

New Territories in Modernism: Anglophone Welsh Writing, 1930-1949

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Abstract

This thesis aims to surmount the perennial critical neglect of literary Modernism in Wales through revealing and examining the Welsh Modernism of eight, key Anglophone Welsh writers. In chapters one, two and three, in which I examine work by Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones, Idris Davies, David Jones, Lynette Roberts and Vernon Watkins, I demonstrate how, in different ways, the linguistic experimentation of Welsh writers both reflects and constitutes their engagement with the potentially revolutionary, Modernistic conditions generated by unprecedented linguistic, social and cultural change in modern Wales. In chapter four, I draw a comparison between Dylan Thomas's use of rural Carmarthenshire, and Salvador Dalí's use of Cadaqués, on the Catalan coast, to create psycho-geographical spaces of Modernist transgression; while in chapter five, I identify and explore similarly combative and progressive Modernist techniques – specifically, of the grotesque – in the work of Gwyn Thomas and Rhys Davies. I conclude that Welsh writing in English from 1930-1949 saw the emergence of a distinct, *Welsh* Modernism that challenges conventional literary histories and, in more than one sense, takes Modernism and Modernist studies into new territories.

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Introduction

When was Welsh Modernism?

On 17 March 1987, Raymond Williams presented a lecture as part of a series convened by the University of Bristol. The lecture was called 'When Was Modernism?' – a title that Williams 'borrowed from a book by [his] friend Professor Gwyn Williams: *When Was Wales?*'¹ – and posited the following argument:

After Modernism is canonized [. . .] by the post-war settlement and its accompanying, complicit academic endorsements, there is then the presumption that since Modernism is *here* in this specific phase or period, there is nothing beyond it. The marginal or rejected artists become classics of organized teaching and of travelling exhibitions in the great galleries of the metropolitan cities. 'Modernism' is confined to this highly selective field and denied to everything else in an act of pure ideology, whose first, unconscious irony is that, absurdly, it stops history dead. Modernism being the terminus, everything afterwards is counted out of development. It is *after*, stuck in the post.²

Nowhere is the exclusionary force of conventional histories of Modernism more palpable than in the country of Raymond Williams's birth and the subject of Professor Gwyn Williams's book: Wales. With the exception, perhaps, of Saunders Lewis in the Welsh language, and Dylan Thomas, occasionally Caradoc Evans, and David Jones (whose work is most often studied in the context of English or 'British' Modernism) in English, Wales' writers have been, in the main, debarred from scholarly discussions of literary Modernism. In the case of Welsh writing in English, a minority of scholars have at least addressed the prospect of a Welsh Modernism as part of more discursive studies of the literature of Wales – notably M. Wynn Thomas in *Internal Difference: Twentieth-Century Writing in Wales* (1992) and *Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales* (1999), and Tony Conran in *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry* (1997). Yet no sustained nor

¹ Raymond Williams, 'When Was Modernism?', in *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London and New York: Verso, 2007), pp. 31-35 (p. 31).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

sufficiently wide-ranging study of Anglophone Modernism in Wales has been undertaken. Christopher Wigginton recognises this deficiency in his recently published book, *Modernism from the Margins: The 1930s Poetry of Louis MacNeice and Dylan Thomas* (2007), stressing that ‘Welsh Modernism continues to be neglected, even within Wales’;³ but he too limits the scope of his critical enquiry to Dylan Thomas, only mentioning other potentially Modernist Welsh writers in passing. My aim in this thesis is to begin to afford the topic of Welsh Modernism the critical scrutiny that it has so far been ‘denied’, by considering Anglophone Welsh writing from the 1930s and 40s in the context of European Modernist literature and art. In a sense, I combine Gwyn Williams’s question, ‘When Was Wales?’ with Raymond Williams’s adaptation, ‘When Was Modernism?’ and ask, ‘When Was Modernism in Wales?’

Part of the reason why the notion of a Welsh Modernism has gone mostly unexplored, it seems, is the (often superficial) dissimilarity between canonical Modernist literature and art, and Anglophone Welsh writing of the first half of the twentieth century. With no firmly established ‘Anglo-Welsh’ literary tradition from which to deviate (an issue which I examine more closely in chapter one of this thesis); flourishing, for the most part, after the high Modernist period, between 1930 and 1949; and tending to be concerned with rural and industrialised locations and milieus in a way that contravenes the popular conception of Modernism as ‘an art of cities’;⁴ Anglophone Welsh writing, has, to use Williams’s terms, ‘been counted out of development’ – ‘stuck in the post’ and on the periphery. Yet to exclude Welsh writing from discussions of Modernism on the basis of these narrow criteria is, now, in the current climate of Modernist studies, completely unjustifiable; for critics have recently begun to recognise the divergent,

³ Christopher Wigginton, *Modernism from the Margins: The 1930s Poetry of Louis MacNeice and Dylan Thomas* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 111.

⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, ‘The Cities of Modernism’, in *Modernism: A Guide To European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 96-104 (p. 96).

multifaceted character of Modernism, and to theorise the complex relationship between Modernism, canonicity, and geographical, social and cultural specificity. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, for example, have coined the term ‘geomodernisms’, to denote a ‘locational approach to modernisms’ engagement with cultural and political discourses of global modernity’;⁵ and Channa Kronfeld has examined similar issues in *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (1996) – a study of Modernist Hebrew and Yiddish poetry. I am centrally concerned with bringing the progressive and expansive scholarship of Kronfeld, Doyle and Winkiel into dialogue with writing from Wales in this thesis.

Fundamental to my argument is what I regard as certain, key Anglophone Welsh writers’ distinctively Welsh Modernist use of language. In the first three chapters, where I look at the work of Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones, Idris Davies and David Jones (chapter one), Lynette Roberts (chapter two) and Vernon Watkins (chapter three), I argue that, in different ways, the linguistic experimentation of Anglophone Welsh writers both reflects and constitutes their engagement with the potentially revolutionary, Modernistic conditions generated by unprecedented linguistic, social and cultural change in modern Wales. I therefore adopt the kind of ‘locational approach’ to Modernism espoused by Doyle, Winkiel and Kronfeld. Particulars of place and time also frame my comparison, in chapter four, of Dylan Thomas’s use of Carmarthenshire and Salvador Dali’s use of Cadaqués, in rural Spain, as sites of transgressive, Modernist possibility. My use of the visual arts in this chapter – and indeed throughout this thesis – pertains to my overall aim to represent and appreciate Modernism in all its multiplicity and diversity. In chapter four, I challenge another common critical assumption: that late Modernism, such as that found in Welsh writing in English, is necessarily derivative in nature. I argue, moreover,

⁵ Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, ‘Introduction’, in Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (eds), *Geomodernisms Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 1-14 (p. 3).

that Modernism in Wales is, in Tony Conran's words, 'home-grown' – a product of unique geographical, social, cultural and temporal conditions – as well as being 'part of an international climate'.⁶ This open, inclusive perspective continues to inform my analysis in chapter five, in which I explore the presence and significance of Modernist techniques of the grotesque in the short fiction of Gwyn Thomas and Rhys Davies. Here, I also expose the often socially engaged and politically ambitious impetus of Welsh Modernism, problematising, once again, narrow literary histories, of the kind that Raymond Williams critiqued in 1987, that view Modernism as essentially detached and rarefied in nature. I hope that, collectively, these discussions will go on to generate and inspire future research and critical debate in Modernism studies both within and outside Wales.

⁶ Tony Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p. 113.

1

'The dissolving and splitting of solid things': Welsh Modernism's 'crisis of language'

Language and its deficiency in the context of the modern age preoccupy Modernist writers. This 'crisis of language'⁷ can be traced back to the French Symbolist poets of the nineteenth century,⁸ who, as Elizabeth McCombie notes, shared 'a drive for artistic revolution [. . .] born of [. . .] a sense that everything had been done, written, and felt'.⁹ Attempting to break away from what they perceived to be an exhausted poetic idiom, the French Symbolists pioneered a new kind of poetry in which language is approached in radically innovative ways.¹⁰ Arthur Rimbaud, for example, reflects on this process in his collection of autobiographical prose-poetry, *Une saison en enfer*, or *A Season in Hell* (1873):

I invented the colour of vowels! – *A* black, *E* white, *I* red, *O* blue, *U* green – I organized the shape and movement of every consonant, and by means of instinctive rhythms, flattered myself that I was the inventor of a new language, accessible sooner or later to all the senses.¹¹

Paradoxically, however, the mood of this revelation is one of both artistic accomplishment and defeat. Indeed, *A Season in Hell* is pervaded with instances of linguistic failure. In 'Bad Blood' the narrator asks, 'Do I understand nature yet? Do I know myself? – *No more words*' (p. 219). And in 'Morning' he confesses, 'For my part, I

⁷ Richard Sheppard, 'The Crisis of Language', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 323-336 (p. 323).

⁸ The first French Symbolist poet is generally thought to have been Charles Baudelaire (1821-67), whose theory of 'correspondence', expounded in his poem, 'Correspondences' (1857), inspired Jean Moréas's *Symbolist Manifesto* (1886). The other main French Symbolist poets were Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Jules Laforgue and Paul Valéry.

⁹ Elizabeth McCombie, 'Introduction', in *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems and Other Verse*, translated from the French by E.H. and A.M. Blackmore (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. ix-xxvii (p. xiv).

¹⁰ As Clive Scott suggests, 'most fundamentally [Symbolism] [. . .] awakened an acute consciousness of language. Language was no longer treated as a natural outcrop of the person but as a material with its own laws and its own peculiar forms of life'; Clive Scott, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 206-227 (p. 212).

¹¹ Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*, in *Arthur Rimbaud: Collected Poems*, translated from the French by Martin Sorrell (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 235. All further references to Rimbaud's poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

can no more explain myself than a beggar with his endless *Pater Nosters* and *Ave Marias*. *I no longer know how to speak!* (p. 251) Moreover, *A Season in Hell* seems to demonstrate how the French Symbolists' attempts at poetic rejuvenation ultimately served to compound their impression of linguistic crisis – not least because in Symbolist poetry, particularly, as McCombie explains, in the work of Stéphane Mallarmé,

language [is] freed from conventional modes of denotation [and] assumes material existence independent of what it might signify; yet at the same time the word experienced as word creates an immediate consciousness of the absence of identity between word and sign. The word [therefore] points [. . .] to a thrilling Nothingness, a referential failure, at the heart of language itself.¹²

Writers and thinkers of the early twentieth century destabilized language in a similar way. Between the years 1907 and 1911, the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, posited a theory of language centred on the principle of arbitrariness. More specifically, Saussure argued that 'the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified', he elaborated, 'I can simply say: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*'.¹³ Saussure disrupted traditional ideas about language further by proposing that 'in language there are only differences',¹⁴ and no absolute values. 'Whether we take the signified or the signifier', he concluded, 'language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from that system'.¹⁵ For Saussure, then, language has a fundamentally elusive quality, which is also underlined in the poetry of the early twentieth century – most famously, perhaps, in the work of T.S. Eliot. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1917), for example, the speaker decides

¹² Ibid., p. xvii.

¹³ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, translated from the French by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 67-69. Saussure suggests that the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept [a signified] and a sound image [a signifier]. The latter is not a material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. [. . .] The linguistic sign is then a two-sided psychological entity'; Saussure, p. 66. Saussure's ideas were published posthumously as *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916).

¹⁴ Saussure, p. 120.

