love and mercy makes provision. The ultimate provision was Christ himself. Thus, his work may be seen as a process of redemption (Galatians 3:13), the payment of a ransom (Mark 10:45) and an offering of a sacrifice. Christ is said to have borne the curse, effecting justification, bringing in a new covenant between man and God which results in peace being made between man and God. What God does in

were three different positions amongst Calvinists in Wales.⁵⁷⁹ The debate revolved around the sufficiency of Christ's blood and its spiritual application. Elias, like many others, held the traditional view that there was 'general sufficiency and a particular application' in the blood of Jesus.⁵⁸⁰ An understanding of this doctrine enables us to grapple with the poetry of the era. In the previous stanza, Christ pays the price in full, which supports the idea of general sufficiency. The blood was efficacious enough to save all who would come. The poet uses the image of washing:

<p>Dioddefodd angau loes Yn ufudd ar y bryn, A'i waed a ylch y galon ddu Yn lân fel eira gwyn.</p>	<p>He suffered pain and death, When on the hill brought low; His blood will wash the guilty clean, As pure and white as snow.</p>
<p>Bu'n angau i'n hangau ni Wrth farw ar y pren, A thrwy ei waed y dygir llu, Drwy angau, i'r nefoedd wen.</p>	<p>For in his death our death Died with Him on the tree, And a great number by His blood Will go to heaven made free.</p>

The fourth stanza brings the puritan John Owen to mind and the title of his influential book: *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.⁵⁸¹ The blood is central. It is only through the blood that a myriad can enter heaven because of its divine nature:

<p>Pan grymodd ef ei ben Wrth farw yn ein lle, Agorodd ffordd, pan rwygai'r llen, I bur drigfannau'r ne'.</p>	<p>When Jesus bowed his head And dying took our place, The veil was rent, a way was found To that pure home of grace.</p>
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Christ enables sinners to approach him. See Sinclair Ferguson and David F. Wright (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1988), pp. 54-57.

⁵⁷⁹ John Aaron has translated one part of Owen Thomas's famous *Cofiant* of John Jones Talsarn as a separate book entitled *The Atonement Controversy in Welsh Theological Literature and Debate 1707-1841* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002).

⁵⁸⁰ Aaron, *The Atonement Controversy*, p. xvi.

⁵⁸¹ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007 [1647]).

The veil had formerly been the great barrier dividing man from the holiest part of the temple; it barred access to the Divine. But when Christ died it was rent from top to bottom – a visual representation of man’s free access to God.⁵⁸² The hymn-writer is referring to the Pauline doctrine of Christ’s body being the veil which, having been broken, gives us access to the Divine.⁵⁸³

Gorchfygodd uffern ddu,
Gwnaeth ben y sarff yn friw;
O'r carchar caeth y dygir llu,
Drwy ras, i deulu Duw.

He conquered blackest hell;
He trod the serpent down;
A host from fetters He'll set free
By grace to be God's own.

Gorphennodd Ef y gwaith,
Ac esgyn wnaeth i'r nef;
Lle mae yr holl nefolaidd lu
Yn canu iddo Ef.

He finished that great work
Ascended to the sky
Where heaven's host, in mighty song,
Sing unto Him on high.⁵⁸⁴

The last stanzas of this hymn are saturated with scriptural allusion: Psalm 24, Revelation 20 and especially Paul’s image of Christ as Roman general dragging his enemy behind him in triumph in his letter to the Colossians.⁵⁸⁵

Gibbard captures the juxtaposition that Elias represents in each verse. The hymn begins and ends with a powerful divine figure that conquers hell, fulfils all the prophecies, and crushes the serpent’s head. But notice how the hymn-writer emphasises that his head too was bowed in humility. Juxtaposition is seen throughout. Both hymn and translation capture the Calvinistic doctrine of grace which shaped Nonconformity and its idea of death.

⁵⁸² Matthew 27:51: ‘And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.’

⁵⁸³ Hebrews 10:20. ‘Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh’.

⁵⁸⁴ The last stanza is my translation.

⁵⁸⁵ See Colossians 2:15: ‘*and* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.’

Another example of glorious death is a hymn written by a blacksmith from Talley called Thomas Lewis (1760-1842):

<p>Wrth gofio'i riddfanau'n yr ardd A'i chwÿs fel defnynnau o waed, Aredig ar gefn oedd mor hardd, A'i daro â chleddyf ei Dad, A'i arwain i Galfari fryn, A'i hoelio ar groesbren o'i fodd; Pa dafod all dewi am hyn? Pa galon mor galed na thodd?⁵⁸⁶</p>	<p>Remembering Gethsemane's groans, And sweat were great drops of His blood, And that beautiful back, ploughed and broken And struck with His Father's sword And led Him to that hill, And nailed to that cross by his will; What tongue cannot cry? Will you be silent? And your hard heart, will it not melt?⁵⁸⁷</p>
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This short hymn is only one stanza long. The first reading presents a simple narrative but invites closer analysis. Like the work of Ann Griffiths, this hymn appears to be the fruit of intense spiritual experience. The reader can almost visualise the Passion of Christ with the sweat, the bruised and broken back, and the melting heart. The speaker seems to be Thomas Lewis. The hymn can be better understood when read in context. One can imagine the hymn-writer working away in his forge; he is hammering away and he suddenly finds that he is no longer situated in Talley but has been transported mentally to the Garden of Gethsemane.⁵⁸⁸ He can hear the agony of Jesus. He can see the sweat-drops like blood ploughing furrows into Christ's back: 'aredig ar gefn oedd mor hardd'. The speaker is overwhelmed by the spiritual and physical strain that Christ endured even before reaching the cross. He describes Christ's back as 'handsome' or 'beautiful'. This is where the poem becomes more intense. The speaker sees a bloody back because the sins of the world, in true Bunyanesque fashion, are

⁵⁸⁶ Thomas Lewis (1760-1842), No. 388 'Cofio'r Dioddef', *Llyfr Emytau y Methodistiaid Calфинаidd a Wesleiaidd* (Caernarfon a Bangor: Cymanfaoedd y ddwy Eglwys, 1927), p. 279.

⁵⁸⁷ My translation.

⁵⁸⁸ See John Thickens, *Emytau a'u Hawduriad* (Caernarfon: Llyfrfa'r Methodistiaid Calфинаidd, 1961), p. 176: 'Dywedir yn achlysurol mai gweld yr haearn yn toddi yn y tân a awgrymodd y llinell olaf o'r pennill i'r gof.' / 'It is said that it was seeing the molten iron melting in the fire that created the last line in Lewis's head.'

being placed there.⁵⁸⁹ The sheer pressure of the prospect of our sin being imputed on him is breaking the man, Christ Jesus. This echoes Bunyan's portrayal of sin as a burden carried on the back of his protagonist in *Pilgrim's Progress*. The philosopher and theologian R.C. Sproul used this image to explain the great exchange between a sinner and his Saviour:

This is the description of how salvation comes. It comes as a result of the atoning work of Christ and the exchange of our sin from our backs to His, as well as the cloak of His righteousness being transferred from His account to ours.⁵⁹⁰

This is the moment, in Lewis's mind, that his burden is transferred onto Jesus. God the Father then punishes Christ for Lewis's sin; he does not use a whip but a fatal sword. The language of the forge is used: metallic iconography, sweaty backs, nails, and melting hearts. The author is not only reminded of this death by his trade, but his trade portrays him as executioner. He is the creator of the sword and the nails because he is the very sinner that caused Christ's death. The repetition of 'A'i' | 'And he' is important in the hymn:⁵⁹¹

Aredig ar gefn oedd mor hardd,
A'i daro â chleddyf ei Dad,
A'i arwain i Galfari fryn,
A'i hoelio ar groesbren o'i fodd;

On the one hand, it is an example of a Welsh poetic technique called *Cymeriad geiriol* which repeats the beginning of each line in order to emphasise something important or lead to a climax in the poem; in essence it is the same as the Greek *anaphora*. This technique also

⁵⁸⁹ The Pilgrim in Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* bears a burden of sin which he only gets rid of at the foot of the cross. See p. 1 and pp. 35-36.

⁵⁹⁰ R.C. Sproul, 'Christian loses his Burden', *Table Talk Magazine* (January 2006), <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/christian-loses-his-burden/> [Accessed 09/12/2016].

⁵⁹¹ I have tried to imitate this technique in the translation.

reflects a Hebrew literary device whereby the stress of the prose leads to a climax.⁵⁹² Lewis takes his reader through the garden and up to Calvary but then, he can go no further. The sudden break articulates the impossible task of the hymn writer: to fully comprehend those three hours of hell on the cross. Lewis cannot even start to describe the agonies of Calvary. What we are given is a glimpse of the prelude to the greatest death that ever occurred. The hymn finishes with two questions. One asks whether a heart can melt. The reader can almost imagine the poet staring into the molten metal as he departs from his spiritual reverie.⁵⁹³

Therefore, the Methodists first memorialised their Saviour and emphasised the Calvinistic doctrine of Atonement when they did so. In other literary works, like the quasi-hagiographical *Cofiannau* or the eulogies often included on the front pages of these memoirs, the ‘great preacher’ was memorialised.⁵⁹⁴ However, there seems to be a shift in the subject of creative works relating to death and memory. There is a shift from the individual to the people.

⁵⁹² An example of this is found in the famous passage when Abraham took his son up Mount Moriah, which is in itself, a foreshadowing of Calvary. In Genesis 22, the word ‘and’ is repeated again and again, seeking to capture the experiential agony of Abraham as well as the intensity of the occasion.

⁵⁹³ Thickens, *Emynau a’u Hawduriaid*, p. 176. Thickens says that the only other verse we have which may be by Lewis was recorded in *Y Drysorfa* (March 1937), p. 103. It survives thanks to the oral tradition in the Talley area:

Wrth gofio am goron o ddrain,
 Fe folir am finegr sur;
 Fe genir am bicell mor fain,
 Clodforir am hoelion o ddrur.
 Bydd anthem yn dechrau o hyd
 I Brynwr y byd yn ddi-boen.
 Gan saint a seraffiaid ynghyd,
 Yn bloeddio mai telwng yw’r Oen.

Remembering that sharp crown of thorns,
 He asked for some bitter vinegar
 We sing about that pointed lance,
 We rejoice in the iron nails.
 An anthem is being sung
 To the Saviour who is no longer in pain.
 By all the saints and seraphim,
 They shout: Worthy is the Lamb!

⁵⁹⁴ Pantycelyn and his contemporaries started by writing poetic eulogies to figures like Daniel Rowland, George Whitefield and Howell Harris. This soon evolves into prose and the quasi-hagiographies called *Cofiannau*.

The People

In order to show how this shift was not just isolated in hymnody, this sub-section will show how wider poetry – as well as hymns – reveals a shift from the individual to the collective which went side by side with the increasing social consciousness in Wales.

Pat Jallard has argued that – before the advancement of medicine and rapid industrialisation – an acceptance of death existed especially in religious households. Although her example comes from the 1850s, it provides us with an insight into the mentality of earlier Christians, especially pre-1859:

The Tait children were extremely familiar with the hymns, poetry, and scripture related to death, which enabled them to develop, Jallard argues, an accepting attitude towards their own deaths as a “transition to a happier world with God, where they would be eventually reunited”.⁵⁹⁵

The context for this quotation is Archibald Tait (1811-1880), the Archbishop of Canterbury who lost five of his seven children to scarlet fever. What happens with the advent of increased industrialisation seems to be an increase of people talking and writing about death. For example, in 1872, Christina Rossetti publishes *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* which actually contains five poems about dead babies, such as this one:

A baby's cradle with no baby in it,
A baby's grave where autumn leaves drop sere;
The sweet soul gathered home to Paradise,
The body waiting here.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁵ Quoted in Lynne Vallone, ‘Fertility, Childhood, and Death in the Victorian Family’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2000), 217-226, p. 223 originally from Pat Jallard, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 135.

⁵⁹⁶ ‘A Baby’s cradle’ in Christina G. Rossetti, *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1872), p. 15.



Figure 5 - A Baby's cradle with no baby in it (1872)

These are very real and poignant images: an empty cradle, the little grave, and the powerful lines: 'no baby', which could almost have been uttered by a young sibling. The image is the mother mourning in black. The theology is orthodox where the body waits the great day of Resurrection. The image of the cradle brings Christ's empty tomb to mind. Rossetti writes another similar rhyme:

Why did baby die,
 Making Father sigh,
 Mother cry?

Flowers, that bloom to die,
 Make no reply
 Of "why?"
 But bow and die.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁷ 'Why did Baby die?' in *Sing-Song*, p. 24.



Figure 6 - Why did Baby die? (1872)

The questioning is again pertinent to child and adult. Why did it happen? Why are my parents acting differently? The use of flowers indicates that it just is and there is no need to ask ‘why’ although the poem, in a way, is a form of questioning. The grave in the image looks similar to the cradle in the previous rhyme. Perhaps the illustrator is alluding to the surge of literal ‘cot-deaths’. These examples from Victorian literature show a social shift was actually a British phenomenon and not the product of so-called Celtic melancholia or morbidity.

With the gathering pace of industrialisation in Britain, huge population growth and dangerous working conditions, life expectancy at birth and median age at death were much lower than modal age at death.⁵⁹⁸ The reason for this was that these statistics were highly

⁵⁹⁸ Julie Mills, ‘Mortality in England and Wales: Average Life Span 2010’, *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/mortalityine nglandandwales/2012-12-17> [Accessed: 17/02/17] ‘Life expectancy is the average total life span or the mean age at death. The median age at death represents that age at which exactly half the deaths in a given time period

sensitive to changes in mortality among infants and children. Children were dying due to poor working conditions, consumption, and malnourishment. Ebenezer Scrooge's harsh outburst in *The Christmas Carol* reveals the anxiety in 1840s England related to children, death and population growth: 'If they better die, they better do so and decrease the surplus population'.⁵⁹⁹ In 1842, Lord Shaftesbury, an evangelical peer, initiated the Mines and Collieries Act after the horror of 26 children dying in one colliery accident in 1838.⁶⁰⁰ Shaftesbury's philanthropic activism finally led to the 1878 Factory and Workshop Act which prohibited young children from working and insisted that they receive an education.⁶⁰¹ Death could be avoided. This seems to be an obvious fact for the modern reader but for a nineteenth-century family, death was always very near. Pat Jallard's work has shown how medical advancements led to a change in people's perception of death:

Once doctors came to believe that they could cure more diseases, the death of a patient represented failure, rather than a landmark in life to be thoughtfully prepared for. The doctor is no longer perceived as the comforter of the dying, but as the medical professional who exercises scientific skills to avoid death, and who often prefers to evade the topic with patients.⁶⁰²

This evasion of death from both the scientific world and arguably the theological world led to an increase in literary output. Death was no longer a glorious thing but a disaster which warranted a say from the poets. Theologically, the publication of the *Origin of Species* had shaken belief in the inerrant nature of the scriptures, meaning that everything from the age of the world to the very existence of heaven was now under question. Furthermore, when death

were below that age and half the deaths were above that age. Modal age at death is the age where death is most likely or most common'.

⁵⁹⁹ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1842]), p. 39.

⁶⁰⁰ See *The Condition and Treatment of the Children employed in the Mines and Colliers of the United Kingdom Carefully compiled from the appendix to the first report of the Commissioners With copious extracts from the evidence, and illustrative engravings* (London: Paternoster, 1842).

⁶⁰¹ The Act meant that no child under 10 could be employed. Education was compulsory up to the age of 10, and 10-14-year olds were only allowed to work half-days.

⁶⁰² Jallard, *Death in the Victorian Family* p. 96.

occurred in the family, that religious doubt intensified. Relatively recent scholarship shows how religious doubt or anxiety can have an effect on psychological and physical well-being.⁶⁰³ The proximity of death leads to doubt and doubt may subsequently lead to depression. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, it is noticeable that it is Bessy's death that leads Nicholas Higgins into a state of doubt and despair:

There's many a time when I've thought I didna believe in God, but I've never put it fair out before me in words, as many men do. I may ha' laughed at those who did, to brave it out like – but I have looked round at after, to see if He heard me, if so be there was a He.⁶⁰⁴

Death causes those doubts to come out in words. Lynne Vallone concludes that the increase in fear and doubt was a result in the weakening of evangelical fervour:

With the passing of Evangelical fervour, the fear of death and difficulty in consoling the grieving became more pronounced within the Victorian family.⁶⁰⁵

This pronounced fear and increasing proximity to death may be some reasons for the poetic outburst which occurred in Wales.

Jesus Christ and all the great preachers were being remembered in Wales but so were babies, mothers, wives, brothers, sons and daughters. The power of verse to commemorate loved ones is especially visible in the magazines written for women in the nineteenth century. As a reaction to the 1847 Blue Books Report, Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd) established *Y Gymraes* under the patronage of Lady Llanover. This magazine was a failure financially and in 1879 a new magazine was formed, called *Y Frythones*. Death seems to dominate its issues.

⁶⁰³ See Neal Krause, Berit Ingersoll Dayton, Christopher Ellison and Keith Wulff, 'Aging, Religious Doubt, and Psychological Well-Being', *The Gerontologist*, 39:5, 525-533.

⁶⁰⁴ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 227.

⁶⁰⁵ Lynne Vallone, 'Fertility, Childhood, and Death in the Victorian Family', *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2000), 217-226 (p. 222).

For example, in one issue of *Y Frythones*, three poems focus on women by the graveside.⁶⁰⁶

D.J. Rees writes about Mary in ‘Mair ar lan y Bedd’;⁶⁰⁷ R.M. Jones writes about the women by Christ’s cross in ‘Y Gwragedd wrth y groes’:

O! fy Nuw ym mhob rhyw drallod
A’m cyferfydd drwy fy oes,
Dyro nerth i ganlyn Iesu,
Fel y gwragedd wrth y groes!⁶⁰⁸

O! my God in every tribulation
And trouble through my life
Give me strength to follow Jesus
Like the women at the cross.⁶⁰⁹

The phrase ‘dyro nerth’ is almost a plea on behalf of all women who were struggling to cope. There seems to be a recurring image of the woman by the graveside or on the verge of death or on the verge of suicide. S.A.K. Strahan, writing in his 1893 work *Suicide and Insanity*, regarded suicide as

Due to two causes, first, because the increase of wealth has not beneficially affected the great mass of people; and second, because many of the people are deteriorating from city life, unhealthy occupations, and the wear and tear of modern life generally.⁶¹⁰

Russell Davies has written extensively on the taboo subject of suicide during the era especially in Carmarthenshire.⁶¹¹ Davies notes how the person most exposed to the pressures of industrial modernity were men. However, the Victorians’ imagery of these distressing

⁶⁰⁶ See *Y Frythones*, III:1 (January 1881).

⁶⁰⁷ *Y Frythones*, III:1 (January 1881), p. 31.

⁶⁰⁸ *Y Frythones*, III:1 (January 1881), p. 33.

⁶⁰⁹ My translation.

⁶¹⁰ S.A.K. Strahan, *Suicide and Insanity* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893), p. 123.

⁶¹¹ See especially Russell Davies, *Secret Sins: Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire, 1870-1920* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2012) and his chapter ‘Women and Suicide in Carmarthenshire’ in Angela V. John (ed.), *Our Mothers’ Land* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp. 95-109.

realities was usually feminine.⁶¹² However, all of these poems seem to be portraying the opposite: strength and resilience. The weeping woman is a biblical and nationalist trope; it can be found throughout the Bible, from Psalm 137 down to the cross. She is actually portrayed as a strong individual.⁶¹³

One such portrayal is by the poet Catherine Jane Prichard, ‘Buddug’ (1842-1909) who takes the reader to a graveyard in Dolwar Fach where her dead (or sleeping) poetic mother waits for the call of the archangel in ‘Yr “Hen” Ann Griffiths’ | “Old” Ann Griffiths:⁶¹⁴

Ann Griffiths. Pam yn hen?
Nid oedd ond ieuanc oedran,
Rhyw chwech ar hugain oedd pan aeth
I'r bedd o Ddolwar Fechan!
Bydd rhyw ieuencyd byth
Ar fynwent Llanfihangel,
Nes daw ei chysegredig lwch
I ateb yr archangel.⁶¹⁵

Old Ann Griffiths. Why ‘old’?
She was but young,
Around twenty-six years old
When she went from Dolwar to the grave!
There’ll ever be some youthfulness
In Llanfihangel’s cemetery,
Until her sacred dust
Answers the archangel’s call.⁶¹⁶

The poet emphasises Ann’s youth and puzzles why people call her ‘old Ann Griffiths’. The fact that Ann died in childbirth is important to a female poet. With the lack of contraception, maternal mortality rate was high. Griffiths appears like a sleeping maiden trapped in beauty and Buddug describes her legacy almost in the language of relics, or her sacred remains. The question is: what are these remains? She answers in the second stanza:

⁶¹² Davies, ‘Women and Suicide in Carmarthenshire’, p. 96.

⁶¹³ The weeping woman is often a trope in nationalist discourse as well e.g. Mother Ireland weeping over her dead sons, etc. Although equally female national emblems can be strong and warlike too e.g. Marianne, Mother Russia.

⁶¹⁴ ‘Hen’ is sometimes used as a term of endearment or affection, rather than as an adjective denoting age.

⁶¹⁵ Buddug, ‘Yr “Hen” Ann Griffiths’ in *Caniadau Buddug* (Caernarfon: Swyddfa Cymru, 1911), pp. 39-40.

⁶¹⁶ My translation.

Meddyliau nefol hen
 Mor hen a'r Hen Ddihenydd,
 A rodd yr emynyddes hon
 Mewn gwisg dragwyddol newydd;
 Gwirionedd dwyfol Duw,
 Fel sanctaidd dân yn ennyn;
 A gobaith i bechadur tlawd,
 Fel angor ymhob emyn.

It was ancient heavenly thoughts
 As old as Death itself,
 That dressed this hymnist
 In new, eternal raiment;
 God's divine truth,
 Like a sacred fire kindled;
 And hope to a poor sinner,
 Like an anchor in every hymn.⁶¹⁷

There is a repetition of the word 'hen' | 'old' which wonderfully plays on the old Celtic trope of wisdom and knowledge being accessible to a young person.⁶¹⁸ The poet says that she was old because her God-given thoughts were as old as death itself: 'Mor hen a'r Hen Ddihenydd'. The irony is that Death, in true Methodist fashion, enables Ann to wear new, everlasting raiment. Buddug reveals the secret of this 'eternal youth': 'Gwirionedd dwyfol Duw'; the truth – or Jesus himself – who called himself 'The way, the truth, and the life.' It is also a hope. Buddug uses a similar poetic technique to Welsh *dyfalu* but uses simile instead of metaphor. This truth is like a holy fire, whilst the hope is like an anchor, paying tribute to the nautical references in Ann Griffiths's oeuvre.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ My translation.

⁶¹⁸ See Ifor Williams (ed.), *Canu Aneirin* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970), p.1: 'Gredyf gwr oed gwas. Aneirin describes an 'old-young man'; he is a warrior who had wisdom beyond his years. Early accounts of Myrddin/Merlin also depict him as a young man with the wisdom of an ancient.

⁶¹⁹ See Chapter 1.

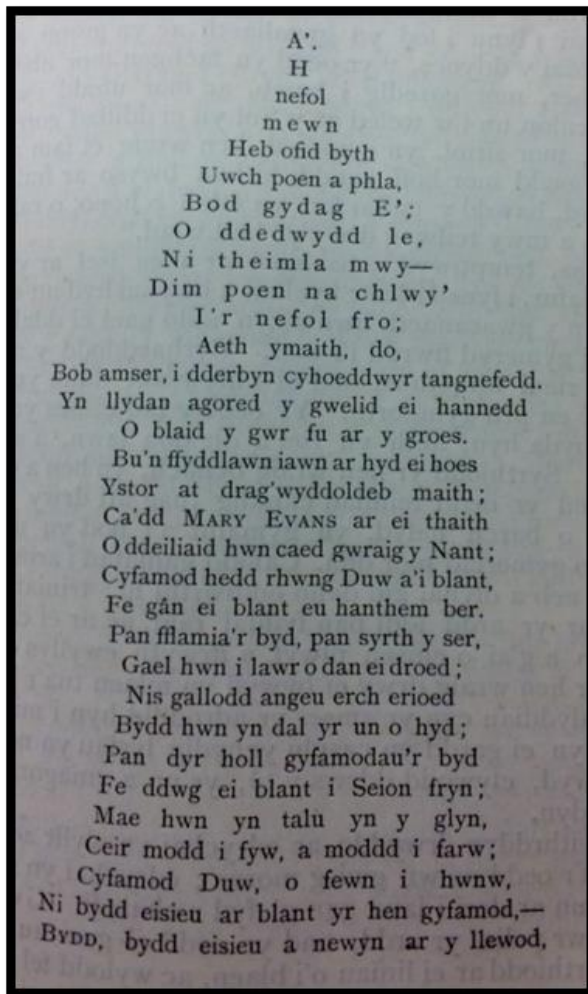


Figure 7 - 'Cof golofn' (1879)

Death even changes the form of some poems. One poet actually writes emblem poems which are shaped like tombstones or objects of remembrance. Tegfelyn (Revd. Edward Lloyd? 1846-1922) grieves and writes the poem 'Cof-golofn' in memory of Mrs. Mary Evans, who showed hospitality to ministers of religion.⁶²⁰ The poet instructs us to read the poem from the last line up. This poetic instruction is heightened by the theology. At the foot

⁶²⁰ See *Y Frythones*, 1:12 (December 1879): 'Yr hon oedd yn wraig rinweddol yng ngwir ystyr y gair. Yr oedd yn hynod am ei lletygarwch i weinidogion yr efengyl, ac yn ffyddlon gyda phob peth perthynol i achos crefydd. Bu farw mewn tangnefedd, gan sisial y geiriau canlynol: 'Y mae eisieu a newyn ar y llewod ieuainc: ond y sawl a geisiant yr Arglwydd ni bydd arnynt eisieu dim.' [Darllener o'r gwaelod tuag i fyny]. | 'This was a virtuous woman in the full sense of the word. She was notable for her hospitality towards ministers of the gospel, and faithful in everything relating to the cause of religion. She died peacefully whilst whispering these words: 'The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing' [Read from the bottom up].

of this monument there is a verse which includes negative words like ‘newyn’ | ‘famine’ and ‘llewod’ | ‘lions’. The reader then realises that this woman was a Christian or a ‘child of the covenant’. This allows the reader to continue up the stone monument imitating the action of the woman’s soul. The speaker muses about death and how other covenants (such as marriage) end, but the covenant of grace enables us, the reader, to continue up the words of the poem in an almost ladder-like succession. In the centre, we are given her name: ‘MARY EVANS’. The shape of the poem itself looks like a woman’s body – a spectral shadow of the deceased. The poet then re-iterates her virtues. She is portrayed as having a store in eternity and being faithful to the crucified one. The top of the stone describes heaven and words suddenly run out as Mary Evans enters its eternity.

Tegfelyn then writes a more personal poem. His cousin, Dorothey Hughes, died at the youthful age of twenty-four. This emblem poem is entitled ‘Bytholwyrdd ar ei Bedd’ | ‘An Evergreen on Her Grave’:⁶²¹

⁶²¹ Tegfelyn, ‘Bytholwyrdd ar ei bedd’, *Y Frythones*, III:5 (June 1881), p. 143.

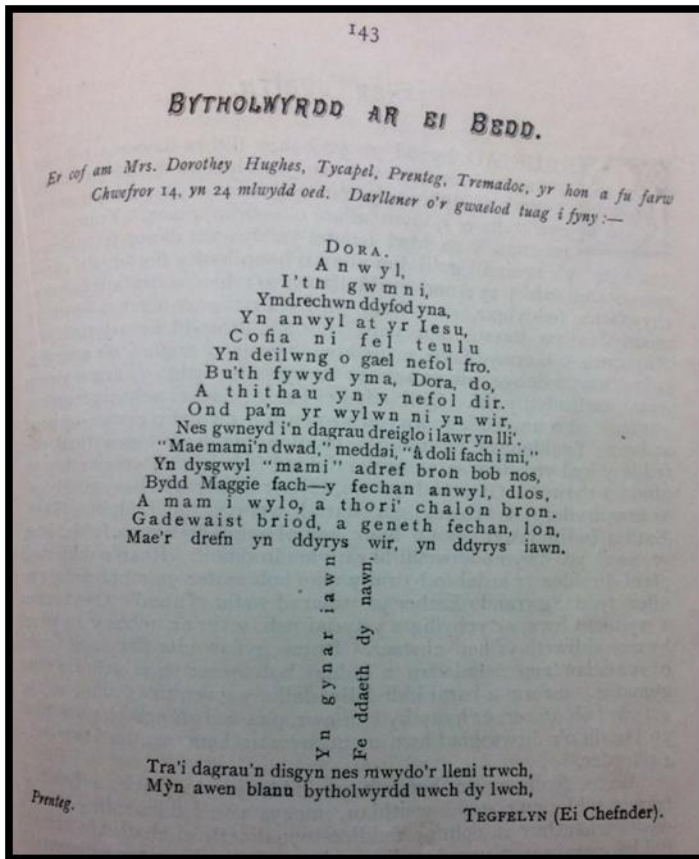
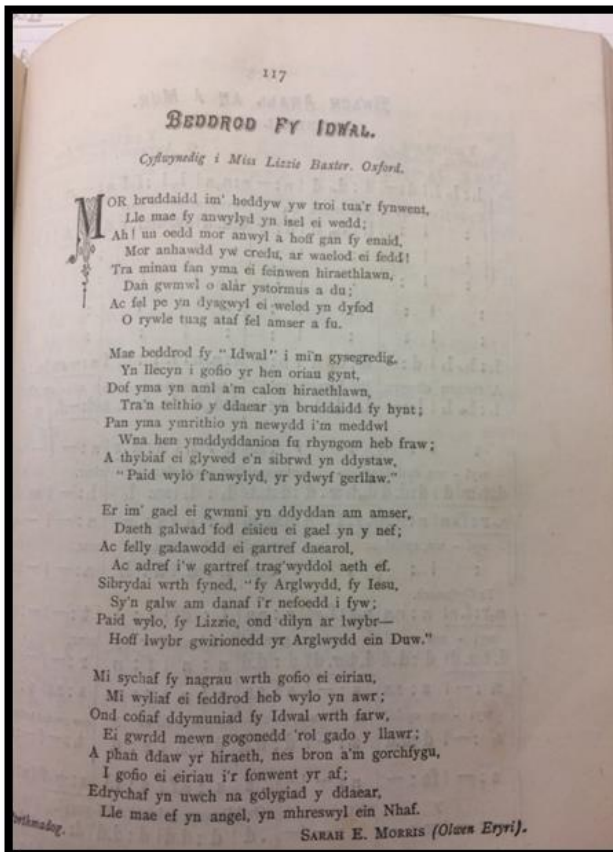


Figure 8 - Bytholwyrdd ar ei Bedd | An Evergreen on her Grave (1881)

The poem is the planted tree. As in the previous poem, heaven is described at the top. The poet wishes that his cousin would remember her family to Jesus when she arrives: ‘Cofia ni fel teulu / Yn anwyl at yr Iesu’; Jesus is another member of the family – a domestic figure. Religious sentimentality goes side-by-side with the cruelty of Victorian Wales. The mother dies ‘yn gynar iawn’; there is a widower, a young child who cries for “mami”; all these details add to the proximity of death in nineteenth-century Welsh society. It is an evergreen tree which symbolises the everlasting life of the Christian. ‘Dora’ is situated at the top of the tree; she is in that ‘better place’ – a phrase which is far more significant when placed within the poverty and living conditions of the Victorian context.



BEDDROD FY IDWAL.



Figures 9 and 10 – Beddrod fy Idwal

The image of the weeping woman is also captured in an earlier edition of *Y Frythones* by the poet Sarah E. Morris (Olwen Eryri) and her poem 'Beddrod Fy Idwal'. As in Buddug's poem to Ann Griffiths, the burial place of the lost beloved is itself sacred: 'Mae beddrod fy "Idwal" i mi'n gysegredig'. The speech marks indicate that the speaker pronounces the place sacred with the name of her beloved. Idwal is mysteriously presented as an angel in the closing line: 'Lle mae ef yn angel' | 'Where he is an angel' which shows how Victorian sentimentality seems to have over-taken the Calvinistic theology that dominated earlier verse.⁶²²

Interestingly, the engraving has a Pre-Raphaelite hue to it in the inclusion of the caged bird.⁶²³ This is a woman imprisoned by death, bound by sorrow, and addicted to the graveside. It is possible that Queen Victoria's widowhood in 1861 influenced these works. However, the poet suggests that a higher vision gives the widow liberty, suggesting that Idwal also may desire her freedom.

Most of the periodicals have examples of poetry written about the death of children.

One example is this *englyn* written in 1870. It is by an anonymous poet to Mr Jarret Jones's baby:

Yma i fyd llwm, afiach – ni ddaeth un,
Ha! naddo'th anwylach;
Diball fo'th rodio bellach -
O gryd i'r bedd, greadur bach.⁶²⁴

Here to a gloomy, morbid world – one did not come,
Ha! you didn't my dear;
You are now unfailing my love
From cot to grave, little one.⁶²⁵

⁶²² 'Sentimentality' - I define this as a form of art which is wholly determined by feeling, irrespective of its aesthetic quality. It can be both a positive and a negative concept. *OED*: 'Of persons, their dispositions and actions: Characterized by sentiment. Originally in favourable sense: Characterized by or exhibiting refined and elevated feeling. In later use: Addicted to indulgence in superficial emotion; apt to be swayed by sentiment.'

⁶²³ It is reminiscent of paintings like 'The Awakening Conscience' by William Holman Hunt (1853) and Rossetti's 'Veronica Veronese' (1872).

⁶²⁴ 'Englyn i faban Mr Jarret Jones, Peirianydd yng Ngwallgofdy, Gogledd Cymru', *Y Goleuad*, 11:55 (Hydref 1870), p. 5.

⁶²⁵ My translation.

The repetition of ‘ach’ sound brings the Welsh phrase ‘ach a fi’ | ‘ugh’ to mind. The grim world ‘fyd llwm’ | ‘gloomy world’ at first seem to allude to the industrial context but then we look at the occupation of the father of the child: an engineer in an asylum or mental hospital. The speaker suggests that it was probably fitting that the little one avoided that unfortunate context.⁶²⁶ The *cyghanedd* in the *englyn* makes it quite a difficult task to even read it out with its ‘th’, ‘ch’, and ‘dd’ sounds. The only soft elements are the *geiriau cyrch* which indicate that the soul has passed to glory: pause and then ‘ni ddaeth un’ | ‘one did not come’.

Hymns written in the latter half of the nineteenth century also document a shift from the individual (or rather, the great man) to the people (babies, widows etc.). There are many examples. Ieuan Gwyllt’s (John Roberts 1822-1877) ‘Y Nefoedd’ is a good example.⁶²⁷ He uses the word ‘Ein’ | ‘Our’ repeatedly:

Er rhodio dyffryn galar prudd,	We’ve travelled through the vale of woe,
Ac wŷlo maith flynyddoedd.	And bitterly wept for many years,
Ein Duw a sych ein dagrau’n lân.	Our God will wipe our tears clean.
Ein galarnadau droir yn gân	Our woes shall be transformed to song
Heb ddarfod, yn y nefoedd.	Unending, in our heaven.

Heaven is a place where the ‘wan flinedig’ | ‘the weary weak’ may rest. In this fourth stanza, the speaker imagines a communal sanctuary in heaven. The note of social consciousness displaces the spiritual truths behind the afterlife. Tears are wiped by the Deity whilst the earthly cries of woe are transformed into unending song. This is a heavenly transformation for the working-class masses rather than the individual soul.

Death is a sad theme which dominates the poetics of the period. The tone of some poems seems to question its nature and ask whether the glorious prospect of the past could

⁶²⁶ This poem reminded me of Thomas Hardy’s ‘To an Unborn Pauper’s Child’.

⁶²⁷ Ieuan Gwyllt, Hymn 696 in *Llyfr Emynau* (1929), p. 214.

still be maintained in a modern, industrial society. What we are beginning to see is that the special relationship – and indeed the shifting focus – between individual and the Welsh people actually influences the poetry. Death and memory form an important part of the Aesthetic. Both the introduction and the first chapter revealed how an attachment to ancestors is one characteristic of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. What this section has shown is that the paradoxical relationship between individual and collective in the realm of memory and death is also vitally important. We will now look at how one other change in nineteenth-century Welsh life also left its distinct mark on the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.

Temperance

Another noticeable change that occurred in nineteenth-century Wales was the emergence of the Temperance or ‘Teetotal’ Movement.⁶²⁸ Representing the ideals of self-control and self-denial, the temperance movement epitomized middle-class Victorian values which had been shaped by the growing Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism.

The Background

The growth of the Temperance Movement should be viewed in the context of industrialisation and changing drinking patterns between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There was a distinctive shift in Wales from a largely rural community – and work-based drinking customs in the eighteenth century – to the problems associated with ‘rapid industrialization and urban dwelling in nineteenth-century South Wales when escalating

⁶²⁸ See ‘Teetotal’ in *OED*: ‘The most specific account of this word is that it was first used by a working-man, Richard Turner of Preston, about September 1833, in a speech advocating total abstinence from intoxicating liquors, in preference to abstinence from ardent spirits only, as practised by some early temperance reformers. Among those present on the occasion was Mr. Joseph Livesey, one of the ‘Seven men of Preston’, who there formed the first Total Abstinence Society on 22 March 1832, and in whose Autobiography (1867–8), included in his *Life & Labours* by John Pearce (1885), particulars will be found [...] It has also been asserted that, in the total abstinence sense, the word arose at Lansing, New York, in Jan. 1827, from the use on pledge cards of T. to indicate ‘total’, and the consequent collocation ‘T.-total’.

levels of drunkenness stimulated intensive temperance activity'.⁶²⁹ Throughout the eighteenth century, Wales's agricultural culture saw beer (*cwrw* in Welsh) becoming the drink of choice. When ale was cheaper than tea and water supplies were unreliable, 'beer fulfilled the dual functions of thirst quencher and a basis of the social framework underpinning Welsh cultural practices'.⁶³⁰ Many drinking customs gradually came to an end as the influence of Nonconformity, and, in particular, the aggressive line taken by Calvinistic Methodism on alcohol began to spread throughout Wales.⁶³¹

However, temperance was not a new phenomenon. Long before the nineteenth century there had been pamphlets and broadsheets, often from religious elements, complaining about drunkenness. These writings rarely advocated total abstinence but rather complained about the gin culture which was crippling society. William Hogarth's famous 'Gin Lane' (1751) depicts the evils of the consumption of gin as a contrast to the merits of drinking beer:

⁶²⁹ Jack. S. Blocker, David M. Fahey, and Ian R. Tyrrell (eds.), *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopaedia* (Santa Barbara and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2003), p. 641.

⁶³⁰ See Blocker, *Alcohol and Temperance*, p. 641. Consumption of ale was closely associated with agricultural rituals, rites of passage, and wedding customs. For example, *cwrw bach* (or 'bidding') was a custom whereby beer was sold considerably above its market price in order to raise money for engaged couples. The *cwrw gwadd* was a feast of beer, bread and cheese held for a member of the community who was suffering from a prolonged illness. See also Trefor M. Owen, *The Customs and Traditions of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press and The Western Mail, 2000), p. 51 and p. 106f.

⁶³¹ Owen, *The Customs and Traditions of Wales*, p. 108: 'The movement [...] appears at first to have made greater headway in north Wales than in the south, probably because of the greater commitment of Methodist leaders such as the Revd John Elias of Anglesey'.



Figure 11 - William Hogarth, *Gin Lane*, 1751.

Here, prosperity is vividly contrasted with chaos. In 1830, Parliament passed the Beer Act which liberalised the regulations governing the sale and brewing of beer. The Beerhouse Act enabled any rate-payer to brew and sell beer on payment of a licence costing two guineas with the intention of increasing competition between brewers and lowering prices and encouraging people to drink beer instead of strong spirits. It resulted in the opening of thousands of new public houses and breweries throughout the country.⁶³² Temperance reformers believed that the Beer Act had compounded the

⁶³² See Davies, *The History of Wales*, p. 363: 'In Blackwood in 1842 there was one for every five inhabitants, and the Dowlais Ironworks was surrounded by two hundred taverns'. In 1850, 305 drinking places were recorded in the towns of Merthyr Tydfil and Dowlais. By 1854, the number had risen to 504. See Blocker, *Alcohol and Temperance*, p. 641.

problem.⁶³³ The 1847 Blue Books Report also encouraged this image of drunkenness and immorality among the Welsh.

Therefore, the question of morality and social ethics was closely linked to temperance from the outset. The first temperance society established in Wales was a branch of the British Foreign and Temperance Society, which formed in Holywell in North Wales in 1832. The society advocated moderate drinking. The first total abstinence society was formed at Llanerch-y-Medd on Anglesey in 1835; all members were expected to sign “the pledge”. There is no doubt that the genesis of Welsh temperance on Anglesey is thanks to the dominance of John Elias’s Calvinistic Methodism on the island. As previously mentioned, he was dubbed ‘the pope of Anglesey’.⁶³⁴

Temperance Literature

As the temperance movement grew and spread to South Wales, literature was produced in conjunction with its rapid growth. *Y Dirwestydd* (The Abstainer) was first published in 1836; *Y Seren Ddirwestol* (The Temperance star), 1837; and *Y Dirwestwr Deheuol* (The Southern Abstainer), 1838 all promoted the cause. As the nineteenth century proceeds, temperance begins to dominate literary output in Wales. Katie Gramich has noted in a recent chapter how the ‘temperance novel’ became popular in Wales following the 1847 Blue Books affair.⁶³⁵ She argues that the ‘ffug-hanes’ or novel, although initially unpopular in Nonconformist circles in Wales because it literally told lies, evolved into a quasi-religious form in the hands

⁶³³ Blocker, *Alcohol and Temperance*, p. 641: ‘the overall result of the beerhouse license in Wales was to increase drunkenness, particularly in the newly industrialised areas’.

⁶³⁴ See *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*.

⁶³⁵ Katie Gramich, ‘Travel, Translation and Temperance: The Origins of the Welsh Novel’ in Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (eds.), *A History of Welsh Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018 [forthcoming]).

of Welsh writers.⁶³⁶ One of these novels, Elizabeth Mary Jones's (Moelona) *Teulu Bach Nantoer* (1913), reveals how alcohol was a scourge in rural communities like Cardiganshire. Literature like *Teulu Bach Nantoer* is perhaps a manifestation of what John Davies has called a 'sub-culture of considerable energy'.⁶³⁷ Although the chapels advocated temperance, the movement had its own unique character and separate literary output which transcended the Nonconformity. Like the chapel, both sexes were actively involved in temperance activities. In 1892, the Undeb Dirwestol Merched Gogledd Cymru (The North Wales Women's Temperance Union) was formed with the southern equivalent forming a little later in 1901. By 1916, some 140 branches in South Wales were run by women.⁶³⁸

Before looking specifically at examples of poetry which figured prominently in the Temperance Movement, it is interesting to plot the theological shift that is hinted at in the previous paragraph. As previously noted, Erdozain's work argues that a shift from an 'internal' concept of sin to an 'external' concept of vice created a mechanism of secularisation from within Nonconformity (arguably the crucible for Welsh teetotalism). He argues that there was a shift from Evangelicalism to temperance agitation in which there was 'a new Methodism of self-reliance and self-control', a religion of morality.⁶³⁹ Furthermore, the burden of guilt was being transferred from self to others.⁶⁴⁰ That is to say, those outside the chapel who were not exercising self-control. Alcohol became Nonconformity's rival; it became *the* sin rather than *a* sin:

⁶³⁶ Gramich is referring to William J. Griffith's *O'r pwlpudd - i'r crogbren: ffug-chwedl ddirwestol* (Bangor: Evan Thomas, 1905) in Cardiff University's Special Collections (SCOLAR) which has been bound with a number of other texts which are religious in character.

⁶³⁷ Davies, *History of Wales*, p. 364.

⁶³⁸ Sarah Jane Rees "Cranogwen" (1839-1916) was a key figure.

⁶³⁹ Erdozain, 'The Secularisation of Sin', p. 77.

⁶⁴⁰ Erdozain, 'The Secularisation of Sin', p. 73.

Under the strained conditions of industrialism, it was their pre-eminent rival and, as such, sin. Industrialisation provides the context, but it was the binary structures of the Evangelical mind, with its ‘profound apprehension of the contrary states of: Nature and of grace’, and the ability to subject quotidian ambiguity to ‘the eternal microscope’, that drove the connection. Here, quite as much as in the ‘betrayals’ of an absconding liberalism, secularisation put down its roots.⁶⁴¹

This rival, alcohol, created an ethicised religion where conversion – which had been the primary focus of earlier and more orthodox evangelicalism – had subliminally been replaced by ‘signing the pledge’.⁶⁴² In 1887, a report from a temperance publication called *The Young Man* shows how conversionism had been demoted to second place: ‘We [The Movement] took many pledges, and there were some conversions’.⁶⁴³ Temperance, to borrow Charles Booth’s observation, ‘had become a religion in itself’.⁶⁴⁴ Before 1830, most Methodists and Anglicans actually encouraged beer drinking, for, as we have observed, it was seen as a better alternative to gin, which was crippling society in the first half of the eighteenth century.⁶⁴⁵

According to the historian Brian Harrison:

Teetotalism in the 1830s was opposed by many religious bodies. Many religious leaders feared that teetotalism was substituting a purely secular and ethical crusade for the reliance on divine grace.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴¹ Erdozain, ‘The Secularisation of Sin’, p. 77.

⁶⁴² ‘Signing the pledge’ - People were encouraged to make a covenant or an oath stating that they would abstain from intoxicating drink.

⁶⁴³ Extract from *The Young Man* (July, 1887), p. 74.

⁶⁴⁴ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 3rd Series, Religious Influences VII (London: Summary, 1903), p. 20.

⁶⁴⁵ *The Gin Craze* was so serious that Parliament had to pass five major acts to control its consumption in 1729, 1736, 1743, 1747, and 1751.

⁶⁴⁶ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (London: Faber, 1971), p. 179.

Some Nonconformist leaders were cautious of temperance because it ultimately substituted a theology based on total reliance on divine grace for salvation. Temperance, as we will see in the hymns, suggested that sobriety was the root of personal salvation.

Most of the temperance magazines were non-denominational although they were financially supported by the chapels. The religiosity is evident in their content. The slogan of *Y Dirwestydd* highlighted divine appointment by quoting the words of the Apostle Paul: ‘Ffrwyth yr Ysbryd yw – Dirwest’ | ‘The Fruit of the Spirit is – Temperance’.⁶⁴⁷ The message was clothed in religious language. According to one poet known as ‘Gimel’:

Yn lle bod gyda’r meddwon câs,	Instead of being with wicked drunkards,
Yn yfed diod gwae,	Drinking that woeful drink,
Cawn wledda, trwy ddaioni grâs,	We can feast, through grace’s goodness,
Heb achos llwfrhau. ⁶⁴⁸	With no cause to be disheartened.