¹⁵ Ibid.

that 'It is impossible to say just what I mean!'¹⁶ while in part one of *The Waste Land* (1922), 'The Burial of the Dead', the speaker recollects

[. . .] when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.¹⁷

Another poetic voice enacts and reinforces this theme of faltering and failing language in the fragmentary closing lines of Eliot's polyphonic poem:

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascese nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon – O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins

(ll. 424-431)

And the same preoccupations re-emerge in 'East Coker' (1940) – the second of Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years –
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres* –
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,¹⁸

Echoing Rimbaud and Mallarmé, in all of these poems Eliot seems to be questioning the effectiveness of language as a means of knowing and of expressing the world.

¹⁶ T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', in *T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 6. All further references to Eliot's poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹⁷ Eliot, *The Waste Land*, p. 54, ll. 37-41.

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker', p. 190.

A feeling of disjunction between language and the world is often also expressed in Modernist fiction. In his short story, '*Die Verwandlung*' or 'The Metamorphosis' (1915), for example, in which the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, awakens to find that he has been miraculously 'transformed in his bed into a giant insect',¹⁹ Franz Kafka employs a strikingly laconic, matter-of-fact style in order to narrate extraordinary and terrifying external events:

He [Gregor] felt a slight itching up on his belly; slowly pushed himself on his back nearer to the top of the bed so that he could lift his head more easily; identified the itching place which was surrounded by many small white spots the nature of which he could not understand and made to touch it with a leg, but drew the leg back immediately, for the contact made a cold shiver run through him.

He slid down again into his former position. This getting up early, he thought, makes one quite stupid.

(p. 90)

Kafka's work is most frequently aligned with Expressionism – an aesthetic first associated with visual art which I discuss more fully in chapter five of this thesis – and several other Modernist movements that formed in continental Europe during the early decades of the twentieth century seem similarly to have been born out of a consciousness that language had become estranged from reality. In 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909), for instance, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti asserts that 'Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap'.²⁰ 'No work without an aggressive character', he continues, 'can be a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a violent attack on unknown forces, to reduce and prostrate them before man'.²¹ Marinetti's proclamations register Futurism's attempt to liberate the written word

¹⁹ Franz Kafka, 'The Metamorphosis', in *The Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, translated from the German by Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 89-139 (p. 89). All further references to Kafka's stories are to this edition and are given in the text.

²⁰ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', translated from the French by R.W. Flint, in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 249-253 (p. 251).

²¹ Ibid.

from the structures of the past and reinvent literature for a new epoch of militarism, patriotism and technological advancement; as he avowed in his 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature' (1912), 'we make use of [. . .] every ugly sound, every expressive cry from the violent life that surrounds us. [. . .]. After free verse, here finally are *words-in-freedom*'.²² This theme of creative freedom resurfaces in 'The First Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), where André Breton proclaims that

Under the pretence of civilisation and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices. It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer [. . .] has been brought back to light. For this we must give thanks to Sigmund Freud. On the basis of these discoveries a current of opinion is finally forming by means of which the human explorer will be able to carry his investigations much further, authorized as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities.²³

Here, Breton calls for 'the mind' and, by extension, language,²⁴ to extricate itself from the oppressive, 'accepted' discourses of 'civilisation' and 'progress', and access a more vital modern world, illuminated and invigorated by the Freudian unconscious.

In a sense, both the Futurist and Surrealist manifestos are products of what Sheppard calls the 'disjunction between social discourse and literary discourse',²⁵ which he sees as fundamental to the modern 'crisis of language'. More specifically, Sheppard proposes that

Where the 'surface' of classical [that is to say traditional or long-established] writing takes strength from and corresponds with the social and linguistic structures which it presupposes and celebrates, the modern writer cannot assume

²² Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature', in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, translated from the Italian by R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), pp. 84-93 (p. 89).

²³ André Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism', translated from the French by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 307-311 (p. 308).

²⁴ As Breton states in 'The First Manifesto of Surrealism', 'language has been given to man so that he may make Surrealist use of it'; Breton, 'The First Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 309.

²⁵ Sheppard, 'The Crisis of Language', p. 328.

this correspondence. He has to dismantle the structures of the conventional world and ‘explode’ language before he can create an adequate ‘verbal ikon’.²⁶

This idea of Modernist writers dismantling the conventional world and ‘exploding’ language is particularly relevant to the Italian Futurist movement, echoing its dictum of ‘*parole in libertà* and *tavole parolibre*, or liberated words and syntax’,²⁷ and its aggressive rejection of tradition. Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound’s Vorticist aesthetic, expounded in the appositely-titled *BLAST* magazine in 1914 and 1915 (the cover of which is reproduced as Figure 1 in the appendix to this thesis) is similarly called to mind; for as Andzej Gasiorek notes,

the search [in *BLAST*] for a kind of ‘radical purism’ in words, to match the ‘stark radicalism of the *visuals* found in Vorticist art, resulted in a [linguistic] ‘play’ that minimized the use of connectives, articles, pronouns, and prepositions, making it edgy and charging it with a visceral power.²⁸

A linguistic ‘explosion’ is, we might argue, also an appropriate metaphor for the Surrealist movement’s creation of its own incongruous, illogical and often shocking ‘language’ from dreams, hallucinatory states and other manifestations of the unconscious mind.²⁹

Indeed, according to Walter Benjamin,

it is [precisely] as magical experiments with words, not as artistic dabbling, that we must understand the passionate phonetic and graphic transformational games that have run through the whole literature of the avant-garde [. . .], whether it is called Futurism, Dadaism, or Surrealism.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid. Sheppard’s argument is adapted from Roland Barthes’s study of modern poetic writing, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953).

²⁷ Sylvia Martin, *Futurism* (Köln: Taschen, 2006), p. 66.

²⁸ Andzej Gasiorek, *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), p. 17.

²⁹ As Sheppard suggests, both the Dadaists and the Surrealists embarked on ‘a quest for a new language which is no language, [. . .] by which the mind, conscious of its imprisonment, might in astonishment free itself. Multi-media, cacophony, abusiveness, dreams, children’s games, drugs, psychedelia, automatic writing, nonsense and a-syntactical poetry, calligrams, violently incongruous images and surprise effects, all are legitimate in the attempt to break down conventionalised responses to words’; Sheppard, ‘The Crisis of Language’, p. 333.

³⁰ Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia’, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), II. 206-221 (p. 212). Benjamin’s essay was first published in 1929.

The phrase ‘crisis of language’ takes on a wholly new resonance, however, when it is applied to Welsh authors writing in English in the first half of the twentieth century. This is because ‘the disjunction between social discourse and literary discourse’ underlying this modern anxiety is exacerbated in the Welsh context by an accompanying linguistic divide: a new social discourse derived from English-speaking Wales, and an established literary discourse rooted in native Welsh-language culture. As Tony Conran explains, Welsh writing in English

shares its territory with another linguistic community which regards its tongue as the right and natural language of the country – a claim which Anglo-Welsh writers often accept, and which if they dispute, they cannot ignore.³¹

This situation was particularly difficult for Anglophone Welsh writers to ignore at a time when Welsh nationalists, such as the Welsh-speaking writer, critic and political activist, Saunders Lewis, were questioning the legitimacy of ‘Anglo-Welsh’ writing. As Lewis argued in 1938, in his provocative lecture and pamphlet, ‘Is there an Anglo-Welsh literature?’:

Is there an Anglo-Welsh nation which has its own literature in its own language? It is unlikely that anyone would answer that question with a “Yes”, except possibly some native of South Pembrokeshire.

A writer of literature belongs to a community. Normally he writes for that community. His instrument of expression, – the speech he uses, – has been shaped for and given to him by that society. Moreover, there belong to that society traditions and experiences and a secular mode of life as well as a literary heritage which have impressed themselves not only on the language but on all those who so use it that their use of it is seen to be literature. Every separate literature implies the existence of [. . .] an organic community. Such a community, possessing its own common traditions and its own literature, we generally call a nation.

Who, then, are the Anglo-Welsh? Actually we never think of an Anglo-Welsh people. The term is an abstraction, a literary abstraction, even as “Britisher” is an abstraction, but a political one. Neither term has reference to an organic community. Neither term has any social or cultural connotation.³²

Indeed, to adapt a phrase from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s 1975 study, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Anglophone Welsh writers of the early twentieth century might,

³¹ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 1.

³² Saunders Lewis, *Is there an Anglo-Welsh Literature? Being the Annual Lecture Delivered to the Branch on December 10th, 1938* (Caerdydd: Urdd Graddedigion Prifysgol Cymru, 1939), p. 3.

in a sense, be said to have experienced a ‘*detrterritorialization* of language [my emphasis]’³³ because, as representatives of the so-called ‘first flowering’³⁴ of Anglophone writing in Wales – of an, as yet, as Saunders Lewis avers, indistinct ‘Anglo-Welsh’ literary tradition – they occupied a nomadic position within two established cultural spaces. In the words of M. Wynn Thomas, they shared a

common experience – [arguably] simultaneously constructive and destructive, liberating and inhibiting – of belonging to a place apart; a historical region which was certainly not assimilable to England, but which could not be integrated into traditional Wales either. It was doubly separate – set apart on two counts and on two fronts – and its writers were perhaps accordingly doubly blessed and doubly cursed.³⁵

Moreover, this notion of Anglophone Welsh writers as, linguistically, both ‘cursed’ and ‘blessed’, ‘inhibited’ and ‘liberated’, also overlaps with Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas about ‘minor literature’ and, more specifically, with what they describe as the unfortunate³⁶ but, at the same time, ‘revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature’.³⁷ like ‘a Czech Jew [who] writes in German, or an Ouzbekian [who] writes in Russian’³⁸ (to use Deleuze and Guattari’s examples), a Welsh writer who writes in English is, we might argue, inevitably engaged in ‘setting up a minor [and, in this respect, potentially transformational or ‘revolutionary’] practice of a major language from within’.³⁹ Indeed, because of this, Deleuze and Guattari contend, ‘minor literature’ has the capacity to act as ‘the revolutionary force for all literature’⁴⁰ – an idea that connects Welsh writing in English, however marginal, with the international

³³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, translated from the French by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 18.

³⁴ Peter Elfed Lewis, ‘Poetry in the Thirties: A View of the ‘First Flowering’’, *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, n.s. 71 (1982), 50-74 (p. 50). It should be noted, however, that this ‘first flowering’ did not signify the beginning of Welsh writing in English. Allen Raine (Anne Adaliza Puddicombe née Evans), for example, was writing novels in English at the end of the nineteenth century.

³⁵ M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference: Literature in Twentieth-Century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p. 26.

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.* ‘Minor’, in this context, does not of course mean ‘inferior’ or ‘unimportant’, but simply refers to Anglophone Welsh literature’s minority-position within a dominant language and culture.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Modernist imperative to 'make it new'. Such an approach does not, as this chapter will demonstrate, entail an 'implicit dehistoricization of both the minor and the modernist',⁴¹ which Chana Kronfeld warns might result from this 'logical slippage'⁴² between the two categories. Neither does it deny (as Kronfeld claims Deleuze and Guattari's study does) 'minor [and, therefore, potentially, Modernist] status to [. . .] literatures in 'indigenous' minority languages',⁴³ such as Welsh. On the contrary, this chapter will show how three Anglophone Welsh writers, Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies, together with the English-born poet and visual artist, David Jones, engage in their work from the 1930s and 40s with the modern linguistic crisis in early twentieth-century Wales – a crisis which, by its very nature, affected both English and Welsh-speaking communities – in a way that both expands and challenges our knowledge and understanding of Modernism.

I

Gwyn Thomas, a writer known and widely admired for his verbal exuberance and inventiveness, might seem an unlikely figure to associate with a 'crisis of language'.⁴⁴ In his seminal introductory study of English-language literature in Wales, *The Dragon has Two Tongues* (1968), for example, Glyn Jones refers to Thomas's 'amazing gifts as a spontaneous speaker',⁴⁵ to 'the extraordinary vigour of [his narrative] style, the brilliance, the gusto, the torrential language, the inexhaustible imagery',⁴⁶ and describes him as possessing 'a mind [. . .] that uses metaphor as naturally, as abundantly and as persistently

⁴¹ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁴ As Michael Parnell notes, 'when Gwyn Thomas became a writer of wide renown, it was the individuality of his use of the English language that excited the reviewers' praise'; Michael Parnell, *Laughter from the Dark: A Life of Gwyn Thomas* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 8.

⁴⁵ Glyn Jones, 'Gwyn Thomas', in *The Dragon has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing*, ed. Tony Brown, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 100-116 (p. 102).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

as do most of us the cliché'.⁴⁷ Similarly, for Stephen Knight, Thomas is 'the most verbally brilliant writer of Welsh fiction in English';⁴⁸ 'only Dylan Thomas', Knight insists, 'can challenge him'.⁴⁹ It is precisely this striking verbal individuality and ingenuity, however, which should encourage – and has recently, in the case of Dylan Thomas, led to – consideration of these writers in the context of the Modernist fixation with language. Walford Davies has argued in his essay, 'The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Welsh Contexts, Narrative and the Language of Modernism', for example, that Dylan Thomas's position as a first-generation English speaker in a Welsh-speaking family meant that his poetry 'represented a kind of [experimental] no-man's-land between two languages – one dead, the other powerless to be born. Or at least powerless to be born into any kind of natural ease'.⁵⁰ This, Davies suggests, explains 'not only why he [Thomas] appears so radically different from any other poet of the 1930s, but also why he found poetry more and more difficult to write'.⁵¹ Gwyn Thomas may not, as Glyn Jones suggests, have found the process of writing particularly difficult, but his similarly complex socio-linguistic background, I would argue, demands that his literary output during the 1930s and 40s be considered within the kind of conceptual framework that Walford Davies invokes, and this premise will form the basis of the discussion that follows.

Gwyn Thomas's parents were Welsh-speakers, from Welsh-speaking backgrounds, and their first six children were brought up with Welsh as their first

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 116.

⁴⁸ Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction: Writing Wales in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 93.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Walford Davies, 'The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Welsh Contexts, Narrative and the Language of Modernism', in *Dylan Thomas: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 106-123 (p. 110).

⁵¹ Ibid. Another example of this recent critical focus on the Modernist language of Dylan Thomas is Chris Wigginton's essay, 'Birth and copulation and death': Gothic Modernism and Surrealism in the Poetry of Dylan Thomas', in *Dylan Thomas: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 85-105.

language.⁵² Immigration and the promotion of English in schools, however, meant that, like the suburban Swansea in which Dylan Thomas grew up, industrial South Wales, including the Rhondda valley where the Thomas family lived, was becoming increasingly Anglicised.⁵³ Sensing a need to adapt to this rapidly changing social environment, Thomas's mother and father brought up their subsequent children, Thomas included, as exclusively English-speaking, creating a linguistic rift in the family.⁵⁴ Thomas reflected on this situation in a television programme broadcast in 1969 called *It's a Sad but Beautiful Joke*:

Our kitchen, about the size of an average hutch, was a busy, bi-lingual bomb of a place. The first six children spoke Welsh, the bottom six English, and all at the same time; politics in English, gossip in Welsh, and downright lies in both.⁵⁵

Thomas, then, despite being unable to speak Welsh, was nevertheless immersed in the language and its culture while he was growing up, both at home and, as Glyn Jones points out, at the Welsh chapel that his family attended.⁵⁶ And this confluence of English and Welsh is manifested in his writing during the 1930s and 40s. In *Sorrow for thy Sons*, for example, a novel which Thomas completed in 1936 and centred on the lives of three brothers, Alf, Hugh and Herbert, in the industrialised South Wales valleys during the Depression years, English phrases and syntax are frequently juxtaposed with Welsh sentence structure:

⁵² Parnell, p. 8.

⁵³ As Parnell notes, 'South Wales, and especially the Rhondda, had during the nineteenth century seen a huge influx of workers from Cornwall, the west Country, Yorkshire, and Ireland, as well as numerous others from Italy and Spain, and all these brought English either as their own language or as a *lingua franca*, and none of them understood Welsh at all. At another level, the education system was in various ways promoting English in preference to Welsh, it being far more 'convenient' to deal in one language only, and English, as they saw it, with its worldwide importance and its great heritage of literature to recommend it, was obviously more 'desirable'; Parnell, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁴ Parnell, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Gwyn Thomas cited in Parnell, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Glyn Jones, 'Gwyn Thomas', p. 102.

Alf noticed that the kitchen fire was still lit. It had sunk low. There was a kettle pressed down on it. Two towels, dirty, were hung from a brass bar, thick and running just below the mantel shelf.⁵⁷

Here, the phrases ‘two towels, dirty’ and ‘a brass bar, thick’ seem to echo the way in which adjectives are positioned after the nouns that they describe in Welsh. And this is a common occurrence in the novel: Thomas also writes that ‘on the table in the centre of the room there were twelve boy’s suits, second hand, and half a dozen pairs of shoes, new’ (p. 163), and he describes how ‘the headmaster [. . .] pulled out a walking stick, thick, brown’ (p. 112). The appearance of the sentence, ‘around the barricade played children’ (p. 20), instead of the more usual ‘around the barricade children played’ or ‘children played around the barricade’, provides another example of this linguistic interchange, calling to mind the way in which the verb is generally positioned before the subject in Welsh-language clauses. Verbs are actually usually located at the beginning of sentences in Welsh, and this also finds expression in Thomas’s prose. It is perceptible, for instance, during the account of Hugh’s punishment at school:

He heard the headmaster talking to him, gaspily. The small exertion of three strokes had winded him.

‘This may seem . . . very stupid . . . to you, Evans. But . . . you’ve got . . . got to be taught [. . .]’

Came three more strokes. Hugh heard himself being told to get down.

(p. 112)

In this extract, Thomas disrupts the otherwise conventional English syntax by writing ‘Came three more strokes’ rather than ‘Three more strokes came’. These grammatical patterns also occur in Thomas’s short story, ‘Myself My Desert’ (1946), in which the impoverished narrator imagines himself with ‘nicer hair, a cleaner shirt, a body straighter’,⁵⁸ and in the novella, *Oscar* (1946), when the narrator, Lewis, stands beside ‘a

⁵⁷ Gwyn Thomas, *Sorrow for thy Sons* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), p. 23. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

⁵⁸ Gwyn Thomas, ‘Myself My Desert’, in *Where did I put Pity?: Folk Tales from the Modern Welsh* (London: Progress Publishing, 1946), pp. 183-193 (p. 185). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

lighted window, small'⁵⁹ and observes that his destitute friend, Hannah, 'looked no happier. Rather did she look as if the rain was beating a little harder on the wet mountain that she looked like' (p. 32). In this second example, Thomas positions a verb before the subject, initially writing 'did she look' rather than 'she looked'.

The effect of this 'seepage'⁶⁰ from Welsh into English in Thomas's prose is, as M. Wynn Thomas suggests, a 'kind of linguistic defamiliarization [. . .] which is a product of Welsh biculturalism'⁶¹ – a sense that 'language [has become] other to its ordinary self'.⁶² Indeed, Parnell traces 'the individuality' of Thomas's 'particular brand of English' back to the 'family idiolect which the Thomas children learned from their father [. . .], whose peculiar delivery, not quite Welsh and not quite English, made memorable and comical his interpretation and presentation of [. . .] ideas'.⁶³ Stephen Knight, on the other hand, has considered the broader social history of the bicultural Rhondda valley in his analysis of Thomas's oeuvre, demonstrating how his hybridized narrative style lends itself to a postcolonial reading.⁶⁴ But Thomas's mode of writing can also be viewed in another way. More specifically, it might be said to represent that point of modern linguistic crisis, born out of a heightened feeling of 'disjuncture between social and literary discourse', at which language – both English and Welsh – is 'exploded' in an attempt to create a new, more adequate mode of expression. Thomas's fictional world becomes, in a different sense, like his childhood home: 'a busy bi-lingual bomb of a place'. Moreover, Thomas's new, bicultural 'verbal ikon' seems to reflect how, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, 'minor

⁵⁹ Gwyn Thomas, *Oscar*, in *The Dark Philosophers* (Cardigan: Parthian, Library of Wales Series, 2006), pp. 3-101 (p. 3). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

⁶⁰ Tony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness: Essays on the English Poets of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982), p. 27.

⁶¹ M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 61.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Parnell, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Stephen Knight discusses Thomas's 'capacity [. . .] for writing the hybrid stories characteristic of colonized writers, where some aspects of native tradition are interwoven with the modern situation of the society, in the language and the techniques – with some appropriate hybridizing revisions – of the colonizing culture'; Knight, p. 97.

literature' is particularly concerned to develop or experiment with 'intensives or tensors'⁶⁵ – defined as the various 'linguistic elements [. . .] that express the "internal tensions of a language"'⁶⁶ – and the following passage from *Sorrow for thy Sons* also creates this impression:

Gwyneth had funny lips, twisted a bit, made her talk like a woman who's hiring a maid. That wasn't her fault. Gwyneth was too fond of hard work to think of hiring a maid. It was a touch of paralysis she had had as a kid that made her talk funny like that. Screwed her lips up into a curious shape, gave Alf the itch to be always touching them with his. But more than that, nothing.

(p. 13)

With the phrase 'Screwed her lips up', Thomas begins a sentence with a verb, once again effecting the permutations of Welsh grammar. And the phrases, 'twisted a bit' and 'But more than that, nothing', where conventional word order is similarly inverted, also have this defamiliarizing effect; these phrases would usually be expected to read 'a bit twisted' and 'But nothing more than that'. Moreover, shock waves from these linguistic 'explosions' – from these words, to borrow a phrase from Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, 'adorned with all the violence of their irruption'⁶⁷ – radiate through Thomas's narratives, and the unfamiliar and unpredictable idiom that results allows Thomas to circumvent and, in doing so, continue to dismantle linguistic paradigms.⁶⁸ In *Sorrow for thy Sons*, Alf does not feel a desire 'to kiss' Gwyneth, but experiences 'the itch to be always touching [her lips] with his'. As Glyn Jones notes, Thomas's narrative style 'enlarges and enlivens',⁶⁹ and here the verb 'kiss' is effectively blown apart – presented in the form of its constituent units of meaning. In *Oscar*, the verb 'teach' bursts open in a similar way, as Lewis recalls how 'the teachers [. . .] had vanished after a few months of trying to put

⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 22.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Deleuze and Guattari use Prague German as an example of this, noting its 'incorrect use of prepositions' and its 'employment of malleable verbs'; Deleuze and Guattari, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, 'from *Writing Degree Zero*', in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 31-61 (pp. 59-60).

⁶⁸ It should be noted that Thomas's frequent emulation of the dialect of the South Wales valleys also has this effect; for example, the narrator describes how, when Alf gave Annie a newspaper, 'she called him a bloody cleversticks of hell, rolled the paper into a tight tampy ball and flung it in Alf's face' (p. 16).