This poem is a simple 8.6.8.6 quatrain which reflects the hymn form with an ABAB rhyme. It begins with a drinking scene where the speaker presents a dark scenario full of woe; theologically, it could even be argued that the poet wants to reflect hell in the first two lines. The second part presents a feast where abstinence is actually a product of grace.⁶⁴⁹ This poem was published in 1836 and already we can see how theological language is being employed: ‘trwy ddaioni grâs’ | ‘through the goodness of grace’. Salvation needs to be acquired *from* drink which has become the very symbol, or even, the substance of sin itself. This idea of a banquet of spiritual food is only available to the sober-minded. In the same issue of *Y Dirwestydd*, it is interesting that a wedding is described thus:

⁶⁴⁷ Galatians 5.

⁶⁴⁸ *Y Dirwestydd* 6, December 1836.

⁶⁴⁹ The Bible does not forbid alcohol but it does forbid drunkenness. See Ephesians 5:18.

Dydd Gwener, Tachwedd 11, priodwyd Hugh Hughes â Jane Hughes o Gaergybi, y ddau yn aelodau gyda'r Annibynnwyr yn y dref honno. Hon oedd y briodas ddirwestol gyntaf yn y gymdogaeth.⁶⁵⁰

The reporter goes on to note how they partook in a 'dê da' or a 'good tea' where there was no alcohol present. There is a subtle theological shift present in this little wedding notice. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, the Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to 'not be unevenly yoked together with unbelievers'. As part of a larger discourse on the Christian life, Paul is telling the young church that it is wiser that Christians (or believers) do not become one (he uses the agricultural metaphor) with unbelievers. But this marriage notice shows that being a Christian or a believer is simply not enough. A social doctrine has formed whereby a teetotaler cannot marry a non-teetotaler.

The drunkard and even those who were not teetotal are transformed in the poetry of the movement into the realm of the lost, the unregenerate, and those who needed salvation.

Ieuan Gwynedd's (1820-1852) hymn is an example of this shifting theology:

Byddin Dirwest sydd yn awr	See how the Army of Temperance
Yn wynebu'r frwydr fawr;	Faces the great battle,
Boed ei milwyr oll yn un	May their soldiers all be one
Am ddyrchafu Mab y Dyn! ⁶⁵¹	In glorifying the Son of Man!

This first stanza echoes Charles Wesley's famous hymn on Christian warfare:

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your Armour on,
Strong in the Strength which God supplies
Thro' his Eternal Son;
Strong in the Lord of Hosts,
And in his mighty Power,

⁶⁵⁰ *Y Dirwestydd* 6, December 1836. 'On Friday, November the 11th, Hugh Hughes and Jane Hughes from Caergybi married. Both were members of the Congregationalists in that town. This was the first temperance wedding in the neighbourhood'.

⁶⁵¹ Ieuan Gwynedd, 'Hymn 914' in *Llyfr Emynau a Thonau y Wesleyaid* (1904), p. 432.

Who in the Strength of JESUS trusts
Is more than Conqueror.⁶⁵²

They are not called ‘Soldiers of Christ’ in Ieuan Gwynedd’s hymn, like in II Timothy 2:3, but ‘Soldiers of Temperance’ who worship Christ. These subtle changes reflect a shifting theology from the emphasis on personal salvation toward a collective moralism. The hymn continues:

Pechod creulon golla’r dydd,	Cruel sin will lose the day
Caethion medd’dod ddônt yn rhydd:	Drunkard slaves will be set free:
Llwyr ddymchwelir Babel fawr:	Babel will be overthrown
Er ei bri, hi gwymp i lawr.	Even in its might, it shall be cast down.

The enemy is named; the word ‘pechod’| ‘sin’ is straightaway portrayed as alcohol or drunkenness. The speaker then echoes one of Wesley’s most famous conversion hymns ‘And can it be’:

Long my imprison’d spirit lay
Fast bound in Sin and Nature’s Night;
Thine Eye diffus’d a quick’ning Ray,
I woke; the Dungeon flamed with Light;
My Chains fell off, my Heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and follow’d Thee.⁶⁵³

In Ieuan Gwynedd’s hymn, Wesley’s ‘imprisoned spirit’ has been transformed into a drunken convict. The hymn then goes on to use an image from the Book of Genesis.⁶⁵⁴ He plays with the word ‘Babel’, as in the Tower of Babel⁶⁵⁵ – ‘ddymchwelir Babel fawr’ – perhaps an allusion to the ‘babble’ which will be made *sensible* when the captors are sober. Gwynedd’s hymn finishes with another image taken from Genesis:

⁶⁵² Charles Wesley, ‘The Whole Armour of GOD’, first appeared in John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1742), p. 21.

⁶⁵³ Charles Wesley, ‘Free Grace’ in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: William Strahan, 1739), p. 118.

⁶⁵⁴ See Genesis 11.

⁶⁵⁵ See Genesis. The Tower of Babel was where God separated the peoples of the earth linguistically. They had to scatter because they no longer understood one another.

Nac edrychwn byth yn ol –
 O! na fydded neb mor ffol!
 Awn yn mlaen yn fyddin gref,
 Awn yn mlaen yn nerth y nef. Amen.

May we never turn and look back
 O! that no one would be so foolish
 Let's go forward, one strong army,
 Let's go forward in heaven's strength. Amen.

The speaker refers to Lot's wife who foolishly turned and looked back at the burning city of Sodom after God had sent angels to rescue them. Her heart was still in Sodom and she was judged by being turned into a pillar of salt.⁶⁵⁶ The message is clear. If you return to alcohol, you too will be judged. This is a message which has radically changed since Wesley's hymn where the chains have completely fallen off and where (in the next stanza, which is never sung today⁶⁵⁷) God preserves that once-imprisoned soul:

Still the small inward Voice I hear,
 That whispers all my Sins forgiv'n;
 Still the atoning Blood is near,
 That quench'd the Wrath of hostile Heav'n:
 I feel the Life his Wounds impart ;
 I feel my Saviour in my Heart.⁶⁵⁸

Wesley's next stanza contradicts Ieuan Gwynedd's scenario where a person who returns to drink will be destroyed:

No condemnation now I dread,
 JESUS, and all in Him, is Mine⁶⁵⁹

Wesley's emphasis (which suggests a more Calvinistic belief than his brother John's Arminianism) is upon the salvation of the sinner, who cannot face condemnation for he has been justified freely by God's grace through the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ.⁶⁶⁰ In

⁶⁵⁶ See Genesis 19.

⁶⁵⁷ This is partly due to the emphasis on wounds which, for the Victorian audience, was too close to sacramental Catholic imagery.

⁶⁵⁸ Wesley, 'Free Grace', p. 118.

⁶⁵⁹ Wesley, 'Free Grace', p. 118.

⁶⁶⁰ See Romans 3.

contrast, on the subject of judgement, one issue of *Y Dirwestydd* in 1837 provided an image which illustrated *its* condemnation which bears the title: ‘Y Gwpan Feddwol a’i Chynwys Dinystriol’ / ‘The Drunkard’s Cup and its Destructive Content’:



Figure 12 - Y Gwpan Feddwol A'i Chynwys

This illustration is accompanied by a commentary which lists the consequences associated with drink by number and then warns the reader against them:

1. Poverty
2. Apoplexy
3. Madness
4. Dropsy
5. Gout
6. Death

Death is portrayed as a grim reaper with hourglass and scythe in hand. Two men in the background are slowly turning into the demons which are troubling the other men. This idea of the *demon drink* was a widespread concept associated with drunkenness. Men were conceived as becoming demons, having consumed the ‘demon drink’. In 1840, the Australian temperance magazine *The Teetotaller* states: ‘What damns tens and hundreds of thousands of souls yearly? Will not every tongue reply, “Tis drink! the demon drink!”’⁶⁶¹ The personification of alcohol was widespread in the era. The *Scottish Temperance Review* stated in 1848: ‘Intemperance is a possession as well as a disease, alcohol is the demon, we are determined to cast him out.’⁶⁶² The sinner has been changed into a drunkard and the devil is now in liquid form.

Not only does the orthodox view of *the sinner* and the devil change but temperance re-moulds the Deity as well. In 1836, in the pages of *Y Dirwestydd*, a poet called John Jones writes a hymn to a *new* god:

Llawer siom, a llawer saeth, Gyda’r ddiod meddwol daeth, Ond bellach ffarwel byth, O hyn sydd yn hyfryd, Hyfryd, hyfryd, hyfryd, O hyn sydd yn hyfryd Llechu y’nghôl dirwestiaeth mwy. ⁶⁶³	So many disappointments, many arrows, With alcohol did come, But now, forever I’ll farewell, O this is what’s wonderful, Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, O this is what’s wonderful, To nestle in temperance’s bosom. ⁶⁶⁴
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This stanza would have been blasphemous to earlier Methodists. It is written in the experiential tone of Griffiths or Pantycelyn’s hymns; the last line of the first stanza imitates

⁶⁶¹ *The Teetotaller*, 1:6 (1st of August, 1840), p. 43.

⁶⁶² *The Scottish Temperance Review* (June, 1848), p. 285.

⁶⁶³ *Y Dirwestydd*, 5 (November, 1836), p. 35.

⁶⁶⁴ My translation.

some of the hymns that were discussed in the first chapter.⁶⁶⁵ And yet Temperance is portrayed as a god in this hymn. Salvation no longer comes from God but from a life of abstinence. The speaker continues:

Ymlaen yn ngrym dirwestiaeth 'r af,	I'll go forward in the power of temperance,
Yn ddirwestwr marw wnaif;	I'll die a teetotaller,
Dirwestiaeth biau'r dydd	Temperance wins the day
O hyn sydd yn hyfryd,	O this is what's wonderful,
Hyfryd, hyfryd, hyfryd,	Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful,
O hyn sydd yn hyfryd	O this is what's wonderful,
Plant dirwestiaeth dowch y'mlaen.	Temperance's children, come forth.

The repetition of 'Dirwestiaeth' | 'temperance' hammers the hymn-writer's views home. It is a hymn, nonetheless. It praises the movement in an unmistakably religious idiom. This song replaces God with a new deity. People no longer go forth 'in the might of the Lord' but in the might of temperance. The speaker does not die as a Christian but as a teetotaller, as if that were as good or even better: 'Yn ddirwestwr marw wnaif'. The phrase 'Plant dirwestiaeth' | 'Children of Temperance' plays on the idea of the elect. These theological shifts reveal a changing Nonconformity that even had its own bilingual anthems:

Di, yr unig Dduw,	You, the only God,
Sy'n codi'r meirw'n fyw	Who resurrects the dead
O feddau'r blys:	From desires' graves:
O dyro ras yn awr	O may thy grace to
I wael drigolion llawr,	All the inhabitants of earth,
Ac ymddisgleiriaid gwawr,	Shine, a glorious dawn,
O'th nefol lys. ⁶⁶⁶	From thy heavenly court.

Lord, grant this day may be
A feast of Jubilee,
To all around:
O! grant thy love divine,
In all our hearts to shine,

⁶⁶⁵ See Chapter 1.

⁶⁶⁶ *Y Dirwestydd*, 9 (March, 1837), p. 76.

To make us truly thine;
May grace abound.⁶⁶⁷

This anthem was written in 1837 by M. J. Dinbych with an additional English verse. Notice the word ‘blys’ which can be translated as ‘excessive desire’ and may be associated specifically with the craving for alcohol. It is God who liberates people from their chains through his grace. Calvinistic theology is ethicised and becomes totally moralistic. There is no mention of regeneration or the atonement; spiritual grace is generalised. Under the poem, the hymn-writer even instructs the singers to sing it to ‘God save the King’ which, perhaps, shows a society moving away from the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist heritage into an anglicised jingoism which propagated the ‘teetotal nation’. The poet remarkably uses the same post-millennial language of his predecessors and applies it to his own view of a Wales where temperance abounds. He writes another hymn-like verse in the next issue:

O boed i fendith y Jehofa,
Ddilyn hyn, o rybudd gwir!
Fel b’o dynion yn sobreiddio ,
Ac na b’o meddwon yn ein tir:
Dynol ryw yn llwyr ymwrthod
A’r diodydd meddwol hyn,
Gan ymofyn am wir undeb
A’r gwr fu’n dyoddef ar y bryn.⁶⁶⁸

O may the blessing of Jehovah,
Follow this, a true warning!
So that men may all be sober,
And no drunkard in our land:
Mankind will totally abstain,
From all intoxicating drink,
By seeking for full union
With the man who suffered on the hill.⁶⁶⁹

Unity with Christ is conditional on being sober! Sobriety is what is being stressed rather than actual salvation – the individual is less a sinner coming for salvation than a drunk seeking sobriety! This is a long way from the scriptural emphasis, where a sinner comes as *a sinner* to

⁶⁶⁷ There is an extra stanza in English.

⁶⁶⁸ *Y Dirwestydd*, 10 (April, 1837), p. 79.

⁶⁶⁹ My translation.

Jesus.⁶⁷⁰ As mentioned in the first chapter, Toplady's 'Rock of Ages', first published in 1775, sets out the biblical notion of what a *sinner* actually is:

Nothing in my hands I bring;
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly:
Wash me, Saviour, or I die!⁶⁷¹

The whole point is that the drunkard is foul and he can fly to that fountain *as he is*. If he were sober, he would not need to come.⁶⁷²

This 'new religion' had a missionary outlook too. In another publication called *Y Seren Ddirwestol*, the religious language forms a parody of Pantycelyn's famous hymn 'O'er the gloomy hills of darkness':

<p>Gymdeithas Ddirwestol cynnyddid, A'i thaeniad a fyddo trwy'r byd, Nes byddo pob llwyth, iaith, a chenedl, Mewn undeb dirwestol i gyd: Boed Cymru o'r gogledd i'r Dehau, A Lloegr yn unfryd a llon, Yr Alban, ac ynys y Werddon, Yn law-law'n cyduno â hon.⁶⁷³</p>	<p>Prosper now, o, Temperance Movement, May it spread through the whole world, Until every tribe, language, nation, In temperate unity all: May Wales from the north to the south, And England likeminded with joy Scotland, and Ireland as well, Be hand-in-hand united in this.⁶⁷⁴</p>
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The language is evangelical but the message is temperance, not divine grace. The first word of the hymn emphasises that this is communal: 'Cymdeithas'. This 'coming together' is clothed in the language of imperial uniformity. The poem also makes explicit that this is a

⁶⁷⁰ For example, see Luke 5:32.

⁶⁷¹ Hymn CCCXXXVII in Augustus Montague Toplady, *Psalms and Hymns for Public Worship* (London: E and C Dilly, 1776), p. 309. 'Rock of Ages' first appeared in *The Gospel Magazine* in 1775.

⁶⁷² See Luke 5:32.

⁶⁷³ J. Morris, Caerlleon, *Y Seren Ddirwestol*, No. 1 (Ionawr, 1837), p. 5.

⁶⁷⁴ My translation.

British venture. The author lists the home nations that will, hand-in-hand, spread the good message of temperance. Secularisation has been nurtured in the shifting theology of a nation.

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed a major fact about nineteenth-century religious poetics in Wales: there was a general shift from a focus on the individual to the collective. The hymn form can, and has, revealed the social and theological changes which affected the Welsh people. The figure of Jesus Christ in the hymns and poems is a useful indicator of this shifting individual ~ collective theology. For the Unitarian, he is the teacher. For the Methodist, he is the atoning Lamb of God who shed his divine blood. For Nicander, he was the ruler of a single unfractured Church. For Elfed, he is the Brother and moral example; fundamentally, he becomes just one of us. The second section revealed the complex formation of the ‘Nonconformist Nations’ which revealed a myth-symbol complex of a fractured Nonconformity.

The third section then looked at death and how the subject and author of the hymn changed in this regard. Christ’s atoning death was slowly replaced with the death of children, mothers and workers. With medical advancement and the prospect of avoiding death, people wrote about the horrors and unnecessary nature of this universal inevitability.

Part of God’s Kingdom on Earth was the necessity for people to improve, or to use the language of the day, to evolve. The fourth section looked at the Temperance Movement and highlighted a nuanced shift in evangelicalism and showcased a move towards a social rather than an individual religion. Christ is *the* sober, perfect man; he is an example whom all Wales should seek to emulate. In the past, the poetic pilgrim seemed to be talking to God as

an individual. But now, the pilgrim is looking around rather than having that sole, uninterrupted gaze on the Deity.

CHAPTER 3

‘Brewed God knows how long’: The Active Afterlife of Nonconformity
in the Modernist poetry of Gwenallt and Glyn Jones.

*...for a twentieth-century Welshman to understand himself, it is essential to know to which denomination or religious sect his immediate ancestors belonged.*⁶⁷⁵

Emyr Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition*

Having nested in Beulah and traversed the Nonconformist nation[s], the next two chapters will turn to Humphreys’ ‘twentieth-century Welshman’, or rather, to twentieth-century Welshmen and women. In the previous chapter, the complex and sometimes confusing terrain that our pilgrim traverses begins to be shaped by two factors: Socialism and Nonconformity. These factors seem to be overshadowed by an over-arching trend of secularisation which became a tenet of early twentieth-century literature and sociology. However, as already mentioned, if ‘God died in the nineteenth century then he had an active afterlife in the twentieth’.⁶⁷⁶

This third chapter considers that ‘active afterlife’ in Wales by looking at two very different Modernist poets whose ‘immediate ancestors’ belonged to that period of ‘disenchantment’—the end of nineteenth-century Wales. Both poets seem to move away from the collective nature of Nonconformist poetics. Both poets reject the ‘hymn’ form and choose to express a residual religion in a Modernist idiom. Their names are David James Jones ‘Gwenallt’ (1899-1968) and Glyn Jones (1905-1995). These poets ‘sought new gods in unorthodox places’.⁶⁷⁷ They even dared to seek Him out in more orthodox places as well.

⁶⁷⁵ Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition*, p. 101.

⁶⁷⁶ Lewis, ‘Modernism and Religion’, p. 180.

⁶⁷⁷ Pericles Lewis, ‘Modernism and Religion’, p. 193.

Like other Modernist poets, Gwenallt and Glyn Jones seem to return to previous religious models. Most of the denominations had abandoned Calvinistic / Augustinian theology by the beginning of the twentieth century, as reflected in the later hymns analysed in the previous chapter. What this chapter suggests is that these theologies nevertheless persist in the poet's psyche – a kind of theological unconscious which determines the footsteps of their pilgrimage; their poetry subliminally addresses and sometimes adheres to certain doctrines such as the doctrines of grace, the doctrine of sin, and especially the doctrines of salvation.

This chapter suggests that, although these poets belonged to a very different context, they wrote within, and indeed returned, to the Calvinistic ideas which established the Welsh Christian Aesthetic, adhered to by Ann Griffiths and Pantycelyn.⁶⁷⁸ There is a sense that literary inheritance as much as individual conviction is important here. The older doctrines which nurtured and established the writings of Griffiths and Pantycelyn persisted into the twentieth century. Furthermore, according to Paul Robichaud (following Conran), it was a tension between *buchedd* and industrialisation that shaped modern Wales;⁶⁷⁹ the same could be said of Gwenallt or Glyn Jones as well.⁶⁸⁰ However, it is important to remember that these poets are difficult to label, especially when they seem to belong to both the *buchedd* and industrial cultures.⁶⁸¹ The complexities of these 'culture[s]' are analysed in Raymond Williams's *Marxism and Literature*. He establishes a 'trivium' when analysing culture,

⁶⁷⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁶⁷⁹ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p.1: 'It [Anglo-Welsh poetry] derives from a special sort of society, which I shall call the *buchedd* from a Welsh word meaning a 'way of life' or 'ethos'.

⁶⁸⁰ Robichaud, *Making the Past Present*, p. 49.

⁶⁸¹ R.M. Jones, *Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg 1936-1972* (Llandybie: Christopher Davies, 1975), p. 25: '[Gwenallt oedd] bardd mwyaf anlabeladwy Cymru yn yr ugeinfed ganrif / 'Of all the poets of the twentieth century, Gwenallt was the one whom no-one could ever label'.

identifying ‘residual’, ‘emergent’, and ‘dominant’ aspects of culture. His ‘epochal’ analysis recognises:

The complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance.⁶⁸²

The question one must ask is what was that ‘specific and effective’ dominant culture in Wales at the beginning of the twentieth century? On the one hand the ‘residual’ Nonconformist culture continued to show some characteristics of ‘dominance’. As Williams continues:

A distinctive and comparative feature of any dominant social order is how far it reaches into the whole range of practices and experiences in an attempt at incorporation.⁶⁸³

The far-reaching grasp of both Nonconformity, and the more ‘emergent’ trends of Socialism, into the whole range of ‘practices’ and ‘experiences’ suggests that at the turn of the twentieth century, the Welsh sub-culture[s] of Nonconformity and Socialism had ‘residual’, ‘emergent’ and ‘dominant’ features but it is difficult to differentiate between them. What these highlights is the complexity of the Welsh cultural scene and how both *buchedd* and industrial cultures were, to use Williams’s lexicon, ‘would-be’ dominant cultures. Perhaps, then, it is the Welsh Christian Aesthetic which provides a more malleable and long-lasting tradition that transcended, and even intertwined with, Conran’s dual notion of *buchedd/ traddodiad* and industrialism, and with Raymond Williams’ trivium.

As has already been seen in chapters one and two, this is an aesthetic shaped by paradoxes. Firstly, personal religious experience runs alongside the collective experience of

⁶⁸² Raymond Williams, ‘Dominant, Residual, and Emergent’ in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 121.

⁶⁸³ Williams, ‘Dominant, Residual, and Emergent’, p. 125.

the ‘chosen’ people.⁶⁸⁴ (We will see in this chapter how the shift from personal to collective – traced in the second chapter – becomes balanced again in the poetry I have chosen.)

Secondly, Allchin and Jones’s tradition of ‘praise’ | ‘mawl’ runs alongside the troubling presence of doubt.⁶⁸⁵ This chapter will further the argument that, as well as being a crucial tenet of religious poetry, this paradox is a fundamental building block of the Aesthetic.

Thirdly, whilst there is a distinct recognition of The Fall and sin in particular, there is also a tradition of praise which marvels at creation. The tradition of praise and the recognition of the fall are especially evident in the poetry of Gwenallt and Glyn Jones.

According to the Welsh Christian Aesthetic, the chief end of art – whether it be a conscious or subconscious act – is to glorify God, the primary imagination.⁶⁸⁶ According to the Catholic poet, David Jones:

It is [...] the form-making which is also a sign-making that causes man’s art to be bound to God. Implicit in the activity called art, and belonging to the very essence of that activity there is that which makes it a ligament.⁶⁸⁷

These views articulate an inescapable connection between *homo faber* and *Deus faber*. David Jones uses spiritual anatomical language – alluding to the biblical concept of the church as body and Christ as head⁶⁸⁸ – to emphasise that it is the artist’s ability to construct form,

⁶⁸⁴ This is a similar concept for Conran. He sees this dichotomy between individual and collective (embodied in a Pantycelyn hymn) as ‘initiation rites’ of *buchedd* culture. See Conran, *op.cit.*, p. 11: ‘A Pantycelyn hymn is in its nature an embodiment of that polarization – an expression of individual longing for fulfilment and meaning that is yet sung as an expression of social solidarity and uplift.’

⁶⁸⁵ See Allchin, *Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition* and R.M. Jones, *Mawl a Gelynyon Ei Elynion: Volume 2: Amddiffyn Mawl* (Swansea: Barddas, 2002).

⁶⁸⁶ See R.M. Jones, *Mawl a Gelynyon Ei Elynion*, p. 379. See also p. 10: ‘Mawl yw’r term mwyaf addas i gyfleu’r math hwn o duedd sy’n anochel bresennol ym mhobman’/ ‘Praise is the most fitting phrase to convey this bias which is inevitably present everywhere’. Jones’s particular branch of structuralism – where ‘Praise’ is combined with ‘Order’ and ‘Value’ – is used in formulating this argument.

⁶⁸⁷ David Jones, *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber, 2008 [1959]), p. 160.

⁶⁸⁸ See 1 Corinthians 12.

structure and beauty that makes him an arm of God. *Homo faber* is actually made in the image of *Deus Faber* Himself – we are His ultimate handiwork.⁶⁸⁹ This connection between *homo faber* and *Deus faber* is evident when Glyn Jones sets out his aesthetics in an unpublished memoir called ‘Remembering aloud’. His views are like those of David Jones and Gwenallt:

What I do see them [poets] as [sic] is creators of beautiful objects. To me, a poet is much more a craftsman, a maker, than a prophet. I said earlier that I didn’t expect original ideas in poetry – only original, fresh, vivid, vigorous ways of expressing these ideas. A poem is a structure, made up of ideas, emotions, perceptions, images, language, technique – the lot formed together, that they become, as a whole, a unit, and beautiful [...]

But there is one difference between the poet and every other kind of artist – and that is, that his material isn’t stone, or timber, or paint – but words, language; and language has its roots deep in the human psyche.⁶⁹⁰

We can see from this quotation that theology and religious language is deeply rooted in Glyn Jones’s psyche. He did not expect ‘original ideas in poetry’; his own work, like that of his contemporary, Gwenallt, taps into the older, theologically-charged traditions where men and women re-create in accordance to a structure which has been long established. Let us look at their pilgrimages.

Gwenallt

J.E. Meredith states that David ‘Gwenallt’ Jones (1899-1968) was the greatest religious poet that Wales has seen since the days of Ann Griffiths.⁶⁹¹ It is interesting that Meredith bypasses

⁶⁸⁹ Genesis 1:26 talks about *imago Dei* (the image of God) meaning a mental, moral, and social likeness to the Deity.

⁶⁹⁰ Glyn Jones, ‘Remembering Aloud’, unpublished manuscript, p. 16.

⁶⁹¹ J. E. Meredith, *Gwenallt: Bardd Crefyddol* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1974), p. 53: ‘Dywedwyd ynghynt mai ef yn ddiau yw bardd Cristionogol mwyaf Cymru ers dyddiau Ann Griffiths; y mae’n un o’r beirdd crefyddol mwyaf yn hanes llenyddiaeth Cymru, a barna Saunders Lewis ei fod yn cymryd ei le yn y traddodiad Ewropeaidd’/ ‘It has been said that he was the greatest Christian poet in Wales since the days of Ann Griffiths; indeed, he is one

the previous century – in linking Gwenallt to Griffiths – proposing that their oeuvres share a similarity, placing this Modernist poet on a par with Griffiths.⁶⁹² R.M. Jones notes in an essay on Gwenallt, that when the latter was dying, it was a copy of Pantycelyn’s hymns that he wanted by his side as he ‘crossed the Jordan’.⁶⁹³ Both Meredith’s comment and Jones’s recollection give us an insight into the poet’s mind from two of his closest friends.⁶⁹⁴ Gwenallt associated himself with his Calvinistic ancestors. Arguably, it was the chaotic theological and social atmosphere of the nineteenth century that caused Gwenallt to look back and position himself, as a poet, in the Calvinistic, experiential territories of the first chapter.

But this adherence was not always the case. When looking at Gwenallt, we will follow him through his different collections: *Y Mynach a’r Sant / The Monk and the Saint* (1928), *Ysgubau’r Awen / A Bundle of Muse* (1939), *Cnoi Cul / Chewing the Cud* (1942), *Eples / Leaven* (1951), *Gwreiddiau / Roots* (1959), and *Y Coed / The Trees* (1969). The first part of this section on Gwenallt will consider the hinterlands of his oeuvre. The second part will focus on the Christian concept of ‘tröedigaeth’, or conversion, which sees both poet and poetics ‘turning’ to God between 1920 and 1939. It has been difficult to structure this section on Gwenallt because he writes poems about earlier experiences later in life. The poems discussed are chosen because of their content rather than their chronological sequence.

of the greatest religious poets in the history of Welsh literature, and Saunders Lewis judged that he could claim a place within the European tradition.’

⁶⁹² See Chapter 1.

⁶⁹³ R. M. Jones, ‘Gwenallt’ in *Dros F’Ysgwydd*, <http://www.rmjones-bobjones.net/llyfrau/YSGRIFAU.pdf> [Accessed: 04/04/2017], p. 209. ‘Crossing the Jordan’ is the point at which the Christian passes into the heavenly Canaan at death.

⁶⁹⁴ R.M. Jones, ‘Gwenallt’, p. 209.

Hinterlands

The importance of place, and especially theologically-charged space, is central to Gwenallt's oeuvre, and indeed, the whole Welsh Christian Aesthetic. Bobi Jones sees Gwenallt's poetry as a 'Pantycelyn-esque' 'diary of pilgrimage' in which the poet uses a pilgrim persona to traverse sacred territories.⁶⁹⁵ This poetic pilgrimage is best surveyed in Christine James's recently edited complete works of the poet.⁶⁹⁶ As James notes, 'there is no doubt that by setting his work in the context of his habitat or environment one may then acquire an integral and more complete view of Gwenallt's poetry'.⁶⁹⁷ The collection itself serves as a quasi-journal, whilst the form and content of each poem reflects both cognitive and literal journeys that Gwenallt undertook.⁶⁹⁸

Gwenallt's journey began in the industrial town of Pontardawe on the 18th of May 1899. The first sentence of Gwenallt's religious autobiographical essay 'Credaf' | 'I believe' (1943) maps out this early cartography, both cognitively and literally: 'Y mae'r capel yr awn iddo mewn pentref diwydiannol' (The chapel we attended was in an industrial village).⁶⁹⁹

That village was Pontardawe:

⁶⁹⁵ R.M. Jones, 'Gwenallt' in *Dros F'Ysgwydd*, p. 209.

⁶⁹⁶ Christine James (ed.), *Cerddi Gwenallt: Y Casgliad Cyflawn* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2001). All further references to Gwenallt's poetry are to this edition and are given parenthetically throughout the chapter.

⁶⁹⁷ Christine James, 'Rhagymadrodd' in *Cerddi Gwenallt: Y Casgliad Cyflawn* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2001), p. xvi: 'Nid oes dwywaith nad trwy osod ei waith yng nghyd-destun ei gynefin y ceir yr olwg fwyaf cyfannol ar farddoniaeth Gwenallt'. In a lecture entitled 'Cefndir Meddwl fy Marddoniaeth' | 'The ideological background of my poetry', he said "y cynefin" sydd yn bwysig, nid fy mhrofiadau i yn y cynefin hwnnw' | it is the "the habitat" that is important, not my experiences in that habitat'; see 'Y Bardd a'i Fro', *Barn*, 68 (Mehfein 1968), p. vi; cf. Gwenallt's notes in LLGC 21754E (Gwenallt's Papers), f. 2.

⁶⁹⁸ In literary criticism, the convention is to refer to 'the speaker' when discussing the 'I' of the poetry itself. An important facet of this Aesthetic is the autobiographical nature of the authorship.

⁶⁹⁹ 'Credaf' in Meredith, *Gwenallt: Bardd Crefyddol*, p. 55.

Pontardawe yw'r enw swyddogol ar yr holl bentre, ond i ni yn yr Alltwen [*sic*] Pontardawe oedd enw'r pentre ar lawr y dyffryn. Wrth edrych ar y Gwaith Dur a'r Gwaith Alcan a'u mwg a'u mwrlwch ym Mhontardawe, fe fydden ni, fechgyn, yn dweud wrth ein gilydd: 'Dyna dwll o le!'⁷⁰⁰

These quotations position the young poet between Alltwen and Pontardawe, and between the chapel (Soar Calvinistic Methodists) and the industrial works. One is portrayed as Welsh, the other English; one is portrayed as old, the other new; one could almost see *buchedd* on one side, industrialism on the other – both drawing the young poet's gaze. The land is an active agent in the formation of this poet. Indeed, following his success in the 1926 Eisteddfod, it is the land that names him 'Gwenallt' which is 'Allt-wen' in reverse.⁷⁰¹ This deliberate *reversal* in the name shows something of his ludic nature. He plays with the idea of 'turning' – whether that is against the crowd or even against the poetic conventions of the period. There is something archaic in placing the adjective before the noun and it was something he would be criticised for later in his career.⁷⁰² This is one instance where the reversal succeeded and there is something poetic, and even religious, in naming himself after his hinterland.

However, in a recent biography of Gwenallt, Alan Llwyd shows how the theme of exile shapes Gwenallt's oeuvre:

Nid i Sir Forgannwg y perthynai Gwenallt. Gwyddai hynny. Cafodd ei eni yn y lle anghywir. Roedd yn alltud yn ei gynefin ei hun, ac yn frodor o wlad

⁷⁰⁰ LIGC 21754E (Gwenallt's Papers), ff.2. My translation: 'Pontardawe is the official name of the whole village, but for us in the Alltwen Pontardawe was the name of the village at the bottom of the valley. When we looked at all the smoke and all the smog from the iron and tinworks, we would, as boys, say to one another: 'What a dump!'

⁷⁰¹ See Beth Owen, 'Cywiro Camsyniadau', *Taliesin*, 38 (July 1979), 90-91 (p. 90). He abandoned the name 'James' and from that time forward he became D. Gwenallt Jones.

⁷⁰² Jones, 'Gwenallt' in *Dros F'Ysgwydd*, p. 206. Discussing how his poetry weakened in later years, Jones notes how he failed to place adjectives before nouns successfully: 'Ni fedrai ef o'r braidd roi ansoddair o flaen enwau'n llwyddiannus (yn arbennig y rhai amlsillafog, haniaethol).' | 'He could hardly place an adjective before a noun successfully (especially the polysyllabic, abstract ones).'

estron, er y byddai, cyn diwedd ei fywyd, yn cyfaddawdu rhwng y ddau le ac yn cydnabod pwysigrwydd y ddwy sir yn ei wneuthuriad a'i ddatblygiad.⁷⁰³

The other county Llwyd is referring to is Carmarthenshire, a land which would become a symbolic, quasi-utopian space representing stability, religious orthodoxy and peace for the poet:⁷⁰⁴

I remember going to the top of Allt-wen Rock, and seeing in the distance, above Swansea Bay, the perfect world: Utopia: a world without prison, without war, without poverty, without oppression and injustice, a peaceful world, just, free and perfect.⁷⁰⁵

To some extent, Carmarthenshire would fulfil the utopian vision set out in this quotation. This was the place where his parents originally hailed from. His father, Thomas Ehedydd Jones, moved from Esgeir-ceir farm near Rhydycymerau to Pontardawe in 1894; he was drawn by the economic boom in the area following William Gilbertson's recent exploits in tin and iron.⁷⁰⁶ Thomas eventually found work in the furnaces and these industrial surroundings would leave a lasting legacy for Gwenallt. This was the place where, in 1910, the poet witnessed a coal miners' strike in Tarenni-gleision Pit that made him angry.⁷⁰⁷ This was the

⁷⁰³ Llwyd, *Gwenallt*, p. 35: 'Gwenallt did not belong in Glamorganshire. He knew this. He was born in the wrong place. He was an exile in his own habitat, hailing from a foreign land. Even so, before his death, the two counties would be reconciled in his mind and he would acknowledge the importance of both counties in his fashioning and development.'

⁷⁰⁴ See 'Credaf', pp. 68-69. In 1929 Gwenallt spent some time in Connemara. He recounted how being in Ireland taught him that both *the past* and *place* can be spiritually refreshing; he uses biblical language to describe these 'living fountains' / 'ffynhonnau bywiol': 'Gwelais werth iaith, a diwylliant a thraddodiadau'r bywyd gwledig. Âi fy meddwl o hyd yn Connemara yn ôl i Sir Gaerfyrddin, a gwelais mai yno yr oedd fy ngwreiddiau' / 'I saw the value of language, culture and rural traditions. My mind constantly drifted from Connemara to Carmarthenshire and I determined that *that* was where my roots were.'

⁷⁰⁵ LIGC 21754E (Gwenallt's Papers), ff4-4v; reproduced in J. E. Meredith, *Gwenallt: Bardd Crefyddol*, p. 19: 'Rwy'n cofio mynd i ben Craig yr Allt-wen, a gweled yn y pellter uwch bae Abertawe y byd perfffaith: yr Iwtopia: byd heb garchar, heb ryfel, heb dlodi, heb ormes ac anghyfiawnder, byd heddychlon, cyfiawn, rhydd a pherfffaith.'

⁷⁰⁶ J.H. Davies, *History of Pontardawe and District from Earliest to Modern Times* (Llandybie: 1967), pp. 59-65.

⁷⁰⁷ Gwenallt talks about the season of strikes between 1910-1914 in his introduction to T. E. Nicholas, *Llygaid y Drws: Sonedau'r Carchar* (Denbigh: Gee, 1941), p. 9.

place where the teenage Gwenallt discovered the radical newspaper *Llais Llafur* (Labour's Voice) and subsequently became a member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) when he was seventeen years old (c.1916). According to Llwyd, the party's motto was progress; they believed in a perfect world untainted by sin where, like Robert Owen (1771-1858) before them, it was only by changing the environment that you could change the man.⁷⁰⁸ Meredith notes:

At this time he [Gwenallt] was heavily influenced by the atheistic Rationalist Movement. As he read the literature of the *Rationalist Bookshop* in Swansea he was led to believe that only the material had any solid reality – anything supernatural was irrational.⁷⁰⁹

This was also the place where he joined two local Pacifist branches: The Fellowship of Reconciliation (Cymdeithas y Cymod) and the Anti-Conscription Society (Y Gymdeithas Wrth-Gonsgripsiwn) which moulded Gwenallt into a conscientious objector during the war.⁷¹⁰ Following harsh persecution from the Calvinistic Methodists for his pacifism and his increasing acquaintance with Marxists like Nun Nicholas, Griffith Davies, and T. E. Nicholas (Niclas Y Glais), Gwenallt eventually turned further and further from Christian Socialism towards an ardent atheistic Marxism:

Yr oedd Marcsiaeth i ni yn llawer gwell efengyl na Methodistiaeth. Efengyl oedd hi; crefydd a chrefydd gymdeithasol, ac yr oeddem yn barod i fyw drosti, i aberthu drosti, ie, a marw er ei mwyn, ond ni chodem fys bach dros Galfiniaeth. Yr oedd cyfalafiaeth i ni yn beth byw. Gwelem y tlodi, y newyn a'r hanner-newyn, aflendid yr hofelau, mamau yn myned yn hen cyn eu

⁷⁰⁸ Llwyd, *Gwenallt*, p. 49.

⁷⁰⁹ Meredith, *Gwenallt: Bardd Crefyddol*, p. 20: 'A'r adeg yma daeth yn drwm o dan ddylanwad y Mudiad Rhesymoliadd anffyddiol. Wrth ddarllen llenyddiaeth y *Rationalist Bookshop* yn Abertawe arweinwyd yntau i gredu mai mater oedd yr unig sylwedd – peth afresymol oedd pob dim goruwchnaturiol.'

⁷¹⁰ The local branches of these pacifist organisations were established by two congregational ministers from Allt-wen, W.J. Rees and Rees Rees. Gwenallt was worshipping with the Congregationalists (Annibynwyr) at the time because his own Calvinistic Methodist pastor in Soar Pontardawe, the Rev. D. G. Jones, was an avid supporter of the war. See Dewi Eurig Davies, *Byddin y Brenin: Cymru a'i Chrefydd yn y Rhyfel Mawr* (Swansea: Tŷ John Penry, 1988), pp. 151-7. Gwenallt was subsequently jailed twice for conscientious objection between May 1917 and May 1919, firstly in Wormwood Scrubs and then Dartmoor prisons.

hamser, creulondebb y milwyr a'r plismyn yn adeg y streiciau, meddygon yn rhoi 'tuberculosis' ar dystysgrif y marw yn lle 'silicosis' er mwyn osgoi talu iawndal i berthnasau, a'r cyrff yn dod adref wedi'r damweiniau. Daeth corff fy nhad, ymhen blynnyddoedd ar ôl hyn, adref, wedi ei losgi i farwolaeth gan y metel tawdd, a hynny heb eisiau. Yn y bregeth angladdol, pan ddywedodd y gweinidog mai hyn oedd ewyllys Duw, tywelltais oddi mewn i mi holl regfeydd yr 'haliers' ar ei bregeth ac ar ei Dduw, a phan ganasant ar lan y bedd 'Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodau' cenais yn fy nghalon 'The Red Flag'.⁷¹¹

This quotation summarises an important political and spiritual transition in Gwenallt's life.

He states 'we saw the poverty' but he could not *see* God. The tone of this prose is angry; unaccepting of both Divine providence and the cruel social condition of the working class.

His father's death in 1927 had a profound effect on him. One cannot help thinking that the loss of his father contributed to Gwenallt's loss of faith. This faithless tone is captured in one of his earliest poems, 'Gwae fi' ('Woe is me', *CG*, 294):

Gwae im' fy ngeni yn ein hoes flinedig,
A'm dyfod yn rhy hwyr i fyd mor hen,
Y byd na wŷr ddefosiwn, ofn parchedig;
Y byd sy'n llawn traheuster, mwyniant mên.

Woe is me, to be born in this weary age,
Coming too late to this ancient world,
A world which knows no devotion, no reverence,
A world saturated with arrogance, despicable pleasure.

Fe'n ganed yn y gaeaf, blant gwywedig,
Ac amdo'r bedd oedd cadach gwyn ein crud;
Ein cred sy'n llesg, ein gobaith yn lluddedig,
Mae gwaed Calfaria heddiw'n oer a mud.

We were born in wintertime, withered children,
The grave's shroud was the white cover of our cradle;
Our beliefs are feeble, our hopes weary,
Today, Calvary's blood is cold and dumb.⁷¹²

⁷¹¹ 'Credaf', pp. 60-61. My translation: 'Marxism for us was a better gospel than Methodism. It was gospel; religion, a social religion, and we were ready to live for her, yes, even die for her sake, but we didn't raise a little finger over Calvinism. Capitalism for us was a living entity. We saw the poverty, the famine and starvation, the hovels' uncleanliness, mothers turning old before their time, the cruelty of the soldiers and policemen during the strikes, doctors writing 'tuberculosis' on the death certificates instead of 'silicosis' in order to avoid paying compensation to the relatives, and the bodies returning home after all the disasters. My father's body returned once, years later, burnt to death by molten metal; there was no need for it. In the funeral sermon, when the minister said that it was God's will, I poured out within me all the 'haulier' swearwords on his sermon and on his God, and when they sang 'Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodau' | 'There'll be a myriad of wonders' at his graveside, I sang 'The Red Flag' in my heart'.

⁷¹² Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by myself.

The first word, ‘woe’, reminds the reader of Hedd Wyn’s famous poem ‘Rhyfel’ (c.1914-1916).⁷¹³ Both poems portray a God who is far off and deaf to the pleas of his people. In Gwenallt’s ‘Gwae fi’, theological concepts are thrown onto the slag heaps and disintegrate in the grinding world of industry, as in another poem called ‘Gwlad ac Ynys’ | ‘Country and Island’ (CG, 170, 1959):

Hen ofergoelion marw – yr enedigaeth wryfol,
Gwyrthiau, duw yn dyfod yn ddyd,
Duw yn marw ar groes a chodi o’i fedd–
A luchiwyd fel ysbwriel i’r cistiau lludw
A’u tywallt ar y tomennydd i’w llosgi.

The old dead superstitions – the virgin birth,
Miracles, and a god becoming man,
God dying on the cross, rising from his grave –
Were thrown like rubbish into the dust bins,
And poured on slagheaps to be burnt.

This image of ‘pouring’ brings his father’s death to mind in 1927 – this was the moment that God the Father died as well as his own father who, in the sonnet ‘Fy Nhad’ (‘My Father’, GC, 70, 1939), is Christ-like, yet dying *without* resurrection:

Ac wedi’r cwbl ni throaist ti yn chwerw,
Ond rhoddaist arnynt fendith d’enaid nobl:
Gwelais y cam a’r cabl a’r croesbren garw
Yn goron ar dy ben ar wely marw.

And after it all you did not turn bitter,
But laid upon them the blessing of your noble soul:
I saw the wrong and the cable and the rough crucifix
As a crown on your head as you lay on your deathbed.

⁷¹³ See Hedd Wyn, *Cerddi'r Bugail* (Wrexham: Hughes a’i Fab, 1931), p. 1. Translation by Gillian Clarke:

Gwae fi fy myw mewn oes mor ddreng,
A Duw ar drai ar orwel pell;
O’i ôl mae dyn, yn deyrn a gwreng,
Yn codi ei awdurdod hell.

Bitter to live in times like these.
While God declines beyond the seas;
Instead, man, king or peasantry,
Raises his gross authority.

The boy looked at his father and saw Jesus. This was the man who suffered on behalf of his son. He had suffered abuse during the period of Gwenallt's conscientious objection from the religious Pharisees of the era and he had worked and suffered in the hell of industry, just like Jesus, who suffered hell for the elect. This religious allusion is fused with industrial language: 'y cam a'r cabl' is the lexicon of the factory. This association of father with God is similarly seen in his long poem 'Y Sant' | 'The Saint' (CG, 2 [1928]):

Fy nhad oedd mor fawr, gawr o gyhyrau,
 Un hir a manwl; roedd fy nhrem innau
 Ar ei wisg lwyd, cry' osgo'i aelodau;
 O'i enau mawr y dôl grym ei eiriau;
 Ar aelwyd y wlad fy nhad oedd fy Nuw.

My father was so large, a muscular giant,
 A tall and meticulous man; my own gaze
 Was on his grey clothes, the strong bearing of his limbs;
 From his great mouth came his powerful words;
 On my country's hearth my father was my God. (ll. 17-21)

The repetition of the 'au' rhyme is reminiscent of biblical poetry where God's attributes are listed in a sequence before ending with the solid and final word: 'Duw'. Is his father's death, the crucial moment, when Gwenallt truly rejected the faith (but not the language and imagery of Calvinistic religion); when Calvary's blood turns 'mute and cold'? This key moment is portrayed vividly in one of his best-known poems, 'Y Meirwon' ('The dead', CG, 121):

Ond y llewpart diwydiannol a naid yn sydyn slei,
 O ganol dŵr a tân, ar wŷr wrth eu gwaith.

But the industrial leopard leaps with sudden stealth,
 From the midst of fire and water, upon men at their work.