⁶⁹ Glyn Jones, 'Gwyn Thomas', p. 116.

some knowledge into Clarisse' (p. 14). Thomas's deconstruction of 'kiss' and 'teach', in fact, generates an almost Brechtian 'alienation effect'⁷⁰ within language; his technique seems to announce, as the German Expressionist playwright, Bertolt Brecht, did in his writings on the theatre, that

the familiar must be stripped of its inconspicuousness; we must give up assuming that the object [or action] in question needs no explanation. However frequently recurrent, modest, vulgar it may be it will now be labelled as something unusual.⁷¹

Standard English is also made alien in *Sorrow for thy Sons* when Lloyd falls over a classmate in school, and the narrator perceives him 'resting on one hand, looking at his other to see if there were any splinters and letting out a violent murmured rat-tat-tat of curses' (p. 102); Thomas incongruously employs a hard sound, 'rat-tat-tat', to describe a 'murmur' – a technique that he replicates in the novella, *Simeon* (1946) in his description of 'the plain, distant rattle of [Simeon's daughter, Bess's] sobs'.⁷² Similarly, in *Sorrow for thy Sons* he writes that 'the street [. . .] was full, full of men [. . .] parading back and fro' (p. 80), rather than 'to and fro' or 'back and forth', and tells how 'Jones the ostler' (p. 21)

passed by with his stick that had a piece of loose clicketing metal on the end of it. That would make the time about half past four. Alf felt like shouting to Jones to see why in the name of holy Joe he didn't get a nail from somewhere in the colliery and put that bit of metal right. It had been clicketing and getting on people's nerves for five years or more. But Jones was a bit deaf, and as obstinate as some of the horses it was his job to feed underground. The metal would keep on clicketing until Jones passed over or the stick crumbled.

(p. 21)

⁷⁰ Bertolt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, translated from the German by John Willet (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 179-205 (p. 192).

⁷¹ Bertolt Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect', in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, translated from the German by John Willet (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 136-147 (p. 144-145). Gwyn Thomas wrote several plays later in his literary career.

⁷² Gwyn Thomas, *Simeon*, in *The Dark Philosophers* (Cardigan: Parthian, Library of Wales Series, 2006), pp. 243-295 (p. 275). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

‘Clicketing’ is an unfamiliar word reconstructed from a dismantled English equivalent, ‘clicking’; and Thomas’s recursive use of this neologism underscores its deconstructive effect.

This process of linguistic fission and ‘creative reassembly’⁷³ is also palpable in *Sorrow for thy Sons* when Thomas describes how the headmaster talked ‘gaspily’ (p. 112), creating a new adverb from the English verb ‘to gasp’, and identifies the music at a local dance as a ‘bellocking, tuneless combination of piano, trombone and cymbals’ (p. 11). In this second example, ‘bellocking’ appears to be an amalgam of ‘bollocking’ and ‘bellowing’; and Thomas makes similar attempts, as T.S. Eliot puts it in his analysis of the praxis of the modern poet, ‘to force, to dislocate [. . .] language into his meaning’⁷⁴ in his short fiction. In *Oscar*, for example, Lewis perceives ‘the bawl of singing that splurched out of [Oscar’s] mouth’ (p. 85), and observes Danny standing on the coal tip ‘his sack dangling in his hand, the other hand keeping the mouth of the sack open to admit the ribblings of coal he picked up’ (p. 57). Here, ‘Splurch’ seems to originate from ‘lurch’ and ‘splurge’, and ‘ribblings’ from ‘dribbling’ and ‘ribs’ – from orthodox English words that, in the hands of Thomas, are, to use a phrase from *Myself My Desert*, ‘pulled miles out of shape and plumb’ (p. 184).⁷⁵ In this respect, Thomas’s approach to language can be compared to that of James Joyce in his high Modernist novel *Ulysses* (1922) – a text which, as the following passage evinces, flouts the rules of English in a comparable way:

Men, men, men.

Perched on high stools by the bar, hats shoved back, at the tables calling for more bread no charge, swilling, wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food, their eyes bulging, wiping wetted moustaches. A palled suetfaced young man polished his tumbler knife fork and spoon with his napkin. New set of microbes. A man with an infant’s saucedstained napkin tucked round him shovelled gurgling soup down

⁷³ M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, p. 61.

⁷⁴ T.S. Eliot, ‘The Metaphysical Poets’, in *T.S. Eliot: Selected Essays*, 2nd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), pp. 281-291 (p. 289).

⁷⁵ Thomas’s use of the word ‘plumb’ is also unusual. Here, ‘out of plumb’ is interpreted as ‘inexact’.

his gullet. A man spitting back on his plate: halfmasticated gristle: no teeth to chewchewchew it.⁷⁶

According to Deleuze and Guattari, Joyce, as an Irish writer who writes in English, exploits 'the genial [or liberating] conditions of minor literature'⁷⁷ in his work – conditions which, as previously discussed, facilitate a '[transformational] utilization of English',⁷⁸ or 'a minor practice of a major language from within'. Clearly, this argument can also be applied to the narratives of Gwyn Thomas. Moreover, we might construe the similarly explosive or 'revolutionary' practice of English seen in the work of Joyce and Thomas as manifesting a 'deterritorialization of language' (to invoke Deleuze and Guattari's critical vocabulary again) – an uprooting of a major language, or its radical transposition beyond the territorial boundaries of 'the major culture'.⁷⁹

Not only does Thomas display a Joycean disregard for the boundaries of the English language in *Sorrow for thy Sons*, but the novel is also shot through with what appear to be self-conscious references to the explosive potential of words. Herbert suggests to Alf, for example, that 'the language [he uses] on the road is enough to blow the roof off a chapel' (p. 51), to which Alf replies, 'That's why I use it. I haven't seen any roofs blowing off yet. It must be a matter of patience or I'm not using the right words' (p. 51). Alf is clearly expressing his opposition to what he perceives as the puritanical nature of chapel culture here. But his remarks are also applicable to Thomas's own Welsh Modernist praxis: the chapel is entrenched in native, Welsh-language culture and, as previously shown, Thomas's narrative destabilizes traditional linguistic models. Thomas's narrator also avers that 'Metaphors were powder barrels of disaffection. They

⁷⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 177.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ As Ian Gregson observes, Deleuze and Guattari 'celebrate minority status for being seized upon by [...] writers (who include, they say, [Kafka] Joyce and Beckett) as a powerful opportunity to evolve a literature which undermines the stale authority of the major culture'; Ian Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 2.

exploded under one's nose' (p. 40) – a strikingly accurate analysis of Thomas's own metaphorical language in *Sorrow for thy Sons*, as the following passage attests:

Alf hated aisles as much as he hated the colour white. He had the warm gospel of happiness on his lips, and there were times when Gwyneth froze it into long icicles that sank into his flesh like knitting needles.

(p. 167)

The excess of discursive, loosely associated and even incongruous metaphor and simile in this passage is itself best elucidated in metaphorical terms: the impression formed is of a 'shell-burst'⁸⁰ of imagery, which is an expression of 'disaffection', of estrangement from conventional language. Glyn Jones also seems to be referring to this effect when he describes Thomas as possessing 'a mind [. . .] which shoots up all its material as it were into massive and spectacular fountains, and plays upon them always the dazzling illumination of his wit'.⁸¹ And we witness a similar display of lexical fireworks in *Oscar*, when, referring to Oscar's treatment of his housekeeper, Meg, Lewis predicts that

the sight of her flesh, which was very white and soft, would coax all his snoring desires from their rat-holes and he would come lunging to his feet like some element who has just been brought back from the dead, a solid sheet of flame with all his appetites barking like dogs from him, hungry for food and Meg and Christ knows what.

(p. 26)

Thomas's language is not always this extravagant, but its very unpredictability ensures that it achieves a continuously seismic effect. In *Sorrow for thy Sons*, Alf recalls how, when a child injured himself while attempting to climb over the wall of a policeman's house to retrieve a ball, 'the policeman came out and stood there like a lighthouse taking the poor little devil's name and address' (p. 38), and a schoolteacher is introduced as 'a man in his middle twenties, with a belted coat and a moustache that struggled under his nose like an endurance race' (p. 114). Similarly, in 'And a Spoonful of

⁸⁰ Gwyn Thomas, 'Dust in the Lonely Wind', in *Where did I put Pity?: Folk Tales from the Modern Welsh* (London: Progress Publishing, 1946), pp. 148-170 (p. 154).

⁸¹ Glyn Jones, 'Gwyn Thomas', p. 116.

Grief to Taste', the narrator suggests that the sound of his voice in the choir caused 'the hair of the choir leader to drop out like hail',⁸² while in *Oscar*, Lewis compares the face of a regular customer at the local pub to 'chalk writing something on the air' (p.16) and accuses a fruit and vegetable seller of being 'drunk as a wheel' (p. 8) Thomas's use of metaphor and simile in these examples elicits an almost Saussurean awareness of the arbitrariness of language, and might be compared to what Glyn Jones recognised as the Surrealists' 'dramatic placing of objects, words, ideas never before associated, to achieve a sense of shock, strangeness, wonder'.⁸³

This connection between Thomas's idiom and European Surrealism is strengthened as his figurative language assumes increasingly surprising and outlandish forms. Thomas writes, in *Sorrow for thy Sons* that 'Alf had long ago come to the conclusion that Mrs Taylor had a stomach full of crab apples that twisted her life into all shapes except the right one' (p. 178), and he identifies Alf's neighbour as

a robust woman, with a throat as deep and resonant as a pit shaft. Alf thought that if you fell down that woman's throat you'd come to no harm, because her inside was full of the sunlight she got down her every time she swallowed, and you'd come up as the first line of a sentimental song. She was a crack hand at sentimental songs.

(pp. 18-19)

Linguistically, these passages again seem to actualise what M. Wynn Thomas has described as Gwyn Thomas's desire 'to dramatize the sense of a decisive break with the past, of a radical new departure'.⁸⁴ Thomas's English appears 'deterritorialized' to the point that it is no longer subject to that language's mechanisms of sense. This effect is not dissimilar, in fact, to that created through the Surrealist practice of 'express[ing] – verbally, by means of the written word [. . .] – the actual functioning of thought [. . .] in

⁸² Gwyn Thomas, 'And a Spoonful of Grief to Taste', in *Where did I put Pity?: Folk Tales from the Modern Welsh* (London: Progress Publishing, 1946), pp. 171-182 (p. 171).

⁸³ Glyn Jones, '18 Poems Again', *Poetry Wales*, n.s. 9 (1973-74), 22-26 (p. 24).

⁸⁴ M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 26.

the absence of any control exercised by reason'.⁸⁵ The following, dream-like monologue from 'Myself My Desert' also has a Surrealistic tenor:

I know now that to live is only gradually to become, in ways and looks, part of the earth that only let you go for a little canter and is waiting like a lusting thing to be on top of you again, stopping up your laugh, your groan and all your foolery of seeking food and sureness in a slipping, fruitless wilderness; of clutching fear's hand in the dark you share and bawling lullabies to make it sleep that sound so loud they keep the world awake and finding, when you take the trouble to glance, that your hand is gone and the hand you clutched is now your own. It looks alien and feels dead for it is yours and yet not yours.

(p. 183)

In particular, the sinister hand in this extract evokes Dylan Thomas's Surrealistic short story, 'The Lemon' (1936), in which a young boy explores the dark corridors of a remote house:

Nant, the boy, was not alone; he heard a frock rustle, a hand beneath his own scrape on the distemper. 'Whose hand?' he said softly. Then, flying in a panic down the dark carpets, he cried more loudly: 'Never answer me.' 'Your hand' said the dark, and Nant stopped still.⁸⁶

Both passages, in fact, call to mind Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel's Surrealist film, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), discussed in more detail in chapter four of this thesis, which features a number of shots of disembodied and macabre hands.

Gwyn Thomas, then, can be seen as a writer who is engaging with a heightened sense of modern linguistic crisis in early twentieth-century Wales, exploding conventional linguistic structures and constructing a 'new verbal ikon' reminiscent of the alternative 'languages' of European Modernism. In effect, Thomas utilizes what Deleuze and Guattari view as the 'revolutionary conditions' of 'a literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature': he makes 'a minor or intensive use of [language]'⁸⁷ – a practice that effectively 'deterritorializes' it, or pushes it beyond the 'territory' of the

⁸⁵ Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 309.

⁸⁶ Dylan Thomas, 'The Lemon', in *Dylan Thomas: The Collected Stories* (London: J.M. Dent, 1984), pp. 54-58 (p. 55).

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 27.

major culture. As this deterritorializing impulse constitutes the inception of a new Anglo-Welsh 'verbal ikon' – a new mode of expression that establishes or marks out a distinct *territory* for Anglophone Wales and Anglophone Welsh literature – however, we might argue that Thomas's narratives are, in fact, animated and propelled by what Deleuze and Guattari describe as 'a double movement of [linguistic] deterritorialization and reterritorialization'.⁸⁸ In the next two sections of this chapter, I go on to explore how this Modernist dynamic, generated by the 'crisis of language' in modern Wales, also finds expression in the work of Glyn Jones and Idris Davies.

II

Glyn Jones was born into a Welsh-speaking family, in the South Wales mining town of Merthyr Tydfil.⁸⁹ Unlike Gwyn Thomas, he was brought up initially to have Welsh as his first language, but by the time that he had reached his teenage years, the same process of Anglicisation that prevented Thomas from speaking Welsh had also caused him to lose his native language; 'English, the language of school and street, and of chapel activities', as Tony Brown has pointed out, 'finally and inevitably, became the language of his home'.⁹⁰ Jones was to spend the rest of his life rediscovering his native language and learning about Welsh culture. During the 1930s, he became a member of a Welsh-speaking chapel in Cardiff and attended evening classes on Welsh culture taught by

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 24. Deleuze and Guattari use this phrase in their discussion of 'the breakdown and fall of the [Hapsburg] empire', which they suggest 'accentuates everywhere movements of deterritorialization, and invites all sorts of complex reterritorializations'; Deleuze and Guattari, p. 24. We might argue, similarly, that 'the movements of deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization' within Welsh writing in English are symptomatic of, and inspired by, the depletion of the British Empire.

⁸⁹ Glyn Jones, 'Autobiography', in *The Dragon has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing*, ed. Tony Brown, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 5-36 (p. 9).

⁹⁰ Tony Brown, 'Introduction: The Making of a Writer', in *The Collected Stories of Glyn Jones*, ed. Tony Brown (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. xiii-lxvi (p. xxiii). As Brown notes, 'by the time Glyn Jones became involved in the chapel, the week-night activities for the young people [. . .] were all conducted in English [. . .] although the Sunday services were still held in Welsh'; Tony Brown, 'Introduction', pp. xxii-xxiii.

Saunders Lewis.⁹¹ In particular, he became fascinated by Welsh-language literature, recalling later how he was ‘swept off [his] feet by the unfamiliar music of the *cywyddau*,’⁹² and how he read the *cywyddwyr* and *The Mabinogion* ‘in a sort of blaze of glory’.⁹³ At the same time, however, Jones was acutely aware of, and deeply troubled by, the effects of economic depression on the working-class people of English-speaking South Wales. ‘How’, he later asked in the unpublished manuscript, ‘Remembering Aloud’,

do you persuade people who have lived on the dole, and suffered the Means Test, for perhaps ten years – how do you make them realise that the language and Welsh culture are important? What they want is a job and a good standard of living for themselves and their children [. . .].⁹⁴

As this note suggests, Jones was a writer for whom the modern ‘crisis of language’ in Wales was an immediate concern. Indeed, in *The Dragon has Two Tongues*, he proffered suggestions of ways in which this predicament might be allayed:

What I myself would welcome in Anglo-Welsh writers is [. . .] a wider knowledge of the past and present of our country, particularly of our native literature, and a deeper sense of her destiny. This would surely result ultimately in closer unity between Welsh and Anglo-Welsh, so that the two groups could recognize each other as Welshmen and not merely antagonists.⁹⁵

When Jones brings together English and Welsh-language culture in this way in his own short stories from the 1930s and 40s, the overall effect is often contiguous with the linguistic rupture seen in Gwyn Thomas’s early writing. In his 1935 short story, ‘Porth-y-Rhyd’, for instance, it becomes clear from the outset that Jones is purposively attempting to connect with Welsh-language culture. He constructs the narrative in two

⁹¹ Tony Brown, ‘Introduction’, p. xxix.

⁹² Glyn Jones, ‘Autobiography’, p. 37.

⁹³ Ibid. As Dafydd Johnston notes, the *cywydd* form consisted of ‘couplets of seven-syllable lines, with end-rhyme alternately stressed and unstressed’. Johnston explains how ‘by the fifteenth century the *cywydd* had become established as the standard form for all types of poetry, so that the poets of the period are often referred to in Welsh as *Cywyddwyr*’; Dafydd Johnston, *The Literature of Wales: A Pocket Guide* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 34.

⁹⁴ Glyn Jones cited in Tony Brown, ‘Introduction’, p. xxix.

⁹⁵ Glyn Jones, ‘Conclusion’, in *The Dragon has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing*, ed. Tony Brown, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 192–196 (p. 196).

parts: '*Machludiad*',⁹⁶ meaning 'a going down, a setting (of the sun)',⁹⁷ and *Codiad* (p. 88), meaning 'a getting up, an arising'⁹⁸ in Welsh. The story's title, which is also in Welsh and translates into English as 'gateway to the ford',⁹⁹ is the name of the place that its protagonist, Tudur, comes from, and is used, according to Welsh custom, as a substitute for his actual surname. On a more subtle level, the name 'Tudur' calls to mind the medieval Welsh bard, Tudur Aled;¹⁰⁰ and Tudur's apprehension of the view from his cottage as 'lovely, a thing for praise' (pp. 88-89) later in the story echoes the central theme of praise in the Welsh poetic tradition.¹⁰¹ Additionally, Tudur's surroundings appear to ground the narrative in rural, Welsh-speaking Wales and, more specifically perhaps, in Llansteffan, Carmarthenshire – a region that Jones was drawn to throughout his life – as opposed to the industrialised, English-speaking south:¹⁰²

Tudur was going in the sunshine down the steep little road from his cottage to the bay. It was so hot there was nothing out, no creatures and hardly any birds, only a dusty snake rowing his way across the path, and the baggy cormorants. The coast there was lovely in parts, and then lonely again, and a bit terrifying; and the bay itself was a curve of tigered sand between the headland and the line of pitch cliffs that the water shawled, bubbled with woods behind, whose brambles mixed with the sea-pinks and the blue thistles.

(p. 85)

This knowable external world, however – already vaguely awry (Tudur's environment is unusually and oppressively hot and empty, and envisaged through resonant but faintly

⁹⁶ Glyn Jones, 'Porth-y-Rhyd', in *The Collected Stories of Glyn Jones*, ed. Tony Brown (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 85-90 (p. 85). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

⁹⁷ Tony Brown, 'Notes', in *The Collected Stories of Glyn Jones*, ed. Tony Brown (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 354-402 (p. 365).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Johnston notes that 'the classical poetry of the fifteenth century reached its climax with Tudur Aled (c. 1465-1525), a virtuoso craftsman who achieved a remarkable density of ornamentation and imagery over the whole range of poetic genres'; Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 42.

¹⁰¹ As Johnston suggests, 'two essential features of the Welsh poetic tradition are its antiquity and the continuity of its central theme of praise'; Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 1.

¹⁰² Tony Brown points out that every August, throughout his life, Jones was in Carmarthenshire staying with his father's relatives, an annual visit to rural, Welsh-speaking Wales which [...] provided him with another world about which to write, far away from the scruffy urban world of Merthyr'; Brown, 'Introduction', p. xvii. Tudor Bevan draws a parallel between Jones's description of Y Werle or Wharley Point at Llansteffan in the essay 'X = ?' and his portrayal of the coastline in 'Porth-y-Rhyd'; Tudor Bevan, *Glyn Jones: The Background to his Writings*, Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Wales, Swansea, 1989, p. 55.

discordant imagery such as ‘baggy cormorants’, a ‘rowing’ snake, ‘tigered sand’ and ‘bubbled with woods’) – is soon made utterly strange as the narrator recounts how, on his way down to the bay, Tudur

saw a raven in the stony branches of this cracked oak tree stretching down the fingers of his wing feathers out of his shoulder, with his leg underneath like a weapon, and he thought instinctively to learn something he didn’t know or had forgotten. That polished wing was lovely too, in the fire of the sun, like the smooth grain in black wood, and the dark blade of each of its flat feathers a finely-split layer of long thin stone, black and slender, and polished, like a book-knife; but he shut his wing again on his secret and pulled his skin lids down his flat eyes for the sun and made himself finished and entire. Tudur’s heart sank; he was excluded, with no connection anywhere. And he heard in dismay his blood shouting the tide had gone out for the last time. He flung down his box and pulled his boots off, and started running across the sands trying to catch sight of the tide before it slid over the horizon for the last time.

(p. 86)

Jones’s account of how a raven perched in the ‘stony branches’ of a tree, ‘pulled his skin lids down his flat eyes for the sun’, and ‘made himself finished and entire’ – a series of events which, in turn, causes Tudur to hear ‘his blood shouting the tide has gone out for the last time’ – exposes the reader to what might be described as the linguistic uncanny or ‘an experience of being disorientated, of not feeling entirely at home’¹⁰³ with the type of language being used. And we experience a similar sense of ‘shock, strangeness, wonder’ when Tudur, alone in his cottage, gazes out of the window at the bay:

Slowly the light smoked up between the clouds, and Tudur saw with excitement the bay full of water between the headland plastered with irregular fields and the sliced cliffs on the left [. . .]. It was lovely, a thing for praise, although the air was dull and filled with small rain cold as dust, and there were no waves, only the sea with light floating on it like a wafer, heaving gently and the skin of the water never broken. He rose to run down to the beach, but as he lifted the latch he saw a quiet woman in the room, holding out her long hair to dry it like a net before his fire. [. . .] To see her first was wonderful, yet he was disappointed somehow, displeased that she was standing there like that before his face as though he were nothing, ignoring him. But she was wet with rain, her hair and her dress.

‘So there is a woman on the earth,’ he said, trying to please her. ‘I am glad. Where have you come from? Who are you?’

He thought she said, ‘Yourself,’ but he wasn’t sure.

(pp. 88-89)

¹⁰³ Tony Brown, ‘Glyn Jones and the ‘Uncanny’’, in *Almanac: A Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English – Critical Essays*, ed. Katie Gramich, n.s. 12 (2007-08), 89-114 (p. 89).