One cannot help recalling William Blake's famous poem 'The Tyger' (1794) where another God-like, industrial cat is portrayed; both God and Industry are leopard-like. In a way, Gwennallt cannot distinguish between these two Powers; he fails to 'frame' their 'fearful symmetry'.⁷¹⁴ This is apparent in the beginning of 'Credaf' (1943): 'Doi ofn arnaf wrth weled crafanc y crân yn siglo'r ingot uwchben y gweithwyr yn y pwl'.⁷¹⁵ Indeed, this seems to be the God of Sinai – the Blakean, Old Testament Urizen – who is literally 'a consuming fire'.⁷¹⁶ This is confirmed in another poem, 'Rygbi', where he admits to this industrial worship: 'Addolem ar ein deulin y fflam ar ben y stac' | 'We worshipped on our knees the flame at the top of the chimney-stack' (CG, 122, 1951). This new Pantycelyn-esque 'pillar of fire' is what killed his father, but God allowed it, as he writes in 'Y Sant' (GC, 2, 1.128):

Fe glywaf ei lef, gwelaf wylofain
 Ei loyw lygaid, yn ymyl ei ugain,
 Ei wyneb, oedd goch, yn hwy gan ochain;
 Mor hagr-wedd y marw! (ll. 121-124)

I hear his cry, I see his lucid
 Eyes wailing, near his twenties,
 His red face exclaimed with a sigh;
 How uncomely the dead!

Yr ymennydd briw trwm ni wyddai ba raid
 I Dduw ei ddwyn, yn ôl cwyn "diaconiaid";
 I nef Ei degwch hunanol fe'i dygwyd
 O'i chôl, a'm duwiol fam a adawyd
 A'i gruddiau'n wylo'n unigrwydd ein haelwyd;
 Garw oedd fy mywyd, a gwir oedd f'amheuron;
 Melltithiais, caseais y Cnaf yn Seion. (ll.128-134)

⁷¹⁴ William Blake, 'The Tyger' in *Blake Complete Writings*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 214.

⁷¹⁵ 'Credaf', p. 55: 'A fear came upon me when I saw the crane's claw swinging the ingot above the workers in the pit'.

⁷¹⁶ Hebrews 12:29.

The wounded, heavy mind did not know why
 God had to take him, as the 'deacons' would say,
 To the heaven of His selfish justice, he was taken
 From her lap, and my pious mother was left
 Weeping, tears flowing down her cheeks on our lonely hearth;
 My life was harsh, and my doubts were true;
 I cursed and hated the Knave in Sion.

These are the words of anger and unbelief. His weeping mother is portrayed like Mary with Christ on her lap. Gwenallt wonderfully conjures up the biblical narrative and asks why did Jesus die? The speaker hates God for taking his father, or rather, for taking Jesus away. His confusion and doubts are like the disciples who had not yet realised the necessity of Jesus' death. In the next stanza he describes the tomb in which he places his father, his faith, and God:

Rhois yno fy ffydd, a'm crefydd, is gro,
 A rhoi'n y ddaear yr hen weddïo
 A gawswn o grud, yn gyson gredo,
 Fy hoen am byth, fy ninam obeithio,
 A'r Iddew o Dduw, yn nhir ei fedd o.

I placed there my faith, and my religion, in the grave
 And I placed in the earth the old prayers
 I'd been saying from the cradle, that constant credo,
 My joy forever, my immaculate hope,
 And God the Jew, in the grave with him.

The woeful letter 'o' at the end of each line is a vivid, visual portrayal of nothingness as well as a recurrent aural lament. It also pictorially brings Christ's circular tomb-mouth to mind (commonly thought because the stone 'rolled' away). God is a 'Jew' ('Iddew o Dduw' | 'Jew of a God'). The speaker re-calls the idea of 'Jewish deicide', an anti-Semitic belief that the Jewish people were 'Christ-killers'; in Gwenallt's imagination, the *Jewish* God murdered his

‘Saviour’, who, in this poem is indistinguishable from the poet’s father. ‘Jew of a God’ also suggests that God has dealt a harsh bargain with him.

A new religion seems to emerge in ‘Gwlad ac Ynys’ | ‘Country and Island’ (CG, 170, 1959):

Y labordy oedd eglwys y wlad; y Rhesymolwyr oedd yr offeiriad,
A’r pedwar efenglydd oedd Darwin, Huxley, Bradlaugh a McCabe.

The country’s church was the laboratory; the Rationalists were the priests,
And the four evangelists were Darwin, Huxley, Bradlaugh and McCabe.

He cleverly shows how agnosticism and even atheism needs the language of religion to operate. He portrays science as a religion and Darwin and Huxley like its gospel propagators. Later in life, Gwenallt muses on this period of dissatisfaction and atheism. He says: ‘As Socialists and Communists we wanted to reform everybody and everything, but not ourselves’.⁷¹⁷ What seems like an unrepentant turn from religion shows how, psychologically and spiritually, the concept of death coupled with residual notions of indwelling sin had a deep impact on the poet. These were elements that would eventually pave his way back from atheistic thought to orthodox religion.

Having addressed the biographical hinterland it may be helpful to approach some of the poems from that ‘spatial’ angle of what Alan Llwyd calls Gwenallt’s ‘two counties’.⁷¹⁸ For the purpose of illustration, Robert Orsi observed that in modern American cities, migrants have drawn from religious resources to appropriate

Public spaces for themselves and [have] transformed them into venues for shaping, displaying, and celebrating their *inherited* and *emergent* ways of life

⁷¹⁷ *Credaf*, p. 76: ‘Yr oeddem fel Sosialwyr a Chomiwnyddion am ddiwygio pawb a phopeth, ond nid ni ein hunain’.

⁷¹⁸ Llwyd, *Gwenallt*, p. 35.

and understandings of the world. They have remapped the city, superimposing their own coordinates of meaning on official cartographies.⁷¹⁹

Orsi is describing a *sacred* reterritorialization whereby a migrant will actively celebrate the ‘inherited’ and the ‘emergent’ (similar concepts to Raymond Williams’ ‘residual’ and ‘emergent’) ways of life by superimposition upon the new territory, constructing an alternative public sphere. This may be through shrines, altars or even a piece of art which the person has brought or re-created from somewhere else. This trend in sociology of religion can aid us when reading Gwenallt’s poetry. In a way, his oeuvre can be seen as a celebration – or even a critique – of both ‘inherited’ and ‘emergent’ ways of life, and can help us to understand the changing theological, social, and literary undercurrents of the twentieth century in south Wales.

The habitat which nurtured him was one of conflict as well as *convivencia* (co-existence)⁷²⁰ where ‘inherited’ (Conran’s *Buchedd* culture) and ‘emergent’ (industrial) ways of life battled it out on both literal and cognitive maps. The choice of Friedrich Könekamp’s (1897-1977) ‘Cwm yr Eglwys’ for the front cover of the collected poems shows how sensitive Christine James was to this concept. Gwenallt himself owned the painting:⁷²¹

⁷¹⁹ Robert A. Orsi, *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 47. My emphasis.

⁷²⁰ *Convivencia* - A term from Medieval Spain denoting a religious co-existence between Muslims, Christians and Jews.

⁷²¹ Cwmyreglwys is a small seaside village in Pembrokeshire. On the shoreline there are the remains of a church that was battered by a storm in 1859. Gwenallt was a personal friend of the artist.



Figure 13 - 'Cwm yr Eglwys' by F.R. Könekamp

The painting depicts a vivid fusion between the religious buildings and the fabric of the landscape where the red river and the blue sea fluctuate and conflict. The omnipresent church perches above the red and blue flow – an unshifting sentinel. The painting is reminiscent of some poems written in the 1950s collected in *Eples / Leaven* (1951) and *Gwreiddiau / Roots* (1959). In the poem 'Morgannwg' ('Glamorgan', CG,125, 1951):

Yn y môr mecanyddol roedd teuluoedd dyn
A'r eglwysi fel ynysoedd glân.

Mankind's families were in that mechanistic sea
And the churches were like clean islands.

The sea of industry/humanism/atheism envelops the people. The church is portrayed as an island which, although battered, remains immune to the onslaught of the sea. Gwendallt had previously rejected religion for the new religion of Marxism. This powerful sea, like his faith, changes its meaning in different poems. For example, in the later poem 'Gwlad ac Ynys'

(‘Land and Island’, *CG*, 170, 1959), it is not a destroying force but a menagerie containing concepts far older than socialism, industrialism, and atheism:

Yr hen ofergoelion marw yn nofio yn y dyfnder	The old dead superstitions swim in the deep
Fel morfilod cyntefig, angenfilod cynddelwig,	Like primordial whales, prototype monsters,
Ac yn eu mys y oedd Pysgodyn y Pasg.	And in their midst was the Fish of Easter.

These ‘depths’, in Gwenallt’s poetry, contain residual remnants and powers which can re-emerge; these are the roots which dominate so much of his oeuvre and manifest the idea that dormant theologies (like Calvinism) would re-emerge in Gwenallt’s personal life. These poems are from the 1950s and it seems as if he is looking back and meditating on the whole idea of pilgrimage and how certain discoveries are made along the way. The word ‘cyntefig’ | ‘primitive’ or ‘primordial’ is a reference to the ‘Eglwys Gyntefig’ | ‘The Primitive Church’ whilst the ‘whales’ are figures for religion or faith. This poem portrays these old superstitions as ‘primordial whales’, underwater ghosts that haunt the ‘Gwlad wareiddiedig’ | ‘Civilised land’.

The idea of a ‘haunted space’ and a favoured land would be instrumental in Gwenallt’s return to religion. In ‘Gwlad ac Ynys’, the Fish of Easter is ‘in their midst’. This spirit of sacramentalism is evident in David Jones’s 1952 poem *The Anathemata* as well. Gwenallt’s ‘Pysgodyn y Pasg’ | ‘The Easter Fish’ brings Jones’s ‘ichthyic signs’ to mind from the ‘Rite and Fore-time’ section of the long poem.⁷²²

As, down among the palaeo-zoe
 he brights his ichthyic sign
 so brights he the middle-zone
 where the uterine forms
 are some beginnings of his creature.⁷²³

⁷²² The sign of the fish was used as a code in the Roman catacombs when the early Christians were in hiding.

⁷²³ David Jones, *The Anathemata* (London: Faber, 1955 [1952]), p. 74.

Fish fossils, like the acronym IXΘΥΣ, means that Iēsous **Christos**, **Theou Yios**, Sōtēr is seen in the land itself.⁷²⁴ For David Jones, sacramentalism enabled the South Wales landscape to evolve from a mere geographical mass into a mythologised space where:

Man and nature, seen and unseen, object and symbol as part of a total experience, unified in spite of itself by their sacramental point of view. To them [sacramentalists] the Word is made flesh at all times and on an infinite number of levels.⁷²⁵

There is a hint of this sacramentalism in one of Gwenallt's earlier poems, the *awdl* 'Y Sant' (1928) written around his 'conversion' period:

Ond Ei waed tost oedd yn nhân coed y tŷ,
A dagrau fy Nêr yn lleithder y llaethdy,
A'i hoelio dros y byd yn nhail drws beudy.

But His harsh blood flowed in our fireplace,
And the moistness in the dairy was the tears of heaven,
And He is crucified for the world in the dung on the cowshed door.

The long poem depicts a young saint whose sexual and spiritual fervour are closely related. His 'blood' ever flowing is tinged with Roman Catholic sentiment. However, it is more that everything reminds him of Calvary rather than blatant sacramental transubstantiation. Even the filthy dung-covered nails on the cowshed door bring the crucifixion to his mind. It is the 'Pysgodyn' | 'the Fish of *Easter*' that swims, especially in Carmarthenshire, a space of renewal and purity:

'A thithau hen sir, a'th wyneb siriol,
Yn daer y'm gelwit, fe'm gelwit i'th gôl,

⁷²⁴ Iēsous **Christos**, **Theou Yios**, Sōtēr – Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. The word 'Ichthys' is Greek for fish, a symbol used by Christians in the first century A.D.

⁷²⁵ Charles Moorman, 'T.S. Eliot' *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney (New York and London: 2000), pp. 505-523 (p.507).

Galwai pridd a dwfr, galwai praidd a dôl,
 Heulwen y mynydd, awelon maenol,
 A beddau fy nhadau f'enaïd yn ôl
 O demtasiwn nosau f'uffernau ffôl.

'And you, ancient county, with your delightful face,
 Earnestly call us to your lap,
 The soil and water calls. The flocks and meadows too,
 Mountain's sun and breeze from the rocks,
 And my fathers' graves whisper for my soul's return
 Back from the hellish temptations of foolish nights.

The 'old county' calls the speaker into righteousness. This personification is heightened by the repetition of the land or ground itself calling. The language seems to suggest that the land is implementing grace. But I would argue that it is the 'memory' especially with the use of the father's graves that points Gwenallt back to God. Indeed, this stanza is reminiscent of Larkin's 'Church Going' with the 'many dead [that] lie around' (l.63).

Gwenallt was moulding Carmarthenshire into a sacred space – a lost Garden of Eden – throughout his oeuvre. He said: 'I saw that my roots were in that place'.⁷²⁶ It is almost as if his imagination re-draws that lost county as the paradise lost by his parents. Carmarthenshire – as geographical setting and personified being – plays the role of hinterland, Utopia and Promised Land. This was Pantycelyn's county, and Gwenallt's poetry is saturated with allusions to that 'old world'. The birds from that county sang to him as a child, as the first stanza of 'Yr Hen Emynau' ('The Old Hymns', *CG*, 169, 1959) states:

Buont hwy yn canu uwch fy nghrud,	They sang above my cradle
Uwchben fy machgendod a'm hieuenctid,	Above my boyhood, and my youth,
Fel côr o adar Cristionogol	Like a choir of Christian birds

⁷²⁶ 'Credaf', p. 68: 'Gwelais mai yno yr oedd fy ngwreiddiau'.

He identifies these birds in a later poem called ‘Sir Gaerfyrddin’ (‘Carmarthenshire’, *CG*, 217, 1969): ‘Bantycelyn, Tomos Lewis ac emynwyr arall y sir / A ganai i ni, pan oeddem yn blant, Efengyl Iesu Grist’.⁷²⁷ This is an example of how the Welsh Christian Aesthetic fuses *traddodiad* and *buchedd* cultures. The birds are a reference to *Adar Rhiannon* / ‘The Birds of Rhiannon’ who, in *Y Mabinogi*, could revive the dead or lull the people into a deep sleep. Gwenallt cleverly portrays the ‘old hymnists’ (*Buchedd*) as these pagan birds who belong to *traddodiad*. The poet confirms this in another, earlier poem called ‘Adar Rhiannon’ (*CG*, 6, 1939):

Codwch y meirwon â’ch cerdd adloniant,
 Rhowch i’r byw obaith ar ddieildaith hynt,
 Eiliwch gân y gwrolwych ogoniant,
 Emyn neu gainc o’r hen harmoni gynt.

Raise the dead with your refreshing song
 Give hope to the living upon their singular way
 Compose a song of the brave, lovely glory,
 A hymn or a tune of the harmony of days gone by.

In his imagination, Carmarthenshire is Canaan/heaven on earth: a prelapsarian world which existed before coal mining. In ‘Golden Grove’ (*CG*, 79, 1939), his visit to this Edenic park near Llandeilo gives him a glimpse of what he calls the ‘tradition of the soil’:

A gwelaf, wedi dychwelyd i’r bro,
 Draddodiad y pridd tan y tipiau glo.

And when I return to my land, I see
 The tradition of the soil under the coal tips.

Gwenallt exemplifies this in his novel *Ffwrneisiau* (1982) where the protagonist Tomos Hopkin (based on Gwenallt’s father) dreams of returning to Rhydycymerau one day:

Fe fyddai ei wraig ac ef yn gadael Gwaun-Coed, ac yn prynu ffarm fach yn myl y ffordd fawr rywle yn agos i Rydycymerau; ffarm fach i gadw buwch ac

⁷²⁷ ‘Pantycelyn, Tomos Lewis and the other hymn-writers from the county / Sang of Christ’s Gospel to us, when we were children.’

yhydlig ddefaid, ac yr oedd ganddo yhydlig ddefaid yn eiddo iddo yn Gelli Ucha.⁷²⁸

Even when they are taken from the Garden of Eden, something within them yearns after that pre-industrial state.⁷²⁹ Two sonnets portray this yearning. In ‘Sir Gaerfyrddin’

(‘Carmarthenshire’, *CG*, 78, 1939), the poet describes an ascent to the highlands of freedom:

Mewn pwll a gwaith clustfeiniwn am y dydd
Y cawn fynd atat, a gorffwyso’n llwyr,
Gan godi adain a chael mynd yn rhydd
Fel colomennod alltud gyda’r hwyr

In pit and factory we listened for the day
When we could come to you, and rest completely
Stretching out our wings and being set free
Like pigeons coming home to roost at dusk

Freedom from the darkness for a short while is a trope in Welsh mining literature.⁷³⁰ The idea of ‘ascent’ is a reference to Carmarthenshire being ‘higher up’ both geographically and spiritually than Glamorganshire. Who is in this higher land? His grandparents are there, as is Pantycelyn.

⁷²⁸ Gwenallt, *Ffwrneisiau* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982), p. 39: ‘Both he and his wife would leave Gwaun-coed, and buy a smallholding on the big road somewhere near Rhydycymerau; a small farm to keep a cow and some sheep, for he already had some sheep which belonged to him which were kept at Gelli Ucha.’

⁷²⁹ These ideas would influence Gwenallt’s theology. ‘“Nid ydyw credu mewn pechod gwreiddiol yn gyfystur â chredu bod dyn yn gwbl lygredig. Athrawiaeth amhosibl ei derbyn yw honno, a chredaf ei bod yn bwysicach nag erioed i’r diwinydd Cristnogol bwysleisio bod daioni mewn dyn sydd yn fwy gwreiddiol na’i bechod, ei fod wedi ei greu ar lun a delw Duw ac er gwaethaf ei holl wyriadau nad ydyw’r ddelw wedi ei dinistrio.’ (To believe in original sin is not synonymous with believing that man is wholly corrupt. That is a philosophy impossible to accept, and I believe that it is more important than ever for the Christian theologian to emphasize that there is goodness in man which is more original than his sin, that he was created in the image of God and despite all his errors that image has not been destroyed.) Meredith, p. 46.

⁷³⁰ I am thinking especially of poems like ‘Glas’ by Bryan Martin Davies (who was interestingly one of Gwenallt’s students in Aberystwyth) when he describes a day trip to Mumbles. See *Cerddi Bryan Martin Davies* (Caernarfon: Barddas, 2003).

In ‘Rhydcymerau’ (CG, 130, 1951), his grandmother is like a ventriloquist for her poetic forefather, Pantycelyn:

Rwy’n cofio am fy mam-gu yn Esgeir-ceir
 Yn eistedd wrth y tân ac yn pletio ei ffedog;
 Croen ei hwyneb mor felysych â llawysgrif Peniarth,
 A’r Gymraeg ar ei gwefysau oedrannus yn Gymraeg
 Pantycelyn.
 Darn o Gymru Biwritanaidd y ganrif ddiwethaf ydoedd hi.

I remember my grandmother sitting by the fire
 At Esgeir-ceir and folding her apron in her hands;
 The skin on her face, as yellowed and dry as the Peniarth manuscript,
 And the Welsh flowing from her aged lips, was the Welsh of
 Pantycelyn.
 She was a fragment of Puritan Wales, preserved from the last century.

The indentation before ‘Pantycelyn’ locates the hymn-writer (and his farmhouse) as the *axis mundi* of Carmarthenshire; he is literally central. Gwenallt’s grandmother seems to embody both *traddodiad* (‘llawysgrif Peniarth’) and *buchedd* (‘Cymraeg Pantycelyn’). After the indentation, there is a notable space or gap which, to me, indicates a sonic or melodic memory, filled-up with either his grandmother/Pantycelyn’s voice, or those hymns, which only Gwenallt – and those of us who share his inheritance – are privy to. The poem continues with the line ‘Darn o Gymru’| ‘A piece of Wales’, which shows how his grandmother is not only interchangeable with the figure of Pantycelyn, but she is also a part of that landscape.

Gwenallt tried to harmonise these old and new melodies but, arguably, it is out of these conflicting hinterlands that his own particular art is born. Much of his poetry is saturated with the idea of dichotomy, parallelism, couplets, duality and paired words. He frequently employs the sonnet form; perhaps, to him, it was a form which represented two sides bridged by the *volta*. One of the earliest of these dichotomies was the primary

production of those conflicting hinterlands: industry itself and Nonconformity. This is best seen in the poem which includes both counties: ‘Sir Forgannwg a Sir Gaerfyrddin’

(‘Glamorganshire and Carmarthenshire’, *CG*, 132, 1951):

Tomos Lewis o Dalyllychau,
 A sŵn ei forthwyl yn yr efail fel clychau
 Dros y pentref a’r fynachlog ac elyrch y llyn;
 Tynnai ei emyn fel pedol o’r tân,
 A’i churo ar einion yr Ysbryd Glân
 A rhoi ynddi hoelion Calfaria Fryn.

Tomos Lewis from Talley,
 His hammer bangs like a bell from the forge,
 It rings through village, monastery, and the lake’s swans;
 He drew a hymn from the fire like a horseshoe,
 And he beat it on the Holy Spirit’s anvil
 Before placing Calvary’s nails through it.

Tomos Lewis re-emerges in his forge.⁷³¹ What we have here is a portrayal of a purer industry fusing with religion –two products of emergent and residual cultures – fusing together and creating a hymn. The hammer (one half of Communism’s well-known icon) suddenly metamorphoses into a bell, or rather, a call to worship. The old monastery is dead, and the new religion is forged in this stanza. The poem continues with another familiar figure, Pantycelyn, before taking us to Glamorganshire where a different world exists:

Ni allai’r ddiwydiannol werin
 Grwydro drwy’r gweithfeydd fel pererin,
 A’i phoced yn wag a’r baich ar ei gwâr:
 Codem nos Sadwrn dros gyfiawnder ein cri
 A chanu nos Sul eich emynau chwi:
 Mabon a Chaeo; Keir Hardie a Chrug-y-bar.

The industrial folk could not
 Wander through the works like pilgrims,
 With empty pockets and burdened backs:
 We’d rise up with a cry on Saturdays to fight for justice

⁷³¹ See Chapter 2. Section on ‘Death and Memory’.

And on Sundays we'd sing your hymns:
Mabon and Caeo; Keir Hardie and Crug-y-bar.

The couplets are interrupted by two lines which do not 'stand in line'. The first couplet takes us to Glamorganshire where Gwenallt realises that the industrial *volk* cannot wander through the works like pilgrims. The image is too anachronistic and irrelevant. He cleverly reverses the hymns of Pantycelyn by placing the chosen people back in bondage. The 'gweithfeydd'/'works' reminds the sensitive reader of the brickworks in Egypt, a location far removed from the 'Canaan' of Carmarthenshire. The burden has been put back on their backs as it were, which is a reference to Pantycelyn's famous hymn where the burden of sin is lifted from his back:

Mi dafla' **'maich oddi ar fy ngwar**
Wrth deimlo dwyfol loes;
Euogrwydd fel mynyddoedd byd
Dry'n ganu wrth dy groes.⁷³² (GWP, 175)

The poet then tries combining ideas of socialism with Christianity but there is something unmelodic in the coupling. Caeo and Crug-y-bar are hymn tunes whilst Mabon and Keir Hardie were social reformers and politicians. He tries to span that gulf in his imagination but he fails before moving on to the next stanza:

Y mae rychwant y groes yn llawer mwy
Na'u Piwritaniaeth a'u Sosialaeth hwy,
Ac y mae lle i ddwrn Karl Marcs yn Ei Eglwys Ef:
Cydfydd fferm a ffwrnais ar Ei ystad,
Dyneiddiaeth y pwll glo, duwioldeb y wlad.
Tawe a Thywi, Canaan a Chymru, daear a nef.

The span of the cross is far greater

⁷³² My emphasis. Translation by Edmund Owen:

I cast my burden when I view
His anguish on the tree;
The enormous load of guilt is turned
To song at Calvary.

Than their Puritanism and Socialism,
 And there is room for Karl Marx's fist in His Church:
 Farm and furnace coexist on His estate,
 The humanism of the coal mine, the piety of the countryside.
 Tawe and Tywi, Canaan and Wales, earth and heaven.

The poet returns to the cross and finds that its span or 'rhychwant' is greater than Socialism and Nonconformity. The last line is far more melodic, and its progression shows something of the poet's philosophy: the two rivers, 'Tawe a Thywi', rivers of Glamorganshire and Carmarthenshire, with the *Cynghanedd*, almost fuse together. Wales is then interchangeable with the Promised Land, Canaan; 'Daeaf a nef' | 'Earth and heaven' refers to union which is possible under the span of the cross. What we are seeing here is both a *sacred* reterritorialization and a radical new divine geography where the 'things of the world' begin to grow dim because they are fused with the things of heaven.

He had started to experiment with the language of the two worlds in an earlier sonnet called 'Sir Forgannwg' ('Glamorganshire', *CG*, 95, 1939):

Y Sul a rydd amdanynt ddillad glân	Sunday makes them put on their clean clothes
Ac yn eu hwyneb olau enaid byw,	And in their faces the light of lively souls
Ac yn y cysegr clywir yn eu cân	And in their song in the holy place
Orfoledd gwerin bendefigaidd Duw;	Is heard the joy of the people of almighty God
Tynnir y caets o waelod pwll i'r nef	The cage is hauled up from the pit to heaven
Â rhaffau dur Ei hen olwynion Ef.	By the steel ropes of His old wheels.

The language of religion mixes with the language of Marxism here. The poet describes a Sunday where the miners are cleaned up and *converted* into quasi-aristocrats: 'gwerin bendefigaidd Duw'. The use of the words 'eu'|'their', 'gwerin'|'volk' next to 'enaid byw' is an example of the personal/collective binary. Gwenallt is imaginatively re-drawing a Marxist propaganda poster in our heads; this is a poster where the proletariat are portrayed in

messianic light.⁷³³ ‘Olwynion Ef’ | ‘his wheels’ refers to the shaft wheel as well as the wheels of God’s providence in Ezekiel. The iron ropes of industry are those ropes of promise which can be pulled on in the Psalms.



Figure 14 - Jack Hastings, *The Coming Revolution* (1935)

We cannot ask Gwenallt which county he preferred. However, Gwenallt foresaw such questions and in his last collection *Coed / Trees* (1969), he writes another poem on Carmarthenshire ‘Sir Gaerfyrddin’ (CG, 217, 1969):

Pr’un yw’r sir orau yng Nghymru gyfan, gofynnwch chwi?
 Fe fydda’ i’n cloffi rhwng sir Gaerfyrddin a sir Forgannwg
 Am fod fy nhylwyth wedi eu claddu yn y ddwy: ac ail i’r
 dewrder gwledig
 Oedd dewrder diwydiannol y De; dewrder yn herio’r milwyr
 a’r plismyn pell.
 Ond, tydi, Shir Gâr, a gododd y genedlaethol wawr: tydi a
 wnaeth y gyntaf wyrth.

⁷³³ See figure 14.

Which is the best county in the whole of Wales, you ask?
 I would be in two minds between Carmarthenshire and Glamorganshire
 For my relatives are buried in both places: and second only to the
 rural courage
 Was the industrial courage of the South; the courage to defy soldiers
 and the bussed-in police.
 But, it was you, Carmarthenshire, who nurtured the dawn of nationalism: you
 who performed the first miracle.

The dialectal use of ‘Shir Gâr’ in the closing line is a linguistic identification mark which places him as an inhabitant of that county. ‘Câr’ also means love whilst the last line brings Christ to mind with images like ‘miracle’ and ‘dawn’. Gwenallt mulls over the facts that Carmarthenshire was the crucible of industrial action, Calvinistic Methodism, and even Welsh nationalism.⁷³⁴ In ‘Sir Forgannwg a Sir Gaerfyrddin’ (*CG*, 132, 1951), he mused on how one could sing that burdens were lifted at Calvary when his brothers and sisters were burdened by physical taskmasters. The answer lies in the Church, ‘Yr Eglwys’ (*CG*, 76, 1939):

Ac yno y gosodwn wrth Dy draed	And there we place at Your feet
Faich ein bychander pechadurus ni,	The burden of our sinful unworthiness,
Eiddilwch gostyngedig cnawd a gwaed,	The humble frailty of flesh and blood,
Ac ofn Dy greadigaeth ryfedd Di.	And fear of Your wondrous creation.

This is a liberated poet who, having seen the importance of both hinterlands, returns to the cross, placing Pantycelyn’s burden there, whilst also magnifying and being overwhelmed at the wonder of creation.⁷³⁵

⁷³⁴ The first Plaid Cymru MP was Gwynfor Evans, who was from Llangadog in Carmarthenshire.

⁷³⁵ The word ‘rhyfedd’ is used in the same way as in Ann Griffiths’s poems. See Chapter 1, ‘Rhyfedd’.

Tröedigaeth | Conversion

But as we saw in the beginning, Gwenallt had not always been at the foot of that cross.

Although we have already discussed poems which seem to reflect a ‘converted’ sensibility, it is important to re-trace our steps and analyse the change in Gwenallt. The word ‘tröedigaeth’ slightly differs from its common English translation: ‘conversion’. Theologically, it denotes when a person is ‘born again’⁷³⁶ – the very same evangelical experience that Ann Griffiths and Pantycelyn experienced – a turning-point in the formation of their oeuvres as well as a key moment in their own lives. The Welsh word captures the actual movement of ‘turning’ to God.⁷³⁷ Similarly, the concepts of ‘turning back’, ‘repentance’, or ‘conversion’ seep into Gwenallt’s poetry as well as being a ‘turning point’ in his own life. Having already looked at place, this section will now focus on the period leading up to his first poetry collection, *Ysgubau'r Awen / A Bundle of Muse* (1939) and will argue that the poet’s conversion had a profound effect on Gwenallt’s literary output.

Christine James is correct to note that Gwenallt’s transition from being a Marxist to a Christian did not happen overnight.⁷³⁸ There were numerous factors which included his political dissatisfaction with social politics of the era,⁷³⁹ as well as a realisation that capitalism and communism were both primarily concerned with the ‘self’:

⁷³⁶ See John 3 especially verses 5-8 which leads on to verse 16.

⁷³⁷ See *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*. Its first recorded use is by the poet Lewis Glyn Cothi (c.1420-1490) when he prays to God: ‘arglwydd kyniata imi wrth fynghalon *droeadigaeth* atad ti.’

⁷³⁸ James, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxi. In his later years, Gwenallt referred to himself as an unofficial member of the Evangelical Movement of Wales. In his papers, he sets himself in the tradition of ‘Apostol Paul. Sant Awstin (Augustine). Luther a Chalfin. Pascal. Kierkegaard. Barth.’ See LLGC 21754E (Gwenallt’s Papers), ff.54. On the Evangelical Movement of Wales see Noel Gibbard, *Cofio hanner canrif: hanes Mudiad Efengylaidd Cymru 1948-1998* (Bridgend: Bryntirion, 2000).

⁷³⁹ Gwenallt was especially disappointed with the Labour Party. Ramsay MacDonald’s election in 1924 was an important event. That ‘radical’ government did not implement social change as Gwenallt had expected.

Dysgodd Rousseau ac eraill i ni fod y natur ddynol yn drwyadl dda, ac y gallai dyn, yn ei rym a'i allu a'i wybodaeth ei hun, adeiladu cymdeithas gyfiawn, berffaith. Ond gwelais fod un peth yn gyffredin i gyfalafwyr ac i Gomiwnyddion – hunan-les. Yr hunan oedd yn huddygl ym mhob potes.⁷⁴⁰

This language echoes John Calvin's portrayal of self in relation to sin:

So long as we do not look beyond the earth, we are quite pleased with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue; we address ourselves in the most flattering terms, and seem only less than demigods.

For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity.⁷⁴¹

This dominance of self was also evident in his personal artistic aesthetics before 1927:

Gwenallt adhered to the romantic ideas that were prevalent in Welsh poetry at the time – poetry of the moment, poetry of emotion and the subjective –and one sees the romantic, egoistic and over-emotional slant in many of his poems.⁷⁴²

But things were starting to change. During Gwenallt's imprisonment for his conscientious objection (c.1919), he had started thinking about concepts such as 'original sin'⁷⁴³ – ideas which are usually anathema to any Marxist:

Yr oedd y distawrwydd (ac yr oedd distawrwydd y carchar yn debyg i ddistawrwydd mynwent ar hanner nos), yr hanner newyn, y caethiwed di-haul, di-awelon yn mennu ar y nerfau, yn sychu'r gwaed ac yn gwanhau'r

⁷⁴⁰ See *Credaf*, pp. 67-68: 'Rousseau and others taught us that man's nature was intrinsically good, and that man, in the power of his own mind and personal knowledge, build a righteous and perfect society. But I saw that there was one thing capitalists and communists had in common – self-interest. The self was the soot in every broth'.

⁷⁴¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge (1845), Christian Classics Ethereal Library, pp. 38-39, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.iii.ii.html> [Accessed: 13/08/2018].

⁷⁴² Christine James, 'Introduction', p. xxxi: 'Llyncodd y syniadaeth ramantaidd a oedd yn rhemp ym marddoniaeth Gymraeg yr adeg honno – barddoniaeth y foment, barddoniaeth yr emosiwn a'r teimlad goddrychol – a gwelir yr osgo ramantaidd, fyfiol a gor-deimladol mewn amryw o gerddi.'

⁷⁴³ See also Gwenallt, *Plasau'r Brenin* (Aberystwyth: 1934), p. 75.

ymennydd. Yr oedd llygredigaeth a phechod yn awyr y carchar, ysbryd dial a chosb rhwng ei furiau.⁷⁴⁴

This acute awareness of sin intensified in the 1920s. In 1925, he spent two years teaching Welsh in Cardiff before being appointed as a lecturer in Aberystwyth. According to his close friend, Albert Davies, Cardiff played a role in this realisation. This was the period when:

His involvement in the philosophy and art of Catholicism [intensified]. The fascinating life in the City of Cardiff. His consciousness of human sin in the City, its surprises, its wonders, its realism, its human behaviour.⁷⁴⁵

The quotation goes on to describe the rampant prostitution in the city at the time. It was around this time that the young poet started reading the works of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) as well; in *Credaf* he observes:

Baudelaire oedd y bardd mwyaf ohonynt i gyd, o ddigon, canys, er y ceir yn ei farddoniaeth ffasiynau ffôl ei gyfnod, darganfu un peth pwysig, a'i cododd uwchlaw ei oes a'i ganrif. Mewn canrif [...] pan gredai dynion yn naioni'r natur ddynol, pan oedd gwyddoniaeth ac addysg yn grefydd, pan gerddai dynion at berffeithrwydd ar hyd ffordd cynnydd a datblygiad, pan oedd eu diwinyddiaeth yn Rhyddfrydol, darganfu Baudelaire un peth pwysig – pechod, y pechod gwreiddiol [...] Y mae'r neb a genfydd ei bechod ei hun yn hanner Cristion.⁷⁴⁶

This realisation of sin was the first important step towards that conversion. Both Gwenallt and Baudelaire re-discovered one of the oldest Christian doctrines, Original Sin. Gwenallt

⁷⁴⁴ Quoted in Meredith, *Gwenallt: Bardd Crefyddol*, p. 23. My translation: 'The silence (and the quietness of prison was similar to the quietness in a cemetery at midnight), the semi starvation, the sunless and breezeless captivity preyed on your nerves, dried your blood and weakened your mind. The prison's air was saturated with corruption and sin whilst the spirit of revenge and punishment lingered within its walls'.

⁷⁴⁵ Albert Davies, 'Wanderings', unpublished document. See Llwyd, *Gwenallt*, p. 157. It is interesting to note that it was the city of Cardiff that led Glyn Jones to a realisation of sin as well.

⁷⁴⁶ See *Credaf*, pp. 67-68: 'Baudelaire was by far the greatest poet of them all for, though his poetry contains some of the foolish fashions of his period, he discovered one important thing, which raised him above his age and his century. In a century in which men believed in the goodness of man's nature, when science and education were religions, when men travelled towards a perfect state on the roads of progress and evolution, when theology was Liberal, Baudelaire discovered one important thing – sin, original sin [...] anyone who acknowledges their sinfulness is half way to becoming a Christian.'

seems to be alluding to the more reformed belief concerning Original Sin whereby an inherently sinful nature (the basis of Calvin's Total Depravity) results in a complete alienation from God and the total inability of humans to reconcile with God according to their own abilities.⁷⁴⁷ Only by means of Redemption through Jesus Christ may a sinner have union and communion with God.⁷⁴⁸ The Catholics believe in an inherited nature but not an inherited guilt.⁷⁴⁹ It seems that both Baudelaire and Gwenallt are referring to the Reformed notion of Original Sin. In 1945, Gwenallt explains why Baudelaire was important:

Un o ysgrifau mwyaf poblogaidd Syr O.M. Edwards yw ei ysgrif ar Plu'r Gweunydd, y plu a gwelodd ar Gors Caron yn ymyl Tregaron; ond nid disgrifio plu gweunydd rhamantus a wnaeth Baudelaire, ond y gors, hen gors Caron y natur ddynol; disgrifio lliwiau ffosfforaidd ei phydredd hi, a sugn gwenwynol ei damnedigaeth. – Roedd Baudelaire yn rhy fodern i'w oes ei ddeall, ond ymhen canrif ar ôl ei farwolaeth y mae yn fwy modern nag y bu erioed, am iddo ddisgrifio anniddigrwydd, gwacter ysbrydol a thrasiedi ein byd a'n bywyd ni.⁷⁵⁰

Baudelaire had come to the same realisation of 'original sin' as Gwenallt. In 1854, he wrote to his mother: 'En somme, je crois que ma vie a été damnée des le commencement, et qu'elle

⁷⁴⁷ See Calvin, *Institutes*, CCEL, Book 2, Chapter 1 which is entitled 'Through the Fall and Revolt of Adam, the Whole Human Race Made Accursed and Degenerate. Of Original Sin.'

⁷⁴⁸ See Calvin, *Institutes*, CCEL, Book 3, Chapter 18, p. 2122: 'For this reasons also, Paul gives the name of adoption to that revelation of adoption which shall be made at the resurrection; and which adoption he afterwards interprets to mean, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). But, otherwise, as alienation from God is eternal death,—so when man is received into favor by God that he may enjoy communion with him and become one with him, he passes from death unto life. This is owing to adoption alone. Although after their manner they pertinaciously urge the term reward, we can always carry them back to the declaration of Peter, that eternal life is the reward of faith (1 Pet. 1:9).'

⁷⁴⁹ See Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2015 [1937]), pp. 145-146: 'Roman Catholics reject the idea of man's spiritual impotence and his utter dependence on the grace of God for renewal. They adopt the theory of synergism in regeneration, that is, that man co-operates with God in the spiritual renewal of the soul'.

⁷⁵⁰ Sgwrs Radio, Hydref 8, 1945. Quoted in Meredith, *Gwenallt: Bardd Crefyddol*, p. 44: 'One of Sir O. M. Edwards' most popular essays is the one on Cotton Grass (Plu'r Gweunydd), the grass he observed near Tregaron's marsh; Baudelaire did not describe the romantic cotton grass, but the marshy swamp itself, the old Caron marsh of man's nature; he described phosphorous colours of its putrefaction, and the poisonous sucking of its damnation. – Baudelaire was too modern for his age to understand him, but within a century of his death he is more relevant and modern than anything because he captured the discontentment, the spiritual emptiness and the tragedy of our sad world and our lives'.

l'est pour toujours'.⁷⁵¹ In Gwenallt's first collection, *Ysgubau'r Awen* (1939), his greatest and most well-known sonnet is actually called 'Pechod' | 'Sin':

Pan dynnwn oddi arnom bob rhyw wisg,
Mantell parchusrwydd a gwybodaeth ddoeth,
Lliain diwylliant a sidanau dysg;
Mor llwm yw'r enaid, yr aflendid noeth:
Mae'r llaid cyntefig yn ein deunydd tlawd,
Llysnafedd bwystfil yn ein mêr a'n gwaed,
Mae saeth y bwa rhwng ein bys a bawd
A'r ddawns anwareiddiedig yn ein traed.
Wrth grwydro hyd y fforest wreiddiol, rydd,
Canfyddwn rhwng y brigau ddarn o'r Nef,
Lle cân y saint anthemau gras a ffydd,
Magnificat Ei iechydwriaeth Ef;
Fel bleiddiaid codwn ni ein ffroenau fry
Gan udo am y Gwaed a'n prynodd ni.

When we strip off every kind of dress,
The cloak of respectability and wise knowledge,
The cloth of culture and the silks of learning;
How poor the soul is, the naked filth:
The primitive mud is in our primal matter,
The beast's slime in our marrow and our blood,
The bow's arrow is between our finger and thumb
And the barbarous dance is in our feet.
As we wander through the original, free forest,
We see between the branches a piece of Heaven,
Where the saints sing anthems of grace and faith,
The *Magnificat* of His salvation;
We raise our nostrils up like wolves
Baying for the blood that bought us.

In the octave, a painful process of self-discovery takes place. The theme of clothing and dressing are important biblical images. The prophecy of Isaiah describes how all men are unclean and even their 'righteousnesses' and virtues are described as 'filthy rags'.⁷⁵²

Conversely, in Isaiah 61, when salvation occurs, the sinner is clothed in 'garments of salvation' which are described as 'robes of righteousness'.⁷⁵³ The theological concept being addressed here is propitiation; the Greek word is *ἱλαστήριον* (*hilastērion*) relating to an appeasing or an expiating.⁷⁵⁴ When God looks at a sinner, he either sees sin or righteousness.

The robe of righteousness can only be worn through the application of the atoning blood of

⁷⁵¹ 'In brief, I believe that my life was damned from the beginning, and it is damned for evermore'.

⁷⁵² See Isaiah 64:4: 'But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.'

⁷⁵³ Isaiah 61:10: 'I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh *himself* with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth *herself* with her jewels.'

⁷⁵⁴ The origin of the concept is Hebrew. The Mercy Seat or the Propitiatory was the lid or cover of the ark of the covenant, so called on account of the expiation made once a year on the great Day of Atonement (Hebrews 9:5) The Hebrew word is *כַּפֶּרֶת* (Kapporeth) 'the cover', a meaning connected with the covering or removal of sin (Psalm 32:1) by means of expiatory sacrifice.

Christ which is a ‘propitiation’ (a kind of shield) for our sins. When God looks at a sinner robed in such garments, He sees His Son and is satisfied. That is why Gwenallt ends the sonnet with anthropomorphism. When stripped bare, *only* the blood of atonement can satisfy the wolf who sings the song of grace and mercy which sounds like a howl of desperation.

It was in this earlier musing on sin and conversion that Gwenallt wrote the *awdl* or long poem called ‘Y Sant’ | ‘The Saint’ in 1928. He had already won the Eisteddfod Chair in 1926 with his poem ‘Y Mynach’ | ‘The Monk’ and he saw this new poem as an opportunity to develop his thinking on the nature of ‘conversion’, ‘sin’, and the conflict between body and soul. This poem would become one of the most controversial in Welsh literary history because of its ‘shocking’ sadistic/masochistic content and the judges’ refusal to award the chair to Gwenallt, even though they acknowledged that his poem was the best.⁷⁵⁵ This poem would also reveal the influence of two further thinkers and theologians on Gwenallt’s conversion: William Williams Pantycelyn (1717-1791) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).

In 1928, *Y Mynach a’r Sant* was published in a booklet. Gwenallt dedicates the booklet to the spirit of Thomas Aquinas, not Pantycelyn. The questions that were tormenting his early musings on conversion were how could a man banish sin and reach perfection? This was manifested in the old dichotomy of body and soul. How could a man satisfy the needs of the body and soul? Why was there a battle between the two? It was Aquinas who answered these questions for him.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁵ For a good overview of the dispute see Peredur Lynch, “‘Y Sant’ Gwenallt”, in Hywel Teifi Edwards (ed.), *Cwm Tawe* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), pp. 293-328.

⁷⁵⁶ See Llwyd, *Gwenallt*, p. 169.

According to Aquinas, and Augustine before him, the soul is restless until it finds repose in God.⁷⁵⁷ Both Pantycelyn's *Theomemphus* and Gwenallt's Saint go into the world thinking that pleasures will satisfy. According to Aquinas, it was *Beatitudo*, the union between the will and mind of God and man that brought about this peace. But man cannot apprehend this union without grace. An experiential relationship must occur between God and man: 'cognitio dei experimentalis' / 'an experiential knowledge of God'. In his refutation of the premise that "it is not a sin to tempt God", Thomas distinguishes between two forms of God's goodness (*bonitas*) or will (*voluntas*), one speculative (*speculativa*) and the other affective or experiential (*affectiva seu experimentalis*). Only through this affective-experiential way can a believer prove God's will and taste his sweetness.⁷⁵⁸

We can see how Gwenallt was then naturally drawn to the most experiential of Welsh poets, Pantycelyn. Meredith notes that Gwenallt would always muse on the hymns of Pantycelyn because he was 'Pencerdd y gwaed' | 'Chief bard of the Blood'. We can see Pantycelyn's influence on Gwenallt; one of his favourite hymns was 'Gwaed y groes' | 'The blood of the cross' and we can hear echoes of this famous hymn in 'Pechod':

Gwaed dy groes sy'n codi i fyny
 'R eiddil yn goncwerwr mawr;
 Gwaed dy groes sydd yn darostwng
 Cewri cedyrn fyrdd i lawr:
 Gad im deimlo
 Awel o Galfaria fryn.⁷⁵⁹

The blood of thy cross lifts
 The feeblest into the greatest conqueror;
 The blood of thy cross subdues
 Proud giants to their knees;
 May I feel
 A breeze from Calvary's hill.

⁷⁵⁷ See Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 3.

⁷⁵⁸ For a good simplified summary of Aquinas's influence on Gwenallt, see Llwyd, *Gwenallt*, pp. 169-173.

⁷⁵⁹ Number 555, *Llyfr Emynau* (1929), p. 177.

The blood is the central agent in Pantycelyn's stanza. It is the blood of atonement that lifts the weak to that position beyond the trees in 'Pechod' whilst the same blood also 'undresses' or subdues the giants of self. This paradox is important to note because it is at the forefront of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.

But it is Pantycelyn's long poem *Theomemphus* (1764) that probably influenced Gwenallt the most. Like 'Y Sant', the poem explores the conversion of a young man. It is no accident that in 1927, Saunders Lewis published his magisterial work on Pantycelyn and had already publicly debated with W. J. Gruffydd on the importance of sin in every great literature.⁷⁶⁰ Gwenallt's poem begins by asking an old saint:

Dywed imi, wr duwiol,	Tell me, godly one,
A'i rhwydd santeiddrwydd i ti?	Is saintliness easy for you?
A'i dawn ydyw daioni? (CG, 2, ll. 6-8)	Is goodness a talent?

The remainder of the poem is an answer to this question. This old Carmarthenshire saint could easily be Pantycelyn. The boy is given a religious upbringing, but this is paradoxically set next to a sinful, sadistic strain. Notice the paradox here:

A'm mam yn aml oedd yn mwmian emyn
 Am nawdd mewn ing, man hedd mewn angen,
 Maddeuwr beiau yn angau'n hongian,
 A'i iawn yn waed prudd yno hyd y pren (ll. 27-30)

My mother would often hum some hymn
 About protection in anguish or peace in needy times,
 The forgiver of sins hanging in death's realm,
 And His bloody atonement on that melancholic cross.

⁷⁶⁰ See 'Llythyr Ynghylch Catholigiaeth', *Y Llenor*, 6:2 (Summer, 1927), 72-77. For an excellent overview of the argument see John Emyr, *Dadl Grefyddol Saunders Lewis ac W.J. Gruffydd* (Bridgend: Bryntirion, 1986).

The child comprehends that out of evil comes good; the great paradox of Calvary is sung by his mother. It is no wonder, then, that the child tries to re-enact some form of cruelty, hoping that good may arise:

Carwn wneud dolur i greaduriaid,
 Ceisio, a chwalu cyrff, coesau chwilod;
 Dal iâr yr haf, a'i dolurio hefyd,
 Ei gwanu â phin er dygnu ei phoenau:

I loved harming those little creatures,
 Crushing bodies and pulling their legs,
 Catching butterflies, and nailing their wings
 With pins – before watching them twitch in pain: (ll. 22-25)

This stanza disturbed the judges in the Eisteddfod. But, like Pantycelyn, Gwenallt is exploring the complex psychological and spiritual fusion which plays out in the mind of the child. The judges could not accept the sinfulness of man but too quickly ascribed the stanza to the realm of sadism. Alan Llwyd and others have already looked at the psychology behind this stanza.⁷⁶¹ Unfortunately, both judge and critic often miss the subtle nuances of Gwenallt's mature study of sin, nature, and spirituality.

The speaker grows and enters a world of Dionysian revelry:

Yr oedd ddihafal y carnifal nwyfus,	Nothing compares to that lustful carnival,
Dawns y cannoedd ar hyd y nos gynnes,	The dance of hundreds during those sticky nights,
Pob dyn yn dduw, yn cydio'n ei dduwies,	Every man a god, clutching his personal goddess,
(ll. 259-261)	

⁷⁶¹ Llwyd, *Gwenallt*, pp. 160-173.

The actual ‘conversion’ moment comes pages after his immersion in sinful pleasure. As noted above, he returns to Carmarthenshire as a wretch or a cripple (much like the image of Theomemphus on crutches in Pantycelyn’s preface).⁷⁶² He leaves Babylon and comes home:

Y pridd yn un anadl ag anadl gwedd; Dôl ataf o draw aradrgan lawen, Bodlonrwydd syml lais, ac mi welais wên Wyneb aradwr ar ei lwybr adref. Sefais. Cyffrowyd, dihunwyd enaid.	The soil pulsated like an inhaling face; It came to me in the form of a plough song, The simplicity of a voice, and I saw the smile Of the ploughman on his homeward way. I stood. I was moved, and my soul woke up.
--	--

(ll. 445-449)

The speaker has a quasi-romantic encounter with a pantheistic God as well as being moved by simplicity and common grace. The speaker realises that all the evil he has participated in can actually be metamorphosed into virtue following repentance:

Nid ofer yn dy gof yw d’ing, d’ofid,
Daw iechyd a nwyf o’th glwyf a’th glefyd. (ll. 461-462)

Your memory’s store of pain and grief was not for nothing,
Health and life will grow from your wounds and suffering.

These great paradoxes have their crux on Calvary: the place where death resulted in life for all who believe. However, Carmarthen seems to be *the* place of spiritual health and conversion. It is the place, in Gwenallt’s oeuvre, where spiritual roots (gwreiddiau) can take a hold.

The last poem to be considered is ‘Gwreiddiau’ | ‘Roots’ (1959). This is a poem that captures the journey of the saint towards that metaphorical land (represented by Carmarthenshire) – a land of stability and spiritual life. The agricultural metaphor is biblical

⁷⁶² See ‘Pantycelyn’s Preface’ in Eifion Evans, *Pursued by God: A Selective Translation with notes of the Welsh religious classic Theomemphus by William Williams of Pantycelyn* (Bridgend: Bryntirion, 1996), p. 58: ‘But take Theomemphus on his crutches as it were, and embrace him, for he presses on to eternal life.’

and is derived from Christ's 'Parable of the Sower' where a ploughman spreads seed (the gospel) on different kinds of ground; the different kinds of ground thus represent different people, different hearts, and different responses.⁷⁶³ The poem begins with the biblical image of poor ground which cannot support the roots:⁷⁶⁴

Gwenith arwynebol a haidd penchwiban
 Oedd haidd a gwenith ein gweunydd gynt;
 Rhag cyfyngder y clwydi a'r cloddiau traddodiadol
 Codent hwy eu bysedd blaengar i gofleidio
 Pob awel eang ac agnosticaidd wynt.

The barley and wheat of our fields were once
 Superficial wheat and frivolous barley;
 They raised their progressive fingers to clench at
 Every global and agnostic wind, rising above
 The narrow confines of the traditional gates and hedges.

This stanza symbolises the poet's own youth about which he writes with Paul's verse in mind: 'that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting'.⁷⁶⁵ He describes the early harvest as 'superficial wheat' and 'frivolous barley' in the first line. They have no root and therefore will be blown away.

The next stanza of 'Gwreiddiau' shows another kind of heart. This – in the speaker's mind – was the time when his being was riddled with dissatisfaction:

I'r awyr denau y codent hwy eu pennau,
 Y delfrydol wenith a'r ysbrydol haidd,

⁷⁶³ Found in three of the Gospels: Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8.

⁷⁶⁴ Gwenallt's use of Christ as 'fertility god' is important in this poem. He replaces Dionysus.

⁷⁶⁵ Ephesians 4:4.

Am na fynnent edrych ar y meysydd materol
 A'r gweryd terfynol, a rhag i'w trwynau arogleuo
 Drewdod y domen euog wrth eu gwraidd.

The idealistic wheat and the spiritual barley
 Raised up their heads in the thin air,
 Since they did not wish to look at the material fields
 And the final earth, and so that their noses could not smell
 The stink of the dunghill of guilt at their roots.

The 'idealistic' wheat and the 'spiritual barley' is a reference to the 'inherited' and 'emergent' ways of life. These are the two extremes: the spiritual people who would not look at 'y meysydd materol' | 'the material land' and those who would not acknowledge 'y gweryd terfynol' | 'the final clod', i.e. the grave. In this stanza, we begin to see hints of what would later lead the poet back to God, the overwhelming discovery of original sin: 'Drewdod y domen euog' | 'the stink of the dung heap of guilt' which he ironically discovered whilst reading Baudelaire:

Yn eu daear dlawd ac yn eu pridd plwyfol
 Breuddwydient am wledydd y rhamantaidd des,
 Lle dawnsiai eu perthynasau gyda'r pabi fflamlyd
 Yn Van Goghaidd feddw felyn,
 A'u brig wedi dotio ar y goleuni a'r gwres.

In their poor earth and their parochial soil
 They dreamt of warm romantic lands
 Where their relatives danced with flaming poppies,
 Intoxicating yellow Van Gogh-ish attire
 And their ears besotted by light and heat.

This next stanza refers to the European artistic movements that influenced Welsh art and indeed Gwenallt himself. It is an amalgamation of related art movements: Aestheticism, Postimpressionism, Decadence, and most importantly, Symbolism. The speaker describes these artistic movements like one of those impressionist paintings where colours fuse and which are portrayed in a wonderful phrase: 'feddw felyn' | 'drunken yellow'. The poppy –

which in this case is weed-like, although beautiful, as well as bringing the decadence of Paris and opium to mind – denotes a poor soil: ‘daear dlawd’ which will yield a weaker batch of wheat. The painting which he is alluding to is Van Gogh’s ‘Wheat Field with a Lark’ which portrays the field dotted with red poppies:



Figure 15 - Vincent Van Gogh, 'Wheat Field with a Lark' (1887)

The poem ends with the good soil which will produce a good harvest. Surely Gwenallt has Carmarthenshire in mind. This Welsh soil is somewhere that the good news of the gospel can take root:

Â’u herydr teircwys, eu hogedi a’u ffydd.
 Diolch am y dwthwn pan ddarganfu’r gwenith
 A’r haidd eu gwraidd yn y rhagluniaethol bridd;
 Pridd ac isbridd wedi eu troi a’u trafod
 Trwy’r canrifoedd yng Nghymru gan yr aradwyr Efengylaidd

Thanks for the day when the wheat and the barley
 Discovered their roots in the providential earth;
 Soil and subsoil turned over and worked
 Through the centuries in Wales by the evangelical ploughmen

With their three-bladed ploughs, their harrows, and their faith.

Thus, the saint is formed in that idealistic image of spiritual Carmarthenshire. The last line of the stanza combines the hard protestant work ethic / social activity with evangelical imagery.

The biblical verse is a reference to Paul and Apollos as ‘evangelical ploughmen’:

Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building.⁷⁶⁶

God provides the hinterland and God is the instigator of conversion. Gwenallt's oeuvre reflects the paradoxes of Calvinistic theology and remains a perfect example of a Welshman nurtured in the shadow of an orthodox Nonconformist century but who re-discovered God, for himself, in very unorthodox places.

Glyn Jones (1905-1995)

Another poet whose ancestors belonged to the Welsh culture described in the previous chapter was Glyn Jones (1905-1995). Both Glyn Jones and Gwenallt were socialists and became devout Christians. Both poets looked towards Carmarthenshire as a kind of Utopian, prelapsarian hinterland, and both poets also discovered some sense of ‘sin’ during their sojourns in Cardiff. Interestingly, their poetical oeuvres follow a similar early romantic strain before becoming ‘darker’ as the years go on. They also both experience a spiritual and

⁷⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

aesthetic conversion (c.1930) which is intertwined with a renewal of national consciousness.⁷⁶⁷

This section focuses on Glyn Jones's poetry in Meic Stephens' *Collected Poems* (1996) before focusing on his last, unfinished, and most complex poem called 'Seven Keys to Shaderdom'. This section will also look at some of Jones' unpublished essays and interviews which reveal the complex nature of his belief and interrogate whether he, too, adhered to the dormant Calvinism within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.⁷⁶⁸

Hinterlands

Glyn Jones was born in 1905 to a Welsh-speaking family in Merthyr Tydfil – a politically radical and religiously-charged town.⁷⁶⁹ This was the year that M. Wynn Thomas wonderfully describes as the 'ghost dance of Welsh nonconformity' because the Welsh Revival (c.1904-1905) was taking place – the spiritual 'Indian summer' before the great Nonconformist decline.⁷⁷⁰ His parents were both members at Soar, the Welsh Independent chapel in Merthyr; 'she active, he passive'.⁷⁷¹ His father was a clerk and his mother a school teacher. Merthyr, like Gwenallt's Pontardawe, was a site where the 'residual' and 'emergent' cultures conflicted and sometimes co-existed. In the poem 'Merthyr', the speaker is drawn by

⁷⁶⁷ M. Wynn Thomas, 'Fucking and Forgiveness': The Case of Glyn Jones' in Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, pp. 256-293 (pp. 259-264).

⁷⁶⁸ I am grateful to Tony Brown for providing me with copies of unpublished interviews and essays.

⁷⁶⁹ Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, p. 9.

⁷⁷⁰ Thomas, 'Evan Roberts: The Ghost Dance of Welsh Nonconformity', p. 214.

⁷⁷¹ Jones, *DHIT*, p. 22.

the ‘Merthyr-mothered breeze’ ‘*inside* that county borough / Known as Merthyr’.⁷⁷² What does the speaker see? He sees ‘lively men, / And dead men’s histories’ (*CP*, 44). This line aptly positions life alongside death. Merthyr was an industrial cosmopolitan boom-town where ‘lively’ revivalists preached in the midst of day-to-day poverty, death, and torture. By 1901, the general population of Merthyr Tydfil had reached 80,000 from 27,000 in 1831.⁷⁷³ It was a place of paradoxes: ‘Merthyr Tydfil [...] was a stern and forbidding father, a nurturing mother, lover, friend and mortal enemy’.⁷⁷⁴ That is how Mario Basini describes Jack Jones’s version of Merthyr. His novel, *Black Parade* (1935), is a vivid portrayal of Glyn and Jack Jones’s shared hinterland. Apalling housing, poor living conditions, disease, danger and crime are presented:

The district was most dangerous for anyone with money in their pocket [...] The Iron Bridge District was the rendezvous for hawkers, travelling tinkers, subbing navvies, prostitutes and those who patronised them [...] When the lodging houses were full the overflow went to sleep at the nearby coke ovens, so did the penniless ones rest their weary and lousy heads there, and many a one who went to sleep there never woke, for they were overcome by the fumes from the ovens and passed away peacefully in their sleep.⁷⁷⁵

This quotation exemplifies this paradoxical panorama. The district described is a place of “pleasure” and “rest” as well as a place of torment and abuse. Death itself is a cruel combination of relief, rest and hell. This was the charged, quasi-mythic environment that nurtured a religious aesthetic fuelled by paradox.

⁷⁷² Glyn Jones, ‘Merthyr’ in *The Collected Poems of Glyn Jones*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), p. 43. All further references to Jones’s poetry are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the main body of the essay. There is a sense of irony in this line. Any breeze nurtured in Merthyr was likely to be toxic!

⁷⁷³ Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘The Merthyr of Keir Hardie’ in *Merthyr Politics: The Making of a Working-Class Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966), p. 61.

⁷⁷⁴ Mario Basini, ‘Foreword’ in Jack Jones, *Black Parade* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2009 [1935]) p. ix.

⁷⁷⁵ Jones, *Black Parade*, p. 113.

Merthyr's terrible beauty can be captured in its radical history. The Merthyr Rising of 1831 had led to the town being labelled as a den of radicalism. Joe England states that Merthyr had an active middle class throughout the nineteenth century, to which Glyn Jones later belonged.⁷⁷⁶ Throughout the 1830s the Chartists were active; their activity finally culminated with the Newport Rising of 1839.⁷⁷⁷ With this background, it is no surprise that there were violent strikes in Aberdare in 1908-1909; the Cambrian lock-out in 1910, and the Tonypany Riots in the same year. Glyn Jones grew up in what Tony Brown calls a 'raw, mixed, volatile, and occasionally violent community'.⁷⁷⁸ Glyn Jones himself states:

An early memory I have is of coming, unexpectedly, in a hollow up the mountain, on a thick ring of squatting miners in the centre of which stood two bare-fisted collier boys, facing each other, stripped to the waist, bleeding, sweating, and panting loudly. It was a sight which, however fascinating and powerfully moving, I knew I should not be watching. This sort of savagery had no support at all from the enlightened and chapel-going citizens of Merthyr.⁷⁷⁹

This eyewitness account is written in a voyeuristic tone. Brown notes how the boxing episode is revealing in many ways, since it gives us a glimpse into early twentieth-century Merthyr but it also reveals something of Jones's fascination with the masculine world of physicality and homoerotic violence. However, the phrase 'I knew I should not be watching' alludes to Jones's sense of guilt and, I argue, dormant Calvinistic sense of sin which will be explored later in this chapter. Like Gwenallt, Glyn Jones is always located between the two worlds of

⁷⁷⁶ Joe England, 'Unitarians, Freemasons, Chartists: The Middle Classes in Victorian Merthyr,' *Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 23:4 (December 2007), pp. 35-58 (p. 38).

⁷⁷⁷ For the Newport Rising see David J.V. Jones, *The Last Rising: The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).

⁷⁷⁸ Brown, 'Introduction', p. xiv.

⁷⁷⁹ Unpublished holograph manuscript headed 'Time of Winstone's fight, September 1965', apparently a short piece for radio on one of Merthyr boxer Howard Winstone's world-title fights. Included in Brown, 'Introduction', p. xiv.

Nonconformity and Socialism; redemption and damnation; the elect and the reprobate; belief and unbelief. We can begin to see how this dualistic existence lies at the heart of his oeuvre.

A sense of escapism from this paradoxical land is hinted at in Jones's early poetry. Aesthetically, the poems are influenced by the English Romantics and the pre-Raphaelite movement, whose work he had been reading whilst in school at Cyfarthfa Castle.⁷⁸⁰ He then went to a teacher training college in Cheltenham before taking his first post in Cardiff. This is where he discovered D. H. Lawrence.⁷⁸¹ Jones had bought two volumes of Lawrence's collected poems in 1931 during the Depression (c.1929-1931):

Lawrence had been a young teacher at one time like myself, he had been brought up in a mining area near a countryside of exceptional natural beauty as I had been, his family were Congregationalists and mine were the Welsh equivalent, namely Independents [...] it was the work of Lawrence, dealing with an environment so like in many ways the one I had been brought up in myself, that first made me think of writing.⁷⁸²

This environmental juxtaposition is seen in his poem 'Merthyr' in which the 'great green roof, some Beacon slope' contrasts with the 'battered wreckage' (*CP*, 42-43) of the town. These colourful and visual images remind the reader that Jones was a painter and had initially wanted to study art. Robert Minhinnick has highlighted this important element in his excellent essay 'An Uncommon Path':

Certainly from his earliest work until the latest, one of his most pressing artistic concerns has been the creation of the original, the startling image [...] the poet [was] occasionally intoxicated by the power of his visual perceptions, or perhaps the very brilliance of the words themselves. For Glyn Jones's verse

⁷⁸⁰ Jones, *DHTT*, p. 27: 'It was in my grammar school, naturally enough, that I awoke to the marvel of English romantic poetry. My favourite book became the *Golden Treasury with Additional Poems*, i.e. work by William Morris, Rossetti, Browning, Swinburne, Tennyson and so on.'

⁷⁸¹ Jones, *DHTT*, p. 30: 'My literary hero then was D. H. Lawrence, and later Hopkins shared with him my admiration.'

⁷⁸² Jones, *DHTT*, p. 31.

has always exhibited an obvious sensuality. We feel with this poet in particular the sexual-like pleasure of choosing, handling and arranging his words, the coaxing out of their sweet and ugly sounds.⁷⁸³

The eroticism throughout the oeuvre is paradoxically ‘sweet’ and ‘ugly’. It is an important juxtaposition, examined later in this chapter. In the novel *The Valley, the City, the Village* (1956), Trystan is described as a ‘boy continually amazed by the beauty and the ugliness of his world’ and, one might argue, Glyn Jones’s poetry itself gives birth to that ‘terrible beauty’.⁷⁸⁴

Like his parents, Glyn Jones eventually became one of those ‘chapel-going citizens’. In his culturally emblematic work *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, Jones includes a letter that he wrote to Keidrych Rhys which locates the genesis of the work to a conversation the two friends had on a Cardiff bus during the war:

I was on my way to the Welsh Sunday school I attended, and you were going to catch your train back to London. ‘I don’t suppose’, I said, ‘that many poets will be going to Sunday school this afternoon.’
‘Ah,’ you replied, ‘not *English* poets. But you are not an English poet. You are a Welsh one.’⁷⁸⁵

M. Wynn Thomas notes how, although Rhys and Jones were both different, ‘chapel was, for both of them, a central, complex, cultural signifier’.⁷⁸⁶ Part of this Welshness was being a chapel-goer. The artist Elwyn Davies recalls the discussions that took place before he and Glyn Jones went to Paris together in 1932:

⁷⁸³ Robert Minhinnick, ‘An Uncommon Path: Some Thoughts on the Poetry of Glyn Jones’, *Poetry Wales*, 19:3 (1984): 63-71 (p. 64).

⁷⁸⁴ Minhinnick, ‘An Uncommon Path’, p. 63. I borrow the phrase from W. B. Yeats’s poem ‘Easter 1916, the historico/political context of which is the Easter Rising of 1916.

⁷⁸⁵ Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (London: J. M. Dent, 1968), p. 1.

⁷⁸⁶ Thomas, ‘Fucking and Forgiveness’, p. 258.

28th. This time tomorrow I will be somewhere near Newhaven, happy. Glyn called for me in his holiday best, carrying his suitcase. ‘There’s nice you look, Glyn,’ said Mam. I was in my new sports jacket and we eyed each other like a couple of cocks before battle. ‘Look after him in that old Paris, won’t you?’ Mam tolerated my trips abroad because she recognised that they were a part of my education, but they never won her wholehearted approval. Each one frayed the maternal bond a little more. Yet, if they had to be, I couldn’t do better than go with Glyn. Chapel matrons approved of Glyn – he was ‘very faithful’, teetotal, and a ‘nice boy’, in spite of his poetry. Mam’s anxiety was therefore eased a little by the conviction that in his company a wild throwing over of traces was unlikely.⁷⁸⁷

The above quotation makes Glyn Jones out to be a good boy and a chapel-goer. However, the phrase ‘in spite of his poetry’ is most revealing. This quotation reveals something of what Glyn Jones ‘the Congregationalist’ looked like whilst, I argue, the poetry itself reveals the subliminal sense of guilt and sin which he felt within.

Between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, by his own admission, ‘religion and Welshness’ meant nothing to him.⁷⁸⁸ 1930 was a turning point (the same year as Gwenallt’s conversion). During that year he underwent a serious operation for appendicitis; he also met his wife and continued exploring Welsh-language culture. According to Thomas:

His own rediscovery of Welsh Nonconformity in 1930 had been inseparable from his rediscovery of the Welsh language, its literature, its culture; and it was this rediscovery that in retrospect seemed, for him, to have made possible the realization of his Welsh identity, even as an English-language author.⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁷ Elwyn Davies, ‘Glyn Jones and I go to Paris, extracts from a 1932 diary’, *The New Welsh Review*, 1:4 (Spring 1989), 33-37, (pp. 34-35).

⁷⁸⁸ Glyn Jones, ‘The Making of a Poet’ 2, *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist* 113, 74-75.

⁷⁸⁹ Thomas, ‘Fucking and Forgiveness’, p. 260.

This self-discovery seems straightforward. In a talk given at Minny Street Chapel, Glyn Jones stated that ‘An interest in our language, our literature, and our religion – three things in Wales which are inseparable – far more relevant to one another than they might be in England’.⁷⁹⁰

But if Jones’s work is looked at with closer attention, I believe there is much more occurring in this poet’s life. This section will show how his ‘conversion’ or ‘transformation’ was only the beginning of a spiritual and artistic quest which M. Wynn Thomas has described as an ‘open-ended conversation with himself’.⁷⁹¹ Tony Brown says that:

The poems [...] tell a different, more complex and more human story; one should have realised that faith is rarely simple, especially in a man who once described the world as a ‘mixture of madhouse and torture chamber’.⁷⁹²

This is the man who wrote that strange but important note in his 1986 notebook: ‘I am this filthy attic; I am this corrupt and dying man’.⁷⁹³ Is this a confession of sin that led to his last poem, ‘Seven Keys to Shaderdom’? We will discuss this when looking at the poem.

The conversation with self is evident in his earlier poetry, especially the poem ‘Selves’ (c.1930s). Here, the speaker is set higher-up, ‘in the heavenlies’ like the Apostle in Ephesians,⁷⁹⁴ and speaks of his ‘year of faith’ which ebbs and flows in a poem which echoes both Dafydd ap Gwilym and Matthew Arnold:

⁷⁹⁰ Glyn Jones, ‘Tyfu’n Gymro’, Unpublished and undated talk given at Minny Street Chapel, p. 13: ‘I gasglu pethau at eu gilydd – yn Minny Street dechreuodd hyn i gyd – diddordeb yn ein hiaith, ein llenyddiaeth, a’n crefydd – tri pheth yng [*sic*] Nghymry sy’n agos iawn at ei gilydd – yn llawer mwy perthnasol i’w gilydd, hyd y gwela i, nag yw’r tri pheth hyn dros y clawr yn Lloegr.’

⁷⁹¹ Thomas, ‘Fucking and Forgiveness’, p. 264.

⁷⁹² Tony Brown, ‘Tones of Loneliness: The Poetry of Glyn Jones’, *New Welsh Review* 39 (Winter 1997-98), p. 46.

⁷⁹³ Glyn Jones, ‘What was before Big Bang? 1980s Jottings’, *New Welsh Review* 39 (Winter 1997-98), 40-43 (p. 40).

⁷⁹⁴ Ephesians 1.

From this high hilltop I have seen the day
 Disperse the early strewings of the dawn,
 And silent floods of night that float no gleam
 Enkindled by men's fingers, wash upon
 The drowning beaches of the world around;
 And I have seen the summer's beauty born
 Of virgin-seeming spring, and then the fall
 Out-ravelling to winter's raggedness;
 And I have felt diurnal change, and change
 Of season in my year of faith. (*CP*, 200)

The 'summer's beauty born' reflects the praise which the speaker gives to nature, whilst the 'winter's raggedness' denotes the antithetical doubt and unbelief. We are then introduced to the two selves:

And now within the I-womb, two lives lust
 And wrangle endlessly; not the sharp
 Contentions of the body with the soul,
 That flesh-and-spirit, Jacob-Esau strife,
 But ghost and mind disputing troubles me.
 And how shall they live as one; the soul that seems
 As reckless as an upwind gull who mounts
 Towards the rafters of the clouds, and peers
 Across his shoulder, proud as any king;
 Soul whose pinions spring him up to scale
 The night, and sweep him past the star-holes there
 To glimpse the splendour spread beyond the old
 And rotting canvas of the sky; and mind,
 The serpent-subtle, he whose belly trails
 Along the earth-cracks, and whose narrow maw
 Would be the norm and measure of my life;
 Stigmata-seeking hand; tongue slow except
 To mock; root-knowing, fruit ignoring eye?

(*CP*, 200)

'Two lives lust' and they are called 'ghost and mind'. M. Wynn Thomas calls this a more 'modern' binary. But this binary is not just modern. On the one hand, there is a soul eager for trusting; a soul which yearns to fly up to the stars and peep through the star-holes to see what

is beyond; a soul which, like a bird, wishes to mount up on eagle's wings with faith.⁷⁹⁵ Then, on the other hand, we have the grounded 'intellectual' serpent – a character which is reminiscent of Shader Tom (See 3.2.iii) in his 'reptile house'. This binary is not exclusively modern, for it is seen in the poetics of King David right down to the works of R.S. Thomas. The poem ends with a prayer for integration or even a yearning after God. The influence of Gerald Manley Hopkins is evident:

Remain, stand still,
In thy creation, Lord, till mind learns flight,
So that my soul may wing her way to thee
And not wheel round like mother waterfowl
Whose young float squeaking in the mighty reeds.
(CP, 201)

There is a power in the old, grand, Miltonian blank verse, combined with the recurring image of a bird. This prayer, referring back to the earlier confession, is in itself an allusion to Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight':

It is these two selves that now destroy my peace
And make of me the sole unquiet thing
Among these hills.

This *agon* between the 'two selves' suggests the birth (with Jacob and Esau in mind) of a single form of creativity – out of the conflict of paradox, contrast, belief and unbelief, there is a hint of hope and faith.

As in our discussion of Gwenallt, we will look at Jones's poetry from two angles. Whilst keeping the 'religious turn' or conversion in mind, we will look in particular at his earlier poetry and then his later poetry. Arguably, this dichotomy is also informed by other binaries: the outward versus the inward religion, and the conscious versus the subconscious theology. To begin with, we will explore Glyn Jones's early poetry alongside his 'Congregationalism'. Pictorially, it will be like the pilgrim entering a chapel building and

⁷⁹⁵ Isaiah 40:31.

observing the visible scene. However, whilst doing this, this section will also point out possible theological undertones or hints as it were, which eventually contribute to the possibility of a dormant Calvinism in the poetry. The pilgrim will then ascend the steps and enter that ‘attic’ where, I argue, lives a kind of ‘hunchback’— the ‘other’ Glyn Jones who, I believe, is revealed in his relatively unknown later poem called ‘Seven Keys to Shaderdom’. Arguably, this poem is the key to the dormant Calvinism in the life and poetry of Glyn Jones; it is where these doctrines are most apparent.

‘He was very faithful, teetotal, and a nice boy’⁷⁹⁶

Glyn Jones’s Congregationalism has already been surveyed by M. Wynn Thomas in his magisterial *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*.⁷⁹⁷ But Thomas finishes before addressing Jones’s own personal faith and only touches on elements such as guilt, sin, faith and personal theology. Before addressing the complex nature of Jones’s inner belief, it is important to survey his outward Congregationalism. What is ‘Congregationalism’? Simply, it is a Nonconformist church which runs its own affairs independently with an emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. Congregationalism became an alternative to the strict church government of the Presbyterian Calvinistic Methodists.⁷⁹⁸ It is interesting how Gwenallt (with the same social consciousness) was drawn to the more conservative Presbyterian system. The more left-leaning Congregationalists were usually at the forefront of social reform,

⁷⁹⁶ Davies, ‘Glyn Jones and I go to Paris, extracts from a 1932 diary’, p. 35.

⁷⁹⁷ See Thomas, ‘Fucking and Forgiveness’, pp. 256-293.

⁷⁹⁸ Although it must be noted that independent ‘Congregationalism’ is a far older form of Nonconformity. Its origins are Elizabethan (1558-1603). There were those who wanted the national church re-organised using a Presbyterian system. Others repudiated the whole concept of a ‘state church’. These collectively became known as ‘Independents’ and their leader, Robert Browne (1553-1633) set forth the tenets of Congregationalism in his *Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Anie* (1582). The Savoy Declaration (1658) is also drawn on Congregational foundations. Conversely, the Calvinistic Methodist Church in Wales was only established in 1811.

humanitarian concern, and theological advancement. It is interesting that an evangelical neo-Calvinist like R. Tudur Jones and the liberal semi-Pelagian Pennar Davies (see 4.3) could sit together in the same denominational pew.⁷⁹⁹ Tudur Jones would write the magisterial *Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru* whilst Davies would go on to become a radical theologian.⁸⁰⁰ Similarly, today, different branches of Congregationalism have emerged; all share that radical freedom of spirit alongside a love of community which they see stemming from Jesus Christ.

The obvious thing about Congregationalism is the collective – the people – but also the paradoxical emphasis on the individual. Glyn Jones was a member of Cardiff’s Minny Street Congregational Church in Cardiff (or Annibynwyr) until his death. Minny Street’s website states:

Nid adeilad sanctaidd yw’r eglwys, ond pobl yn credu. Yn union fel mai nid chi yw eich dillad, nid ein hadeilad yw eglwys Minny Street. Nid lle mohonom ond pobl yn cydaddoli.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁹ See Thomas, ‘Fucking and Forgiveness’, pp. 270-274. For Pennar Davies, see chapter 4, Section 3.

⁸⁰⁰ See W. T. Pennar Davies, “‘The Fire in the Thatch’: Religion in Wales’, in R. Brinley Jones (ed.), *Anatomy of Wales* (Cowbridge: Gwerin Publications, 1972) pp. 105-116 and R. Tudur Jones, *Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru* (Swansea: Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg, 1966).

⁸⁰¹ My translation from the Welsh: ‘The Church is not a sacred building but a believing people. Just as you are not the clothes you wear, we are not the building itself. We are not a place but a people worshipping together.’



Croeso i Eglwys Minny Street, Caerdydd Ffydd yn gweithio trwy gariad. (Galatiaid 5:6)

Mae pawb ohonom, fel hadau dant y llew, hwyr neu hwyrach yn blino ar nofio'r gwynt, ac yn dymuno darganfod tir da a diogel i gael plannu'n gwreiddiau. Nid ydym yn gyflawn hyd nes y gwnawn hyn. Mae mynychu Eglwys Crist yn gymorth yn hyn o beth. Ond beth sydd i ddweud am yr Eglwys? Nid adeilad sanctaidd yw'r eglwys, ond pobl yn credu. Yn union fel mai nid chi yw eich dillad, nid ein hadeilad yw eglwys Minny Street. Nid lle mohonom ond pobl yn cydaddoli. Fel eglwys, estynnwn groeso i chwi. Estynnir croeso i chwi am yr hyn y medrwch chwi ei gynnig i ni: eich cymeriad a'ch profiad, eich doniau a'ch grasusau, a hyd yn oed eich ffaeleddau a'ch gwendidau.

Fe wyddoch yn barod mae'n siwr nad oes yr un eglwys yn berffaith! Ym Minny Street diolchwn i Dduw fod gan ddrain rosynnau, yn hytrach na dannod Duw fod gan rosynnau ddrain. Estynnwn i chwi groeso a derbyniad am bwy a beth ydych, yn union fel y cawsom ni ein derbyn am beth a phwy oeddem, ac ydym, ni. Hyderwn y byddwch yn profi yn ein plith ymdeimlad o berthyn. Plant Duw ydym oll, brodwr a chwiorvdd vn cvdweithio i weld cariad a dras Duw vn ffvnnu vn ein plith.

Hyfryd yw cael estyn croeso twymgalon i chwi i addoli gyda ni ym Minny Street.

Mae ein haddoliad boreol yn gynnes, deuluol a bywiog - **10:30yb**.

Am **9:30yh** pob ail Sul yn y mis cawn oedfa fer, hanner awr, yn y festri, yng ngofal yr aelodau iau, sydd bob amser yn hwyliog a bendithiol. Cawn pwt o frecwast gyda'n gilydd ar ôl yr oedfa hon.

Mae ein haddoliad hwyrol am **6:00yh**, yn fwy traddodiadol efallai - y frechdan emynau cyfarwydd - ond hoffwn feddwl fod y bara'n ffres a'r cynnwys yn faethlon.

Figure 16 - Minny Street Webpage

Jones's poems capture this 'Congregationalist' spirit; they are paradoxically full of people whilst also emphasising the speaker as separate. In the poem 'Biography' (May 1939), and the section entitled 'Slum-World', Cardiff life is captured alongside the speaker's individualism:

Here he went guided through the goverened squalor.

Down the navelled finger-nail of road, a crowded park,
Webbed with a circus-harness of frail chalk, with children's games
Square and snail-shaped, breaking the rowdy curtain of gay gulls,
But the birds were children, gull-voiced like the sinking sailor-man.

(CP, 17)

We see the vivid juxtaposition here between the solitary walker and the children in the ‘crowded park’. As the children skip or run around the ‘snail-shaped’ markings, we can almost hear the gulls fleeing away. The ‘faint’, ‘frail’ chalk lines suggest that the games are over and the ‘gull-voiced’ children are probably mourning a loss which is yet to come. In his ‘Sketch of the Author’ for the 1939 *Poems*, Glyn Jones confirms this sense of impending disaster.⁸⁰² He uses the word ‘haunted’ and there is a ghostly feel to the whole poem.⁸⁰³ Tony Brown notes how a ‘tone of loneliness’ is emphasised in the previous stanza when the speaker passes by all these scenes like an unclean leper:

Through the brightness of that inn-sign scene and sun, his bored
Eventful body, beleaguered in angel-smell and flame of its
Paradisal defender, passed like a sundering leprosy.

In biblical times, the leper would pass by saying ‘unclean’ and people would move away from him; he was the physical representation of being accursed of God.⁸⁰⁴ The use of the verb ‘sundering’ captures the separation between the individual and the collective. This might be the guilt of not being ‘down’ the mine with his comrades or on the battlefield. It may also be the manifestation of something else, something spiritual – an awareness of spiritual insufficiency.

This aloof speaker who nevertheless desires to enter the community is seen in ‘Merthyr’ where the speaker wishes to be killed ‘inside that county borough’ which is full of ‘neighbours, worthies, relatives’ (*CP*, 44) whom he wonderfully recalls at the end of the

⁸⁰² Jones, *The Collected Poems*, p. 143: “‘Biography’ is intended to convey the sense of insecurity and of impending disaster which has haunted us during the last year or two.’

⁸⁰³ Its tone reminds me of ‘Gweledigaethau y Bardd Cwsg’.

⁸⁰⁴ See Leviticus 13.

poem. In another poem, 'Hills', the speaker – like quasi-psalmist – 'stood aside when they flooded down / The slope from two pits' (*CP*, 41). He hears the:

sound of their boots
Like chattering of tipped hail over roofs;
I can remember like applause the sound
Of their speech and laughter, the smell of their pit clothes.
(*CP*, 41)

As Brown notes, the image of applause may be a sign of approval which the speaker longs for. More than this, he yearns after the physical and, indeed, natural comradeship which comes through in the poetry of the Quaker Waldo Williams; landscapes full of people: 'bro brawdoliaeth' / 'region of brotherhood'.⁸⁰⁵

This sense of community and hardship is captured in some of his other earlier poems (c.1930). The poem 'Interior During the Depression' captures the tense mood of these economically difficult periods:

I tilt my chair back in my girl's new rooms.
They are poor now, but all the same
They still afford a decent fire where
The coals wear antlers of golden flame.
(*CP*, 172)

The speaker's action seems to be initiated by boredom. The final three lines of the stanza sees the speaker narrating his own story – 'They are poor now' – 'but' the coals suddenly metamorphose into fiery stags. This promethean poetic act is an encouraging one, suggesting that even in poverty, the speaker has a home, family, an imagination, and most importantly: a wife. But even the comforting fire goes out in 'Wife a' lost' (*CP*, 173):

My fire died early, and our grate,
Bars and oven, went cold as slate;

⁸⁰⁵ Waldo Williams, 'Preseli' in *Cerddi 1922-1970*, ed. by Alan Llwyd and Robert Rhys (Llandysul: Gomer, 2014), p. 253: 'Fy Nghymru, a bro brawdoliaeth, fy nghri, fy nghrefydd...'

The bread and candles she left behind,
Custard and onions, I've failed to find.

The wife is described as a fire; she is life-giver. Her absence results in misery which is an allusion to the centrality of wives and mothers in mining communities like Merthyr:

Shivering, I crouch here, icy feet
Hungering for my Cadi's heat;
Loud in its hungering under the clothes
My empty rebuking belly crows.

(CP, 174)

The speaker's own body rebukes him with the sense of hunger.⁸⁰⁶ This is not meant to be a chauvinistic poem. On the contrary, it documents the difficult context that would arise when men had to be both 'bread-winners' and 'home-makers'. This was extremely difficult especially if there were young children. Widowers would often move back to their parents because the traditional family unit was the only efficient means of life in these hard valley communities.

By the time Glyn Jones was born, 43 per cent of the electorate of Merthyr Boroughs were classified as 'miners'.⁸⁰⁷ His father was not one of those miners. He held clerical positions for most of his life. These earlier poems seem personal, but they are also communal. There is a distance between the speaker and the subject when, in the first stanza of 'Interior', there is a shift from 'I' to 'They' (ll. 3-4). It is almost as if the speaker (or even the poet) wishes to be associated with the heroic working class but circumstances, and ultimately class,

⁸⁰⁶ Glyn Jones took the title from a poem by William Barnes. See A. T. Quiller-Couch (ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).

⁸⁰⁷ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 243.

makes it an impossible task. In ‘A Miner Reads Wordsworth’, the final stanza portrays the speaker in the same pitying tone:

My pals fill me with pity now;
 And that was felt by God’s own Son
 When His last shift was nearly done.
 (CP, 185)

On the one hand, Christ’s compassion for *His* people humanizes the Messiah into a miner, whilst his redemptive sacrifice metamorphoses into a ‘last shift’ down the hellish pit. On the other hand, the speaker is comparing himself to Christ. He was after all a Nazarene but also the Second Person of the Trinity; Christ was one of them as well as being wholly separate. Once again, the subliminal doctrines of Calvinism seem to be re-appearing here; namely the doctrine of Election. The speaker battles with the idea of belonging and being one of the chosen people – this subliminal anxiety is evident when he calls the working-class miners ‘My pals’.

Before pursuing these theological undertones, it should be noted that Glyn Jones’s chapel religion was matriarchal. Thomas notes that Glyn Jones ‘regularly associated the God he worshipped as a Welsh independent with the traditionally maternal warm embrace of total forgiveness.’⁸⁰⁸ Recent scholarship by Roger Ottewill has shown how Congregationalism actually depended on women because they constituted two thirds of the membership in counties like Hampshire and traditionally the denomination advocated women’s suffrage as well.⁸⁰⁹ As already seen with ‘Interior’ and ‘Wife’a lost’, the mother/wife figure is a powerful image in Jones’ poetry. Like Gwenallt, women are elevated in the oeuvres.⁸¹⁰ However,

⁸⁰⁸ Thomas, ‘Fucking and Forgiveness’, p. 281.

⁸⁰⁹ See Roger Ottewill, ‘“Skilful and Industrious”: Women and Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire 1901-1914’, *Family and Community History* 19:1 (2016), 50-62.

⁸¹⁰ See ‘Rhydcymerau’ (CG, 130, 1951) for Gwenallt’s grandmother.

before looking briefly at women in Jones's oeuvre, it should be noted that both Gwenallt and Glyn Jones may actually be reinforcing, rather than challenging, patriarchal conceptions of ideal maternal femininity. In 'Goodbye, what were you' (1970), the Virgin Mary figure and his own mother are interchangeable:

At the voice of the mother on a warm hearth,
 Dark and firelit, where the hobbled kettle crinkled
 In the creak and shudder of the rained-on window,
 This world had its beginning
 And was here redeemed.

All in that kitchen's warmth, that mother's glow,
 Was blessed, nothing was abandoned.
 There God's boy was born, loving, by lantern light,
 His church built of the breathing of cattle;
 (CP, 66)

The Welsh *aelwyd* is fused with the stable in Bethlehem – redemption is wrought in both.

The mother's tender care is coupled with theological universality where 'nothing was abandoned'. Glyn Jones's grandmother has similar features in 'The Dream of Jake Hopkins' (1954), a poem organised around the relationship between 'Blessed Memory' and 'Undesired Memory':

Do you remember the grandmother of those days?
 Do you remember, when the whole sky was ablaze,
 And the crimson sun-ball, evulsed and fiery, stood
 Dissolving on the hillcrest? A heavy figure, broad
 And black, floated out of that bonfire, as it were
 Upon a rolling raft of warm illumination.
 (CP, 30)

'The grandmother of those days' is colossal and associated with fire; she is like Gwenallt's grandmother in 'Rhydcymerau': 'Yn eistedd wrth y tân [...] / Darn o Gymru Biwritanaidd' | 'Sitting by the fire [...] / A piece of Puritanical Wales' (CG, 130, ll. 5 and 8). These grandmothers are uncanny; homely and unhomely at the same time. In 'The Dream of Jake

Hopkins', she is 'warm illumination' as well as 'broad / And black'. In 1956, a similar description appears in the novel, *The Valley, the City, the Village*, followed by some further detail:

She shepherded her rolling shadow down the slope; returning from the prayer-meeting she wore over her vast flesh her long black boat-cloak, with the brass buttons like a dramatic row of drawer-knobs down the front of her.⁸¹¹

The young speaker portrays her grandeur by likening her to the biggest thing in a child's sphere: the chest of drawers. Indeed, the whole passage in the novel reminds the reader of Christ in the Book of Revelation:

His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.⁸¹²

These women are given Christ's attributes. The maternal love coupled with powerful presence is literally 'God manifest in the flesh'⁸¹³ ("flesh" is one of his commonest words' in Glyn Jones's poetic vocabulary).⁸¹⁴ In 'Again' (1954), generations of strong Valleys women are portrayed:

Inside the warm room, those two women together
Cleaning the brass candlesticks in silence
Are my daughter and mother.
(CP, 40)

The repetition of the word 'brass' brings the apocalyptic passage to mind as well as the working-class living room which often was dominated by brasses on the hearth. Generally, if the hearth is looked at, the women are portrayed as strong survivors, whilst men are usually depicted as dead or aloof:

⁸¹¹ Jones, *The Valley, the City, the Village*, p. 12

⁸¹² Revelation 1: 14-15.

⁸¹³ 1 Timothy 3:16.

⁸¹⁴ Minhinnick, 'An Uncommon Path', p. 65.

Shall my daughter too run through the streets to the pit-head,
 And stand cold among the women crowding the gateway,
 And see the young men brought up dead?

(*CP*, 41)

The women are portrayed as ‘silent’ in these stanzas. Unlike *Gwenallt*, whose women do appear as either maternal or sexual, Glyn Jones powerfully portrays Welsh women realistically, and arguably, very effectively.⁸¹⁵ Perhaps there is an underlying criticism of the patriarchal society in this stanza. Myriads upon myriads of women are ‘silenced’ or standing cold at the ‘pit-head[s]’. Perhaps this is the cruellest form of patriarchy: the creation of silent widows. Jones, like ‘the women’, is horrified by death but he is also conscious that he is part of the patriarchal system. This anxiety in Jones’s oeuvre (this is just one example of many) may be the manifestation of that same indwelling sin which *Gwenallt* and Baudelaire were conscious of within themselves.

Before moving up to that attic of dormant Calvinism, we should realise that women are also portrayed as lovers in the poetry. The pre-Raphaelite influence on the first poem in the collection, ‘Gold’, is obvious:

A midday half-moon slopes in heaven, tipped
 And empty, with her golden liquor spilt.
 She rolls transparent on the floor of heaven.
 She has splashed her wine of gold upon the broom;
 And poured it over the golden chain, adrip
 With honey-drench; and emptied it between
 My hands, where rests the gold-clot of my love’s
 Fair head, her chain-mail cap of golden curls.

(*CP*, 3)

The sensuous description of the moon fuses an impressionistic fluidity with the kinetic force of one colour. The moon ‘rolls’ and splashes ambrosial colour on the broom before lighting

⁸¹⁵ See for example ‘Ann Griffiths’, *CG* 77.

his beloved's hair – settling like a halo. Minhinnick notes how Jones 'seems fascinated by human hair'.⁸¹⁶ The sheer intoxication is so focused on the wet golden locks that the person is lost – 'the golden chain', 'the gold-clot of my love's / Fair head', 'her chain-mail cap' – there is no other description of his beloved. Indeed, this is an instance of the 'creation of the original, the startling image' that Minhinnick describes.⁸¹⁷ The reader is mesmerized by the hair as well.⁸¹⁸ What is interesting is the last description: 'her chain-mail cap of golden curls'. Not only is the person lost but so is the gender – medieval 'chain mail' is not usually feminine; although 'her' marks the subject as female, the speaker dresses her in masculine attire.

The seemingly transgressive, homoerotic imagery is hidden throughout Jones's oeuvre. Or rather, Jones embraces all aspects of physicality, with a complex fusion of desire and repulsion. In the story 'The Kiss', an unnamed collier mysteriously comes to life:

Along one side of the road leading down to the village was a line of naked poplars all shoved sideways, swaying to one side like the long hair of earth blown up erect ... The workman longed to speak again, longed to see the bodies of women and men moving once again with passionate or even commonplace movements as the restless urgency used them, hungered and thirsted to taste with his mouth, longed to smell living bread, to feel fire. If he could exist to touch flesh with his healed hands, never increasing suffering.⁸¹⁹

The phallic poplars are transformed into the 'long hair of earth' for the workman. Sensuous feelings or longings seem to be articulated through nature similes. Brown has shown how 'a tender concern for suffering is articulated in registers which are both highly physical, even

⁸¹⁶ Minhinnick, 'An Uncommon Path', p. 65.