Here, phrases such as ‘the light smoked up’ (in which Jones reinvents the verb ‘smoke’), ‘the air was dull’, ‘small rain cold as dust’ and ‘the skin of the water’ have a deeply estranging effect which is compounded by the almost Surrealistic absence of conventional, logical narrative causality. As Nicholas Royle notes, the uncanny is ‘inextricably bound up with thoughts of home and dispossession, the homely and the unhomely, property and alienation’.¹⁰⁴ Through devising an idiom that is ‘uncanny, unhomely, not-at-home’,¹⁰⁵ Jones, like Gwyn Thomas, effectively both ‘deterritorializes’ the language – alienates it from the ‘major culture’ – and ‘reterritorializes’ it in the form of a new ‘verbal ikon’ that is more representative of modern, Anglophone Wales.

This process is also observable in ‘The Apple-Tree’ (1940) – a short story centred on a family of three children, Sibli, Trystan, and Robyn. Echoing ‘Porth-y-Rhyd’, all three of these names demonstrably reflect Jones’s aspiration to reconcile Welsh writing in English with Welsh-language culture, though ‘Sibli’ and ‘Trystan’ are especially revealing. Sibli is a character in the medieval Welsh tale ‘*Proffwydoliaeth Sibli Doeth*’ or ‘The Prophecy of Sibli the Wise’,¹⁰⁶ recorded in *The White Book of Rhydderch* and *The Red Book of Hergest*,¹⁰⁷ and she also appears in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, or *The Triads of the Island of Britain*.¹⁰⁸ ‘Trystan’, on the other hand, is derived from the Welsh version of the Arthurian legend of *Tristan and Isolde*, *Trystan ac Essyllt*. The quiet, coastal environment introduced in the opening paragraph of ‘The Apple-Tree’ – a setting which echoes that of ‘Porth-y-Rhyd’ – once again seems to focus Jones’s narrative in rural, Welsh-speaking Wales:

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Tony Brown, ‘Notes’, p. 366.

¹⁰⁷ Entitled *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* and *Llyfr Gwyn Hergest* in Welsh, these books contain the eleven tales that comprise the *Mabinogion*; Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. As Johnston notes, the Welsh Triads are ‘surviving fragments and allusions to lost [medieval] tales’ in which ‘characters and episodes are arranged in groups of three as a mnemonic device’; Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 17.

Two brilliant hills stood on the coast, with the river swollen between them carefully swallowing the sea. Over the fields of one were spread the shadows of the clouds with the slow wind peeling at them, skinning slowly back off the grasses their dark membrane of shadow, but the sea-thorns were plastered flat and brown in a bush-crust against the round rock of the other, caking its bareness, although a red tree grew on the curve of its only field. A burning sun poured out of the sky on the thick liquid of the sea, and on the ripples of the eating river, and on the shore-pool with its darn of groundwind, and on the sea-sand, and the timber, and the flesh.

Down at the foot of the field-bearing hill stood a grey cottage. Three children lived there, and the eldest was called Sibli.¹⁰⁹

Following the same pattern as 'Porth-y-Rhyd', however, this knowable world is disarranged by the 'uncanny strangeness'¹¹⁰ of Jones's style. The narrator observes an 'eating river', 'the thick liquid of the sea', fields with 'a slow wind peeling at them', and 'sea-thorns [. . .] plastered flat and brown in a bush-crust against the round rock'. New, hybrid words such as 'bush-crust', 'shore-pool' and 'sea-sand' are wrought, with 'Shore-pool' and 'sea-sand' seeming to reinvent established English nouns such as 'seashore', 'beach' and 'bay'. Tony Brown provides another example of this transformational linguistic play in 'The Apple-Tree', pointing out that, in his reference to 'the last tawn of the pointed sandbar' (p. 94), Jones extracts 'tawn' from the standard English words, 'tawny' and 'tawniness';¹¹¹ and this is also a feature of 'Porth-y-Rhyd', in which Jones envisages 'a thin white sky-skin' (p. 87) and 'a ladder sea-sun' (p. 87). Recalling the work of Gwyn Thomas, Jones also uses Welsh in 'The Apple-Tree' as 'a prism through which to fracture'¹¹² standard language: his reference, later in the narrative to how 'a bird dived into the back of the sea' (p. 94), for example, is 'an echo of a literal translation of the Welsh *cefnfor*', meaning '(the deep of) the ocean'.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Glyn Jones, 'The Apple-Tree', in *The Collected Stories of Glyn Jones*, ed. Tony Brown (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 91-98 (p. 91). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹¹⁰ Royle, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Brown, 'Notes', p. 367.

¹¹² M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, p. 61.

¹¹³ '*Cefn*' translates literally into English as 'back'; Brown, 'Notes', p. 365.

The imaginative scope of Jones's 'new verbal ikon' becomes apparent when Trystan returns from a trip to 'the city' (p. 92) to find that his sister's lover has drowned:

Trystan listened in agony [. . .]. He heard Sibli go on with her speaking, the steady anguish of her voice as she held her face close to the yellow lamplight.

'My spirit ached, I heard the creak of the well-rope. I could not speak, my mouth was dust like the blackened flower-tongue, my eyes dry as the barren finger-nail. And I saw my hands were orchards fruited with grief. I wished for thick darkness, for this day to drain like sand back into the sun, or for the bright hand of the rain around me. I saw the torn mouth of the poppy mouth my knee and the stumps of the fractured bridge sticking out of the sides of the hills. The waterbirds cried, the arum's frosted gold was snapped, the lily-bell showed the blood-veins red in her aching throat. I was naked in a bleak island of spotted thistles and my heart was broken like a heart in a picture. I saw on the coasts a drowned body wrapped in red rock under the hawk-hang of my heart – Christ send a night angel to stand by my candle – and the sea was a vivid ruffian that roared over it, gathering his freckled shoulder into the rock.

(pp. 94-95)

While the mystical, nostalgic tone of Jones's narrative here, as in the previous passages considered, is quite different from the black, often outrageous comedy of Gwyn Thomas's prose, the kind of language used is of a piece with Thomas's most ambitious and outlandish verbal experiments. Disorientating sentences such as 'I wished for thick darkness, for this day to drain like sand back into the sun, or for the bright hand of the rain around me' are again interspersed with new, estranging lexical admixtures such as 'hawk-hang', 'flower-tongue' and 'blood-veins'; though the appearance and cadence of these words do call to mind Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon'¹¹⁴ in his innovative poem of 1918, 'The Windhover' – a text in which, interestingly, Hopkins also 'experiment[s] [. . .] with rhythm, and rhyme influenced by [. . .] Welsh patterns'.¹¹⁵ Additionally, the causal and chronological relationships that traditionally lend narratives cogency and verisimilitude are subverted in 'The Apple-Tree', so that Sibli's narrative seems closer to Modernist poetry than to prose; indeed, her declaration, 'I could not

¹¹⁴ Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Windhover', in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Poems*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 117, ll. 2-4.

¹¹⁵ Catherine Phillips, 'Introduction', in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Poems*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. xi-xvi (p. xv).

speak' (as previously noted) and also her reference to 'red rock' echo the first part of Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Trystan is also the name of the protagonist in Jones's novel, *The Valley, the City, the Village*, which he was working on throughout the 1940s (though the novel was not published until 1956). In this narrative Jones again covets the uncanny in language, observing 'the back of the black river oiling down the cwm'¹¹⁶ (*cwm* being Welsh for 'valley'); noting how 'a beam of sun like a foot-thick slice of talc, stretches in glass-like rigidity' (p. 265); and reporting that

In the distance was the blue sea or the sea silver in a new skin, and the smooth hills crowded around like a plump wallow of green-backed whales. The gathered grass lay emerald under the long wet paint of sunlight.

(p. 69)

Another strategy that Jones uses to defamiliarise language in this text is to texture his prose with obscure and esoteric words. When recalling his boyhood in the Ystrad valley, for example, the narrator describes how he and his friends 'covered the mountain's sunlit back with the patterns of our exultation and delirium, with the bedlam choreography of our dizzy eleutheromania' (p. 29);¹¹⁷ and Jones employs a similarly elaborate vocabulary to convey the experience of a train-ride to Pencwm School:

We dive in darkness on dithyrambic wheels through the gathering crescendo of jangling gongs, bells, and deafening siren shrieks, we clamour two hours for Pencwm and hear the drum of detonations and the uproar of some interminable calliope [. . .].¹¹⁸

(p. 58)

These examples demonstrate how, as Stevie Davies suggests,

¹¹⁶ Glyn Jones, *The Valley, the City, the Village* (Cardigan: Parthian, Library of Wales Series, 2009), p. 5. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹¹⁷ 'Eleutheromania' denotes a 'mad zeal for freedom'; *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Available at <http://dictionary.oed.com/> [accessed May 17th 2010].

¹¹⁸ A 'calliope' is 'an instrument consisting of a series of steam-whistles toned to produce musical notes, played by a keyboard like that of an organ'; *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [accessed May 17th 2010].

Jones's inventiveness with the English language [in *The Valley, the City, the Village*] yields a spree of language, riotous, saturnalian, [. . .] explosive, expressive, in which English is forced to mix its registers promiscuously, in defiance of taste and common usage.¹¹⁹

In several of Jones's poems from the 1930s, too, we witness the effacement of orthodox language in favour of an abstruse and 'deterritorialized', though ultimately reterritorializing, idiom. 'Man' (1934), a poem originally published under the title 'Half an Ancestor',¹²⁰ provides a particularly memorable example:

The crucifix's shortest armstump points up.
He noticed. Knew much ghost-talk flim-flam. Blew
Buckshot; picked fish for his bucket near
Chucked lime off the lizard pools. Sucked small
Sea-honey; swallowed the workers' pabulum,
The fishy porridge of a snake. Hated
The mounted squires' duck, the hatted knee.
Gulped at some baggy tits for suck and love.
Felt his half-children screaming in his loins
For entry, entry into grassy bone,
And fed them cold pudding by his catmint
And the sleepy apples. Sliding sea-stars were good,
So Saturdays, entires, bitters, and
Though some vicar's mason cut the chancel
Cross-arms equal, church, working the bell-wheels.¹²¹

The linguistic character of this poem is captured in Jones's own phrase, 'ghost-talk flim-flam': Jones's language is an unfamiliar, unquiet 'ghost-talk' that is perhaps closest, in its effect, to Surrealist 'psychic automatism', or verbal expression 'dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason'.¹²² In his 1934 poem, 'Sande', Jones again, as in 'Porth-y-Rhyd' and 'The Apple-Tree', explicitly draws on native Welsh literary culture and, more specifically, on the tales of *The Mabinogion*: 'Sande' is derived from the

¹¹⁹ Stevie Davies, 'Foreword', in Glyn Jones, *The Valley, the City, the Village* (Cardigan: Parthian, Library of Wales Series, 2009), pp. ix-xv (p. xii).

¹²⁰ Meic Stephens, 'Notes on the Poems', in *The Collected Poems of Glyn Jones*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 133-166 (p. 140).

¹²¹ Glyn Jones, 'Man', in *The Collected Poems of Glyn Jones*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996) p. 9. All further references to Jones's poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹²² Breton, p. 309.

character of Sandde Bryd Angel, or Sandde Angel-Face, in *Culwch ac Olwen*,¹²³ whom no man will fight because he is so beautiful.¹²⁴ The poem goes on to explode these cultural signifiers, however – Sandde is recast as the emaciated skeleton of a saint – and linguistic norms prove to be equally friable:

Sande's crucifix, that crisscross star.
 The risking saint, naked and upright, scans
 His crop of hills and prays against the dark.
 The winds pluck off his ripened flesh like leaves,
 And then his upright bone-shrub chants, the rigid
 Thicket of his skeleton repeats
 Its praises from a lip of bone, and through
 The lantern holes of both his eyes, his ghost
 Erect and vivid, sees his morning star.
 The melted lightnings yellow round his head;
 The vigour of his dropped bones burns the rocks;
 Scattered he prays and sees his pulsing star.¹²⁵

Jones's particular aptitude to amass strange, hybrid neologisms from the rubble of familiar language is again evinced in 'Sande' and 'Man' – in 'bone-shrub', 'sea-stars', 'sea-honey', 'lightnings' and 'armstump'.