⁸¹⁷ Minhinnick, 'An Uncommon Path', p. 64.

⁸¹⁸ Yeats may be an influence here. His early volumes like *The Wind among the Reeds* are full of images of lovely women with long, heavy hair.

⁸¹⁹ Jones, *The Collected Stories of Glyn Jones*, p. 45.

erotic, and also overtly religious'.⁸²⁰ Sympathy, or even possible empathy, for homoeroticism is articulated in 'The Kiss':

Then very slowly he began untying the bandages. He fingered them with his large hands as though his ministrations were sacred, laying them gently aside with slow priestlike tenderness and deliberation [...] His love-acts were skilful, and soothing to his brother, tender and reverential, and his calm absorption in this eucharistic task seemed child-like and complete.⁸²¹

The language here, as Brown rightly notes, reveals an 'impulse to identify with, to be at-one-with, guiltily to *atone* for – we remember the religious registers – that which the respectable self is moved to reject, aesthetically or morally, [and which] seems to be at the heart of Glyn Jones's fictional world'.⁸²² Brown later argues that this at-oneness – even with the elements that *respectable* Wales would reject, such as homosexuality – is what makes Jones a truly communal or congregational poet. The sense of shame that individuals would experience is therefore embraced by Jones which may be the key in understanding the guilty confession that would produce 'Seven Keys to Shaderdom'. Homosexuality was not only seen as sinful by Calvinistic Christianity, but it was also illegal at the time. These poems reveal something of Jones's fascination with sexuality as a whole, whether it was other people's sexuality or his own. Arguably, this is the sin-bearing congregational poet would write that guilty confession in his 1986 notebook.

Further evidence of this fascination may be seen in the pre-Raphaelite hue that is striking in Glyn Jones's reminiscences of his mother. It is interesting to note in poems like 'Goodbye, what were you?' (1970) the possible oedipal sexual undertones:

Here a child wept repentant into a Father's breast,

⁸²⁰ Brown, 'Introduction' in *The Collected Stories of Glyn Jones*, p. lii.

⁸²¹ Jones, *The Collected Stories of Glyn Jones*, p. 47.

⁸²² Brown, 'Introduction' in *The Collected Stories of Glyn Jones*, p. lii.

Warm for his childish tears, not bright with stars,
 Or filled with his suffering that mother's arms
 And in the shawls of her prayers and kisses slept.

In the Kitchen shadow and flicker and warmth,
 And the deafening storm, thickening hair by hair
 Its blinding pelt of tempest on the window panes.

(CP, 67)

The act of repentance and confession is mediated through the maternal figure whose gender seems irrelevant in the first line: 'a Father's breast'; God is manifest in his mother's forgiveness, not aloof 'with stars'. 'Prayers' and 'kisses' of his mother are fused – religious, maternal love captured in the image of the old Welsh shawl. This kitchen becomes the 'holy of holies': the words 'flicker' and 'warmth' brings the Holy Spirit to mind, indicating the presence of God. But there is more. As an aside, in Rhys Davies's revival novel *The Withered Root*, one of the characters notes an important detail about Welsh religion: 'in some natures the impulse of religious worship is mingled inextricably with the sexual impulse'.⁸²³ Jones's description of his mother's 'breasts' and 'hair' is almost religious. This is evident in his later writings:

But what I remember most clearly about her from my boyhood is less her active piety than her remarkable and rather awesome good looks, the pale unblemished skin of the long face, the abundant red-golden hair, the large imperious grey eyes, the slightly aquiline nose with the flared nostrils.⁸²⁴

⁸²³ Rhys Davies, *The Withered Root* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007 [1927]) p. 259.

⁸²⁴ Jones, *DHTT*, p. 22.



Figure 17 - Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'Proserpine' (1874)

This sounds more like Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Proserpine' (1874) than his mother. His mother is a goddess whom he pleases: 'I have to confess that the only reason I came to chapel at that time was to please Mam'.⁸²⁵ One cannot help thinking that Jones at times cannot bear the fact that Christianity is dominated by the figure of the 'pale Galilean', rather than the warm and intimate Proserpine / Virgin Mary: 'But I turn to her still, having seen she shall surely abide in the end; / Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and befriend.'⁸²⁶ That quotation by Swinburne could easily be from a Catholic missal. Christ is much more

⁸²⁵ Brown, 'Introduction', p. xxviii.

⁸²⁶ Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Hymn to Proserpine' in *Selected Poems* (New York: Routledge, 2002) p. 60.

difficult to visualise for Swinburne and Jones. In ‘The Unpromised Land’ – a radio talk by Glyn Jones (1966) about his visit to Israel – he hints at this difficulty of ‘visualising Jesus’:

But for myself, I felt regrettably, unequal to the imaginative leap which would have enabled me to visualise Jesus, or indeed anyone except tourists, in these surroundings. Similarly the room of the Last Supper in Jerusalem. I should have experienced a greater sense of elation, if this hygienic-looking chamber had been homelier, less spacious and important looking: I wanted it to be more like the loft above the grocer’s shop in the valleys, dim, and aromatic and mysterious, in which my childhood imagination had first pictured this poignant scene.⁸²⁷

The difficulty of having a fixed image of Jesus explains the God-like descriptions of his mother. Both are paradoxically wonderful and difficult relationships. At times, he worships her and at other times he cannot bare her mollycoddling:

I sometimes think ‘What a wonderful thing is mother-love’. It prowls around the off-spring ready to fling out its claws at anyone or anything that menaces them, quite regardless of itself, how ridiculous it must look. But how horrible a thing it is when it wants to go on protecting and what is worse, when it assumes dictatorship over the offspring, although that offspring is better able to manage its own affairs than ever the mother would be, Mothers – your mate is the man you chose –not your sons or your daughters.⁸²⁸

The mother is leonine and her devotion is paradoxically both comforting and stifling. God’s love is also described in the Bible as being ‘motherly’. One of the most famous examples is Christ’s own words on the cross. He would have gathered Jerusalem like a hen does with her chicks (Matthew 23:37).⁸²⁹ But God’s love is also hinted as being a ‘dictatorship’. God and mother are both strong and powerful figures.

⁸²⁷ Glyn Jones, ‘The Unpromised Land: A talk by Glyn Jones’ transmitted on Welsh Home Service on Sunday August 7th, 1966. Given to Meic Stephens in 1988.

⁸²⁸ Glyn Jones journal entry April 1933. See Brown, ‘Introduction’, p. xvi.

⁸²⁹ cf. Hopkins’ ‘God’s Grandeur’.

Glyn Jones sees such characters in the Bible. In 'Bathsheba' (1988), the powerful woman is lover – strong and in control of the adulterous King David who obeys her commands:

Bolt up the windows of your joy,
David on my dead-

Silence that thud of passing drums
To the pulse of blood or clock;
Turn against pity your iron key
Cold in your palace lock

(*CP*, 102)

The warm hearth is now a bedchamber. King David had seen the beautiful married woman Bathsheba bathing on her roof and had desired her. He sent her husband Captain Uriah to the front line of battle, knowing that he would die. David and Bathsheba become lovers and eventually marry. God judges David by killing the first son not before challenging David through the Prophet Nathan. Psalm 51 is believed to be David's great prayer of repentance following these acts. In the poem, there is silence after 'dead'. The imperatives here come from Bathsheba not David. She is in command. The sexual rhythm and language of the stanza leads to a crescendo where Bathsheba reveals God's judgement, the death of her child: 'Louder the feet of my child's burial / Thunder descending your stair'. The use of the possessive pronouns, 'my' and then 'your', 'my' and then 'your' is an *agon* between bodies; this is heightened by pulsating rhythm which reminds the reader that this was a relationship driven by sex. Soon enough Nathan the prophet would judge David, but it is Bathsheba who curses him through breaking the silence.

David's sexual guilt is a good point to enter that 'filthy attic' which Jones wrote about. These 'Congregational poems' have theological undertones which suggest that Jones's belief was complex and, ultimately, an individual faith.

The 'filthy attic'

This section will explore and ask what Jones meant by that jotting in 1986: 'I am this filthy attic, I am this corrupt and dying man'.⁸³⁰ It does so by examining two of Jones's poems before focussing on his last great poem, 'Seven Keys of Shaderdom'. The previous section has already alluded to Jones's anxiety about sin and the entailing guilt which may have resulted from these emotions. It also hinted at Jones's anxiety about Calvinistic doctrines like repentance, election, and the very nature of God Himself. In 'Remembering Aloud', Jones calls himself a 'Christian-manqué' which denotes a sense of failure.⁸³¹ According to Robert Minhinnick, the

[r]ichness of his [Jones's] work is intensified by an element of guilt which deepens the perspective of many of his poems, late and early. Apparent is a need for the poet or his characters to atone for some sin, a desire always fervent and sometimes over-intense for "the sweet breakfast of forgiveness".⁸³²

This is Calvinistic language: 'atone', 'guilt', 'sin', 'intensity', and 'forgiveness'. Minhinnick is quoting from the poem 'Morning' where the ultimate guilty apostle – Peter – is portrayed (1975):

On the night beach, quiet beside the blue
Bivouac of sea-wood, and fresh loaves, and the
Fish baking, the broken ghost, whose flesh burns
Blessing the dark bay and the still mast-light,
Shouts, 'Come'.

A naked man on deck who heard
Also cockcrow, turning to the pebbles, sees
A dawn explode among the golden boats,
Pulls on his sea-plaid, leaps into the sea.

Wading the hoarfrost meadows of that fiord's

⁸³⁰ Jones, 'Jottings', p. 40.

⁸³¹ Jones, 'Remembering Aloud', p. 16.

⁸³² Minhinnick, 'An Uncommon Path', p. 65.

Daybreak, he, hungering fisherman, forgets
 Cockcrow tears, dark noon, dead god, empty cave,
 All those mountains of miraculous green
 Light that swamped the landing-punt, and kneels,
 Shivering, in a soaked blouse, eating by the
 Blue blaze the sweet breakfast of forgiveness.

(CP, 62)

Jones had of course visited the Sea of Galilee in the 1960s: ‘to me it was lovelier than anything I had ever imagined, a case of the-light-upon-land-and-sea being more vivid even than the light of the imagination’.⁸³³ The scene Jones is imagining is recorded in John 21 where Christ appears to the disciples after his Resurrection. Images of wood, fish, bread, flesh, and blessing indicate that exclamation by John: ‘It is the Lord’. The poem begins with Christ as ‘the broken ghost’ with the paradoxical impossibility of his flesh burning. But the poem’s main protagonist is Peter and his response. The gap between ‘Come’ and a ‘Naked man’ emphasises the spatial and spiritual gulf between Peter and Christ. This may also be a cryptic reference to one of the sources of Jones’s guilt: a denial of the Saviour in his youth as well as a homosexual fascination with the naked male form, as was recorded earlier in the chapter. In this poem, the same Peter that denied Christ;⁸³⁴ the same Peter that swore and blasphemed, and that same Peter who would eventually become the leader of the disciples is undressed, washed in the sea, and is forgiven by Christ. (One cannot help hearing echoes of Gwendallt’s ‘Pechod’ here). The poet subtly recalls the life of Peter. Christ’s ‘broken’ flesh seems to burn in the fire, paying the sacrificial price for Peter’s denial which took place beside another fire.⁸³⁵ Christ invites him from the darkness – across the void – and feeds him with much more than fish. He is of course *ICTHYS - Iesus Christos Theo hyios Soter*.

⁸³³ Description of the Sea of Galilee in ‘An Uncommon Path’, p. 7.

⁸³⁴ Luke 22: 54-62.

⁸³⁵ Luke 22: 55.

Whether there may be an underlying homoeroticism, there is definitely a dormant evangelicalism in this poem.

This poem depicts a sinner receiving forgiveness. But most of Jones's earlier poems are negative and portray a fallen world without redemption. In 'Night' (1938), there is no possibility of resurrection:

The angelled air, the sea is edged
 With fever where black Patmos lies;
 Beneath his island aching oak
 My thunder-hearted lover dies.

Like grief the rowdy swans return,
 Rain has her earring on the thorn;
 With broken hands I roll my rock
 Back on the Pasc of this raw dawn.

(CP, 14)

A risen body (a recurring image in Jones's poems and stories) 'budges the rock and walks the quays'. The poem was written in 1938 – the year of Anschluss and Nuremberg. 'The angelled air' brings Alicante's bombings to mind in an already war-torn Spain. The Apostle John – the disciple whom Jesus loves: 'boanerges' / 'son of thunder' – dies without revelation. This may be a memorial to the so-called 'degenerate artist' Ernst Barlach (1870-1938) whose death in 1938 may have symbolically heralded the death of art for Jones, the painter/poet. Barlach's 1919 woodcut 'The Writing Prophet' is an important parallel text; he is skeletal, drained, and hopeless. No wonder Christ rolls his 'rock / Back on the Pasc of this raw dawn'. Death still has dominion and there is no resurrection.



Figure 18 - Ernst Barlach, 'The Writing Prophet' (1919)

There is an acute awareness of sin throughout the oeuvre which verges towards the doctrine of 'Total Depravity'. For Jones's contemporary, Gwenallt, it was reading Baudelaire's 'Fleurs de Mal' that led him to a belief in original sin. As previously discussed, Gwenallt's sonnet 'Pechod' (Sin) dismantles all the layers of respectability from mankind, revealing a wolf who howls for the blood of atonement. For Jones, it was the world around him, especially the slums of Cardiff that did it:

Poverty I knew about well enough in Merthyr before I came to Cardiff, but direct contact with the conjunction of poverty, vice and crime was new to me and I found the experience deeply shocking and depressing.⁸³⁶

This acute awareness of sin surrounding him led to an acute awareness of sin within. I read ‘Seven Keys to Shaderdom’ as a religious poem which is a study of the man as both artist and soul. It is also a study of an aging man. Old age, after all, is a negative consequence of sin. The poem sometimes enters the world of Llywarch Hen, an old man who, in a ninth- or tenth-century series of *englynion* known as *Canu Llywarch Hen*, laments the death of his twenty-four sons. Mercer Simpson notes how Jones ‘was always reluctant to reveal himself’ and how it is dangerous to read the speaker of the poem as Jones himself.⁸³⁷ However, Twm Shader is more than Jones’s bohemian, Dylan Thomas-esque, ‘what-he-might-have-been’, ‘Other’. He is the shading (the alter-ego) behind the light of the ‘delightful man’: ‘all my poems are, without exception, based firmly on fact’.⁸³⁸ This, if anything, is recognition of an underlying nature tainted with sin which, if not dealt with, leads to damnation.

‘Shaderdom’ is an obvious play on the word ‘Christendom’ – the seven sections are the seven pillars that hold up the religion of ‘self’, i.e. that inward devotion that Shader Tom has to Shaderdom, the religion of ‘me’ or ‘I’.⁸³⁹ The prologue introduces us to this narcissistic and solipsistic figure. According to Simpson: ‘Shader is the man Glyn Jones might have become if he had developed primarily as a painter and if he had been seduced by

⁸³⁶ Jones, *DHIT*, p. 29.

⁸³⁷ Simpson, ‘Introduction’, p. xix.

⁸³⁸ Glyn Jones, ‘Glyn Jones on his Selected Poems, Fragments and Fictions’, *Bulletin of the Welsh Academy*, No. 14 (Summer 1948), no p.n.

⁸³⁹ The title of the poem may be a reference to George M. Cohan’s play ‘Seven Keys to Baldplate’ (1913) which has a similar tone and the same melodramatic types that Jones employs. Cohan had adapted the play from a novel by Earl D. Biggers which had a revival in 1935.

bohemianism and sensuality'.⁸⁴⁰ I think this description is insufficient and far too simplistic. The very location must be noted: 'the hollow has the resonance of a gigantic skull' (111); the reader is taken into a strange symbolic landscape which is dominated by 'atmospheric filth'. This is an internal world which is a cluttered space of 'leaning canvases': 'they stand patiently as though waiting at secret exits, that, opened, will allow them to flock out and take wing into the external world' (111). These are the protagonist's ideas which have not yet come to fruition or, to use the poem's lexicon, been 'let out'. The protagonist is a painter who constantly stares into a 'well-cracked cheval mirror' (112), leaning on his 'snake-tongued thumbstick'. This is a vivid image of the artist. A cheval mirror usually has two sides which are rotated which reminded me of the earlier poem 'Selves'. The obsession with 'self' leads to destruction; he leans on a snake-tongue stick – a slow death – bitten by the poison of Eden's sin. Jones is allowing us to enter that 'filthy attic' and he introduces us to this 'dying and corrupt man' who is a lonely and distressed figure.

The first section like in Gwenallt's 'Y Sant', recalls a 'wasted youth' (113): 'the apple blossoms and the summer glow' of romances, fantasies and sexual activity. At first, these women seem real and vivid:

Where is Lleucu now, where Gwen, where golden Angharad?
Where are Betty Blythe, and Vilma Banki, and Laura La Plante?

At first, the reader assumes that this list is Shader Tom's lovers. But Jones's explanation of 'Pola Negri' reveals what might be going on in this strange episode:

That Pola Negri was, in the days of the black and white films, what was then called a "vamp" – she would now be called I suppose a sex-symbol.⁸⁴¹

Towards the end of the section the women change:

⁸⁴⁰ Simpson, 'Introduction', p. xviii.

⁸⁴¹ Jones, 'Some inside authorial information', no p.n.

I have seen them since, tired in city supermarkets,
 Thick-nosed, afflicted, grey, called Nana, buying
 Cut-price toilet rolls in large quantities.

Then a further metamorphosis occurs:

And I awake again to hear, 'Jesus Christ, the same
 Yesterday, today, and for ever', – and
 I feel the shit-soaked feathers beat about my head,
 The screeches wake me and the talons tear my heart.

The women are owls from the Mabinogion and also more humble pigeons living in the attic; this episode is recalling the story of Blodeuwedd – the maiden who was constructed out of flowers and was eventually turned into an owl for her sin. These are women of his imagination – mythical creatures who occupied his mind and who he imagined encountering 'in the dark lanes of our villages'. The recurring 'Jesus Christ, the same / Yesterday, today and for ever' represents religious repression of these desires but also reveals an inward Promethean agony which results from these 'real' or 'imaginary' women – sexual guilt where the flower maidens of his youth have now metamorphosed into owls which 'tear my heart'.

The second section moves on to another corner of his 'filthy attic' – inhumanity and violence. The section begins with a television set which he describes as an experience of 'confused torment' (115). Paradoxes fill this part which further supports the idea that the poet is adhering to the Calvinistic aesthetic. Praise goes alongside the fall:

Beautiful the papery crocuses, pure white, purple, or luminous rust,
 Buds of amber, golden beads, the burnished
 Cups of long gold globes unbroken

(*CP*, 115)

The word 'beautiful' appears at the beginning of the first three stanzas of the second section. The repetition is like God's creation in Genesis 1 with the repetition of 'good'. Nature here is tainted with the fall: the living flowers are described as 'papery' whilst 'rust' is a biblical word associated with the fall. This is an imperfect creation – a paradox which produces art. Even the violence of a 'broken' child is described in a strange, almost artistic way:

While our child dies bleeding, alone, on the sun-splashed, the well-
bombed road.

The section ends where the speaker takes the form of his mother/God and looks on without the power to change the situation:

And when in the guise of mother, I, childless, heard
The screeches of my burning child, meaningless itself was then
Without all meaning, was become vain, barren, dead and meaningless.

'Meaningless' is not sufficient for the speaker here. The speaker identifies the root cause. If these things happen by chance then all is dead and meaningless. The speaker is exploring concepts such as eternity, God, and sin. How can such a deity allow such beauty to live alongside horror? He is also challenging poststructuralism's 'death of the author'. If read in that context, the line challenges a thought-system whereby all meaning and cause is taken away.

This doubt and confusion dominates the third section too. As in R. S. Thomas's 'Border Blues', the old voice of Pantycelyn interrupts the poem:

The pond's black glass, or polished river, or mercury lake –
...holl hyfrydwch natur
A'i melystra penna' ma's,
All meaningless now – not meaningless, still,
Yielding their insistent sweetnesss, but ineffectual,
No solace in such blissfulness for the past's guilt,
Its degradation, shames, the future's horrors – in such
Dazzling remembered brevities, no liberation,

No intimations and no hope.

The hymn quoted is ‘O! Llefara addfwyn Iesu!’ / ‘O! Speak dear Jesus’.⁸⁴² How can he hear Jesus with such sin abounding? How could Pantycelyn say such things? Pantycelyn is a recurring figure in the oeuvre. Gwenallt has a dialogue with him in ‘Sir Forgannwg a Sir Gaerfyrddin’ (‘Glamorganshire and Carmarthenshire’, *CG*, 132, 1951) and now so does Glyn Jones. The words in the first section on Christ being the same yesterday, today and forever are repeated with Twm’s statement in the stanza above: ‘the past’s guilt [...] shames, the future’s horrors’. The doubting Thomas continues as he sees a minister walking home:

After your God’s grace sermon you walk in darkness your road home
Alone, manse-ward, weeping, to that wayward cancerous wife.
Could you, could any, hear that admonition, gentle, loving,
Through time’s ferocities, vacuity of distances, seethe of stars,
To the stunned heart intoned, ‘My child, my child, peace, don’t cry,
don’t cry?’

(*CP*, 118)

This dialogue with Pantycelyn, and arguably God, is riddled with doubt. The last lines of the third section present Twm Shader with that Bunyan-like burden still on his back:⁸⁴³

I shuffled, shouldering my bogus intellectual hump,
Home to my painting,
And the aching pages of my poetry, and prayer.

These moving lines give the reader a glimpse into the very crucible where Jones’s art was formed. These burdens are all art-creating anxieties – spiritual torments which hurt him physically and spiritually. The fourth section focuses on nationalism and the fifth on Philistinism. One line is particularly interesting in the fifth section:

My Lord Bishop, when last I saw God
He was limping, his thigh broken after that wrestling one night

⁸⁴² Hymn 205 in *Llyfr Emytau* (1929), p. 91.

⁸⁴³ His tone is similar to R. S. Thomas’s great poems of doubt such as ‘Waiting’.

With you in the Peniel nightclub.
(CP, 123)

The question here is: who is a God? In Genesis, Jacob has a limp, having wrestled with God. But this ‘God’ has a broken thigh. This reversal is important because Shader Tom is the one who is leaning on a stick throughout the poem – he sees himself as God, and ‘Shaderdom’ has become his religion. It is difficult to differentiate between the artist, the deity and the speaker. Such complexities and anxiety relating to the ambiguous relationship the speaker has with his God reveals how sophisticated, complicated, and experiential this poem is from the perspective of religious poetry.

The sixth section is dominated by trees. Like Gwenallt in his poem ‘Gwreiddiau’ – where the speaker spends his early life metaphorically seeking those brilliant foreign fields – Shader Tom also talks about foreign trees:

Young, I watched the blaze in foreign trees,
Their coloured sunlit mops to me
Unreal auburn then, false even, dyed,
Fake, red as their red-haired whores’.
Old now, and home, a stander in such native
Red-gold waterfalls, still I burn.

This stanza is full of fetishized hair. The scene is Parisian, possibly fin-de-siècle, but it could also be the landscape of his mind. The reason for this suggestion is the word ‘watched’. Did the speaker participate or did he simply voyeuristically watch ‘sex’ as the poet watched the masculine bodies in the boxing match on the Merthyr heights? Whatever the root, the emphasis here is on dissatisfaction and the cost of ‘watching’ pleasure. The words ‘fake’, ‘Unreal’ and ‘dyed’ are different from the golden hair described in ‘Gold’ or his mother’s authentic auburn hair in *DHTT*. The cost is summarised in the puzzling words ‘still I burn’. Is he referring to a living hell? On the one hand, this is a purgatorial state of guilt masked in the

lexicon of venereal disease. On the other hand, the speaker may be describing the effects of acquiring, and living with, venereal disease. In a sense both are difficult to eradicate. These ‘foreign trees’ are a destructive force.

Jones’s 1982 jottings may provide us with the root of this sylvan metaphor:

Wales to me is like a tree, or rather a grove of trees, growing, dying,
needing weeding out, protecting, caring for, but all the time with a life
of its own.

The speaker enters this Welsh grove and ‘It is not dead’ (124). Having described the ‘autumn forest’ in the language of human physiology, he reaches the bare oak. We start to see the depth of this metaphor. The trees are multivalent; sometimes they are symbols for people, poets, language, preachers, and sometimes, the nation itself:

The bare oak, old
Wind-gnawed bones up there, black on the bleak skyline, lives,
Sinks joyfully into the underworld the great questing
Arm of its roots – its praise-poem is its spring
Parable of starlings, soft, sweet, sunny
From its lemon-yellow blaze of leaves.

The image of the ‘questing’ arms digging further into the matter of Wales brings Gwenallt’s poetry to mind where the soil – as in ‘Gwreiddiau’ – is emphasised. The purpose of this questing is revealed in the next stanza: ‘inheritance renews itself’ in ‘language, / Manners, ties, religion, graves, relationships, / And land, and even our games’ (125). The poem then, in the spirit of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic, praises this tree:

Marvellous great tree, fecund, beautiful – vast tree of bare
Winter’s black bones, a still-leaf skeleton, sombre, fanned out
Before a dazzling evening’s lemon glow
(126)

Brilliance. Great tree, marvellous great tree, fecund, beautiful,
Before your all-ness my brush fell helpless from my fingers.
(127)

The artist is overwhelmed. Mercer Simpson believes that this vision of a tree relates to Glyn Jones's own mystical experience in Ynysangharad Park, in Pontypridd, when a tree burst into flower before his very eyes.⁸⁴⁴ These are the moments when light overcomes darkness and floods in through the attic windows. Although M. Wynn Thomas refers to Calvinistic theology as 'dark' – the theology, and indeed the language, of darkness cannot survive without its antithetical light. Alongside this darkness is that paradoxical desire to praise. A.M. Allchin noted that it was 'praise above all' that summed up Welsh poetics.⁸⁴⁵ M. Wynn Thomas says that the dichotomy of beauty and suffering is the 'soiled hand-me-downs of a discredited romanticism'.⁸⁴⁶ This is correct, but the dichotomies are also evidence of a Calvinistic undercurrent, which cannot just be discarded. This grand vision of the tree is repeated in another excellent poem called 'War and Peace' (1970):

Under the vast burning-glass of the Second
World War's hatred, I walked dying down
Bridge Street, Pontypridd, and flung out suddenly

Wide wings, are they, soaring in some torrid gyre –
Great boughs, exultant, naked in the gale –
This glow, is it rosier than the low sun's
Firelight, jammed ruby in autumn sumacs –
Coiled, am I, in the hot armpit of the hills,
Warming my orange wampum in your rays?

(68)

'Great boughs' fuses Ann Griffith's Calvary with Yeatsian gyres. This 'all-ness' or 'complete perfection' seems to be a mystical manifestation portrayed in David's psalms as: 'my cup runs over'.

What happened was little enough like this.

⁸⁴⁴ Simpson, 'Introduction', p. xix.

⁸⁴⁵ See Allchin, *Praise Above All*.

⁸⁴⁶ Thomas, 'Fucking and Forgiveness', p. 265.

But how could I, frightened and confused, present,
 Even to those who believe and speak
 The language, the meaning of *tangnefedd Duw*?
 (69)

Like Paul, the speaker is overwhelmed by the ‘mystery of godliness’ and especially the concept of *tangnefedd*, that ‘peace of God which passes all understanding’⁸⁴⁷ – a word with no translation in English. He also says, of course, that even if you speak Welsh it does not guarantee spiritual understanding.

‘Seven Keys’ ends with Tom cowering like a snake under the light of a threatening God symbolised by the moon:

Shader rouses suddenly. Another night, star-spotted and with most of the moon in its mouth, has drawn up outside the house and stares at him in furious menace through the skylight. He cowers, mumbling in the darkness.
 (131)

God is like a ‘peeping Tom’ – an artistic double – ‘the all-seeing eye’ looking through the skylight into the dark attics of our existence. Although a fictional persona, I argue that Glyn Jones and Shader Tom are two sides of that cheval mirror; the guilty ‘cracked’ sinner and the good, teetotal boy; the happily married teacher and the voyeur who spied on those boxers as a youth; the poet who praises God and the poet who doubts Him, even hates him for allowing such sadness and violence. Both identities are welcome in the Welsh Christian Aesthetic; in truth, they epitomize the Christian experience. The tradition of praise cannot survive without its antithesis: the tradition of doubt.

When darkness lifts, the hillside, and the speaker’s perspective becomes clear. This is vividly depicted in Jones’s short story ‘Robert Jefferies’:

⁸⁴⁷ I Timothy 3 and Philippians 4:7.

What he loved was to see the whole valley unobscured by the rain or mist or darkness and lit by the bright sun of the morning. I heard him speak of it often in prayer meetings; he saw there, in the sunlight, the landscape of his favourite hymns, where his Saviour stood among myrtles, or strode out of Eden conquering, more lovely than the breaking of the dawn.

(GJCS, 235)

Here is an example of the other side of the mirror. Like Pantycelyn and Ann Griffiths, there is an experiential certainty which, although sometimes darkened, makes the vision of God clearer. He stands amongst the myrtles and conquers the darkness in light.

* * * * *

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the interesting similarities and differences between Gwenallt and Glyn Jones's oeuvres. It is important to note that denominationalism, in essence, matters less and less in this territory. This is a tale of *individual* rather than collective religion – a re-establishment of relation between poet and God. We have seen how important the land and the people are to both poets. We have also identified the strong paradoxes which run through the poetry. Ultimately, a subliminal theology has been read alongside the poetry which reveals a dormant Calvinism whilst also acknowledging other influences like Pacifism and Catholicism. We now move on to further territories where differences between poets reveal the pluralism within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.

CHAPTER 4

The Pluralism of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic: Four twentieth-century Poets.

Having nested in Beulah, and traversed and dwelt in the shadow of Nonconformity, the poetic pilgrim now takes a different approach. In the previous chapters, specific poets have been focused on who adhered to an aesthetic which was overtly affected and formed by an influential, dominant, Calvinistic theology.⁸⁴⁸ This final chapter problematizes this aesthetic further by looking beyond the so-called ‘Calvinistic’ era in Wales (c. 1730 onwards) to earlier, or other, Christian influences.⁸⁴⁹ The chapter acknowledges that the *Calvinistic* aesthetic may not be a wholly sufficient label for an aesthetic phenomenon which is far older than John Calvin (1509-1564), whose theology was, after all, an elaboration of earlier Augustinian thought which was developed during the Reformation. Therefore, whilst not forgetting the pivotal importance of Calvinism in this discussion, this fourth chapter recognises that Welsh religious poetry is drawn from plural forms of Welsh Christian thought.

Four poems by four poets will be considered. These examples attest to the rich pluralism of Welsh Christian experience, whilst also recognising the common thread of Christian doctrine. Christian theology has always focused on the worldwide church whilst also providing room for the expression of individuals, cultures, and specific nations.

Aesthetically, this produces a paradox. Welsh religious poetry attests to individual experience

⁸⁴⁸ See introduction.

⁸⁴⁹ It is difficult to date a so-called ‘Calvinistic’ era but from 1730 onwards Calvinistic Methodism – a truly national movement – began to dominate Welsh culture. For an excellent account of the influx of Calvinistic thought in Wales see David Ceri Jones, ‘Calvinistic Methodism and the Reformed Tradition in Eighteenth-century Wales’ in Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin and Robert Armstrong eds., *Christianities in the Early Modern Celtic World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 164-178.

but also to the collective and social experience connecting modern and ancient poets. Whilst not a complete survey, this chapter acts as a culminating overview of some other territories through which the poetic pilgrim traverses. The four poets are:

- i.* Anne Cluysenaar (1936-2014) whose poem ‘Vaughan Variations’ is an experiential dialogue with faith, place and the Welsh metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan (1621-1695). Cluysenaar was a Quaker.
- ii.* Saunders Lewis (1893-1985), an important figure in Welsh culture and history. His poem ‘Mair Fadlen’ was hailed by Bobi Jones as one of the greatest poems in the Welsh language.⁸⁵⁰ This is an example of a Welsh Roman Catholic poem.
- iii.* Pennar Davies (Davies Aberpennar) (1911-1996) who was influenced by Pelagianism. Whilst in dialogue with Pelagius (c.360-418 A.D.), Davies develops his own neo-Pelagian poetry, as manifested in his ‘Cathl i’r Almonwydden’ | ‘Song to the Almond Tree’.
- iv.* And finally, R. S. Thomas (1913-2000), acknowledged as one of the major twentieth-century religious poets.⁸⁵¹ His poem ‘Gwallter Mechain’ is a eulogy to a desired *Welsh* Anglicanism represented by his predecessor in Manafon. Thomas was a clergyman in the Church in Wales.

⁸⁵⁰ See Bobi Jones, ‘Cerdd Fwya’r Ganrif?’ in *Saunders Lewis y Bardd*, ed. by Medwin Hughes (Dinbych: Gwasg Gee, 1993), pp. 87-105 (p. 87).

⁸⁵¹ Thomas was nominated for the 1996 Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. Before that, he won the 1964 Queen’s Gold Medal for poetry.

Anne Cluysenaar (1936-2014)

An experiential approach within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic

Anne Cluysenaar was not a Welsh poet by birth but she was a part of what Jeremy Hooker calls its ‘ancient poetic tradition’.⁸⁵² Anne Alice Andrée Cluysenaar was born in Brussels in 1936 before her family moved to England on the outbreak of the Second World War. She studied English and French Literature at Trinity College, Dublin which led to her taking Irish citizenship in 1961. However, later in life, she settled and wrote in Wales. It was the Usk landscape – both past and present – that drew her in later years, especially through the figure of Henry Vaughan, the Silurist (1621-1695). She identified as a Quaker.⁸⁵³

Cluysenaar draws on Vaughan for her own ‘language of immanence’ especially in the poetic sequence ‘Vaughan Variations’.⁸⁵⁴ These are twenty-three poems which form a conversation about poetry within a shared landscape.⁸⁵⁵ I will consider poem number 1 and 23 in detail in the next section with some brief references to the other variations. This poem, I argue, is a Quaker poem written within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. Its close proximity – both in setting and structure – to the Welsh landscape is what first indicates this. Then its experiential, contemplative nature links this poem to figures like Ann Griffiths discussed in Chapter 1; this is not a masculine aesthetic dominated by men. Perhaps most important of all

⁸⁵² Jeremy Hooker, ‘Vaughan Variations’: Anne Cluysenaar in conversation with Henry Vaughan’, *Scintilla 19* (Usk: Usk Valley Vaughan Association, 2016), pp. 92-109 (p. 92).

⁸⁵³ See ‘Anne Cluysenaar’ in Alice Entwistle (ed.), *In her own words: Women talking poetry and Wales* (Bridgend: Seren, 2014), pp. 45-6.

⁸⁵⁴ This phrase ‘language of immanence’ is taken from M. Wynn Thomas, ‘R.S. Thomas and Denise Levertov’ in *Moment of Earth: Poems and Essays in Honour of Jeremy Hooker*, ed. by Christopher Meredith (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2007), pp. 284-301: p. 287. The essay looks at Denise Levertov who, in her own personal beliefs, was unorthodox – fusing Catholicism with Hassidic Jewish theology.

⁸⁵⁵ Anne Cluysenaar, *Timeslips: New and Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997). Quotations from the sequence will be from this edition, referenced *T* in the text.

is its kinetic dialogue with the past – particularly the religious experientialism of the past – funnelled through the figure of Vaughan.

Both Vaughan and Cluysenaar belong to a tradition of ‘religious’ poetry based on experience. Although Cluysenaar cannot be called a *religious* poet per se – nor did she share Henry Vaughan’s Anglican faith – her poems ‘have a numinous quality analogous to Vaughan’s’.⁸⁵⁶ Both share that metaphysical syntax of conversation which takes the place of the formal syntax of praise, lament, or apostrophe characteristic of much other lyric poetry. Like a metaphysical poet, her imagery is drawn from disparate areas of human experience; law, medicine, geography, science, alchemy, and formal logic supplement and largely supplant the heavenly bodies, precious stones, and assorted flora and fauna which constituted the acceptable image stock of the Renaissance. This is perceived in the landscapes of the poems and in the mystical lexicon she uses. Vaughan’s mysticism fuses with the Quaker idea of ‘silent worship’.⁸⁵⁷ Words like ‘flicker’, ‘quickness’, ‘glimpse’, ‘touches’, ‘flow’, all point to an experiential form of religion rather than a particular theistic spirituality.⁸⁵⁸

The landscapes of Vaughan and Cluysenaar’s poetry also reflect their shared Welsh environment. The land cannot be divorced from the poetry; its involvement in the formation of the poem is fundamental in understanding what the *Welsh* Christian Aesthetic involves. According to David Jones – another poet whose oeuvre is shaped in response to the Welsh

⁸⁵⁶ Hooker, ‘Vaughan Variations’, p. 97.

⁸⁵⁷ See ‘How Quakers worship?’, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-faith/how-quakers-worship> [Accessed: 13/08/2018]. ‘In the quiet we look for a sense of connection. This might be a connection with those around us, with our deepest selves, or perhaps with God. As we feel this sense of encounter grow stronger, we may begin to see the world and our relationships in a new way. Our worship may take us beyond our own thoughts and ideas to help us respond more creatively to the world around us.’

⁸⁵⁸ I have taken these words from Cluysenaar’s *Migrations* (Blaenau Ffestiniog: Cinnamon, 2011).

landscape – poetry must always ‘preserve liaison with the actual, the bodily, the visible’.⁸⁵⁹

Indeed, he goes on to write that ‘all the arts’ are ‘essentially a conjoining of two things, matter and spirit’.⁸⁶⁰ The Welsh ‘matter’ is used as a means of contemplating or even entering the spiritual realm. This is not necessarily a pantheistic manifestation whereby God ‘is identical with the cosmos’ but a sensibility which locates in nature an important aspect of personal spirituality.⁸⁶¹

We can see this sensibility in poems like Vaughan’s ‘I walked the other day’ in which the speaker spends his ‘hour’ of worship in the landscape of the Usk Valley.⁸⁶²

I walked the other day (to spend my hour)
 Into a field
 Where I sometimes had seen the soil to yield
 A gallant flower
 But winter now had ruffled all the bower
 And curious store
 I knew there heretofore.

The ‘field’ and ‘flower’ are both real and symbolic – ‘matter’ and ‘spirit’.⁸⁶³ Vaughan is in conversation with George Herbert here as well as referencing the Old Testament prophet Isaiah when the prophet meditates on the Suffering Servant.⁸⁶⁴ The prophet refers to the

⁸⁵⁹ David Jones, ‘Wales and Visual Form’, 1944, in *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings*, ed. by Herman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 91. The irony is that Jones actually spent very little time in Wales. Most of his knowledge of its landscapes came from books.

⁸⁶⁰ Jones, ‘Wales and Visual Form’, p. 92.

⁸⁶¹ ‘Pantheism’ in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pantheism/> [Accessed: 18/10/17].

⁸⁶² ‘I walked the other day’ in Henry Vaughan, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Alan Rudrum (Penguin 1995 [1976]), pp. 240-242.

⁸⁶³ Jones, ‘Wales and Visual Form’, p. 91.

⁸⁶⁴ Allan and Helen Wilcox, ‘Matter and Spirit Conjoined: Sacred Places in the Poetry of George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, R.S. Thomas and Rowan Williams’, *Scintilla 11* (2007), pp. 133-151 (p. 139): ‘The fact that Vaughan echoes Herbert’s lyrics alerts us to the metaphoric references of this later poem: ‘the gallant flower’ is a phrase from Herbert’s allegorical poem ‘Peace’, and the plant that withdraws underground in the winter vividly recalls Herbert’s lyric ‘The Flower’ and is a celebration of Christ’s ‘returns’.’

Messiah as a hidden root growing out of dry ground.⁸⁶⁵ This vision acts as mental scaffolding for Vaughan's poetic aesthetic; his religious poetry is about searching under the surfaces for those hidden things: 'there might be other springs'.⁸⁶⁶ As we read, we realise that Vaughan is expressing distress because of his brother's death ('matter') but this eventually leads to a 'spiritual' conclusion in the poem. In the eighth stanza, he asks God: 'That in these masques and shadows I may see / Thy Sacred way'; these 'masques and shadows' in the environment lead on to spiritual contemplation. A masque is a (human) theatrical performance. The speaker desires to see past or through such 'shadows' to discern God's 'Sacred way'.

Cluysenaar utilises this structural parallelism between matter and spirit. This connection, however, goes beyond aesthetic and stylistic similarities. Gwyneth Lewis has described the relationship between Vaughan and Cluysenaar as a 'love affair' and Jeremy Hooker states how Vaughan is 'alive in his poetry' for her:⁸⁶⁷

Vaughan emerges from the conversation as in some ways modern, and at the same time part of an ancient poetic tradition, which is still alive in the late 20th century Britain.⁸⁶⁸

This 'ancient poetic tradition' seems to be formulated within a religious structure; as Cluysenaar herself states:

I am interested in how structures resist or encourage experience, even though you need those same structures to explore experience.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁵ Isaiah 53:2: 'For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him.'

⁸⁶⁶ Rudrum, *Henry Vaughan*, p. 240.

⁸⁶⁷ Hooker, 'Vaughan Variations', p. 96. Personal communication from Gwyneth Lewis: 'Her relationship with Henry Vaughan has been described as a love affair'.

⁸⁶⁸ Hooker, 'Vaughan Variations', p. 92.

⁸⁶⁹ Entwistle, *In her own words*, p. 59. `

This sounds like an arduous process. This *agon* between resisting and encouraging experience explains the complexity of Cluysenaar's own belief but, in a way, reflects the same age-old *agon* between faith and doubt. This inner tug-of-war is seen in Alice Entwistle's enlightening interview with the poet where she asks Cluysenaar whether she is suspicious of orthodox belief. Cluysenaar responds:

Very. I can't believe something because somebody tells me. I can only believe it if I've felt it myself. That's probably why I'm a Quaker. And even then I know one can feel all sorts of things that are not true. But if it's productive in terms of survival I'm willing to give it house-room.⁸⁷⁰

These ideas of 'feeling' and subjective involvement link her to Calvinistic Mysticism as well as to Quakerism.⁸⁷¹ The Quakers believe that truth is continuously revealed through individuals. Phrases such as 'inner light' and the 'inward light of Christ' show how all have this ability to understand God's truth; that is Quakerism's reading of the 'priesthood of all believers' found in Scripture.⁸⁷² Interestingly, although Cluysenaar, like the Quakers, rejected dogma and doctrine, her poems are written in 'Quaker' language – the emphasis on silence and light in her oeuvre are undoubtedly influenced by Quakerism. Therefore, she does, in a way, conform to a belief system in the very act of writing about her experience. This language is needed as a structural entity to explore religious experience.

This Quaker language is evident in her interview with Entwistle. She begins talking about the experiential approach in religion and poetry by referring to 'Vanity of Spirit':

Vaughan's experiential approach to religion is fascinating. There's a passage in 'Vanity of Spirit' where, after a night literally 'spent' in thought, he walks to the little spring on the hillside behind his farm. He recalls how he's analysed nature, looking for the source or 'spring' of creation, without

⁸⁷⁰ Entwistle, *In her own words*, p. 50.

⁸⁷¹ See Chapter 1.

⁸⁷² See 1 Peter 2:5.

success, until he came to ‘traces and sounds of a strange kind’ in himself, which seemed to be part of ‘this mighty spring’. That poem seems to favour inner experience over analytical reasoning.⁸⁷³

The transition from that cerebral night ‘spent’ in *thought*, metamorphoses into an inward quest of contemplation. This ‘inner experience’ is similar to the Quaker notion of ‘silent worship’:

A meeting for worship usually lasts for an hour. In Quaker worship there are no ministers or creeds. We first gather together in silence to quiet our minds – we don't have set hymns, prayers or sermons. In the stillness we open our hearts and lives to new insights and guidance. Sometimes we are moved to share what we discover with those present.⁸⁷⁴

Whilst searching self, Vaughan and Cluysenaar discover these ‘traces and sounds’ within. Vaughan’s sensitive and meditative impulse is passed on to Cluysenaar who, arguably, employs a Quaker idiom even in her reading of and her thinking about Vaughan, drawing on his orthodoxy ‘for her [Quaker] language of immanence’.⁸⁷⁵

‘Vaughan Variations’

In the first Variation, the speaker is standing at Henry Vaughan’s tomb:

Broken across ‘sepulchrum’ and
‘voluit’, your stone is perhaps,
after all, as you would have wanted:
needing to be sought out

(*Timeslips*, p. 129)

⁸⁷³ Entwistle, *In her own words*, p. 46.

⁸⁷⁴ See ‘How Quakers worship?’, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-faith/how-quakers-worship> [Accessed: 13/08/2018].

⁸⁷⁵ See M. Wynn Thomas, ‘R.S. Thomas and Denise Levertov’, p. 287.



Figure 19 - Henry Vaughan's Tombstone

There is hidden parallelism in these lines: the Latin ‘sepulchrum’ and ‘voluit’ are mirrored by the English ‘stone’ and ‘wanted’.⁸⁷⁶ This repetition is not restricted to the words. Siegfried Sassoon also ‘sought out’ this grave of the one ‘whose name flows on for ever / Through pastures of the spirit washed with dew’.⁸⁷⁷ The power of this everlasting name portrays Vaughan in a Christ-like manner in Sassoon’s poem:

Here sleeps the Silurist; the loved physician;
The face that left no portraiture behind;⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁶ ‘Voluit’ is the Latin for ‘wanted’.

⁸⁷⁷ Siegfried Sassoon, ‘Poem XXIII, At the Grave of Henry Vaughan’ in *Collected Poems 1908-1956* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp. 189-190.

⁸⁷⁸ Sassoon, ‘Poem XXIII’.

Vaughan is another ‘loved physician’ whose tomb is broken, hinting at some kind of resurrection. Similarly, Cluysenaar recalls Vaughan’s ‘Vanity of Spirit’ in the next quotation.

The speaker, like the Magdalen, seeks out this ‘face that left no portraiture’:

At other times, I’ve looked for you
in your language, shapes that you’d own
traced by words that change and die off.
(*T*, p. 129)

Is the speaker referring to Vaughan or to God here? Or rather, does Vaughan become a replacement, an incarnation of the ‘Word made flesh’?⁸⁷⁹ In ‘Vanity of Spirit’, Vaughan is searching the Book of the Soul for God. In Cluysenaar’s poem, the speaker searches that ‘name’, which Sassoon referred to, that ‘flows for ever’. Like the Magdalen, the speaker feels a sense of guilt that she is by the tomb because she knows that in some way Vaughan is alive:

My temples ache as if with tears.
It’s a betrayal to say ‘you’
to the self your words breathe in me.
(*T*, p. 130)

The poet is resurrected in his poetry. The flesh, as it were, has become word. Nothing is fixed in the Variations, not even death. These lines may imply that Vaughan’s ‘self’ is somehow reincarnated in the poem’s speaker which is why the second-person pronoun is a ‘betrayal’ – it fails to acknowledge their merger or unity of being. Hooker writes about the ‘continuous creativity’ which links the living with the dead.⁸⁸⁰ However, Cluysenaar’s experiential faith seems to be directed towards language rather than God. Language has the power to resurrect:

I see here how your voice and his
might evolve their ways. Toddler-talk
of twins, down by that clear amber,
half drowned in its hushed and its hushing,
the soft pour of those melting pleats –

⁸⁷⁹ See John 1.