Both Gwyn Thomas and Glyn Jones, then, can be viewed as writers who are responding to a distinct and complex sense of modern socio-linguistic crisis in early twentieth-century Wales. They are writers who are negotiating and utilizing the fraught yet 'revolutionary conditions' of a 'minor literature' that is both positioned within a 'major language' and adjunct to an established, native literary culture. In essence, in the absence of an established Anglo-Welsh literary discourse – or 'a recognisably indigenous English-language literature'¹²⁶ – these writers are exploding and therefore, effectively, 'deterritorializing' language but, at the same time, 'reterritorializing' it in the form of a

¹²³ Meic Stephens notes that 'he pointed out to GJ that there is a Sandde Bryd Angel (Sandde Angel-Face) in *The Mabinogion*, whom no one will engage in battle because he is so handsome, [and] he confirmed that it was there that he had found the name'; Stephens, 'Notes on the Poems', p. 140.

¹²⁴ Stephens, 'Notes on the Poems', p. 140.

¹²⁵ Glyn Jones, 'Sande', pp. 7-8.

¹²⁶ Elfed Lewis, p. 65.

‘new verbal ikon’ or mode of expression which is appropriate to the modern, Anglicised Wales of their experience. Their work is, in a effect, a riposte to Saunders Lewis’s assertion in ‘Is there an Anglo-Welsh Literature?’ that

there is not a separate literature that is Anglo-Welsh, and [. . .] it is improbable that there ever can be that. [. . .] For if the Anglo-Welsh by writing in English have wider fame, more worldly honours, more social success, and more money, the writers in Welsh have the prestige of a national literature, and still some sense of assurance that comes from belonging to a great tradition.¹²⁷

Lewis seems to have based his opinion, at least in part, on his own experience of writing about Wales in English in his 1921 play, *The Eve of St John*. In this text – ‘a [. . .] one-act comedy set amongst the peasantry of nineteenth-century Wales’ – as Bruce Griffiths points out, ‘the influence of [the Irish playwright, J.M. Synge] is plain’,¹²⁸ suggesting that Lewis was casting about for, and failing to produce, a mode of expression appropriate for his Welsh characters. We might argue, moreover, that the Anglo-Welsh ‘verbal ikon’ that Lewis felt simply could not exist was even more disposed to linguistic novelty by virtue of the fact that Glyn Jones and Gwyn Thomas were first-generation English speakers, who, as Tony Conran emphasises, were already ‘essentially dealing with a new language’.¹²⁹ Jones seems to be registering this propensity in *The Valley, the City, the Village* in his characterisation of Gwydion – a figure who he identifies as ‘above all, Welsh’ and ‘deeply conscious of it’ (p. 304):

In Gwydion there is the childish love of words [. . .]. He seemed sometimes as though mankind’s ancient and universal faculty of speech were to him a new and enchanting discovery. He was a dictionary reader, a neologist, an inventor of nicknames [. . .]. Any such oddity as an adjective embedded in the middle of a noun delighted him.

(p. 298)

Indeed, ‘Gwydion’ is the name of a sorcerer in the *Mabinogion*, and so there is a sense that Jones’s character too is a kind of verbal magician, conjuring impossible spectacles and

¹²⁷ Lewis, ‘Is there an Anglo-Welsh Literature?’, p. 13.

¹²⁸ Bruce Griffiths, ‘His Theatre’, in *Presenting Saunders Lewis*, ed. Alun R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), pp. 79-92 (p. 79).

¹²⁹ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 51.

transformations in language. The dyadic impulse, evident in the work of Jones and Gwyn Thomas, towards linguistic ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘reterritorialization’, moreover, is, I would argue, also discernible in Idris Davies’s poetic representation of the effects of the Depression in South Wales, *Gwalia Deserta* (1938); and this text will be the focus of the next part of my discussion.

III

Idris Davies was born in the town of Rhymney, in the Rhymney valley, and, like Gwyn Thomas and Glyn Jones, came from a Welsh-speaking family.¹³⁰ In contrast to Jones and Thomas, however, the Anglicisation of the South Wales valleys did not cause Davies to lose his native language completely; his parents continued to speak Welsh to him at home, and, as Dafydd Johnston notes, he ultimately only lacked ‘the ability to express himself confidently and satisfactorily in [the language] in written’ form.¹³¹ Like Glyn Jones, Davies later attended evening classes in an attempt to improve his knowledge of literary Welsh, and he wrote several Welsh-language poems during the 1930s.¹³² But he continued to use poetry as a medium through which to voice the experiences of the many people in South Wales who spoke English alone. The following verse from ‘I was Born in Rhymney’ (1943) is a well-known example:

I lost my native language
For the one the Saxon spake
By going to school by order
For education’s sake.¹³³

¹³⁰ Dafydd Johnston, ‘Idris Davies’s Life’, in *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 1994), pp. xi-xxxv (p. xiii).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. xiii-xiv.

¹³³ Idris Davies, ‘I Was Born in Rhymney’, in *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 1994), p. 78. All further references to Davies’s poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

Davies's poetic sequence, *Gwalia Deserta*, has been described by Conran as a 'collage'¹³⁴ of discourses, manifesting a 'dislocation and contrast of registers',¹³⁵ which, he suggests, reflect the disintegration of 'the *buchedd*'¹³⁶ or 'the Welsh way of life'¹³⁷ in the South Wales valleys during the early decades of the twentieth century. Conran draws attention, for example, to Davies's juxtaposition, in the opening four lines of the first poem in the sequence, of documentary,¹³⁸ Surrealistic, Welsh hymnological, and modern cinematic styles respectively.¹³⁹

The Commissioners depart with all their papers
And the pit-heads grin in the evening rain;
The white deacons dream of Gilead in the Methodist vestry
And the unemployed stare at the winter trees.¹⁴⁰

In transcribing the dissolution of '*buchedd*-culture'¹⁴¹ in this way, Conran opines, Davies created a 'modernism' which, while it 'never quite got into top gear', 'sit[s] quite happily with the craggier works of Dylan Thomas and Glyn Jones'.¹⁴² Indeed, Conran's exegesis also connects Davies's poetic technique with wider trends in European and Anglo-American Modernism. Collage performed an important role in the development of the new 'languages' of Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism – as the work of the visual artists, Carlo Carrà (Figure 2), Raoul Hausmann, Joan Miró and Kurt Schwitters attests – and

¹³⁴ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 45.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 9. As Conran notes, the *buchedd* originated from 'the Methodist Awakening [in Wales] in the eighteenth century'; Conran, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

¹³⁸ Johnston describes this technique as 'characteristic of the era of [governmental] Mass-Observation'; Dafydd Johnston, 'The Development of Idris Davies's Poetry', in *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), pp. xxxvi-lxxx (p. lvii).

¹³⁹ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁴⁰ Idris Davies, *Gwalia Deserta*, p. 3. Conran notes that Welsh hymn-writers often used the phrase 'balm of Gilead' as 'a metaphor for healing – and particularly spiritual healing'; Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 44.

¹⁴¹ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 9.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 10. Daniel G. Williams has also identified *Gwalia Deserta* as a Modernist text, suggesting that it exemplifies Davies's 'populist modernism' – his creation of 'a dialogic poetry [. . .] that seeks to give voice, to sympathise and celebrate the lives of the working classes, and that in its sheer diversity challenges those who would seek to simplify [. . .] that experience'. Williams goes on to argue that the 'populist modernism' of Idris Davies and the American poet, Langston Hughes, 'can be seen as a challenge to the nationalist ideas [and elitist Modernism] of Saunders Lewis and W.E.B. DuBois'; Daniel G. Williams, Unpublished lecture: 'Idris Davies and Popular Culture' (presented for Cymdeithas Bro Elyrch, Rhymni, 10 November 2005).

T.S. Eliot also invokes a collage-like technique in the closing lines of *The Waste Land*, ‘shoring’ ‘fragments’ of languages against the ruinous, ‘arid plane’ of modern consciousness. Indeed, with its central trope of contemporary South Wales as a desolate land, *Gwalia Deserta* might even be construed as a kind of reply or Welsh counterpart to Eliot’s famous poem.¹⁴³ The parallel that Conran draws between Davies’s early work and that of Glyn Jones, however, should also be considered within the context of what Conran describes as the ‘social and linguistic convulsions churning around the individual consciousness’¹⁴⁴ in contemporary Wales. For the collage, by its very nature, entails a process of rupture and ‘deterritorialization’ comparable with that witnessed previously in both Glyn Jones’s short stories and poetry and in the fiction of Gwyn Thomas. As Jones himself wrote in ‘Nodiadau ar Surrealistiaeth’ or ‘Notes on Surrealism’ (1937), an essay published in the Welsh-language avant-garde magazine, *Tir Newydd* or *New Ground*, collage represents

a new way of creating pictures of objects and people by cutting out bits of pictures of objects and people from newspapers and magazines and then gluing them together on paper to form a new picture.¹⁴⁵

Moreover, if *Gwalia Deserta* amounts to a kind of linguistic collage, then it too can be interpreted as an expressive conduit for and response to the modern ‘crisis of language’ in Wales, and, more specifically, as a text where language, like the ‘bits of pictures of objects and people’ that comprise a pictorial collage, is simultaneously ‘deterritorialized’ or dislocated, and ‘reterritorialized’ or ‘glued together’ to form an experimental ‘new picture’ – a manifestly fissiparous and discursive new literary discourse or ‘verbal ikon’ appropriate to contemporary South Wales.

¹⁴³ Davies’s next poetic sequence, *The Angry Summer* (1943) – a text that is stylistically reminiscent of *Gwalia Deserta* – was accepted for publication by Eliot’s Faber and Faber press.

¹⁴⁴ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, pp. 54–55.

¹⁴⁵ Glyn Jones, ‘Notes on Surrealism’, translated from the Welsh by Tony Brown, *The New Welsh Review*, 28 (1995) 20–22 (p. 22).

This process is decipherable in the opening four lines of the sequence, cited at the beginning of this section, and it is similarly apparent, for example, in the first stanza of poem XXVII:

So we're all Welsh boys gathered together,
Boys bach, boys bach
We have roamed from the rain and the ruins,
Boys bach, boys bach

(p. 15)

Here, conversational, working-class camaraderie ('So we're all Welsh boys gathered together') is juxtaposed with the poetic and notably Romantic 'We have roamed from the rain and the ruins'.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the tone and style of this line can be compared with that of section XIV – a poem which Dafydd Johnston has suggested echoes the work of the English Romantic poet, William Wordsworth –¹⁴⁷ demonstrating how the collage-like 'textual instability and epistemological uncertainty'¹⁴⁸ of *Gwalia Deserta* manifests itself both within the fabric of each individual poem, and at a holistic level:

Roaming the derelict valley at dusk
Breathing the air of desolation
Watching the thin moon rise behind the mountain church,
I seek in the faces of men glimpses of early joy,
I seek in the sounds of human speech
The echoes of some far forgotten rapture ...