⁸⁸⁰ Hooker, ‘Vaughan Variations’, p. 94.

made and remade, some shapings in
 changing water. Your mother's tongue,
 then English, making, remaking.
 Swirled by what can't be said.

(*T*, p. 129)

Language is creative here; it plays a part in an evolving identity. The alchemist's lexicon is employed – 'amber', 'shapings', 'swirled' – referring to the esoteric interests of Thomas Vaughan (Henry's twin brother). Alchemy is defined as a magical process of transformation or creation, especially with elements and their states. The poem's water imagery refers to the River Usk. But on the other hand, language is 'half drowned', a phrase which, as in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and in Celtic tradition, should bring resurrection to the reader's mind. This ancient trope is confirmed in the alchemical phrases 'made and remade' and 'making' and 'remaking'. Like Wordsworth's *Derwent*, nature's watery cauldron – 'the fairest of all rivers' – seems to construct Henry and Thomas Vaughan in a kind of Romantic crucible; it 'loved to blend his murmurs with my nurse's song'.⁸⁸¹ But this 'seed time' includes the 'mother's tongue', combining Romanticism's maternal Nature-figure with the Welsh-speaking mother. The word 'twin' and the phrase 'then English' may be an allusion to the bilingual atmosphere which created Thomas and Henry Vaughan. Language was instrumental in the twins' upbringing. But the speaker also refers to a third language. What is this third language? It seems to be that which stubbornly remains outside of, or beyond language: 'what can't be said'.

Your mother's tongue,
 then English, making, remaking.
 Swirled by what can't be said. All this,
 near your grave, has made you too real,
 like a parent after his death.

⁸⁸¹ See William Wordsworth, 'The Prelude: Book 1', ll. 270-281.

This paradoxical post-mortem language is something which both Vaughan and Cluysenaar experience and transmit through their speakers. The mysterious third language is the instrument which, like a mixing tool, prepares the creation: ‘Swirled by what can’t be said’. In the tradition of religious poetry, the emphasis on ‘silence’ and the importance of the second day of the Paschal Triduum in the life of faith – and subsequently in poetry – has only recently been explored in Welsh religious poetry.⁸⁸² It is evident that this religious sensibility is seen through the language; this is not a lexicon which is overtly directed towards God. Cluysenaar’s idea that spoken words would distort or misshape experience, whether divine or not, is something that McLauchlan surveys in the poetry of R. S. Thomas:

It is this silencing [...] that forces the precondition for authentic re-creation, since it opens a space where God is free to reveal himself as he is, rather than as we would have him be and to transform without the disruptive clamour of our misshaping words.⁸⁸³

Notions of the Divine – whatever that entails or includes – is ‘swirled’, or in this context, prepared by that ‘which can’t be said’; it is the ‘precondition for authentic re-creation’. The disruptive clamour of language goes side-by-side, paradoxically, with the transformative and vivifying effect as well. Like Cluysenaar’s vision of religious experience, language itself is a ‘structure’ which ‘resists or encourages experience’.⁸⁸⁴ It is language that transforms Vaughan from a father-figure to lover and back to a father-figure again: ‘like a parent’. ‘Swirled’ also brings the fluidity of ‘female language’ to mind.⁸⁸⁵ Language is both constructive and un-necessary. Like a linguistic séance, Vaughan re-emerges and when he stands before her, there seems to be no need for words.

⁸⁸² One of the best examples is Richard McLauchlan, *Saturday’s Silence: R. S. Thomas and Paschal Reading* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017).

⁸⁸³ McLauchlan, *Saturday’s Silence*, p. 1.

⁸⁸⁴ Entwistle, *In her own words*, p. 59.

⁸⁸⁵ See Chapter 1’s discussion of Cixous and Ann Griffiths.

However, paradoxically, grand concepts like love and faith *need* to be experienced or expressed by Cluysenaar; as M. Wynn Thomas notes of Denise Levertov:

... throughout her life the crux of her spiritual poetic was an insistence that the transcendent had to be mediated through what Blake termed the ‘minute particulars’ of mundane, concrete experience.⁸⁸⁶

This quotation could have been written about Cluysenaar. Perhaps, silence is that mundane experience which mediates the transcendent. These unsayable mysteries bring another passage from Entwistle’s interview to mind, where Cluysenaar states:

Despite Vaughan’s commitment to Christian doctrine, you can hear Keats’ ‘negative capability’ very clearly in the pursuit of what Keats famously calls ‘uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’. We understand so much now about what that poem calls ‘the creatures’ and ‘the spheres’, but knowledge always leaves gaps for the imagination’.⁸⁸⁷

The reference to John Keats’s 1817 phrase shows how both Cluysenaar and Vaughan wrestle with language and silence, experience and no experience, faith and doubt. This apparent lack of assurance may not be anti-Christian as Cluysenaar supposes, but may lie at the root of the Christian experience itself: ‘Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief’.⁸⁸⁸ Therefore, this *agon* may be said to lie at the heart of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic as well.

The themes seen in the first poem are reflected in the last, and possibly one of her best, poems. In poem 23, the speaker muses upon – and arguably becomes – the pregnant Denize Morgan, as she carries the Vaughan twins:

Her heart-beat flows round them, in them, like a footfall.
Not yet time to breathe. There are no choices.

⁸⁸⁶ M. Wynn Thomas, ‘R.S. Thomas and Denise Levertov’, p. 287.

⁸⁸⁷ Entwistle, *In her own words*, p. 46.

⁸⁸⁸ See Mark 9.

There is no guilt. The world is making them.

The music in the first stanza juxtaposes with the silence in the womb. The heart-beat is rhythmic: it echoes the sexual moment of their conception, the footfall of life, and the pumping of blood for their physical provision. Once again, the alchemist Quaker is at work: ‘Her heart-beat flows’. The sonic unseen is liquefied – blood is pumped from the heart and it carries echoes of that sound along with it. This is a maternal environment devoid of any paternal theology: ‘There are no choices. / There is no guilt’. It is possible that Cluysenaar is musing on the Calvinist doctrine of Original Sin by parodying the psalm: ‘Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did **my mother** conceive me’.⁸⁸⁹ The children are not sinful here and their creator is maternal and life-giving, highlighted by the first word: ‘Her’ and ‘The world’. In the next stanza, the Bible is suddenly located in the starlight:

On the sill of her window, by a guttering candle,
the Book’s left open. On its linen pages,
thoughts in English, which they’ll learn to read by.

Already translated, twice over. In the starlight,
a cock’s lizard eye suddenly blazes.
His blood is warm now, but still remembers.

Cluysenaar’s interest in ancient history, hieroglyphs, and evolution fuses in these stanzas. The language of the Bible has evolved: ‘translated, twice over’ from Hebrew to Latin, from Latin to English. The cockerel’s lizard eye is a remnant of its evolutionary past and how his blood has warmed from his previous cold-blooded state. This is an example of Cluysenaar using modern scientific imagery (similar to R.S. Thomas in his volume *Frequencies* (1978)).⁸⁹⁰ Arguably, modern science is the equivalent of Thomas Vaughan’s alchemy. Both

⁸⁸⁹ See Psalm 51:5. My emphasis.

⁸⁹⁰ See W. Richard Bowen, ‘And Here We Are!’ Science and Meaning in the Poetry of Anne Cluysenaar’, *International Journal of Welsh Writing in English*, 5:1, <https://ijwwe.uwp.co.uk/article/doi/10.16995/ijwwe.5.1/> [Accessed: 31/05/2018].

Cluysenaar and Thomas Vaughan see the scientific world as part of spiritual experience rather than separate and secular. The humans are also a part of this mystical evolutionary past:

Likewise, twin foetuses are shape-changers.
Two becoming one. One becoming two again.
Amoeba. Fish-curl. Mammalian limb-buds.

The second line alludes to the genesis of the twins but also to the sexual act in which they were conceived. The environment is important for this evolution: the mother's womb. Is the poet suggesting that language too is evolving in the womb of the Usk Valley? Jeremy Hooker suggests that the poems themselves are vital in the formation and evolution of this poet:

His [Vaughan's] poems, so alive to the place she came to know and love – the natural, cultural, sacred Welsh landscape – enabled her to belong to that world, and that world to belong to her. Her belonging made no claim to possession or mastery. It was a way of being. The conversation with Vaughan helped her to know herself as a woman and a poet, and as 'a part of reality'.⁸⁹¹

As Hooker notes, Cluysenaar looked beyond orthodox Christian dogma (whether it be Calvinist or other) to a figure who acted as her bridge between the material world and the world of the spirit.

This figure of a mythologised Vaughan emerges in the centre of the poem. As a centrepiece to 'Vaughan Variations', the poet includes a letter that Vaughan wrote to John Aubrey concerning the bards. He reflects on a story about a young shepherd who dreamt a dream:

he saw a beautifull young man with a garland of green leafs upon his head, & a hawk upon his fist; with a quiver full of Arrows att his back, coming towards him (whistling several measures or tunes all the way) & at last lett the hawk fly at him, wch (he dreamt) gott into his mouth & inward parts, & suddenly awaked in a great fear & consternation: but possessed with such a vein, or gift

⁸⁹¹ Hooker, 'Vaughan Variations', p. 108.

of poetry, that he left the sheep & went about the Countrey, making songs upon all occasions, and came to be the most famous Bard in all the Countrey in his time.

(*T*, pp. 143-144)

This Orphic or bardic figure belongs to the Celtic past; he looks like the Green Man. But in ‘Vaughan Variations’, this inspiring figure may actually be the bridging Henry Vaughan himself. This image encapsulates the idea of something older and supernatural which contributes to the modern muse. By placing this passage in the middle of the sequence, the poet is incorporating some kind of initiatory rite into her own artistic work. After all, Cluysenaar is writing in a tradition of experiential *Celtic* Christianity, a tradition rooted in a land: ‘a garland of green leafs’ and ‘the Countrey’. This is a tradition which believes in the past; this ‘beautiful young man’ is an ancient figure but it is also a tradition that is sensitive to the spiritual; this is symbolised by the hawk that flies into the young man’s ‘inward parts’. For Cluysenaar, Vaughan was the bridge between ‘matter and spirit’, whilst language itself was a means of resisting and encouraging religious experience. What is certain is that Cluysenaar’s experiential poetics adheres to the particularly Welsh Christian Aesthetic rooted in the maternal landscape, which is ultimately about language and the conjoining of ‘matter’ and ‘spirit’.

Saunders Lewis (1893-1985)

A Roman Catholic approach within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic

Another poet who muses on the conjoining of ‘matter’ and ‘spirit’ is Saunders Lewis (1893-1985). Lewis is probably best known for his role as one of the founding fathers of the Welsh Nationalist Party in 1925.⁸⁹² Although not necessarily a ‘Calvinist’ per se, his orthodox

⁸⁹² Perhaps it was Lewis’s role in the protest against the Penyborth ‘Bombing School’ of 1936 and subsequent jailing in Wormwood Scrubs in 1937 which set him up as a mythological figure in Welsh nationalism. His radio broadcast in 1962 ‘Tynged yr Iaith’ / ‘Fate of the Language’ led to the creation of ‘Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg’ / ‘The Welsh Language Society’. Arguably the two events that saved the Welsh language were William Morgan’s 1588 Welsh translation of the Bible and Lewis’s 1962 radio broadcast.

Catholicism (sometimes, as we will see in this chapter, veering very close to some elements of Calvinism) would influence the Welsh Christian aesthetic.⁸⁹³ Lewis belonged to a long line of Nonconformist aristocracy. His mother, Mary, was the daughter of Owen Thomas (1812-1891) and granddaughter to William Roberts, Amlwch (1784-1864), two ‘princes of the [Nonconformist] pulpit’.⁸⁹⁴ His father, Lodwig Lewis (1859-1933) was also a Calvinistic Methodist hailing from Gorslas, in Carmarthenshire.

But Lewis supposedly rejected this heritage in what M. Wynn Thomas calls a ‘culturally shocking’ conversion to Catholicism.⁸⁹⁵ Interestingly, it was only after his father’s death in 1933 that Lewis committed this ultimate ‘sin’. It is also important to remember that his wife, Margaret Gilcriest (1891-1984), was of Irish Catholic descent and that she had joined the Catholic Church some years earlier.⁸⁹⁶ This radical change in Lewis’ life was both a spiritual and aesthetic conversion, influenced by his fascination with Wales’ place within the European tradition – a link, he argued, that was severed by the Protestant Reformation and the Acts of Union in the sixteenth-century.⁸⁹⁷ Like Gwenallt, his conversion seemed to be linked to his artistic output. Bobi Jones notes that Lewis’s writing of his seminal prose work, *Williams Pantycelyn* (1927), triggered something spiritual within him:

Roedd e'n briodol falch o'r gamp a wnaeth yn *Williams Pantycelyn*. Mewn llythyr at D.J. Williams, cyfaddefodd chwarter canrif ar ôl ei chyhoeddi iddo fynd yn syth wedyn 'at offeiriad a gofyn am fy nerbyn i'r Eglwys Gatholig.'

⁸⁹³ See Saunders Lewis, ‘The Essence of Welsh Literature’, *Wales*, VII, (27th of December 1947), 337-341(p. 341).

⁸⁹⁴ R. Geraint Gruffydd, ‘Portread’ in D. Ben Rees, *Ffydd a Gwreiddiau John Saunders Lewis* (Liverpool: Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, 2002), pp. 9-12 (p. 9).

⁸⁹⁵ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 12.

⁸⁹⁶ Saunders Lewis actually married Margaret Gilcriest in the Catholic Church of Our Lady and St Michael in Workington, Cumberland, on 31st of July, 1924.

⁸⁹⁷ See *Braslun o Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg hyd 1536* (1932).

Pam? Am iddo gael gan yr Eglwys Gatholig fwy o uniongrededd gwir draddodiadol, uniongrededd â mwy o addoli, a mwy o ddifrifwch credu nag a gâi gan y Methodistiaid adfeiliol ar y pryd. I raddau, cafodd ei droi felly oddi wrth yr Hen Gorff gan yr Hen Fam Gatholig. Medrai fe'i hun felltithio'n ystyrlon 'dragwyddoldeb heb uffern ynddo...yn annheilwng' ac 'yn gynnyrch gwendid breuddwydiol a sentimentaliaeth dynion.' Collodd yr Hen Ganrif hynny.⁸⁹⁸

It seems that in studying Pantycelyn, Lewis experienced some form of epiphany. The Calvinistic Methodists were no longer adhering to the beliefs, especially sin and judgement, which had shaped the theology and literature of redemption fronted by Pantycelyn. It is important to note a letter that Lewis wrote in 1963 to one of his relatives in Anglesey. The letter was written to ask permission to present his latest novel, *Merch Gwern Hywel*, to her and her sister: '[...] mi fydd y Methodistiaid yn meddwl fy mod i wedi dyfod yn ôl yn gyfangwbl atynt. Nid dyna'r gwir. Nes i'r gwir ydy nad ydwyf i erioed wedi eu gadael'.⁸⁹⁹ This letter suggests that he never really left the Calvinistic Methodists' *original* doctrines, as opposed to the later liberalising of these. In the more public 'Llythyr Ynghylch Catholigiaeth' (A Letter about Catholicism), Lewis attacks liberal Protestantism for its unwillingness to acknowledge the centrality of the Doctrine of Sin and the Divine person of Jesus in its theology and literature. He does so by referring to Pantycelyn's *Theomemphus*:

Tua'r un adeg ag y darganfu Theomemphus ei fod yn bechadur, fe ddarganfu Rousseau ei fod ef yn fab Duw; a Rousseau yn hytrach na Phantycelyn yw ffynhonnell y meddwl diweddaraf yng Nghymru [...] Y canlyniad yw mai gwan iawn a disylwedd yw'r syniad am 'bechod' yng Nghymru heddiw [...]

⁸⁹⁸ Bobi Jones, 'Saunders Lewis' in *Ysgrifau: Dros F'ysgwydd* (2016), pp.57-106 (p. 69): 'He was rightly proud of his achievement in writing *Williams Pantycelyn*. In a letter to D.J. Williams, he admitted twenty-five years after its publication that he had gone, having completed the work, to a 'priest in order to ask whether I could be accepted by the Catholic Church.' Why? Because he received more true traditional orthodoxy, an orthodoxy coupled with more worship, and more seriousness in belief in the Catholic Church than he would have received from the ruined Methodism at that time. To some extent, he was converted from the Hen Gorff / The Old Body (Calvinistic Methodists) by the Old Mother Church. He could meaningfully curse 'the idea of eternity without hell in it...as unworthy' and 'a product of dream-like weakness and man-made sentimentalism'. The old Century lost this.'

⁸⁹⁹ See *Bro a Bywyd Saunders Lewis*, ed. by Mair Saunders (Swansea: Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru, 1987), p. 97: '[...] the Methodists will think that I have fully returned to them. Closer to the truth is that I never really left them'.

Trueni yw hynny. Colled i lenyddiaeth yw colli pechod [...] Effaith colli'r ymwybod o bechod yw Moderniaeth Cristnogol, ac oblegid hynny y mae'n ffaidd gennyf i.⁹⁰⁰

He states that sin is at the heart of all the great works from Shakespeare to Racine. He was also disillusioned with contemporary Protestant theologians, as he stated in a lecture where he attacks the notion of 'Christian Modernism' referred to in his letter:

Beirniadaeth lenyddol ar y Beibl yw diddordeb amlycaf diwinyddion heddiw, ond nid diwinyddiaeth yw hynny. Fe ymddengys i mi mai'r duedd at amhendantrywydd credo yw prif nodwedd diwinyddiaeth, - y cyflwr meddwl a elwir yn "modernism".⁹⁰¹

This was a condition or mental state that rejected the older pre-Calvinistic traditions in Wales. This loss of the theological (both Catholic and Calvinistic) concept of Original Sin led to an adapted view of the person of Christ which he sets out in his letter:

Crist y proffwyd yw arwr colegau diwinyddol Cymru heddiw, Crist a ddarganfu Dduw, a enillodd weledigaeth ddihafal o drefn ac amcan bod, ac a fu farw'n ferthyr santaidd dros wirionedd ei weledigaeth.⁹⁰²

This view of Christ was not good enough for Lewis and led to his disillusionment with Nonconformity:

Mae cyfnod Ymneilltuaeth ar derfynu. Y mae ei hanes y blynyddoedd diwethaf yn rhy druenus, ei hansicrwydd ynghylch credo Cristnogaeth, a phylni ei chydwybod, a'r hen agendor rhyngddi a diwylliant.⁹⁰³

⁹⁰⁰ Saunders Lewis, 'Llythyr Ynghylch Catholigiaeth', *Y Llenor*, (Haf 1927), 72-77 (pp. 75-76): 'About the same time that Theomemphus discovered that he was a sinner, Rousseau discovered that he was God's son; and Rousseau, rather than Pantycelyn, is the source of modern thought in Wales [...] This results in a very weak and insubstantial image of 'sin' in Wales today [...] This is such a pity. The loss of sin is a loss to literature [...] The result of this loss is what we call Christian "Modernism", and because of that it is an abomination to me.

⁹⁰¹ A lecture given by Saunders Lewis, quoted in Pat Williams, 'Myfyrdod ar farddoniaeth grefyddol Saunders Lewis' in D. Ben Rees (ed.), *Ffydd a Gwreiddiau John Saunders Lewis* (Liverpool: Modern Welsh Publications, 2002), p.49: 'It is literary criticism of the Bible which interests today's theologians, but this is not theology. It seems to me that an imprecise credo has taken hold of the subject – it is the mental state known as "modernism".'

⁹⁰² Lewis, 'Llythyr Ynghylch Catholigiaeth', p. 76: 'Christ the prophet is the hero of today's theological colleges in Wales. This is Christ who discovered God, a Christ who won a unique vision about the order and aim of being, and a Christ who died a sacred martyr's death over the truth of his vision.'

In a word, the supernatural no longer existed, while the Bible was being taken apart as unreliable and irrelevant. Lewis turned to a religion which retained a belief in the supernatural and the Doctrine of Atonement:

Arbenigrwydd Cristnogaeth erioed a fu rhoi bri neilltuol ar bechod; codi pechod i'r fath ogoniant a phwysigrwydd fel yr oedd yn rhaid i Grist fod yn neb llai na Duw, a hwnnw'n marw fel dyn er mwyn diorseddu pechod.⁹⁰⁴

This theological image re-instates the orthodoxy of 'Christianity' – whether it is in Calvinistic or Roman Catholic form. Perhaps if the Nonconformist denominations had not adhered so much to Liberal theology (i.e. they were only nominal Calvinistic Methodists at this point), Lewis might never have become a Catholic.

But Lewis's 'conversion' was important in regard to his aesthetics as well.

Interestingly, he was frequently in correspondence with David Jones,⁹⁰⁵ and in their letters, they often stated how the Roman Catholic Mass – the doctrine of Transubstantiation⁹⁰⁶ – made sense of everything.⁹⁰⁷ Arguably, their shared fascination with transubstantiation stems from the theological gaps that they perceived around them. The desire for the 'higher dream',

⁹⁰³ Williams, 'Myfyrdod ar farddoniaeth grefyddol Saunders Lewis', p. 50: 'The age of Nonconformity is coming to an end. Its recent history has been too wretched, its uncertainty regarding the Christian creed, the dulling of its conscience and the old void that remains between it and culture.'

⁹⁰⁴ Lewis, 'Llythyr Ynghylch Catholigiaeth', p. 76: 'The distinctiveness of Christianity has always been the importance it places on sin; it raises sin to such heights of glory and importance so that Christ had to be no less than God, but dying as a man, in order to dethrone the power of sin.'

⁹⁰⁵ See. [N]ational [L]ibrary of [W]ales, CF1/5, David Jones' Letters to friends.

⁹⁰⁶ For definition of the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation, see *The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, Section 1376: 'The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: "Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.'" Council of Trent (1551).

⁹⁰⁷ Jeremy Hooker, 'Ends and New Beginnings', *Poetry Wales*, 8:3 (Winter 1972), pp. 22-31.

the higher love, and an art form which could transubstantiate the mundane was a desire that seemed to be the only solution for the world and the church. It was also an important aspect of their artistic vision. Language had the power to transubstantiate matter into spirit; writing itself is akin to the celebration of Mass.

‘Mair Fadlen’

It is this idea of artistic and spiritual transubstantiation which is best seen in Lewis’s long poem ‘Mair Fadlen’ (Mary Magdalen) (1944). At the turn of the twentieth century it was possible for an authoritative text such as William Evans’s *An Outline of the History of Welsh Theology* (1900), to pass over what it calls the ‘dark ages of our country,’ which is associated with Catholicism.⁹⁰⁸ However, Saunders Lewis, on the contrary, believed that pre-Reformation Welsh poetry – written during the so-called ‘dark ages’ – was a ‘unique expression of the *philosophia perennis* of Catholic Christendom’.⁹⁰⁹ So, Lewis’s Roman Catholicism is clearly important but I argue that this Catholic Perennialism should not distract us from the fact that the unique expression of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic transcended Roman Catholic doctrines. In a way, Lewis’s attachment to the Aesthetic was stronger. This particular poem by Lewis reveals a unique fusion of Welsh Calvinistic Methodist thought, Mysticism (not necessarily Roman Catholic)⁹¹⁰ and Pagan Classicism – all centred upon an important female protagonist. However, the Roman Catholic features of the poem are also important to address: the fact that the poem foregrounds a feminine, Marian figure, the conflict between matter and spirit (not necessarily a ‘Catholic’ feature), and the transubstantiating power of language.

⁹⁰⁸ William Evans, *An Outline of the History of Welsh Theology* (London: James Nisbet, 1900), p. 10.

⁹⁰⁹ Pennar Davies, ‘His Criticism’ in *Presenting Saunders Lewis*, ed. by Alun R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), pp. 93-105 (pp. 94-95).

⁹¹⁰ See Chapter 1 on ‘Calvinistic Mysticism’.

A feminine poem

Branwen Jefferies has shown how women play an important part in Lewis's oeuvre (as they do in Catholic theology).⁹¹¹ In a letter Lewis once stated: 'Are not women the most wonderful of all God's imaginings?'⁹¹² The word 'imaginings' portrays God as a masculine constructor when, in reality, God is sometimes imagined as female in biblical language.⁹¹³ Jefferies writes that it was the 'separateness' or 'otherness' of women that particularly fascinated Lewis; this lies at the heart of what made them 'wonderful'.⁹¹⁴ The primary juxtaposition of these female characters in Lewis's oeuvre reflects the same age-old juxtaposition in Catholic theology: the Eve/Mary dichotomy.⁹¹⁵ On the one hand, Lewis creates the sexually amoral, Eve-like characters of Monica and Blodeuwedd; on the other hand, he also presents the virtuous Queen Esther and Ann Griffiths the hymn writer. Mair Fadlen / Mary Magdalene is the converted prostitute who stands somewhere in the middle of this dichotomy.

On one level, the poem documents the account of Magdalen as she makes that agonising journey to the tomb of Christ.⁹¹⁶ The dramatic - even 'experiential' - nature of the poem is heightened by the tone of the speaker's voice; we feel and weep with her:

⁹¹¹ See Branwen Jefferies, 'Saunders Lewis: Golwg Gatholig Gymreig ar Ferched' in *Ffydd a Gwreiddiau John Saunders Lewis*, ed. by D. Ben Rees (Liverpool: Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, 2002), pp. 78-104.

⁹¹² Mair Saunders Jones, Ned Thomas and Harry Pritchard Jones (eds), *Saunders Lewis: Letters to Margaret Gilcriest* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), p. 158.

⁹¹³ God is described with female analogy in Genesis 1: 26-27 (although being made in the image of God here refers to the soul of both male and female), Psalm 123: 2-3, Luke 15: 8-10. God is described as a mother in Hosea 11: 3-4, Deuteronomy 32:18, Isaiah 66:13, 49:15, 42:14, Psalm 131:2, and Matthew 23:37.

⁹¹⁴ Jefferies, 'Saunders Lewis: Golwg Gatholig Gymreig ar Ferched', p. 90.

⁹¹⁵ See Maurice Hamington, *Hail Mary? The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014 [1995]), p. 144.

⁹¹⁶ See John 20.

Am wragedd ni all neb wybod. Y mae rhai,
Fel hon, y mae eu poen yn fedd clo;
Cleddir eu poen ynddynt,

About women no-one can know. There are some,
Like this one, whose pain is a locked tomb;
Their pain is buried,⁹¹⁷

This is an important indicator of the Aesthetic: we, and indeed the poet, are part of this experiential event – the reader is not wholly separate.⁹¹⁸ Lewis's tone 'fel hon' | 'like this one' seems derogatory at first. We will return to these opening lines later on. As an aside, Pennar Davies hints at this 'involvement' when writing on Lewis's literary criticism:

Literary criticism, he says, is a particular form of art and thus is the expression of the critic's personality rather than the application of 'standards' in order to assess the value of the work studied.⁹¹⁹

This is an important quotation because it suggests that Lewis's poetry, another 'form of art', is also the 'expression' of Lewis's own 'personality'; the poem captures his own experiences. To me, Lewis is pointing to the feminine and experiential elements within Roman Catholicism which contribute to the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. For Lewis, these elements are Roman Catholic.

The progressive structure of the poem is Roman Catholic, especially in its reflection of Canonization.⁹²⁰ Protestantism teaches that *all* who have faith in Christ have become saints; they have been justified by faith and are being sanctified throughout their lives. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there are two types of saint: the first group are Christians and the second group are those individuals that reach a state of greater holiness. This poem documents the beginning of that difficult journey towards Catholic sainthood

⁹¹⁷ Saunders Lewis, 'Mair Fadlen' in *Cerddi Saunders Lewis* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p. 23. All further references to 'Mair Fadlen' are given parenthetically throughout the main body of the chapter.

⁹¹⁸ Pennar Davies, 'His Criticism', p. 95.

⁹¹⁹ Pennar Davies, 'His Criticism', p. 95.

⁹²⁰ The step by step process whereby someone becomes a Saint in the Roman Catholic Church.

which involves the rejection of the ‘flesh’, interestingly symbolised by a woman. Moreover, one condition of sainthood in Catholicism is the actual death of that person. This poem does not mention a life of heroic virtue nor document any particular miracle in relation to Magdalen (two further conditions). On the contrary, the concluding stanza portrays an experience more akin to the Calvinistic idea of ‘Sanctification’ or even spiritual rebirth – the democratic condition for Protestant sainthood:

Yn sydyn fel eryr o’r Alpau’n disgyn tua’i brae – A’r cariad sy’n symud y sêr, y grym sy’n Air I gyfodi a bywhau	Suddenly, as an Alpine eagle descends on its prey – That love that shifts the stars, that power which is Word To vivify and raise
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(ll.74-76)

The transforming, life-giving word of the risen Christ is described as an eagle – the iconographical symbol for the Gospel of John which begins with the idea of the *Logos* or the ‘Word’ being made flesh. The words of *the* Word are life-giving; this is evidenced by the gradual flurry of words that are spoken by the living Magdalen which include a deifying phrase: ‘fy Arglwydd’ / ‘My Lord’ (l.67) and ‘Rabboni’ – the intimate recognition of Jesus.

This living, speaking, spiritually healthy woman in the final stanzas contrasts with the dumb woman at the beginning of the poem. There is a broad inclusivity fused with a mystic uncertainty in the opening line: ‘Am wragedd ni all neb wybod’ / ‘About women no-one can know’ (l.1). This could be read as a misogynist statement which echoes the idea of Goethe’s mysterious ‘*das Ewig-Weibliche*’ / ‘eternal womanhood’.⁹²¹ It could also be echoing Freud’s famous statement that the only question he had been unable to answer in his career was ‘*Was*

⁹²¹ See Goethe, *Faust: Part 2*, trans. by David Luke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 239.

will das Weib?' / 'What does a woman want?'⁹²² But the Magdalene in the poem is not, as Simone de Beauvoir addressed, the passive and excluded 'eternal feminine'.⁹²³ The focus narrows: 'Y mae rhai, / Fel hon' | 'There are some, | Like this one' (ll.1-2). Eventually, it narrows to absolute nothingness: 'y mae eu poen yn fedd clo' | 'Whose pain is a closed tomb' (l.2). The first stanza is an example of what Lewis calls 'The Night of the Senses', a quasi-Purgatorial realm which is identified in *Williams Pantycelyn*: 'y chwantau a losgir, a'u gwacáu o bob dymuno cnawd, a'u gadael yn ddiffaith, oni byddont barod i'w llenwi gan Dduw ei hun'.⁹²⁴ As we have seen in the first two lines, this is an uncreative realm which seemingly ends in misery. The speaker refers to inward pain which is like a locked tomb without hope of resurrection.

The simile then metamorphoses. The reference to tidal power, in the negative, means that this woman is stagnant, infertile and dead like the Dead Sea: 'môr marw heb / Symud ar ei ddyfnder' | 'a dead sea / Without movement in its depths' (ll. 5-6). This is a direct allusion and contrast to the creative, kinetic Spirit of God who moved on the face of the waters in Genesis 1.⁹²⁵ This is a spiritual condition, then; it is a fusion of unbelief and a vision which is restricted to the physical. The reference to the 'môr marw' | 'dead sea' may be an allusion to Lot's wife who was transformed into a pillar of salt when she looked back at the burning

⁹²² Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*, Volume 2, Pt. 3, Ch. 16 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 421.

⁹²³ Debra B. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies and Erotic Generosities* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 143-144.

⁹²⁴ These ideas stem from St John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*: 'desires are burnt, they are emptied of all physical desire; they are desolate, unless they are prepared to be filled by God himself.'

⁹²⁵ Genesis 1:2: 'A'r ddaear oedd afluniaidd a gwag, a thywyllwch oedd ar wyneb y dyfnder, ac Ysbryd DUW yn ymsymud ar wyneb y dyfroedd.' / 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.'

cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁹²⁶ Lot's wife loved the things of this world. Yet she is not completely frozen, stagnant or killed: 'Mair sy'n symud tua'i hedd' | 'Mary moves towards her peace' (1.9), which is a promising line. However, in the present, the word 'poen' | 'pain' is repeated again and again. This is the speaker acknowledging the asceticism often linked with Catholic Sainthood. Furthermore, the notes of woe – seen with the repetitive use of the letter 'o' – means that 'Oh!' is almost calling out throughout the stanza: 'clo', 'ffo', 'esgor', 'arno', 'môr' and 'dro'. Interestingly, the later classical reference to Niobe suggests that the Magdalen, like Lot's wife, needs to look back spiritually as it were and turn to 'llwch' / 'dust' or 'ashes' before she can be sainted: 'Gwelwch hi, Niobe'r Crist' (1.29).⁹²⁷

The second stanza begins in a direct way in the present tense:

Gwelwch y llwch ar y llwybr yn llusgo'n gloff:	Look at the ash on the path dragging herself lame:
Na, gedwch iddi, Mair sy'n mynd tua'i hedd,'	No, leave her, it's Mary going towards her peace

(11.8-9)

This ashen Niobe must be left alone – the speaker orders us to let this woman proceed in her unfortunate pilgrimage because she is going to achieve peace. The reader then begins to see the importance of the stanza:

Dyfinder yn galw ar ddyfinder, bedd ar fedd,
 Celain yn tynnu at gelain yn y bore anhoff;
 Tridiau bu hon mewn beddrod, mewn byd a ddibennwyd
 Yn y ddiasbad brynhawn, y gair Gorffennwyd,
 Y waedd a ddiwaedodd ei chalon fel blaen cledd.

Deep calls unto deep, grave unto grave,
 Corpse unto corpse in the unloved morn;
 Three days she lay in her grave, in a world that ended

⁹²⁶ See Genesis 19. Lot's Wife is a pillar of salt on the shores of the Dead Sea. Jewish tradition mentions that the Dead Sea was formed following the destruction of the cities of the plain.

⁹²⁷ Niobe was turned to stone for her *hubris*. According to Greek legend, Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus and wife of Amphion, king of Thebes, was the mother of 14 children, and taunted Latona because she had only two, Apollo and Diana. Latona commanded her children to avenge the insult, and in consequence they destroyed Niobe's sons and daughters. Niobe, inconsolable, wept herself to death, and was changed into a stone, from which ran water.

In that shriek of an afternoon, the word *tetelestai*
 Drained her heart – that shout felt like a blade.

(ll.10-14)

The biblical metaphor changes now. In an act of poetic genius, Mary and Jesus are slowly becoming one, as Mary journeys further and further from self. The language fuses Magdalen with Jesus. The parallelism in the first line sees the grave mentioned twice, then the two tombs (one being Christ's sepulchre the other being Mary's body),⁹²⁸ two corpses and two broken hearts. On the one hand: 'Mair sy'n mynd tua'i hedd' could be a reference to the final outcome of this purgatorial existence, but it could also be the general Christian concept of a sinner approaching 'ei hedd' | 'her peace' which is Christ Himself.⁹²⁹ As R. Geraint Gruffydd and Bobi Jones have noted, Lewis is actually alluding to one of Pantycelyn's famous hymns here as well as Psalm 42:

Rhyw ddyfnder maith o gariad,
 Lled, annherfynol hyd,
 A redodd megys diluw
 Diddiwedd dros y byd;
 Yn ateb dyfnder eithaf
 Trueni dynolryw;
Can's dyfnder eilw ddyfnder
Yn arfaeth hen fy Nuw.⁹³⁰

By using this allusion, Lewis hints at the love of God and the final redemption of Mary which is paradoxically wrought in the death of self. Unlike Lot's wife, she will not remain in that stagnant, ashen state.

⁹²⁸ The influence of Neo-platonism is evident here. The idea is that the body is like a cage or prison of the soul.

⁹²⁹ Christ as Prince of Peace. See Isaiah 9:6.

⁹³⁰ William Williams Pantycelyn, 'O foroedd o ddoethineb', no 68 in *Llyfr emynau* (1929), p. 56.

Matter and Spirit

The internal battle between flesh and spirit is captured in the haunting biblical epigraph: ‘Na Chyffwrdd a Mi.’ | ‘Touch me not’. This is a story about the spirit overcoming the flesh or ‘matter’ – a sensual experience of Jesus turning into a spiritual one – an old Roman Catholic emphasis.⁹³¹ This is best seen in the fourth stanza. This ‘Nos y Synhwyrâu’ | ‘The Night of the Senses’ is described as a chasm:

Yng nghafn nos y synhwyrâu, ym mhair y mwg;
 Gwynnodd y gwallt mawr a sychasai ei draed,
 Gwywodd holl flodau atgo’ ond y gawod waed;
 Cwmwl ar gwmwl yn ei lapio, a’u sawr drwg
 Yn golsyn yn ei chorn gwddf, ac yn difa’i threm
 Nes diffodd Duw â’u holl hofnadwyaeth lem,
 Yn y cyd-farw, yn y cyd-gladdu dan wg.

In the gutter night of senses, that smoking cauldron;
 The same feet-drying, voluminous hair whitened,
 The flowers of memory withered, but for bloody drops;
 Cloud upon cloud wrapped her up, their evil odour
 Were embers in her throat, destroying her vision
 Until God Himself was extinguished with all his harsh awfulness,
 In the joint-death, the joint burial under wrath.

(ll. 22-28)

This stanza is charged with physicality and sexuality. The reader is reminded of the House of Simon where the Magdalen washed Jesus’s feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.

This was probably the last time that she touched him but she cannot touch him physically any more. The senses are gradually destroyed in this stanza: her beautiful hair symbolically turns white whilst all the senses – although not named – slowly disintegrate in this mystical frenzy.

Even God is ‘diffodd’ | ‘extinguished’ which refers to God Himself turning his back on

⁹³¹ Church fathers like Origen, Jerome, Ignatius, and Augustine emphasised ascetical theology. This was manifested in sexual abstinence, simple living, begging and fasting. Extreme examples like St Simeon Stylites prayed for decades seated on a pillar.

Christ, and therefore, on Mary as well. The reference to the clouds: ‘Cwmwl ar gwmwl yn ei lapio, a’u sawr drwg’ refers to the darkness of Calvary which the Magdalen shares in this experiential death of self. In a sense, Lewis transcends Catholic theology in this stanza. Although this is a Catholic poem about a Saint, it is also a “catholic” poem which refers to the experience of all saints – whether Catholic or Protestant – who are crucified with Christ.⁹³²

The transition from ‘matter’ to ‘spirit’ culminates in the eighth stanza. The speaker remembers the perfume that Mary Magdalen poured on Christ’s feet:

<p>Bychan a wyddai hi, chwe dydd cyn y Pasg, Wrth dywallt y nard gwlyb gwerthfawr arno’n bwn, Mai’n wir ‘i’ m claddedigiaeth y cadwodd hi hwn’</p>	<p>Little did she know, six days before Easter, When pouring the precious ointment on him, ‘Twas true that ‘she’s kept this for my burial’.</p>
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(ll.50-52)

The image of the empty bottle symbolically depicts an emptying out – an emptying out of self. Her physical love is poured out on His person and she has nothing left to give. This state is repeated in the tenth stanza. She has now arrived in the garden but there is no body – no ointment is needed: ‘Maent wedi dwyn fy Arglwydd’ | ‘They’ve stolen my Lord’ (l.67). It is at this exact moment that the flesh is displaced with the spirit; Christ approaches her in his new resurrected/spiritual body and speaks to her by name: ‘Mair’ | ‘Mary’ (l.76).

⁹³² Galatians 2:20. Paul refers to this death of self: ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.’

The transubstantiating power of language

Lewis purposefully associates spiritual birth and spiritual death of self with language. ‘Mair Fadlen’ documents the power of the Word as well as the power of words in spiritual reawakening.⁹³³ In the third stanza, Lewis seems to be musing on the significance of God the Word being silenced by death. He was not the first to do this. Ann Griffiths famously mused on the idea of the Great Resurrection being put to death.⁹³⁴ The speaker identifies the source of Mary’s actual pain. It is the single word that *the* Word uttered: *tetelestai* [Gorffennwyd or ‘It is finished’]:

Tridiau bu hon mewn beddrod, mewn byd a ddibennwyd
Yn y ddiabod brynhawn, y gair Gorffennwyd,
Y waedd a ddiwaedodd ei chalon fel blaen cledd.

Gorffennwyd, Gorffennwyd. Syrthiodd Mair o’r bryn
I geudod y Pasg olaf, i bwll byd
Nad oedd ond bedd, a’i anadl mewn bedd mud,
Syrthiodd Mair i’r tranc difancoll, syn,
Byd heb Grist byw, Sabath dychrynlyd y cread,
Pydew’r canmil canrifoedd a’u dilead,
Gorweddodd Mair ym meddrod y cread cryn.

Three days she lay in the grave, in a closed world
In that shriek of an afternoon, the word *tetelestai*
Drained her heart – that shout became a blade.

Tetelestai, Tetelestai. Mary fell from the hill
Into the hollow of the last Easter, into the pit of earth
Which was nothing but a grave, his breath in a dumb tomb,
Mary fell into abysmal death, aghast,
A world without the living Christ, Creation’s awful Sabbath,
The pit of myriad centuries’ obliteration,
Mary lay in the tomb of a shaken Creation.

(ll. 12-21)

⁹³³ He has some biblical license for this. See 1 Corinthians 1:21 which talks about the ‘foolishness of preaching’.

⁹³⁴ See ‘Hymn 1’ in *Flame in the mountains*, p. 162: Rhoi Awdwr bywyd i farwolaeth / A chladdu’r Atgyfodiad Mawr | ‘See! Our Resurrection’s buried, / And our life laid underground’.

The repetition of the word 'bedd' | 'tomb' gives the poetry a quasi-dead rhyme. Language itself ceases, and the repetition of 'Gorffennwyd' and 'bedd' dominates the stanza. Christ's breath is described as a 'bedd mud' | 'a dumb tomb'. The world itself is a tomb because Creation was breaking when the Creator gave up the ghost: 'y cread cryn' | 'the shaken creation'. 'Gorffennwyd' is repeated three times to denote the three days of torture. To live in a world without the living Christ is compared to the 'frightful' day of rest in Creation: 'Sabath dychrynlyd y cread' – this is the Saturday of silence which is precursor to the new Sabbath: Sunday. The horror of Christ's last word *tetelestai* then juxtaposes with his resurrected word: 'Mair'. The poet is employing parallelism here, suggesting that language itself changes something. The death of the Word precedes the great resurrected Word which calls all saints by name to Himself.

We have seen how this poem is a combination of experiential Calvinistic Methodism and orthodox Roman Catholicism. Its focus on matter/spirit dualism in the Roman Catholic sense mingles with the Calvinistic Methodist doctrine of regeneration. Furthermore, the Welsh-speaking Magdalen seems closer to Ann Griffiths than she does to her Catholic heritage. It is a poem which muses on the radical death of self which is required in all Christian theologies. However, this poem also reveals how Lewis never totally abandoned the old Calvinistic theology of his forefathers; elements of the theology merge with certain Catholic doctrines in this poem. One might argue that, in his own way, he saw himself as a custodian of Calvinism's main tenets; namely original sin, the divinity and atoning role of Jesus Christ, and confession of sin. However, the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation does remain at the heart of this poem, especially through the transformative power of words. To

Lewis, the same power that transforms the bread into the body during Eucharist transformed Mary, and all believers, into saints.

Pennar Davies (1911-1996)

A Pelagian approach within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic

M. Wynn Thomas calls Pennar Davies one of the ‘most attractively catholic, intellectually impressive and socially committed Nonconformist figures of the twentieth century’.⁹³⁵ Part of his catholicity was his attraction to the unorthodox teachings of a fifth-century ascetic theologian from Western Britain called Pelagius (360-420 A.D.), the ‘Cambro-Briton (and therefore, for Davies, the proto-Welsh) figure who had emphasised the residual, potential, spiritual goodness both of human nature and of the created world’.⁹³⁶ Davies’s discovery of Pelagianism was a re-discovery of the generous spirit and vision of the early Celtic Church:

Believing this [Pelagianism] to have been the generous religious vision informing the work of the early Celtic Church, he was convinced it was subsequently inherited by some of the greatest Welsh ‘Puritan’ Dissenters of the seventeenth century such as Walter Cradoc, Vavasor Powell and above all Morgan Llwyd (all *Annibynwyr*/ Welsh Independents, like himself), only to be lost when, under the influence of the new, Calvinistic, evangelical leaders of eighteenth-century Welsh Methodism, what eventually became known as ‘Welsh Nonconformity’ succumbed to a narrower, and ultimately a darker theology.⁹³⁷

This discovery would develop into a liberal, ecumenical, and somewhat millenarian vision that infused into the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. It was also a manifestation of what A.M. Allchin calls the tradition of praise within Welsh poetry – a central concept within our exploration of the aesthetic.⁹³⁸ Pelagius’s teachings, according to Pennar Davies, had been

⁹³⁵ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 12.

⁹³⁶ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 272.

⁹³⁷ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 272.

⁹³⁸ See Allchin, *Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition*.

suppressed by the dominance of Calvinism in the eighteenth century, and he sought to restore to Nonconformity that ‘visionary, Pelagian outlook on life he believed it had lost’.⁹³⁹

Born in a poor collier’s family in Aberpennar (Mountain Ash) in 1911, Pennar’s upbringing and spiritual pilgrimage bears some similarities to his contemporaries, Glyn Jones and Gwenallt; all three experienced a spiritual conversion which went side-by-side with a renewed interest in the Welsh language and culture.⁹⁴⁰ Neither Welsh nor ‘religious’ language were spoken at Pennar’s home; the family were not particularly religious, and his mother could not speak Welsh because she came from the anglicised part of Pembrokeshire.⁹⁴¹ His father, Joseph Davies, was involved in two colliery accidents when Pennar was a child; this led to further poverty in the family. Nevertheless, he attended Sunday school and even experienced a brief religious experience in 1923 when an evangelist came to the local church:

It is easy to see as I look back that the resultant frenzies owed more to Dionysius than to Apollo and more to Cybele than to Christ. But Christ was the symbol, and the streams of my paradise were henceforth to be red with the blood of sacrifice.⁹⁴²

This early experience, infused with both Classical and Christian allusion (a hallmark of Pennar’s writing), soon gave way to agnosticism. When he was seventeen, he read the work of T. H. Huxley (1825-1895) and subsequently discovered the word ‘agnostic’ – a word which described his early position before his conversion.

⁹³⁹ Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 272.

⁹⁴⁰ See Chapter 3.

⁹⁴¹ Gwynfor Evans in Dewi Eirug Davies (ed.), *Cyfrol Deyrnged Pennar Davies* (Swansea: Tŷ John Penry, 1981), p. 9: ‘Nid oedd Beibl yn ei gartref nes i angau ymweld â’r aelwyd, ond wedi cael un ddarllennai Pennar ef yn awchus’.

⁹⁴² Pennar Davies in Davies (ed.), *Cyfrol Deyrnged Pennar Davies*, p. 123.

Meanwhile, Pennar excelled academically with a productive period studying in University College, Cardiff, Balliol College, Oxford, where he was a graduate scholar in English Literature between 1934 and 1936, and then doctoral work at Yale which elevated him to the position of an aesthete and intellectual somewhat detached from his working-class background in the Cynon valley. He was also being noticed in Wales as a gifted creative writer belonging to Keidrych Rhys's *Wales* generation.

By the 1930s, literary Wales was turning increasingly secular. This was reflected in its artistic panorama: Rhys Davies (1901-1978), Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), Idris Davies (1905-1953), T. H. Parry Williams (1887-1975) and his cousin, R. Williams Parry (1884-1956) being famous examples. Pennar should, at this point, be listed alongside these poets and writers. Before his conversion, Pennar experienced an intense but brief period of hedonistic behaviour in the United States in the late 1930s. He spent the whole of 1937 travelling from New Haven to Mexico, Mexico to California, up the West Coast into Canada and back to New Haven. But something happened within the ranks of the Welsh intelligentsia and indeed the broader Western intelligentsia. Densil Morgan calls it a 'glitch' in this progressive secularization.⁹⁴³ The startling conversion of Saunders Lewis in 1932-33 was the first sign of a simultaneously spiritual/artistic turn, or return, to God. Both Gwenallt and Glyn Jones were part of this 'glitch', as was Pennar.

⁹⁴³ See D. Densil Morgan, 'Spirit and Flesh in Twentieth-Century Welsh Poetry: A Comparison of the work of D. Gwenallt Jones and Pennar Davies', *Christianity and Literature*, 56:3 (Spring 2007), 423-436 (p. 424).

R. Tudur Jones has noted how Pennar's agnosticism had never been consistent or straightforward.⁹⁴⁴ He draws attention to the literary influences that were also undoubtedly instrumental in his conversion:

[...] the myth-making Platonism of the 'atheist' Shelley, the nature mysticism of Wordsworth, the profoundly worshipful naughtiness of Dafydd ap Gwilym, the Christian realism of Gwenallt and Saunders Lewis, the vitalism of Bergson leading me on to the disparate evangels of Nietzsche, Shaw and D.H. Lawrence, and with these a growing sense of meaningful cohesion in the long tragedy of the people of Wales and a deepening faith rooted in paradox and yet morally self-consistent in a way that the agnostic negation could never be.⁹⁴⁵

Literature is also instrumental in his return; when he says the 'agnostic negation could never be', he is cleverly using agnostic, even atheistic, language but in reverse. This quotation also reveals something of how the mingling of national consciousness and a 'faith rooted in paradox' lay at the core of his belief. Another piece of memoir recalls a moment, (similar to Glyn Jones's experience in Ynysangharad Park⁹⁴⁶) where this change in his life became evident; it is like a Wordsworthian 'spot of time'. It is worth quoting in its entirety because it reveals something of Pennar's burgeoning Pelagian spirit:

A gaf draethu hanes rhyw Gymro? Collais ffydd fy maboed pan gyrhaeddais lencyndod; ac er i ffydd newydd dechrau tyfu ynof yn fuan ni bŵm erioed yn fodlon ar fy nghyflwr, a *viator*, fforddolyn ydwyf o hyd, a nôd fy mhererindod weithiau ymhell bell ac weithiau'n agos. Ar y cyntaf y fewnfodaeth ddwyfol ym mywyd llifeiriol y ddaear a'i holl breswylwyr – planhigyn, anifail, dyn – oedd prif gynnwys fy llonder. Ond, yr oeddwn yn sicr o'r dechrau mai dioddefaint, aberth, marw i fyw ac i fywhau, oedd craidd y wyrth fywydol hon [...] Croes Crist oedd yr arwyddlun mawr. Dyfnhaodd y profiad yn y cyfnod byr y ceisiais gymuno ag Ysbryd y Bydysawd yn fy ymweliadau â'm cysegr arbennig fy hun ar ben y mynydd heb fod yn bell o'r Garreg Siglo rhwng Cwm Cynon a Chwm Taf, ceudwll soserog perffaith luniaidd lle yr oedd modd gorwedd a syllu i'r nwyfre heb fod neb yn tarfu ar y llonyddwch. Ar wastad fy

⁹⁴⁴ R. Tudur Jones (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Cudd fy Meiau: Dyddlyfr Enaid gan 'Y Brawd o Radd Isel'* (Swansea: Tŷ John Penry, 1998), pp. 7-28 (p. 8).

⁹⁴⁵ Pennar Davies in *Ibid.* Translation by R. Tudur Jones.

⁹⁴⁶ See Section on Glyn Jones.

nghefn yn fy mhantle cylchog deuthum i deimlo fod yn llifeiriant bywyd ac yn anferthedd y bydysawd ryw Dydi a oedd yn llefaru wrthyf ac yn gwrando arnaf. Dechreuais ymdrechu i amgyffred y dirgelwch trwy feddwl am lwybrau'r sêr di-rif, ond yr oedd y llus a phryfetach y mynydd yn agosach ac anwylach a chefais fy nhaflu'n ôl i gwmmi fy nghydgreaduriaid ar y ddaear. Wrth feddwl yn arbennig am fywyd dyn y deuthum i deimlo fod ei holl ystyr wedi ei chrynhoi yn nrama ddiglyffelyb antur Iesu o Nasareth.⁹⁴⁷

God is both nebulous as 'Ysbryd y Bydysawd' and familiar as 'Iesu o Nasareth'. In between these two extremes is a religious experience which is written in an almost New Age/Pagan lexicon: 'Dechreuais ymdrechu i amgyffred y dirgelwch' | 'I began to try to comprehend the mystery'. We will return to this passage when looking at Pennar's poetry. At first glance, there are obvious similarities between this episode and Wordsworth's pantheistic 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey':

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels

⁹⁴⁷ Pennar Davies, *Y Brenin Alltud | The Foreign King* (Llandybïe: Christopher Davies, 1974), pp. 174-175. My translation:

'May I speak about the history of some Welshman? I lost the faith of my childhood when I became a young man, and though a new faith soon started to grow within me I was never content with my condition, and I am still a *viator*, a traveller, and the destination of my pilgrimages is sometimes far away and sometimes close by. From the outset it was the divine immanence in the flowing life of the earth and all its inhabitants – plant, animal, human – that was the main source of my joy. But I was sure from the start that suffering, sacrifice, dying in order to live and to revive, was at the heart of this miracle of life [...] Christ's Cross was the great emblem. The experience deepened in the short period I sought to commune with the Spirit of the Universe in my visits to my own special sanctuary on the mountain not far from the Rocking Stone between the Valleys of the Cynon and the Taf, a perfect, shapely, saucer-shaped hollow where you could lie down and gaze at the sky with no-one to disturb the silence. Flat on my back in my circular hollow I came to feel that within the flow of life and the immensity of the universe there was some Thou who was speaking to me and listening to me. I began to try to comprehend the mystery through thinking about the paths of the numberless stars, but the berries and insects of the mountain were closer and more endearing and I was thrown back into the company of my fellow-creatures on the earth. Through thinking particularly about human life I came to feel that its whole meaning was crystallised in the peerless drama of the experience of Jesus of Nazareth.'

All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts.
And rolls through all things.⁹⁴⁸

The difference between Wordsworth's pantheism and Pennar's mysticism is that Pennar identifies that mystical 'presence' as being none other than Jesus Christ himself: 'Wrth feddwl yn arbennig am fywyd dyn y deuthum i deimlo fod ei holl ystyr wedi ei chrynhoi yn nrama ddigyffelyb antur Iesu o Nasareth' | 'When thinking especially about man's life, I came to feel that its whole purpose can be summed up in the peerless drama of Jesus of Nazareth'. Although Davies's theology is unorthodox, Christ remains central in a very real and vivid way even during these early days when he shifted from being an agnostic to a believer.

Therefore, like Gwenallt and Glyn Jones, Pennar experienced a religious conversion during 1938-1940. He would return to Oxford in 1940 and start training for the congregational ministry at Mansfield College under Nathaniel Micklem (a Calvinist) and Cecil John Cadoux (a liberal and pacifist).⁹⁴⁹ This was the period that fostered his political leanings. Davies would remain an ardent pacifist throughout his life as well as a supporter of Plaid Cymru. This 'spiritual' or 'national' conversion went side by side with a renewed commitment to writing in the Welsh language:

The war, which brought me to a definite and unpopular political commitment, also led me to give myself to Welsh rather than English writing and, somewhat to my amazement and to the consternation of friends on both sides of the language fence, to the quaint life of a "Respected" among the unspeakable chapel people.⁹⁵⁰

⁹⁴⁸ William Wordsworth, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13th, 1798' in *The Works of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1994) pp. 205-207 (p. 207).

⁹⁴⁹ Pennar was eventually ordained at Minster Road Congregational Chapel, Cardiff in 1943.

⁹⁵⁰ Quoted in Meic Stephens (ed.), *Artists in Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1971), p. 125.

The dual aspect of this so-called ‘glitch’ in Pennar’s life is evident in the quotation. Up to this point, he had aligned himself with the Anglo-Welsh using the name Bill Davies or W. T. Davies. From now on he named himself Pennar or ‘Davies Aberpennar’ after the village, Aberpennar, where he had been brought up. The name, like Gwenallt, weds the poet to his hinterland.

The choice of name was also an indication of the language which he had chosen to write in. Although his first poems were published in Keidrych Rhys’s Anglo-Welsh anthology *Modern Welsh Poetry* (1944), it was in Welsh that he would produce most of his future creative work. Furthermore, it was not until his first Welsh-language collection that the incarnational theme (the interconnectedness between flesh and spirit), and his Pelagianism were expounded.⁹⁵¹ The literary renaissance of the early twentieth century in Wales had returned to the ancient traditions whilst also being inspired by the latest developments in scholarship and criticism; this was both an indication of a burgeoning literary Modernism which influenced the nation’s theology as well.⁹⁵²

Who was this Pelagius, whose theology and character drew Pennar’s attention? He was a British ascetic monk who travelled to Rome in 383 A.D. and was shocked to see the worldliness that existed there.⁹⁵³ It is believed that the Roman Church at the time viewed Christianity as a set of rituals which ensured bliss in the next life but did not influence their moral behaviour in the present. Inspired by what he saw as a divine instruction, Pelagius labelled himself as an apostle of holiness, instructing Christians in the high ascetic ideals of

⁹⁵¹ See Pennar Davies, *Cinio’r Cythraul* (Dinbych: Gee, 1946).

⁹⁵² Morgan, ‘Spirit and Flesh’, p. 425.

⁹⁵³ It is likely that Pelagius would have been able to speak Brythonic as well as Latin and Greek.

monastic holiness. Every Christian could aspire to this state. Pelagius's theology thus differed from that of Augustine (the father figure of Calvinism). Although his doctrine of God was Catholic enough (Pelagius adhered to the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity), his beliefs about human nature and especially grace triggered the controversy which he would always be remembered for: the Pelagian Controversy. Pelagius held that all humanity were born into the world sinless (therefore rejecting the doctrine of Original Sin); Adam's failure had not corrupted man's nature but had merely set a bad example which people *freely* followed. This meant that humans had the capability of living lives of sinless perfection. Pelagius did believe that humanity needed God's grace for this mission but his definition of grace differed from orthodoxy. For Pelagius, 'grace' meant:

1. 'God's gift of natural free-will to all human beings;' and
2. 'God's gift of the moral law and the example of Christ, which revealed perfectly how people should live, and supplied strong incentives in the form of eternal rewards and punishment.'⁹⁵⁴

This theology meant that human goodness grew out of humanity's free-will and effort; 'entry into heaven', in the Pelagian scheme, 'became a just reward for living a good life on earth, rather than an undeserved gift purchased for helpless sinners by the [atoning] blood of an all-sufficient Saviour'.⁹⁵⁵ This controversy forced Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) to clearly set out the orthodox doctrines of 'Original Sin'⁹⁵⁶, 'Predestination'⁹⁵⁷, 'Conversion'⁹⁵⁸, and

⁹⁵⁴ N. R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power: The Age of the Early Church Fathers* (London: Grace Publications, 2011), p. 254.

⁹⁵⁵ Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, p. 255. The ecumenical Council of Ephesus finally condemned Pelagianism as a heresy in 431 A.D.

⁹⁵⁶ Original Sin - The entire human race was federally represented by Adam and Eve; when they sinned and fell, human nature itself sinned and fell in them. See for example Psalm 51:5, Ephesians 2:2-3, and Genesis 8:21.

⁹⁵⁷ Predestination - From all eternity, God has chosen the sinners He would save, and predestined 'the elect' to become Christians. The rest God left in their own sinful desires. See for example Ephesians 1, 2 Timothy 1:9, Proverbs 16:4, and Jeremiah 1:4.

⁹⁵⁸ Conversion - Humanity is not saved by their own achievement or by their own wills, but only by the transformative power of God the Holy Spirit working sovereignly in the hearts of sinners to break their bondage of sin, creating in them a *willingness* to follow Christ.

the doctrine of the ‘Church’;⁹⁵⁹ Augustinian thought has been dominant in both Catholic and Protestant traditions ever since.

It is not my intention to systemize Pennar’s theology. His theology has already been explained by R. Tudur Jones in his introduction to *Cudd fy Meiau (Hide my Faults)* where he highlighted the mystic strain in those diary entries as well as the unique vision Pennar had of the person of Jesus Christ.⁹⁶⁰ However, Densil Morgan confirms how his theology veers towards ‘Pelagianism’ in this helpful summary:

It is an easy matter to criticise Pennar’s utopianism: though he believed that man is a sinner, his ideas about the Fall are rather superficial. There is something naïve in his faith in the human potential for good. Although he acknowledges the existence of evil, he explains it as a human phenomenon rather than a reality which offends against the glory of God [...] He was a Pelagian who insisted that there was sufficient goodness in the human heart to be able to co-operate with the grace of God and reach perfection. But Pelagianism was a heresy condemned by the church because it belittled the seriousness of the human spiritual crisis and thus the unique nature of the work of God in Christ. However, the strength of Pennar’s position was that he challenged the orthodoxy which turned the gospel of grace into a cheap gospel, failing to take seriously the uncompromising call of Jesus to take up the cross and fulfil his work in the world.⁹⁶¹

As we can see, Pennar rejected the Calvinistic Neo-Orthodoxy and set about finding his own interpretation of faith. Pennar held that Pelagius was not arguing that man could be good without God but he ‘resisted [...] the growing perversion and mechanization and stultification of it [the doctrine of Grace] in the world-denying piety of a Jerome or an Augustine’.⁹⁶²

⁹⁵⁹ Church - Augustine believed that the grace which saved the elect was channelled through the one true Catholic Church and its sacraments. The Protestants later refuted this doctrine and argued that the Holy Spirit bestowed grace on the elect by creating personal faith in the Gospel.

⁹⁶⁰ Jones, ‘Introduction’ in *Cudd fy Meiau*, pp. 14-26.

⁹⁶¹ D. Densil Morgan, *Pennar Davies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 85.

⁹⁶² Pennar Davies, ‘The Fire in the Thatch’ in *Anatomy of Wales*, ed. by R. Brinley Jones (Peterston-super-Ely: Gwerin, 1972), pp. 106-107.

Pennar's faith remained extremely Christ-centred; Christ is both Jesus of Nazareth the real man who was humble in his life and death but He is also the 'Great Disturber, whose love enslaves us, just as it sets us free'.⁹⁶³ Interestingly, this theological paradox is the same troubling *agon* between experiential certainty regarding faith and the niggling doubt which lies at the heart of any Christian aesthetic. Ultimately Pelagius is hailed as a hero of that aesthetic by Pennar himself:

Pelagius's stress on what might now be called the priority of the relationship between God and man has impelled some modern interpreters to hail him as a champion of justification by faith; and his emphasis is relevant here because it is an expression of an enduring reluctance within the Brythonic-Welsh Christian tradition to institutionalize the life of praise.⁹⁶⁴

The poem which I have chosen to analyse in relation to this Pelagianism is a perfect example of un-institutionalised praise, and thus represents the Pelagian approach to the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.

'Cathl i'r Almonwydden' | 'Song to the Almond Tree'⁹⁶⁵

This song is an ode-like poem of five eleven-line stanzas rhyming abab, cdcd, eee, in praise of the almond tree. D. Denis Morgan has called this a 'significant poem' which 'combines a basic simplicity of style with a plethora of classical symbols and mythological allusions in order to express a theologically based *joi-de-vivre*'.⁹⁶⁶ Pennar notes how Grace, for Pelagius, was 'not merely a remedial intervention necessitated by the Fall' but it 'danced in the activity

⁹⁶³ Quoted in Ivor Thomas Rees, *Saintly Enigma: A Biography of Pennar Davies* (Talybont: Lolfa, 2011), p. 101.

⁹⁶⁴ Davies, 'The Fire in the Thatch', p. 107.

⁹⁶⁵ Pennar Davies, 'Cathl i'r Almonwydden' | 'Song to the Almond Tree' in *Yr Efydd o Lyn Cynon a Cherddi Eraill* (Llandybie: Llyfrau'r Dryw, 1961), pp. 9-10.

⁹⁶⁶ Morgan, 'Spirit and Flesh', p. 434.

of the creation itself'.⁹⁶⁷ This song or 'cathl' (the archaic title was deliberately chosen for its sacramental associations) is a joyous celebration of this dance. This is a joy which is intertwined with both the spiritual and physical life; Pennar was clearly not a dualist.⁹⁶⁸ In Morgan's essay on Gwenallt and Pennar, he notes the recurring emphasis on both matter and spirit, something which we have already seen in the works of Cluysenaar and Lewis:

Both [Gwenallt and Pennar] take the flesh, and the redemption of the flesh, with the utmost seriousness. For each, the Spirit is not an insubstantial wraith but that power and presence whereby creation is given hope and glory.⁹⁶⁹

The idea that the flesh *has* been redeemed and its adequacy in 'realizing the potential of [its] created powers' totally contradicted Augustine's emphasis on grace.⁹⁷⁰ For Pelagius, grace merely enabled us to do more easily what we could still do without it, albeit with greater difficulty. This is an important poem because it summarises a renewed spirit of praise within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. Like Glyn Jones's experience in Ynysangharad Park, Pennar seems to be praising an all-encompassing Deity whose ancient nature is not easily defined. That 'power and presence' is best seen in this song to an almond tree.

'A gwelaf...' - The Pelagian Gaze

Point of view, sight, and vision are all important in this poem. Whilst Ann Griffiths's mystical gaze in the first chapter is totally centred on the person of Christ, the Pelagian gaze is kaleidoscopic – it fuses myth with reality; nature is esteemed as a manifestation of that person. The poem is saturated with allusion which, at first glance, is confusing. All five stanzas have a variation on the same climactic refrain: 'And I saw an almond tree...' The

⁹⁶⁷ Davies, 'The Fire in the Thatch', p. 107.

⁹⁶⁸ Dualism – The belief that flesh is evil and spirit is good.

⁹⁶⁹ Morgan, 'Spirit and Flesh', p. 423.

⁹⁷⁰ 'Pelagianism' in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I. Packer (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester and Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), pp. 499-501.

speaker is engaged in a song of praise about what he *sees* in particular. The poem is concerned with how the Spirit is not repressive but actually animates the flesh, animates nature, and animates the speaker's own gaze.

To begin with, the almond tree is simultaneously real and symbolic; Old Testament trees also had this dualistic function. For example in Genesis, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is juxtaposed with the Tree of Life; both were real trees whilst also holding symbolic value.⁹⁷¹ Similarly, the Burning Bush in Exodus represents the supernatural presence of God whilst also being a real tree on Mount Horeb.⁹⁷² Almond trees blossom in the middle of winter with an abundant white luxuriance. On the one hand it is a biblical symbol of hope, purity, and renewed promise; on the other, in Jeremiah 1:11 it is called a 'hasty tree', and in that particular passage, God asks Jeremiah what he sees.⁹⁷³ Jeremiah answers that he sees the 'rod of an almond tree' and is told that he has 'seen well'.⁹⁷⁴ In Greek mythology, the almond tree is a symbol of fertility. The hermaphroditic deity Agdistis was feared by the gods. They castrated the creature, and its genitals sprouted into the first almond tree. Agdistis metamorphosed into Cybele, a mother/fertility goddess. Finally, the blooming process of the almond tree is a great paradox just like the great 'tree' of Calvary. All these allusions animate the first stanza:

Caraf odreon Natur aml ei bronau,
A charaf'r awron, ie, 'n fwy na chynt;
Can's syllais, dro fel Brendan ar ei thonnau
Ac fel Elias ar ei thân a'i gwynt;
Fel Math a Gwydion gwelais flodau'r twyni'n

⁹⁷¹ See Genesis 3.

⁹⁷² See Exodus 3.

⁹⁷³ The 'almond tree', a masculine noun in the Hebrew, is (שֶׁמֶץ - *shä-kād'*) which has its root in a verb meaning (שָׁקַד - *shä-kad'*) 'to wake' or 'to watch'. Davies would have been aware of its multivalent meanings in Hebrew.

⁹⁷⁴ Interestingly, the context of the biblical chapter is actually judgement not praise; Jeremiah was to foretell the swift destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans as a punishment for their idolatry.

Rhyw syn-ymrithio'n ffurf Blodeuedd feddw;
 A chyda Daffne gwelais brennau'r llwyni'n
 Gymdeithion galar i bob gwan a gweddw.
 A gwelaf almonwydden
 Yn chwifio'i gwynder nwyfus tua'r nen,
 Y goeden ddewrwyd, hyf, y mwyn, chwerthinog bren.

I love the fringes of many-breasted Nature
 And love her now, yes, more than I did before;
 For I have gazed, like Brendan, on her waves
 And, like Elijah, on her wind and fire;
 With Math and Gwydion, have seen her hillside flowers
 Amazed, transform themselves to drunk Blodeuwedd's form;
 With Daphne, seen the branches from the thickets
 Sustain the widowed and the weak in grief;
 And I can see an almond tree
 Waving her passionate whiteness to the sky,
 This bold, brave tree, this gentle, laughing cross.⁹⁷⁵

The body of nature is portrayed like Diana of Ephesus – ‘many breasted’ (see figure 20).

Nature is a mother in this poem whom the speaker loves. Pennar opens a ‘Christian’ poem in a ludic manner by alluding to a pagan idol. The context of Jeremiah 1 sees God actually punishing the Jews with a ‘rod’ from the almond tree for their idolatry. Pennar ‘sees’ differently. Statues from antiquity show the hyper-sexualised ‘many breasted’ goddess:

⁹⁷⁵ Translation by Elin ap Hywel. See Rees, *Saintly Enigma*, appendix 1, p. 119.



Figure 20 - A Bronze statue of Diana of the Ephesians

The gaze quickly shifts from the earth to the waters by referencing the ascetic St Brendan (c.484-577 A.D.), the navigator whose *immram* describes a seven years voyage to the Promised Land of the Saints.⁹⁷⁶ The speaker says that they have seen God in the waves like Brendan and heard His whispers whilst staring like Elijah into ‘her wind and fire’. In his diary of a soul, *Cudd fy Meiau | Hide my faults*, Pennar writes:

31st of January – I have had the experience more than once that I was part of the Godhead; not lost like a drop in the sea, but part of Him like a theme or one little note can be part of a great symphony. The note is not lost in the symphony; on the contrary it is in its rightful place. And yet it is part of its whole composition, and without the whole it would be meaningless. This feeling of being part of the Godhead remained with me today. I thought of the great work of creation and all the creatures, and as myself as part of the whole.⁹⁷⁷

Pennar is describing the character of a redeemed world as adumbrated in nature. God is present in this creation. It also resonates very strongly with Ann Griffiths’s mystical

⁹⁷⁶ *Immram* - An *immram* is a class of Old Irish tales concerning a hero's sea journey to the Otherworld (see Tír na nÓg and Mag Mell). Written in the Christian era and essentially Christian in aspect, they preserve elements of Irish mythology.

⁹⁷⁷ Translation by Herbert Hughes.

experiences discussed in chapter 1 especially her hymns which describe the ‘sea of wonders’: ‘Mewn môr o ryfeddodau, / O! Am gael treulio f’oes’ | ‘Lapped in a sea of wonders / O might I spend my days’.⁹⁷⁸ Being part of the Godhead or seeing the Godhead around him is part of his Pelagian world view. A few days earlier, he imagined the Deity as a being who is not transcendent, but present and immanent:

28th of January - In the darkness and silence I was conscious of a certain rhythm – the rhythm of creation, the heart of God beating. I knew that the breath of God was in the room. I was able to rest in the infinite Energy, the invincible strength, the gracious Power which is from eternity to eternity, annihilating annihilation, creating and guiding and preserving.

What he sees in nature is God; this happens before he even reaches the almond tree – the great symbol of Christian paradox.⁹⁷⁹ In the poem, this mental pilgrimage of ending each stanza with the Christianised tree shows the religious process of signification. To begin with the reader is presented with a neutral object; in this case, a tree. What follows then is that the object turns into a myth or a story that pre-figures something much more significant; in this case classical allusion. Finally, there is a fulfilment of the allusion; for the Christian poet, that fulfilment is usually related to Calvary or the person and work of Jesus Christ. Although not unique to Wales, this is a process which Pennar believed was lost in the pietistic and morally superior Nonconformity of the nineteenth century. ‘Christianisation’ had a long story in Wales which had to be gazed at in order to appreciate the truth partially revealed in creation, pre-figured in Paganism, and fulfilled in Christianity. As Pennar points out:

The ‘christianisation’ of the Cymry did not, of course, mean the total repudiation of their Brythonic heritage. It was a process of mutual assimilation – as had been the so-called ‘expansion of Christianity’ from Pentecost onwards. Brythonic habits of thought had already prepared them to accept a ‘Trinitarian’ version of supernal reality with the conception of an enchanted

⁹⁷⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹⁷⁹ The great paradox is seen in Galatians 2:23: ‘Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree.’

otherworld and, in myths of Brân and others, the dependence of the people on the bounty of a suffering sacral king, a native mystery cult which I take to be the primal source of the Grail Legend.⁹⁸⁰

God can be that maternal ‘many-breasted’ mother goddess who is pre-figured by Diana of the Ephesians. But He is fulfilled, or fully revealed, through the great passion of Calvary. After all, the almond tree is feminine: ‘Yn chwifio’i gwynder nwyfus tua’r nen’ (‘waving her passionate whiteness to the sky’) recalling the great motherly statement of Christ on the cross:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!⁹⁸¹

The image here is of a mother who would gather her chicks beneath her folded wings but He cannot. His own children (the Jews) have nailed him to the cursed tree. But the cursed tree is transformed in the poem. In the third stanza, the temple of Jerusalem is suddenly present in the poem:

Can’s gwelais almonwydden –
Ac wele’n nheml yr hollfyd rwygo’r llen–
Y goeden smala, wydn, y swil, dig’wilydd bren.

For I have seen an almond tree –
And in the temple of this world, the tearing of the veil –
This strong and silly tree, this shy and shameless cross.

On the one level, the tree looks like a tearing in ‘the veil’ of the blue sky. But then we realise that it is Christ’s wound – a *negative* gash – from which flowed the *positive* life stream of salvation:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.⁹⁸²

The cross, like the tree, is a paradoxical site. Pennar is referring to this key phrase: ‘his flesh’ which has not only redeemed our spirits but our whole being. This Pelagian gaze allows both

⁹⁸⁰ Davies, ‘The Fire in the Thatch’, p. 106.

⁹⁸¹ See Matthew 23:37.

⁹⁸² Hebrews 10: 19-20.

speaker and reader to see the revelation that flesh, spirit, and all the obscure pagan symbols and mythologies are redeemed and restored on Calvary's tree.

Sex – Pelagian Freedom

This redemption of flesh means that sex can also be celebrated. In an earlier poem called 'Golud' | 'Plenty', the poet celebrates young married love with a daring image of a hand tenderly holding a breast:

Y fun hyfrydlais, paid â ffoi.
Tyrd, aros, a gad imi roi
Llaw dyner ar dy fron.

My sweetvoiced darling, don't go
Come. Stay. Let me place
My gentle hand upon your breast⁹⁸³

The pause in the third line indicates the movement of the 'tender' unthreatening hand. The flesh, particularly marital sex, is something to be gloried in and enjoyed. The final stanza of 'Golud' talks about 'digywilydd gnawd' | 'the shamelessness of flesh' which emphasises the youth of the speaker.

Similarly, in the Cathl, sexual imagery runs throughout. Blodeuwedd is described as drunk; her floral appearance is intoxicating. The final stanza combines classical and Christian images and looks into the great paradox like the knights would in a grail legend:

Pa wyrth yw hon a weddnewidiodd gelain
Yn wyllt orfoledd llaethwyn, berw a bras?
Onid y wyrth a roddodd hoen i'r elain
A nwyf i'r wennol dan yr wybren las?

What miracle has transformed a broken
carcass
Into a milk-white, fertile foam of joy?
Surely the same as gave the doe her gladness,
The swallow her ecstasy under an azure sky?

The speaker is overwhelmed with the great paradoxes that he sees. The transformation of a corpse (the translation does not capture the death in the original) into life is heightened by

⁹⁸³ My translation.

pagan sexual imagery. We are taken to the coasts of Cythera, where Cronus has severed the genitals of Uranus and thrown them into the sea. What results, as Hesiod notes, is *aphros* or foam, which creates Aphrodite, Goddess of love, beauty and prostitution. Like the Grail-myths, the sacrifice of the deity's body produces fertility: 'the milk-white, fertile foam of joy'. This line brings Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' (c. 1485) to mind (see figure 21).

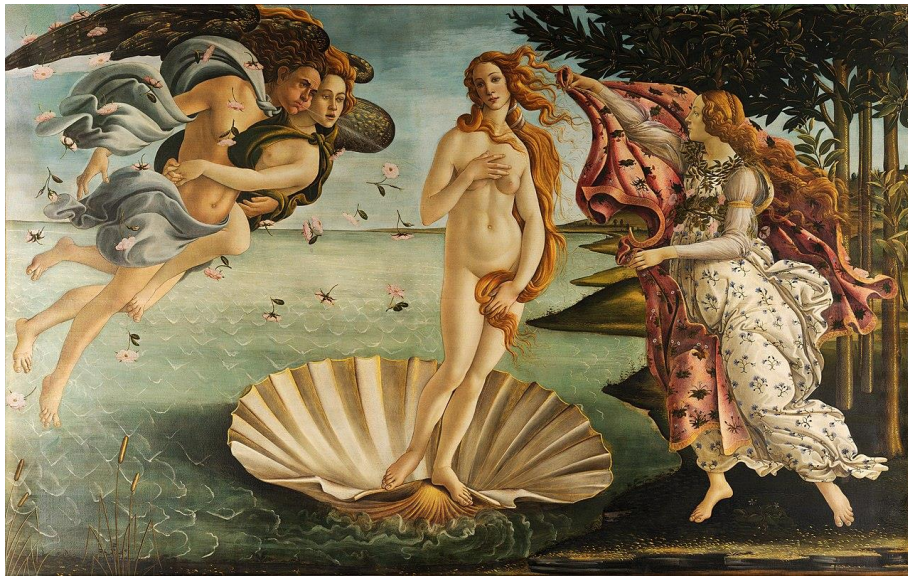


Figure 21 - Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' (c. 1485)

The language of the poem presents sex as something paradoxical: the small death which initiates life after all. In the fourth stanza, the serpent is described in a sexually positive phrase: 'Can's gwelais Sarff yn hyfryd ymgorddeddu / O amgylch Pren y Bywyd' | 'For I have seen a Serpent sweetly coil his body around the Tree of Life'. The fusion of good and evil in this line brings two important passages from the Bible into the poem. John 3:14 documents Christ fulfilling an old Hebrew story associated with Moses: 'and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up'.⁹⁸⁴ The story is found in Numbers 24: 4-9 where Moses erects a bronze serpent which, if gazed at, heals the snake-

⁹⁸⁴ John 3:14

bitten Israelites.⁹⁸⁵ Pennar would have also been aware of the multivalent significance of this ancient image. In Greek mythology, the Rod of Asclepius was a serpent-entwined rod wielded by the god Asclepius, a deity associated with healing and medicine. For Pennar, this was another image fulfilled on Calvary: the great life-giving act of the cross was, in Pennar's eyes, the paradoxical, almost oxymoronic, fusion of good and evil – the devil and Christ. The devil is portrayed in the stanza as 'hyfryd ymgordeddu'; there is something wonderful, he says, in that snake wrapping itself around the tree. For Pennar, flesh and spirit are redeemed; even the most evil and fleshly symbol of them all is redeemed – the serpent. The serpent coiling around the pole is a medical symbol which is still used in many cultures:



Figure 22 - The flag of the World Health Organization with the Rod of Asclepius.

⁹⁸⁵ Numbers 24: 4-9. 'And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us'. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, 'Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live'.

This poem is saturated with the hope that Pennar sees in the central, un-shifting symbol of that almond tree. As Eliot asks in *'The Wasteland'*: 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?'⁹⁸⁶ In this case, it is an almond tree. Perhaps one of the greatest allusions in the poem is a nod to another twentieth-century poet who believed in the unity of human beings and nature, W. B. Yeats (1865-1939). In his magnificent 'Among School Children', Yeats concludes with the image of a chestnut tree:

O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?⁹⁸⁷

These two organic images of tree and dancer portray the unity, or rather, the vitality of the whole as being the essence of both tree and dancer – they cannot be separated. Similarly, Pennar's use of the almond tree and all its myriad allusions, symbols and meanings points to the wholeness of life; both flesh and spirit are one.

Pennar's Pelagian outlook on life re-animated the sacramental and historical elements that Nonconformity had hidden away from the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. Pennar's poetry compels us to 'see well' and observe the great panoply of history that went into its making. His theology is a celebratory one and it adheres to the tradition of praise of God in creation, in humanity – in both flesh and spirit.

⁹⁸⁶ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

⁹⁸⁷ W. B. Yeats, 'Among School Children' in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Wordsworth, 2000), p. 185.

Ronald Stuart Thomas (1913-2000)

An Anglican approach within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic

In *The Poetic Imagination. An Anglican Spiritual Tradition*, L. William Countryman argues that lyric poetry played a significant role in the development and articulation of Anglican spirituality. ‘Poetry’, he writes, ‘is not concerned primarily with poetry, but with human experience of a larger world of feeling, value, encounter, interpretation, music, rhythm – all of which the poem takes up into itself in varying ways’.⁹⁸⁸ He then turns to Anglicanism: ‘its primary focus is not on defining itself but on turning a community toward God in worship’.⁹⁸⁹ Similarly, the poet/priest is also ‘integrally related and thus indivisible’.⁹⁹⁰ In a previous article on R. S. Thomas’s relationship to Welsh hymnwriter William Williams Pantycelyn (1717-1791), I noted how:

Both Thomas and Pantycelyn were also poet/priest figures, whose dual occupations were unified in their presentation of imagined truth. Poetry, to them, was ‘how the communication of religious experience best operated’. Both poetry and religion use metaphor; for Thomas, religious language was a ‘deciduous language’ that had multivalent meanings and could be renewed again and again. The ‘imaginative’ is the crux of the creative act itself for it connects religion and poetry [...] The role of the religious poet, according to Thomas, is imaginatively to present ‘the ultimate reality’.⁹⁹¹

Both priest and poet deal with the medium of language – ‘the supreme symbol’.⁹⁹²

⁹⁸⁸ Louis William Countryman, *The Poetic Imagination. An Anglican Spiritual Tradition* (London: 1999), p. 13.

⁹⁸⁹ Countryman, *The Poetic Imagination*, p. 14.

⁹⁹⁰ William J. McGill, *Poets’ Meeting: George Herbert, R.S. Thomas, and the Argument with God* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 2003).

⁹⁹¹ See Munday, “‘Ann heard Him speak, and Pantycelyn’: The Unexpected Relationship between R. S. Thomas and the Calvinistic Methodists”, p. 3.

⁹⁹² See R. S. Thomas, ‘Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Religious Verse*’ in Sandra Anstey (ed.), *R. S. Thomas: Selected Prose* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), pp. 61-66 (p. 65).

Perhaps the greatest example of a Welsh, or indeed any, Anglican poet/priest who dealt with this ‘supreme symbol’ was Ronald Stuart Thomas (1913-2000).⁹⁹³ According to him, ‘the communication of religious experience best operates’ in poetry.⁹⁹⁴ He is an essential focal point in any study of religious poetry in Wales and especially so when thinking about the pluralistic formation of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.

First of all, what is Anglicanism? The ‘Anglican Episcopal family’ consists of an estimated 85 million Christians who are members of 45 different Churches in 165 countries.⁹⁹⁵ Dating from the Reformation, its system is ritualistic and its organisation remains ‘hierarchical and territorial’.⁹⁹⁶ Their spiritual leader is the Archbishop of Canterbury and, although portrayed as a united family, Anglicanism consists of a plethora of theological convictions and backgrounds. Its foundation is Protestant, but Anglicanism today comprises Anglo-Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Orthodox elements. Theologically, there is a strong divide between the evangelicals and the liberals, whilst the moderates fall somewhere in the middle. If this is the case within the wider Anglican communion, what about Welsh Anglicanism?

The Church in Wales was disestablished in 1920 when political ‘Nonconformist’ factions attacked its privileged status.⁹⁹⁷ Historically, Anglicanism became the ‘foreign’

⁹⁹³ The other contender would be William Williams Pantycelyn. See Munday, “‘Ann heard Him speak, and Pantycelyn’”.

⁹⁹⁴ Thomas, ‘Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Religious Verse*’, p. 65.

⁹⁹⁵ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/> [Accessed: 04/03/2018].

⁹⁹⁶ Chris Harris and Richard Startup (eds.), ‘Preface’ in *The Church in Wales: The Sociology of a Traditional Institution* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. ix-x (p. ix).

⁹⁹⁷ See D. T. W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth: Church in Wales Publications, 1990), p. 2: ‘At a time of considerable Welsh cultural nationalism it was wholly understandable that many people should begin to question whether the church of a small minority ought to be the Established Church in Wales, its clergy entitled to receive tithe from Nonconformist parishioners, who had also to pay their own ministers and to maintain their own places of worship’.

church in opposition to the ‘home-grown’ hegemony of Nonconformity. Furthermore, it was a church of the (usually English-speaking) gentry whilst the Nonconformist chapel was typically Welsh and working-class. However, as we have seen in the second chapter, the story is never that simple. The old Celtic Church (yr Hen Fam / The Old Mother), and the subsequent Tudor efforts to propagate Protestantism in Britain, had been somewhat separate from the English Church. For Thomas, disestablished Welsh Anglicanism had a duty to promote national independence as well as nurture, like an old mother, that Welsh-language culture which was constantly under threat. The church’s disestablishment was, for Thomas, a kind of precursor of Welsh independence: ‘R. S. Thomas had come to view the Church in Wales as, at least potentially, a wholly separate, and therefore truly national, Welsh Church’.⁹⁹⁸ But ultimately the Church failed him. Thomas wrote:

I am retiring at Easter. I shall be 65. I could stay till 70, but I am glad to go from a Church I no longer believe in, sycophantic to the queen, iconoclastic with language, changing for the sake of change and regardless of beauty. The Christian structure is a meaningful structure, but in the hands of theologians and common people it is a poor thing.⁹⁹⁹

He felt that the Church was still ‘the foreign Church of England in Wales’.¹⁰⁰⁰ This is evident in his earlier writings. In his beautiful essay ‘Two Chapels’ (1948), he sombrely states that ‘the Church in Wales [*sic*] isn’t any longer Welsh enough in Spirit’.¹⁰⁰¹ This comment suggests that it may have been Welsh once upon a time.

⁹⁹⁸ See M. Wynn Thomas, ‘“Yr Hen Fam”: R. S. Thomas and the Church in Wales’ in M. Wynn Thomas (ed.), *All that is Wales: The Collected Essays of M. Wynn Thomas* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), pp. 165-183 (p. 166).

⁹⁹⁹ Jason Walford Davies (ed.), *R. S. Thomas: Letters to Raymond Garlick, 1951-1999* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2009), p. 101.

¹⁰⁰⁰ See Thomas, ‘“Yr Hen Fam”, p. 180.

¹⁰⁰¹ R.S. Thomas, ‘Two Chapels’ in Sandra Anstey (ed.), *R. S. Thomas: Selected Prose* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), pp. 43-47 (pp. 46-47).

M. Wynn Thomas has already written a detailed essay on Thomas's troublesome relationship with the Church in Wales.¹⁰⁰² What is evident is that Thomas was a poet priest who exemplified the complex plurality that evidently existed and exists within Welsh Anglicanism. Furthermore, he reflects the diversity of the theological convictions that span the Welsh Christian Aesthetic as a whole.¹⁰⁰³ He was a Doubting Thomas as well as a man of faith, a nonconforming 'low' churchman as well as a ritualistic 'high' churchman.¹⁰⁰⁴ Thomas was never just one of John Betjeman's English country priest poets.¹⁰⁰⁵ Rather, as M. Wynn Thomas argues:

He was consciously the heir of the *Hen Bersoniaid Llengar* (Old Literary Clerics), and therefore of the visionary company of bishops, vicars and rectors who, ever since the Tudor foundation of the Church of England, had helped engineer the survival of the Welsh-language culture native to their country.¹⁰⁰⁶

These visionaries, before and after the period of the *Hen Bersoniaid Llengar*, included William Morgan (1545-1604), Edmwnd Prys (1541-1624), Rhys Prichard (1579-1644), Theophilus Evans (1693-1767), Goronwy Owen (1723-1769), Gruffydd Jones (1684-1761),

¹⁰⁰² Thomas, 'Yr Hen Fam', pp. 165-183.

¹⁰⁰³ Countryman, *The Poetic Imagination.*, p. 13: 'Anglicanism is notorious for its theological indeterminacy'.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See Patrick Toal, 'Playing the old anthropomorphic game': R. S. Thomas's 'Middle Period' and the Rhetoric of Theological (Im)Possibility' in Katie Gramich (ed.), *Almanac: Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English, Vo. 15* (2010-2011), 112-138 (p. 116).

¹⁰⁰⁵ See John Betjeman, 'Introduction' in R. S. Thomas, *Song at the Year's Turning* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955), pp. 11-14 (p. 12). For M. Wynn Thomas see 'A Turbulent Priest', *New Welsh Review* 101, <https://www.newwelshreview.com/article.php?id=663> [Accessed: 22/02/2018].

¹⁰⁰⁶ Thomas, 'Turbulent Priest', fourth paragraph. See also Meic Stephens, 'Hen Bersoniaid llengar', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2006), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-95356> [Accessed: 06/03/2018]: 'Hen bersoniaid llengar [old literary clerics] (*act.* 1818–1858), was the name given to a group of Church of England clergymen who fostered Welsh culture in the first half of the nineteenth century, often in the face of apathy and outright opposition from the bishops of the established church [...] The most important of the clerics were John Jenkins (Ifor Ceri) of Ceri, Montgomeryshire, William Jenkins Rees of Cascob, Radnorshire, Walter Davies (Gwallter Mechain) of Manafon, Montgomeryshire and later of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant in Denbighshire, Evan Evans (Ieuan Glan Geirionydd), who held the curacies of parishes in Cheshire, John Williams (Ab Ithel) of Llanymawddwy, Merioneth, and Thomas Price (Carnhuanawc) of Llanfihangel Cwm Du, Brecknockshire. Associated with them were four remarkable women: Angharad Llwyd (1780–1866) of Flintshire, Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover (1802–1896), of Monmouthshire, Lady Charlotte Guest (later Schreiber; 1812–1895), of Dowlais, near Merthyr Tudful, and (Maria) Jane Williams (Llinos; 1795–1873) of Aberpergwm in the Neath valley of Glamorgan.

and (although not mentioned by M. Wynn Thomas) William Williams Pantycelyn (1717-1791). When Thomas became rector of Manafon in 1942, he must have been thrilled to discover that another member of the *Hen Bersoniaid Llengar* had preceded him there: Gwallter Mechain (1761-1849) – the subject of the poem analysed below.

Gwallter – like Vaughan for Clusyenaar, Magdalen for Lewis, and Pelagius for Davies – was an historical figure in whom a tradition of ‘religious’ poetry based on experience is embodied. In Thomas’s essay ‘Y Llwybrau Gynt’, he muses on Gwallter, Manafon (literally the river place), and the other eminent Welshmen who walked beside the river before him. He writes:

Listening to the sound of the river at night, I often thought of the many rectors before me who had done the same, because Manafon was an old parish, its records stretching back to the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁰⁷

That walk beside the river eventually produces ‘Gwallter Mechain’. It is evident that these dialogues with the past are a central tenet of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic as a whole.

¹⁰⁰⁷ R. S. Thomas, ‘Y Llwybrau Gynt 2’ in Sandra Anstey (ed.), *R. S. Thomas: Selected Prose* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), pp. 129-145 (pp. 143-144).



Figure 23 - 'Gwallter Mechain' painted by Hugh Hughes (1790-1863)

Walter Davies (1761-1849), commonly known by his bardic name Gwallter Mechain, was a scholar, priest, poet, naturalist, and antiquarian who had preceded Thomas as sole incumbent at Manafon, Montgomeryshire. He stayed there for thirty years and produced most of his literary and scholarly work there. He is pictured above (see figure 23) wearing his bardic medallion. In 1797, he began an agricultural survey of North Wales (published in two volumes in 1810 and 1813). This was followed in 1815 by a report on South Wales in collaboration with Iolo Morganwg. Gwallter also contributed to Samuel Lewis's 1833 *Dictionary of Topography of Wales*. In 1837, he moved to the parish of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant (the famous parish of another *Hen Berson Llengar*, William Morgan) where he eventually passed away in 1849.

In the closing pages of Wynn Thomas's essay, he suggests that 'extensive' and 'sustained' study of Thomas's Anglicanism is needed.¹⁰⁰⁸ I believe that the poem 'Gwallter Mechain' (1990) contains the essence of Thomas's desired *Welsh* Anglicanism – an Anglicanism which manifested itself in these heroic figures from Wales's past.¹⁰⁰⁹

'Gwallter Mechain'¹⁰¹⁰

The poem's twelve stanzas, elegiac in tone, are as eclectic as the subject of the poem. At first, the repetition of the pronoun 'He' seemingly refers to Gwallter. But, following closer analysis, Gwallter is uncannily interchangeable with R.S; he is portrayed as his Anglican *doppelgänger*. The poem's tone, especially with the use of the pronoun, is similar to the third-person narrative that Thomas employed in his other autobiographical works.¹⁰¹¹

Gwallter, therefore, appears as a pre-incarnate form of R. S. – as do all the *Hen Bersoniaid Llengar* – custodians of Thomas's desired *Welsh* Anglicanism which the poem presents.

Landscape and Language

'Gwallter Mechain' suggests that this desired form of Anglicanism is closely linked to both the landscape and language of Wales. The first three stanzas of the poem are uniform and organised like furrows in a ploughed field; they deal with agriculture and are written in *verse libre*:

He taught that God's kingdom
is within the seed,

¹⁰⁰⁸ Thomas, 'Yr Hen Fam': R. S. Thomas and the Church in Wales', p. 179.

¹⁰⁰⁹ See Chapter 1.

¹⁰¹⁰ R. S. Thomas, 'Gwallter Mechain' in Tony Brown and Jason Walford Davies (eds.), *R. S. Thomas: Uncollected Poems* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2013), pp. 132-134. All further references to this poem are taken from this edition and are reproduced parenthetically throughout the main body of the chapter.

¹⁰¹¹ See Jason Walford Davies (trans.), 'Introduction' in R.S. Thomas, *Autobiographies* (London: J.M. Dent, 1997), pp. ix-xxxv (p. xi).

and that sowing it carefully
 should produce temples of corn
 in which they could worship.¹⁰¹²

Spirituality is located in the natural, agricultural processes of the land. God is not in a church building (R. S. had himself left those buildings in 1978); but rather, God's kingdom is within the seed. His earlier essay 'Two Chapels' (1948) spiritualises the landscape in the same vein:

Anyone who can feel for the life of the Welsh countryside has experienced something too strong and too profound to be ascribed to another world, or another life. Here, in the soil and the dirt and the peat do we find heaven and hell, and it is in these surroundings that a Welshman should forge his soul.¹⁰¹³

Salvation and damnation are located on the earth – this spiritual landscape is the crucible whereby the true *Welshman* is created. The simplicity of this spirit-creating environment is also emphasised in a later essay called 'The Mountains' (1968) where the beginning of time is described. Thomas writes:

Grass and rock and water, and the raptor circling, brooding over it with lidless eye [...] to live near mountains is to be in touch with Eden, with lost childhood. These are the summer pastures of the Celtic people.¹⁰¹⁴

The prelapsarian, Edenic vision is located, not in the fertile crescent of the ancient Middle East, but in the wilderness of Wales. God can be accessed and worshipped through the carefully produced 'temples of corn' (l.4).¹⁰¹⁵ This is a landscape without cities, claustrophobia and, especially, the cursed machine – paradise regained; it is a fertile land:

He preceded the machine.

¹⁰¹² R. S. Thomas, 'Gwallter Mechain' in Tony Brown and Jason Walford Davies (eds.), *R. S. Thomas: Uncollected Poems* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2013), pp. 132-134 (p. 132, ll. 1-5). All further references to 'Gwallter Mechain' are to this edition and are included parenthetically throughout the main body of the essay.

¹⁰¹³ Thomas, 'Two Chapels', p. 40.

¹⁰¹⁴ Thomas, 'The Mountains', pp. 74-83 (p. 81).

¹⁰¹⁵ This may be an allusion to the corn cob extensively sculpted in the Hindu and Jain temples of India.

Before pesticides, before
 fertilisers, he expounded to them
 the principle of growth,
 the patience by which the good

should hold its own with evil.

(ll. 6-10)

The second stanza portrays Gwallter as a superior being, almost God-like, bearing some resonance to the Garden of Eden. In Genesis chapter three, God instructed Adam and Eve whilst walking with them in the garden. In similar prelapsarianism, the Welsh were once innocent and dwelt in the lonely places before ‘the machine’, ‘pesticides’ and ‘fertilisers’. The speaker seems to be condemning these un-natural aids to growth for they eradicate the weeds, and subsequently, produce un-natural crops. Similar to Pennar Davies’s image of the snake coiled around the tree, good struggles alongside its antithesis. The gap between good and evil in the poem is like a theological hesitation. Can he say it? Can he really state that ‘the principle of growth’ – whatever that growth might be – depends on evil as well as good? Maybe the phrase ‘holds its own’ actually means that this *agon* is evenly-matched. This conundrum reminds me of Thomas’s own comment about his retirement from the Church from *The Echoes Return Slow* (1988), written in the third person:

The problems he had concealed from his congregations had him now all to themselves. A man who had refrained from quarrelling with his parishioners for fear of rhetoric, over what poetry could he be said to preside from his quarrel with himself?¹⁰¹⁶

That deep, poetical, anguish alludes to W. B. Yeats’s dictum that ‘we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric; but of our quarrel with ourselves, poetry’.¹⁰¹⁷ He is drawing attention here to the sometimes uncomfortable tension between ‘the public expression of his faith as minister to his congregations’ and ‘his personal wrestling with ideas and beliefs that some

¹⁰¹⁶ R. S. Thomas, *The Echoes Return Slow* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 112.

¹⁰¹⁷ W.B. Yeats, ‘Per Amica Silentia Lunae’ (1917) in *Mythologies* (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. 331.

parishioners would have found unorthodox'.¹⁰¹⁸ In 'Gwallter Mechain', the poetical gap is a manifestation of his conundrum: the typographical gap is a fence which he climbs over in order to get into the next field or stanza.¹⁰¹⁹

The poem's spiritualised landscape is depicted as being seasonal. In the third stanza, the speaker fuses natural growth with spiritual growth. In the Bible, natural growth is used metaphorically. Jesus himself noted:

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.¹⁰²⁰

The noun *καρπός* (*Karpos*) denotes the fruit of trees, but its biblical use is highly figurative. In this gospel example, a person is metaphorically either a good or bad tree. The speaker in 'Gwallter Mechain' breaks the ancient metaphor down:

He was contemporary also,
showing them how the kingdom
is new every year, the rotation of flesh
leading to ripeness of spirit.
(ll. 12-15)

The 'kingdom', referred to here, fuses the heavenly kingdom with Wales. It is 'new every year' suggesting that seasonal variation within the Welsh landscape is synonymous with

¹⁰¹⁸ Tony Brown and Jason Walford Davies (ed.), 'Introduction' in R. S. Thomas, *Too Brave to Dream. Encounters with Modern Art* (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 2016), pp. 7-27 (p. 19).

¹⁰¹⁹ For a discussion on R. S. Thomas and the gap in the hedge, see Belinda Humfrey, 'The Gap in the Hedge: R. S. Thomas's Emblem Poetry' in William Virgil Davis (ed.), *Miraculous Simplicity: Essays on R. S. Thomas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), pp. 162-169. Reprinted from the *Anglo-Welsh Review*, 26 (1977), pp. 49-57.

¹⁰²⁰ Matthew 7: 16-20.

spiritual ‘ripeness’ and linguistic renewal. The agricultural lexicon in these stanzas mirror Thomas’s ‘Fugue for Ann Griffiths’ where language itself is described as the deciduous green tree (WA, 55, l. 7) which is being constantly renewed. It is worth quoting the poem at length because it aids us in reading some of the later images in ‘Gwallter Mechain’:

I know
 Powys, the leafy backwaters
 it is easy for the spirit to forget
 its destiny in and put on soil
 for its crown. You walked solitary
 there and were not tempted,
 or took your temptation as calling
 to see Christ rising in April
 out of that same soil and clothing
 his nakedness like a tree. Your similes
 were agricultural and profound.
 As winter is forgiven by spring’s
 blossom, so defoliated man,
 thrusting his sick hand in the earth’s
 side is redeemed by conviction.¹⁰²¹

Ann Griffiths’s similes are described as foliage; they clothe and cover the deadness of expression as well as the spiritual barrenness associated with stagnant language. This is a landscape/language (the distinction between the two is somewhat blurred) where the Passion and the Resurrection can be seen ‘in April / out of that same soil’. That same clichéd, Welsh soil is redeemed and produces ‘spring’s / blossom’; this image is intensified when the writer’s ‘sick hand’ is cured having returned to the ‘earth’s / side’.¹⁰²² What he means here is that when the writer returns to the land then his language is also renewed. The final stanza of ‘Gwallter Mechain’ becomes less cryptic with that section of the Fugue in mind:

¹⁰²¹ Thomas, ‘Fugue for Ann Griffiths’, p. 53.

¹⁰²² This is an allusion to another doubting Thomas whose faith was healed when he put his hand into the nail prints and side wound of Jesus. See John 20:27: ‘Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.’

At the year's turn
 he preached of the Janus-faced
 God, of how the blood

on his threshold was berries
 fallen from the dark tree of man
 in disparagement of a whiteness.

(ll. 62-67)

The great paradoxes of redemption are simultaneously renewed in both language and landscape. The bloody berries are a reminder of how the 'Janus-faced / God' killed his 'other' (Jesus Christ) in an act which was a 'disparagement of a whiteness' – a mysterious disturbance of pure holiness.¹⁰²³ Therefore, the seasonal panorama of the poem emphasises the passing of time; but more importantly, the seasons emphasise the necessity of linguistic and symbolic revivification.

As we have already seen, after 1978, Thomas turned away from the Church and became obsessed with the Llŷn landscape in particular. M. Wynn Thomas has suggested that the peninsula hangs like a 'bough, suspended between sky and sea, so that to live there was to dwell in an uncanny, liminal region'.¹⁰²⁴ Thomas was like a bird meditating on that bough and Gwallter becomes a bird-like *doppelgänger* in the poem:

The weekly climb
 into the crow's nest of his pulpit,
 telling them of the glimpsed land

(ll. 53-55)

The sailing allusion reminds the reader of 'Fugue for Ann Griffiths' where she is 'outward bound' and the 'difficulty' of 'navigation' is something which makes these *hen bersoniaid*

¹⁰²³ Janus was the two-faced deity in the Roman pantheon. Conventionally, January (the season depicted) is named after him.

¹⁰²⁴ Thomas, 'Yr Hen Fam': R. S. Thomas and the Church in Wales', p. 179.

heroic.¹⁰²⁵ Although the crow's nest is the top of a sailing ship, for the congregation, the priest also looks like a crow in a tree. The crow-black cassock confines him to the nest-like pulpit. The 'glimpsed land' is both the promised heavenly land, which is subject to Thomas's doubts; it is the 'real', *unused* promised land of Wales which Anglicanism had a duty to promote; and it is also the outside world which both R. S. and Gwallter enjoyed. But because the Welsh did not 'sow' carefully enough, their temples remain unbuilt. But the poem does not end in the restrictive pulpit.

Like Ann Griffiths, Gwallter was a 'bequeather' of Welsh 'jewels'; he was a part of a desired linguistic revivification fused with a desired Anglicanism. R. S. notes how Gwallter's *englyn* from *Awdl ar Gwypw Llywelyn* ('Ode on the Fall of Llywelyn', 1821) was the 'most perfect *englyn* in the Welsh language'.¹⁰²⁶ Ingeniously, this Welsh treasure is buried within the topography of the English poem. Like the parable of the buried treasure in the Bible, this inherited treasure (see Rembrandt's famous painting below) – with its rich natural imagery – is unknown and wasted by the passers-by:¹⁰²⁷

¹⁰²⁵ Thomas, 'Fugue for Ann Griffiths', p. 51. See also Tony Brown, "'Over Seventy Thousand Fathoms': The Sea and Self-Definition in the Poetry of R. S. Thomas," in M. Wynn Thomas (ed.), *The Page's Drift* (Bridgend: Seren, 1993), pp. 165-66. In 'Big Preachers', Thomas also talks about 'unstable bridges' in *Uncollected Poems*, p. 120.

¹⁰²⁶ 'Y Llwybrau Gynt', p. 144.

¹⁰²⁷ In Matthew 13:44: 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field'. Jesus uses the parable of the hidden treasure to emphasise the value of the kingdom of heaven.

Y nos dywell yn distewi, – caddug
 yn cuddio Eryri.
 Yr haul yng ngwely'r heli,
 a'r lloer yn ariannu'r lli.

The dark night becoming silent, – mist
 Hiding Snowdonia.
 The sun set in its briny bed,
 And the moon silvering the sea.¹⁰²⁸



Figure 24 - Rembrandt 'Parable of the Hidden Treasure', c. 1630.

The poem is taken from Gwallter Mechain's *Awdl ar Gwyp Llywelyn* ('Ode on the Fall of Llywelyn', 1821) where pathetic fallacy is used powerfully. The context of this poem is the fall of Llywelyn ein Llyw Olaf (Llywelyn our last Prince) who was killed in 1282. Nature groans at the event. The dark night is silent and the sun is asleep. This may be construed as a direct allusion to Calvary where the greater prince of peace was put to death.¹⁰²⁹ The 'poor

¹⁰²⁸ Translation by Tony Brown and Jason Walford Davies.

¹⁰²⁹ See Matthew 27:45.

priest' groans; ultimately, nature 'groans' because the Church has not bequeathed the nation's rightful inheritance; the poem becomes a symbol of Wales's real treasure – i.e. the kingdom of heaven which, in Thomas's eyes, is the 'surroundings' and language where a Welshman should 'forge his soul'.¹⁰³⁰ Wales could be Heaven; not a simile but the real paradise.

Undoubtedly, this is an underlying criticism of Anglicanism; an Anglicanism which, in Thomas's eyes, had separated itself from Wales's language and landscape. Snowdonia, the heart of Wales, is hidden by a nocturnal mist. Similarly, there is a nationalist promise of a confident dawn hidden between the lines of 'Gwallter Mechain':

The poor priest
of a dispensable parish,
dying intestate
to the world, but to us,
executors of his effects,
bequeather of the above
jewel to light Welsh
confidently on its way backward
to an impending future.

(ll. 38-46)

These linguistic jewels will 'light Welsh' from the current darkness. For Thomas, Anglicanism was meant to be the custodian of these jewels, a religion rooted in the landscape and language of Wales. This had been the case since 1588, when Anglican Bishop William Morgan translated the Holy Bible into Welsh – an act which redeemed the language from certain doom. Ann Griffiths's, Gwallter Mechain's, and even R. S. Thomas's language was 'agricultural and profound' – its similes and metaphors were drawn from their proximity to nature. For them, the blood of Jesus was as fresh as 'berries | fallen from the dark tree' and as precious as jewels hidden in the ground.

¹⁰³⁰ Thomas, 'Two Chapels', p. 40.

Big Medicine

As we have seen, the people were not meant to stand alone in this nationalistic quest. In the fourth stanza, the poet-priest figure – an amalgamation of Gwallter and R.S. – is described as ‘big medicine’ (l. 16), which is probably a direct reference to the Native American culture which R.S. admired so much. In 1974, R.S. reviewed Dee Brown’s *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* in which he compares the Welsh to the Native Americans. In relation to the landscape, the Indians had the correct view of the land:

They were the ones who were free and lived closest to nature. And that is one of the things emphasised in this book. The redskin respected the earth [...] He would never damage the living earth [...] They understood that the earth belonged to no-one but God, the Great Spirit’.¹⁰³¹

Their chiefs too are described in the same way as the *Hen Bersoniaid Llengar* – custodians of an ancient way of life. The essay ends with a call for Welsh ‘chiefs’ to arise who would become ‘leaders of your own choosing to govern you in your own country’.¹⁰³² Thomas seemed to believe that Anglicanism had the capacity to provide the Native Welsh with Big Medicine men – shamanic chiefs that ‘respected the earth’. They were natural leaders – both spiritual and national.

Gwallter was one of these medicine men. Local tradition associated him with the Black Arts.¹⁰³³ According to legend, he used to cast spells and his skills as a conjuror enabled

¹⁰³¹ R. S. Thomas, ‘[Review of] *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown (1974)’ in Sandra Anstey (ed.), *R. S. Thomas: Selected Prose* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), pp. 147-153 (pp. 149-150).

¹⁰³² Thomas, ‘[Review of] *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*’, p. 153.

¹⁰³³ See Charles H. Humphreys, ‘Llanfair Caereinion in the Early Nineteenth Century’. *Montgomeryshire Collections*, XLVIII (1943-1944), pp. 152-154.

him, one notable occasion, to bottle the devil.¹⁰³⁴ The fourth stanza introduces him in this vein:

He was big medicine,
 too, to the artless
 of mind, keeping the miscreant
 all night on a stone
 in the mistletoe river.
 He was high up, as
 they called it, the peasantry
 perpendicularly glancing,
 unable to scale him,
 unable to discriminate
 between learning and magic.
 As did Nicodemus
 before them, they came to him
 by night, in the darkness
 their minds cast. His was the thread
 between elbow and finger,
 measuring the sly length
 between sickness and cure.

(ll. 16-33)

The ‘peasantry’ are referred to as the ‘artless / of mind’, ‘perpendicularly glancing / unable to scale him.’ The image of the ‘big medicine’ is fused with mountain man as well as old *Uchelwyr* in this stanza – which means ‘one who is high up’.¹⁰³⁵ Gwallter is a giant, a mountain of a man intellectually (the use of the word ‘scale’ refers to this) whilst the small people look up at him with vertigo. The speaker suggests that the peasantry are both negatively art-less but also positively simple or natural.¹⁰³⁶ The poem hints that shamanic

¹⁰³⁴ See Letter 730, William Owen Pughe to Iolo Morganwg, 3rd of September, 1805 in Geraint H. Jenkins, Ffion Mair Jones and David Ceri Jones (eds.), *The Correspondence of Iolo Morganwg Volume II 1797-1809* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 700.

¹⁰³⁵ *Uchelwr* - A name for the old Welsh nobility. In English, *uchelwr* means a ‘man who is high up’.

¹⁰³⁶ See *OED* ‘Artless’. Second definition is ‘free from artifice; natural, simple’.

priests, or *dynion hysbys* (knowing ones), are vital for a nationalist renewal – natural *Welsh* leaders.¹⁰³⁷ They are druidic justices, instigators of natural law and order:

keeping the miscreant
all night on a stone
in the mistletoe river.

(ll. 18-20)

Thomas explains this curious episode himself in ‘Y Llwybrau Gynt’:

The old men of the parish liked to tell me how he [Gwallter] had a man stand
on a stone in the river all night to repent of some misdeed.¹⁰³⁸

The eccentricity of this historical punishment reflects similar strange episodes in Thomas’s own life such as his condemnation of modern appliances to his parishioners.¹⁰³⁹ Like a witchdoctor, Gwallter was also regarded as a physical healer: ‘He was big medicine’, perhaps a primitive nickname given to the priest by the peasantry.¹⁰⁴⁰ Then there is the final image of the stanza:

His was the thread
between elbow and finger,
measuring the sly length
between sickness and cure.

(ll. 30-33)

This image is a means of conveying the thin line, ‘thread’, between being able in those days to cure the parishioners and failing to do so.

¹⁰³⁷ See Kate Bosse-Griffiths, *Byd y Dyn Hysbys: Swyngyfaredd yng Nghymru* (Talybont: Lolfa, 1977).

¹⁰³⁸ Thomas, ‘Y Llwybrau Gynt 2’, p. 144.

¹⁰³⁹ From personal correspondence with Tony Brown.

¹⁰⁴⁰ It reminds me of some of Caradoc Evans’s names in *My People* (1915).

Ultimately, this idea of respectfully ‘looking up’ is finally heightened when the speaker links Gwallter to Jesus Christ Himself:

As did Nicodemus
before them, they came to him
by night, in the darkness
(ll. 27-30)

Nicodemus was one of the most learned men in Israel but he came to Jesus by night inquiring about the mystery of spiritual rebirth or conversion.¹⁰⁴¹ Similarly, the gloomy people came to R. S. for council.¹⁰⁴² Gwallter is a redemptive medicine man who, through his various arts, was a *hen berson llengar* – a custodian of the old ways. Like Thomas, he may have appeared like a ‘poor priest’; but in reality, he was ‘big medicine’ – a kind of totem for a desired *Welsh* Anglicanism.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the Welsh Christian aesthetic is drawn from more pluralistic forms of Christianity rather than just a single theology of Calvinism. Four poems by four poets have revealed that the main characteristics of the aesthetic are neither purely doctrinal nor are they literary – they are a combination of both. What is certain is the strong hold that Christian thought has had on the creative output of Wales. Furthermore, we have seen how Welsh religious poetry, in both languages, attests to individual experience but also to the collective and social experiences, which ultimately, connect both ancient and modern poets. This chapter, through detailed close reading, has revealed some of the tenets of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic from a pluralistic, religious point of view.

¹⁰⁴¹ See John chapter 3.

¹⁰⁴² See Thomas, ‘They’ in *CP*, p. 203: ‘bring their grief / sullenly to my back door’.

CONCLUSION

Defining the Welsh Christian Aesthetic

Chapter by chapter, we have followed these pilgrims as they traverse the different territories of Welsh Christian experience. The poets have pitched their metaphorical tents in a land which is ‘let’ ‘rent-free to rain and sheep’;¹⁰⁴³ they have waited, as it were, for an encounter with the Divine. For some, God has become familiar. To others, he has remained very distant.

Our journey began with an English pilgrim perambulating around an old church. Philip Larkin wrote about the echoes of God’s disappearance or, perhaps, as we saw in the final stanza, he was documenting some kind of rediscovery of the sacred. Taking a cue from the final stanza of ‘Church Going’, I suggested four main characteristics which I initially identified as making up the Welsh Christian Aesthetic.¹⁰⁴⁴ These were:

1. A hunger for experiential religion.
2. A *geopious* attachment to the land.
3. An attachment to ancestors.
4. The paradoxical relationship between *faith* and *doubt*.

The following chapters interrogated these characteristics as well as discovering some of the nuances within them.

The pilgrims traversed through the many different territories of Welsh Christian experience – all of these territories contributed to the Aesthetic. We now conclude by looking

¹⁰⁴³ Larkin, ‘Church Going’, l. 26.

¹⁰⁴⁴ See Introduction.

back over the different terrains; this conclusion seeks to provide a fuller definition of the Aesthetic.

A Hunger for Experiential Religion

At the beginning of this thesis, I noted how a hankering after an experiential form of religion – something new and fresh – is evident in all of the chapters. This is a religion which goes beyond the stagnant forms and rituals of conventional structures such as Anglican ‘Church Going’ or Nonconformist ‘Chapel Going’. Poetry is the arena for this experientialism – a *part* of and a *product* of theological concepts such as conversion, epiphany, meditation, prayer, and doubt. Lineation and gaps in some poems make the reader aware of the multiple exigencies of faith and language. Line-breaks, for example, can be interpreted as poetic sighs or groans whilst praise can be denoted by shorter phrasing or punctuation. The poetic arena manifests the speaker’s interaction, or even a failure to interact with God.

In the first chapter, God is purely Trinitarian as he is revealed in the work of Ann Griffiths. The poetry is a personal record, or a collage, of interactions between the human and the divine. The vocabulary is biblical and the personal nature of the content means that the speaker and the poet are fused together; they are inseparable. God the Father is the righteous, loving, judge who sustains all things. He is moved by The Fall of his children and sends his Son, the second Person of the Trinity, into the world.¹⁰⁴⁵ The Son is both man and God; co-eternal and co-equal with the Father, but poetic personification transforms the Nazarene into an ultimate man – *the* man Christ Jesus who is a universally relevant figure. Ann Griffiths views Christ as the Bridegroom of her soul and the great redeemer through the atoning work of Calvary. God sends his Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, to regenerate and sanctify

¹⁰⁴⁵ John 3:16.

Ann in the present world. The Spirit always points to Christ and inspires Ann throughout her oeuvre. Her evangelical conversion triggers a series of encounters, or experiences, with God which are recorded in her verse and letters. Ann hungers more and more after the lover of her soul and longs to be where He is. She becomes a central figure in the Welsh Christian Aesthetic because she comprehends the nature of God in such a full and productive way.

Modern responses to her life and work reveal an art-creating anxiety which, in itself, is also a kind of hungering after experiential religion. Mererid Hopwood's speaker in 'Ond' does not fully 'see' nor 'understand' Ann's faith; therefore, she can never be, metaphorically, in Dolwar Fach – that seat of experiential poetry. Ann's language of paradox is employed throughout the poem, especially in the use of the word 'Ond'| 'but'. Hopwood takes the lexis and moulds it into her own speaker's experiences of doubt, anguish, and yearning. Similarly, Sally Roberts Jones's 'Ann Griffiths' boldly imitates the style of Griffiths and longs for that liberating spiritual experientialism which gave Ann such a powerful and timeless voice.

In the poetry of Rowan Williams and R. S. Thomas, Ann is a haunting representation of Calvinistic Mysticism. She symbolises a radical religious experientialism and, to a certain extent, reveals the modern speakers' inadequacy when it comes to understanding the engagement she experienced with the divine. Williams's translations document a theological shift from a Christ-centred theology to a God-centred theology verging on the apophatic, rather than Ann's cataphic emphasis.¹⁰⁴⁶ This shift in itself is evidence of a distance which has opened between God and man. Williams chooses to focus on the concept of a mercy-seat (the Hebrew word is כַּפֹּרֶת (Kapporeth) 'the cover', a meaning connected with the covering or removal of sin by means of expiatory sacrifice) rather than the Person who died for his sins.

¹⁰⁴⁶ 'Cataphic' theology uses *positive* terminology to describe the Divine in contrast to the *negative* terminology of 'apophatic' theology.

In a sense, this is an abstraction of *the* man Christ Jesus. What we begin to realise is that this Welsh Christian Aesthetic is shaped by doubt, uncertainty, unbelief, and scepticism; this lexis is as viable as praise when it comes to the hunger for experiential religion. Thomas, supposedly, never experienced God in a way that Ann did. The speaker in *The Echoes Return Slow* states:

I have waited for him
under the tree of science
and he has not come.

(ERS, 89)

It seems as if Thomas is articulating an experiential agony at not being able to see or hear ‘the one who called’ (WA, 55, l. 6) and directed Ann.

In the second chapter, we experience a changing context which begins to question the God of Ann Griffiths’s poetry not only experientially but theologically. As far as the Welsh Christian Aesthetic is concerned, there seems to be a shift in emphasis concerning some key Calvinistic doctrines during the nineteenth century. The sovereignty of God (one of these key doctrines) becomes more problematic in an era when man’s responsibility is heightened by increasing social distress and humanitarian awareness in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. The loving and sustaining God of the previous chapter was beginning to be viewed as harsh in his sovereignty, much like Urizen in Blake’s mythology. However, as I have already suggested, doubting this sovereign God became a fundamental part of the Aesthetic.



Figure 25 - William Blake, *The Ancient of Days* (1794), British Museum, London.

In poetry, the form and the content changes according to the shifting social and theological conditions. The hymn form is established and is employed by the different denominations as a means of catechising the Welsh people according to the different theological and social agendas. Most notably, the subject of the poetry shifts from an emphasis on the individual to the collective. This is manifested in a shift from Christ's divine work to his social role as example rather than Saviour. In Welsh, complex use of *cynghanedd* and theological debates seep into hymnody and religious verse. Ultimately, the experiential knowledge of God is not emphasised as it once was.

The third chapter presented, in the work of two Modernist twentieth-century poets, a God who could be sought after again. Both oeuvres portray a God who is far off and deaf to the pleas of his people. Gaps, line-breaks, and dramatic turns in the poetry of Glyn Jones and Gwenallt articulate a hunger after God and meaning; in a sense, the work dramatizes a poetic as well as a spiritual conversion. The old Calvinistic doctrines of original sin and personal

salvation re-emerge in a period which labelled itself as post-Calvinist and Modernist.

Personal reflections make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the speakers and the poets themselves. Neither Gwenallt nor Glyn Jones is a complete stranger to Dolwar Fach.

Both poets experienced a Christian conversion in the 1930s which brought them back to the chapel pew. The chapter then looked in particular at their re-discovery of original sin and the guilt that it entailed; this is an experiential form of religion which was manifested in their poetry.

The fourth chapter revealed that experiential Christianity transcended Calvinistic theology and culture. This ecumenical chapter presented a nebulous God as well as a fervent loving one, and a warm Pelagian deity alongside the cold *Deus absconditus*. For example, the form of Anne Cluysenaar and Pennar Davies's poetry portrays a God who cannot be fixed as that orthodox being. For Cluysenaar, the rhythm and sound of the poetry contrasts with the silences – it is in that gap that the divine emerges. Quakerism includes a method known as silent worship; Cluysenaar emulates this through her poetic form. God is never focussed upon directly; he is in the silence, as it were. In contrast, Davies's grand collage of allusion presents the full panoply of praise. The generous form (which allows so much allusion and so much description) reflects the generous nature of a Pelagian deity.

Whatever the theology adhered to by the pilgrims, God is a central element in the Welsh Christian Aesthetic – not always as a single entity, but a fissiparous Deity reflecting the fissiparous nature and beliefs of the pilgrims.

A Geopious Attachment to the Land / to Ancestors

For Yi-Fu Tuan, a ‘self-consciousness’ of positionality shows how the intertwining of people and place is fundamental in religious systems.¹⁰⁴⁷ Wales is a theologically-charged space where living poets have their own unique relationship and appreciation of their ancestors. In the poems selected for analysis there is often a clear attachment to the past, whether that be its people, landscape, or both. Wales is a country marked by centuries of Christendom; this fact affects the physical landscape, the metaphorical territories, and the hearts and minds of the pilgrims. In the first chapter, R. S. Thomas’s mythic portrayal of Wales is of a land (and a people) where God is *experienced* in one way or another.¹⁰⁴⁸ Ann Griffiths is portrayed as being close to nature and the physical landscape of Wales actually flickers between the spiritual trysts where she meets with the Divine, and the physical landscape whereby she is slowly sanctified. Furthermore, Mererid Hopwood, Sally Roberts Jones and Rowan Williams (and Saunders Lewis in the fourth chapter) are drawn to this ancestral figure and the vibrant landscape wherein she wrote. Both people and landscape are intertwined; they cannot be separated.

Moving on to the nineteenth century, the second section of the second chapter documented how the so-called Nonconformist Nation was far from a singular construct. The mythomoteur in Wales was never one single constitutive myth that gave this ethnic group its

¹⁰⁴⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, ‘Sacred space: explorations of an idea’, pp. 84-99 and ‘Geopietty: a theme in man’s attachment to nature and to place’, 11ff.

¹⁰⁴⁸

God is in the sound of the white water
 Falling at Cynfal. God is in the flowers
 Sprung at the feet of Olwen, and Melangell
 Felt his heart beating in the wild hare.
 Wales in fact is His peculiar home,
 Our fathers knew Him.

(CP, 43)

sense of purpose; but rather the ‘myth-symbol complex’ in Wales was a fractured, nonconforming religion, constructed within theologically-charged spaces which never were, or could be, a single body. As M. Wynn Thomas argues, Wales was, and still is, a plural phenomenon.¹⁰⁴⁹ We discovered how ‘Beulah’, ‘Y Smotyn Du’, ‘Yr Hen Gorlan’ and a new kind of ‘Jerusalem’ prove the existence of variation in this theologically-charged space.

Whilst the Aesthetic may be closely linked to the land, attracted to ancestors, characterised by the paradoxes of faith and doubt, and individual and collective, in all these categories, we see an Aesthetic characterised by pluralism.

In the third chapter, Gwenallt’s oeuvre is saturated with landscape, place, and people. Carmarthenshire is presented as a holy land, a hinterland, a utopia or even a Promised Land which fluctuates between the unattainable and the attainable. Glamorganshire is presented as gritty reality – the crucible of modern poetry and socialist politics – which ultimately fused with Gwenallt’s own form of left-wing Nonconformity. At times, Wales itself is interchangeable with the Promised Land, Canaan. It is a holy site where a *sacred* reterritorialization takes place – a kind of radical new divine geography – where the things of the world begin to grow strangely dim because they are fused with the things of heaven.

Similarly, with Glyn Jones, Carmarthenshire represents a kind of Utopian, prelapsarian hinterland whilst Cardiff becomes synonymous with his personal discovery of ‘sin’. Merthyr Tydfil, on the other hand, becomes the peripheral space where an environmental juxtaposition takes place: the ‘great green roof, some Beacon slope’ contrasts with the ‘battered wreckage’ (*CP*, 42-43) of the town. This is where the poet is situated. He is like a Psalmist or an early Welsh poet, separated from the people as well as being one of

¹⁰⁴⁹ Thomas, *The Nations of Wales*, p. 287.

them. There are specific places where God can be experienced for Jones, much like Ann in the first chapter. Jones had his own mystical experience in Ynysangharad Park, in Pontypridd, when a tree burst into flower before his very eyes. The *geopiety* in these poets' oeuvres culminates in the depiction of their respective grandmothers who appear Atlas-like; they are described geographically as vast Mother Earth characters that fuse Conran's notion of *buchedd* and *traddodiad* in their ancestral presence.

Each poet in the fourth chapter is drawn to the experiences of a spiritual ancestor. For Cluysenaar, Henry Vaughan is both muse and lover – a poetic forefather, who provides her with a spiritual idiom tied to the unique landscape of the Usk Valley. Saunders Lewis, at first, seems to be looking to a foreign, biblical ancestor. But closer reading reveals that Lewis's Magdalen is closer to Ann Griffiths than to the biblical heroine. In 'Mair Fadlen', Lewis explores the transubstantiating landscape which is part of what creates these saints. It is a landscape saturated with memory which, in itself, is fundamental for the creation of modern spirituality. This is what Pennar Davies does as well. He returns to Pelagius, an early Church Father who institutionalized a concept of praise in a landscape which, for him, contained his Deity. Davies sees in Pelagius the very essence of a wholesome Christianity rooted in the natural landscape. Finally, R. S. Thomas was consciously an heir of the *Hen Bersoniaid Llengar* (Old Literary Clerics) especially Gwallter Mechain. Thomas's ideas about a *desired* Welsh Anglicanism lies in these heroic figures from Wales's past as well as the landscape they inhabited.

The paradoxical relationship between faith and doubt.

Paradox lies at the heart of Christianity. In a sense, this section is closely related to the first characteristic of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic: namely, a hungering after an experiential

religion. Some of the greatest theological truths and Christian experiences can be summarised using paradoxical language. These paradoxes find their crux at the cross where the spotless, righteous Son of God became sin for the salvation of the world.¹⁰⁵⁰ According to John Donne, another great religious poet:

Since Christ embraced the cross itself, dare I
His image, th' image of His cross, deny?
Would I have profit by the sacrifice,
And dare the chosen altar to despise?
It bore all other sins, but is it fit
That it should bear the sin of scorning it?¹⁰⁵¹

This 'chosen altar' – an unlikely emblem of eternal life – lies at the heart of Christian doctrine; it, therefore, lies at the heart of the Welsh Christian Aesthetic as well.

One of the Aesthetic's greatest art-generating paradoxes is the paradoxical relationship between faith and doubt. As already mentioned in the introduction, there was a father in the bible who, like some of these poetical pilgrims, sought after Jesus Christ. His son was foaming at the mouth and gnashing his teeth; the disciples tried to heal him but, ultimately, they failed. Christ is compassionate. He starts questioning the father, who tells him that his son is possessed with a spirit that causes the lad to throw himself into furnaces and wells:

Jesus said unto him, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth'. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief'.¹⁰⁵²

¹⁰⁵⁰ See 2 Corinthians 5:21.

¹⁰⁵¹ John Donne, 'The Cross' in *Poems of John Donne, Volume 1*, ed. by E. K. Chambers (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1896), pp. 167-169.

¹⁰⁵² See Mark 9.

The father's cry is a universal one; he aches after belief but is tormented by the very human predicament of doubt. This scene also offers us an insight into religious poetry. If the father were totally assured and confident, then faith would never be required. Similarly, in the poetry, we see a recurring *agon* between faith and doubt as the conflict whereby art is created. In the first chapter, Ann has faith in Christ but he is not present. She believes but she cannot always see her lover. Following on from Ann, the modern responses are full of doubt, uncertainty, and spiritual dissatisfaction. In a way, they cry 'Lord, I do not believe; help thou mine belief'. They yearn after the faith of their ancestors and, in a Kierkegaardian tone, produce beautiful poetry as a result.¹⁰⁵³

In the second chapter, the poets and hymn-writers imagine a world, or a Wales rather, where righteousness dwells. This construct differs depending on each individual's religious conviction and denominational formation. Their poetry reflects an ardent certainty about a glorious future as well as a degree of uncertainty. Overall, a conflict between past belief and present doubt (especially in the second and fourth sections) is another powerful generator of art. In the third and fourth chapters, the poets' lives and oeuvres importantly reveal how religious poetry does not require full, unwavering faith. On the contrary, the poetry of doubt and unbelief can be just as powerful as the poetry of faith.

These four major characteristics attest to the diversity and pluralism within the Welsh Christian Aesthetic. They all intertwine with one another like a Celtic knot; they need one another, and complement one another, as well as having their own distinct natures. For example, one cannot write about the land without referring to its people who, as R. S.

¹⁰⁵³ See Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (London: Penguin, 1992 [1843]), p. 1: 'What is a poet? An unhappy man who hides deep anguish in his heart, but whose lips are so formed that when the sigh and cry pass through them, it sounds like lovely music'.

Thomas wrote in ‘Iago Prytherch’ are subject to ‘the earth’s laws’ [which] ‘Order your life and faith’.¹⁰⁵⁴

Reflection

This study has provided a necessary engagement with a Welsh Christian Aesthetic; it is a phenomenon which has not been adequately addressed by critics in Welsh or English. In reflecting on the thesis as a whole, as well as the four main characteristics of the Aesthetic, perhaps one of the main strengths of the study is the catholicity of the theology and poetry considered. This catholicity is only possible when a study is not confined to a single linguistic or theological tradition. One strength of this study then is that Welsh and English material has been viewed side-by-side. Indeed, this work is part of a larger movement of criticism in recent years which has taken this comparative approach.

The benefits of viewing such a diverse range of poetry side-by-side are great. Firstly, it facilitates comparison and contrast. This may seem obvious but, as we saw in the third chapter, comparisons among poets can throw new light on the work of all. It was interesting, for example, to note how many literary figures in Wales experienced a religious conversion as well as a nationalist awakening in the 1930s. The poetry that arose out of these ‘conversions’ was particularly fascinating. Furthermore, some of the theological / poetical nuances in Wales’s religious environment are only clearly manifested when viewed side-by-side with one another. For example, it is impossible to identify or understand Arminian theology if the reader does not fully understand the tenets of Calvinism. Similarly, in the second chapter, it became clear that utopian visions of Wales differed markedly between different denominations and Christian traditions.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Thomas, *CP*, p. 16.

Rather than viewing a single tradition or a single theology, multiple traditions, beliefs and convictions have been examined. Glyn Jones's observation is, however, a haunting one: 'When one deals with a matter as personal as religious belief perhaps one has to examine cases individually to arrive at correct answers'.¹⁰⁵⁵ While individual poets have been selected and examined, inevitably some generalisations about periods and groups of poets have been made in an attempt to cover the span of Welsh Christian verse between 1730 and the present age. Even in analysing the work of individual poets, as in Chapters One and Three, it is doubtful whether it is possible to reach, as Glyn Jones suggests in *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, what he calls the 'correct' answers.¹⁰⁵⁶ I am not certain whether there can be any 'correct' answers when considering faith and poetry. What I do think is that some key poets, such as Ann Griffiths, demand particular attention. For this thesis, three poets were looked at in detail whilst the others were only touched upon. My hope is that the model adopted in the thesis of looking at both individuals and a range of poets from a particular period will encourage further research into the complex panorama that our religious poetry creates.

Wales is a very complex theologically-charged space. Further research is needed into the interesting cross overs between traditions such as Welsh Roman Catholicism and Welsh Evangelicalism and the artistic output they entailed. Poets such as David Jones, Vernon Watkins, Euros Bowen, Sally Roberts Jones, Bobi Jones, R. Geraint Gruffydd, and W. Vernon Higham have either been briefly touched upon or excluded from this study because of length constraints. More work is also needed in the area of Welsh Revivalism. Much historical work has been done on the culture of religious revivals in Wales but nobody has fully addressed the artistic output of the 1730-1770, 1859, and 1904-1905 revivals. Such a work would need to be both interdisciplinary and comparative, embracing poetry, prose,

¹⁰⁵⁵ *DHIT*, p. 206.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *DHIT*, p. 206.

photography, and art (including cartoons and caricatures). A notable absence in this study is the close relationship which exists between visual art and religious poetry. David Jones is the poet who comes to mind but there are many other artists who have employed both the brush and the pen when expressing their religious sensibility.

This thesis has aimed to be in the vanguard of future research into religion and poetry. Whilst this study is not a purely theological work, it reads the theology and poetry side-by-side in what might be seen as a new historicist approach. Religious poetry, after all, is not created in a vacuum; neither is theology. As I noted in the introduction, R. S. Thomas believed that both religion and poetry are symbiotically involved in comprehending the nature of God. These two categories are, according to Thomas, intertwined and unseparable: ‘poetry is religion. Religion is poetry’.¹⁰⁵⁷ For Thomas, they both employ the imagination, and both attempt – using language – to find a God

who can never be ‘there’ for examination, nor is God to be uncovered in a [scientific] analysis of religious emotion, religious experience, in anything like the usual understanding of such words. God can be established only in the depiction of a face turned towards faith in Kierkegaard’s sense.¹⁰⁵⁸

The idea of a face turning towards faith lies at the heart of religious poetry. God is not ‘there’ for us to touch, embrace or even worship in person – it is the predicament that Doubting Thomas faced all those years ago.¹⁰⁵⁹ It is the predicament that religious poets also face: to believe without seeing.¹⁰⁶⁰

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ormond, ‘R. S. Thomas: Priest and Poet’, p. 53: ‘And, in any case, poetry is religion. Religion is poetry’.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Williams, ‘R. S. Thomas and Kierkegaard’, p. 209. My addition.

¹⁰⁵⁹ See John 20.

¹⁰⁶⁰ See John 20:29: ‘Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’

It is evident that R. S. Thomas himself – like so many other religious poets – was employed in the quest for ‘mediating the sense of a *Deus absconditus*, a hidden God, in language’.¹⁰⁶¹ As Thomas reflects:

The need for revelation at all suggests an ultimate reality beyond human attainment, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. And, here, surely, is common ground between religion and poetry. But there is the question of the mystic. To him the *Deus absconditus* is immediate; to the poet He is mediated. The mystic fails to mediate God adequately insofar as he is not a poet. The poet, with possibly less immediacy of apprehension, shows his spiritual concern and his spiritual nature through the medium of language, the supreme symbol. The presentation of religious experience in the most inspired language is poetry. This is not a definition of poetry, but a description of how the communication of religious experience best operates.¹⁰⁶²

Thomas is quoting here from the theological work of Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) who defended the integrity of religious experience (as something wholly separate from philosophy) when he published *Das Heilige* in 1917, a work that seeks to define the ‘numinous’ (from *numen*, the Latin for divine power). For Otto, the *mysterium* or mystery is relatively vague:

[...] on the one hand absolutely unapproachable or awe-inspiring (i.e. *tremendum*), overpowering and replete with energy or life, while on the other hand, there is something in it that entrances and attracts (i.e. the aspect of *fascinans*) which is expressed conceptually in terms of love, mercy, pity and comfort.¹⁰⁶³

The ‘numinous’ is echoed in Thomas’s idea of the *Deus absconditus*. However, whilst religious poetry may be trying to *uncover* the hidden God; for many poets, God – although physically absent – is neither hidden nor absent. Indeed, human reason is overwhelmed and transcended when Jesus Christ is presented – fully human and fully divine; Christ is the

¹⁰⁶¹ D.Z. Phillips, *R.S. Thomas: Poet of the Hidden God* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.xv.

¹⁰⁶² R. S. Thomas, ‘Introduction’ to *Penguin Book of Religious Verse*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶³ ‘Rudolf Otto’ in *New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 484.

supreme paradox who mysteriously promised his disciples on the Mount of Ascension that ‘I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world’.¹⁰⁶⁴ The Greek adjective *πᾶς* (*pas*) denotes this idea of wholeness – a presence which transcends physicality. Christ is ‘the Word’ or *λόγος* (*Logos*) – denoting the essential wisdom of God and chosen mediator between an unapproachable Father and a sinful people. But Christ, and his place in the Trinity, is always a problematic concept for Thomas and others to fathom. Walford Davies notes how at the ‘very heart of his [Thomas’s] faith is that mysterious pun yoking matter and spirit: Incarnation’.¹⁰⁶⁵ Christ is the image of God, given to men and women, which both can and cannot function as representative of God:

The religious poet, then, must acknowledge the theology of imaging God, being concerned with Absence and Otherness and also with Presence and likeness [...] Thomas often chooses images which both can and cannot function as images of God, and how often the *Via negativa* requires the *Via positiva* in order to function at all.¹⁰⁶⁶

Paradox lies at the heart of all religious poetry. In Thomas’s own copy of Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées*, next to number 546 which is ‘We know God only by Jesus Christ’; Thomas has written in the margin ‘No, no, no!’¹⁰⁶⁷ Such marginalia calls into question Christ’s mediatory role. For Thomas at least, language was another medium whereby God was mediated. Thomas’s spiritual concern and his spiritual nature is mediated through language – and that concern and nature was saturated with gaps, paradoxes, puns, and symbols. In essence, religious poetry is paradox; poetic language, the so-called ‘supreme symbol’, signifies individual spirituality. In a sense, the symbols can only ever touch upon the signified.

¹⁰⁶⁴ See Matthew 28: 20.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Davies, ‘Double-entry Poetics’, p. 156.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Shepherd, *Conceding an Absence*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶⁷ I noted this piece of Thomas’s own marginalia in his copy of Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées*, trans. by W. F. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958), p. 146. Thomas’s copy is at the R. S. Thomas Research Centre, Bangor University.

* * * * *

Religious poetry has never been so relevant. This thesis provides a model which might be adapted in research on other cultures, other faiths, and other artistic environments. An understanding of belief systems through poetry and vice versa can increase our understanding of the power of art in a negative context such as extremism, radicalism, and cultures of hate. From a positive perspective, a study of poetry and theology can increase the understanding that can occur between different races, faiths, and traditions.

For a relatively short period in medieval Spain, a culture existed in which Jew, Christian and Muslim learnt from one another and shared their songs and poetry. It was known in Spanish as the *Convivencia* which can be translated as ‘a co-existence’ which transcended mere co-habitation. I can almost imagine these pilgrim poets, gathered from many Christian traditions, sharing their poetry around a fire. Others join them and *Convivencia* occurs. I believe religious poetry, and its study, has the same broad potential. This is not a sentimental form of doctrinal ecumenicalism, but rather a peaceful co-existence which celebrates difference.

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