(p. 9)

The linguistically uneven and protean character of poem XXVII is also evidenced in the repeated bilingual phrase, 'boys bach', and similarly in poem XXV:

Who seeks another kingdom
Beyond the common sky?
Who seeks the crystal towers
That made the martyrs sigh?

¹⁴⁶ Dafydd Johnston points out that Davies admired the English Romantic poets, John Keats, William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley; Johnston, 'The Development of Idris Davies's poetry', p. xxxix.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. xlii.

¹⁴⁸ Wigginton, *Modernism from the Margins*, p. 30.

On earth alone your towers,
By human strength, shall stand,
And the waters of your mountains
Alone shall save the land.

Your cities shall be founded
On human pride and pain,
And the fire of your vision
Shall clean the earth again.

(p. 14)

Both the content and the form of these stanzas seem to have their origins in Welsh Nonconformist hymnology: the pattern of 'the four-line stanza, with short second and fourth lines rhyming', as Johnston notes, 'is very common in the work of [the eighteenth-century Nonconformist hymn-writer] Williams Pantycelyn'.¹⁴⁹ Embedded in this Welsh religious idiom, however, is secular, Socialist discourse: 'On earth alone your towers/ By human strength, shall stand', 'Your cities shall be founded/ On human pride and pain'.¹⁵⁰

And this also occurs in poem IV:

O timbers from Norway and muscles from Wales,
Be ready for another shift and believe in co-operation,
Though pit-wheels are frowning at old misfortunes

And girders remember disasters of old;
O what is man that coal should be so careless of him,
And what is coal that so much blood should be upon it?

(p. 4)

In the last two lines cited, Davies offsets rhetorical language, familiar from newspaper headlines and political speeches or manifestos, with biblical discourse and, more specifically, with psalm 8, verse 3: 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?'¹⁵¹ In poem XV, on the other hand, ecclesiastical cadences give way to the English nursery rhyme, 'Oranges and Lemons':

¹⁴⁹ Johnston, 'The Development of Idris Davies's poetry', p. xxxviii.

¹⁵⁰ This poem can also be viewed, as Johnston suggests, as a reflection of Davies's 'humanistic interpretation of Christianity'; Johnston, 'The Development of Idris Davies's Poetry', p. xxxvii.

¹⁵¹ Dafydd Johnston 'Notes to Section A', in *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies*, ed. Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), pp. 277-289 (p. 278). As Johnston notes, Davies's 'thoroughly

Oh what can you give me?
Say the sad bells of Rhymney.

Is there hope for the future?
Cry the brown bells of Merthyr.

Who made the mineowner?
Say the black bells of Rhondda

And who robbed the miner?
Cry the grim bells of Blaina.

They will plunder willy-nilly,
Say the bells of Caerphilly.

They have fangs, they have teeth!
Shout the loud bells of Neath.

To the south, things are sullen,
Say the pink bells of Brecon.

Even God is uneasy
Say the moist bells of Swansea.

Put the vandals in court!
Cry the bells of Newport.

(pp. 9-10)

The at once naïve and polemical tone of this poem – ‘They will plunder willy-nilly,/ Say the bells of Caerphilly’ – endows it with a discordant and occasionally jarring quality, reminiscent, once again, of collage. Indeed, Davies’s choice of individual words – his references, for instance, to the ‘pink’ bells of Brecon and to the ‘moist’ bells of Swansea – educes an ‘uncanny strangeness’ similar to that generated by this Modernist technique, a comparable sense that things are not quite ‘at-home’. Again, as previously mentioned, this effect seems to be facilitated and augmented by what Conran describes as the ‘newness’ of the English language for Welsh writers such as Davies, in whose work, Conran suggests, ‘words are [perhaps] [. . .] without the *patina*’ – the ‘trace elements of

religious upbringing provided a source for much of [his poetic] language and imagery, drawn both from the Bible and Welsh hymnology’; Johnston, ‘The Development of Idris Davies’s Poetry’, p. xxxvi.

pathos, irony or snob-value' – 'that English writers would instinctively give them'.¹⁵² Moreover, to return to poem IV, Davies's piecemeal method is again palpable in the shift from archaic folk-song ('O timbers from Norway and muscles from Wales' – a line that also structurally presages the reference to psalm 8, discussed earlier –) to the decontextualized, prosaic instructions of a modern industrialist ('Be ready for another shift and believe in co-operation'); and from this quotidian mode back to the 'Surrealistic' or more accurately perhaps, Expressionistic style that Conran apprehends in the opening of the sequence. 'Though pit-wheels are frowning' subjectively distorts a 'social image'¹⁵³ in a manner characteristic of European Expressionist literature and art.¹⁵⁴

The 'double movement[s] of [linguistic] deterritorialization and reterritorialization' which drive the early writings of Idris Davies, Glyn Jones and Gwyn Thomas can, then, be viewed as Modernist dynamics, which index these writers' creative engagement with, and utilization of, the modern 'crisis of language' in early twentieth-century Wales. This connection with the international cultural context of Modernism problematizes narrow critical approaches to these writers, which tend to recycle, in various forms, the idea of the *bardd gwlad* –

that is, of the poet [or writer] as serving his/her [Welsh] community, deliberately cultivating versatility, regularly producing what in English culture tends to be dismissed as 'occasional' verse [or writing] (much of it knowingly disposable), even while capable of functioning at an altogether more 'sophisticated' literary level.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 52.

¹⁵³ John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), p. 90.

¹⁵⁴ European Expressionism is discussed in more detail in chapter five of this thesis.

¹⁵⁵ M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, p. 53. Some other critics have considered the work of Idris Davies and Glyn Jones within the international context of Modernism. For further discussions of Jones's relationship with Modernism, see M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, pp. 100-110 and Laura Wainwright, 'The huge upright Europe-reflecting mirror': The European Dimension in the Early Short Stories and Poems of Glyn Jones', in *Almanac: A Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English – Critical Essays*, ed. Katie Gramich, n.s. 12 (2007-08), 55-88. Gwyn Thomas's work has not been viewed in relation to Modernism before, although he has been viewed as having European stature. David Smith, for example, describes *Oscar* as 'a masterpiece of twentieth-century European fiction'; David Smith, 'The Early Gwyn Thomas', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1985) 71-78 (p. 71).

But it also, in a sense, entails a ‘deterritorialization and reterritorialization’ of the concept of Modernism itself. As Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel suggest, under these circumstances ‘the *term* modernism’ – historically, and often still, employed to signify a principally transnational, metropolitan, high-cultural phenomenon that began at the turn of the century and ended in the early 1930s – ‘breaks open’, like an orthodox word or phrase in the hands of Gwyn Thomas and Glyn Jones,

into something we [might] call geomodernisms, which signals a locational approach to modernisms’ engagement with cultural and political discourses of global modernity. The revelation of such an approach is double. It unveils both unsuspected “modernist” experiments in “marginal” texts and suspected correlations between those texts and others that appear either more conventional or more postmodern.¹⁵⁶

‘Across their differences’, Doyle and Winkiel continue,

these works share something that allows them to be grouped together: a self-consciousness about positionality. Here, positionality is onto-social as well as geographical, entailing a sense of situated and disrupted social presence. Thus in some sense, however local their settings, their horizon is global and their voicing is refracted through the local-global dialectic of inside and outside, belonging and exile [. . .].¹⁵⁷

As I have demonstrated, the largely ‘unsuspected’ Modernist experiments of Davies, Jones and Thomas are inspired by these writers’ awareness of their own ‘deterritorialized’ position or ‘disrupted social presence’ – ‘refracted through the local-global dialectic’ of native Welsh-language and English-language culture, and fuelled by a conflicting sense of both ‘belonging’ and ‘exile’. In essence, their Modernism is the product of an acute ‘self-consciousness about positionality’, or (to use Deleuze and Guattari’s word) ‘territoriality’,¹⁵⁸ that is at once geographical, social and cultural. The ‘conditions’ in which Davies, Jones and Thomas operate as writers are indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, ‘revolutionary’, and point towards a ‘logical slippage’ between the ‘minor’ and ‘the Modernist’ – a nexus that should encourage consideration of more Welsh writing in

¹⁵⁶ Doyle and Winkiel, ‘Introduction’, in *Geomodernisms*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 25.

English from this period in relation to Modernism – which is firmly grounded in ‘temporal’ and ‘cultural specificity’.¹⁵⁹ This ‘self-consciousness about positionality’, moreover, can also be said to inform the work of the widely acknowledged Modernist writer and visual artist, David Jones, as I will suggest in the final section of this chapter, with reference to Jones’s book-length war poem, *In Parenthesis* (1937).¹⁶⁰

IV

David Jones differs from Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies in the sense that he was neither born nor brought up in Wales. Although his father came from a Welsh-speaking family based in Flintshire, North Wales,¹⁶¹ Jones was born in Kent¹⁶² and lived in London for much of his life.¹⁶³ Additionally, Jones was not exposed to the Welsh language in the same way that Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies were; his father had been discouraged from speaking Welsh as a child, and so he was unable to pass the language on to his son.¹⁶⁴ Despite his English upbringing, however, David Jones felt an intense personal and artistic connection with Wales, and he developed a close affinity with Welsh-language tradition – a relationship that finds constant expression in his work. As Jeremy Hooker points out, he also ‘spent one of the most emotionally intense and intellectually fertile periods of his life living [. . .] at Capel-y-ffin in the Black Mountains in 1925-26’.¹⁶⁵ ‘Here’, Hooker adds, ‘through his paintings, he acquired a

¹⁵⁹ Kronfeld, p. 8. Kronfeld notes that ‘clearly, minor writing existed before modernism [. . .] and will continue to exist after it’, and therefore warns that ‘to conflate the minor and the modernist without providing any historical criteria of contextualisation is to blur the temporality and cultural specificity of both’; Kronfeld, p. 8.

¹⁶⁰ Although I refer to *In Parenthesis* as a war poem, the text is actually difficult to define in terms of genre. Its ambiguity is captured in Thomas Dilworth’s analysis: ‘Most of *In Parenthesis* is not verse, yet it is nearly all poetry, which is language used to maximum potential. It is an epic poem’; Thomas Dilworth, *Reading David Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 20.

¹⁶¹ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 71.

¹⁶² Anne Price-Owen, ‘Introduction’, in *David Jones: Diversity in Unity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 1-10 (p. 3).

¹⁶³ Jeremy Hooker, ‘David Jones and the Matter of Wales’, in *David Jones: Diversity in Unity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 11- 25 (p. 11).

¹⁶⁴ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 71.

¹⁶⁵ Hooker, ‘David Jones and the Matter of Wales’, p. 11.

strong sense of the rhythms of Welsh landscapes, while [. . .] his literary and historical studies enhanced his feeling for Wales as a many-storied land'.¹⁶⁶ To some extent, then, Jones self-consciously 'positioned' himself as – or elected to inhabit the 'territory' of – a modern Anglophone Welsh writer. Like his contemporary, Lynette Roberts, who I go on to discuss in chapter two, his Welshness was, in Patrick McGuinness's words, essentially 'a combination of choice and imaginative will'.¹⁶⁷

Jones's 'imaginative will' to integrate Wales and Welsh culture into his oeuvre is nowhere more apparent than in *In Parenthesis* – a poem based on his own experiences as a soldier in the First World War. Conveying and experimentally interweaving the external and psychological reality of conflict on the Western Front, Jones focuses on the Third Battalion of what was his own regiment, the Royal Welch Fusiliers,¹⁶⁸ whom he identifies in his preface as 'mostly Londoners with an admixture of Welshmen'.¹⁶⁹ Through frequent references and allusions, Jones compares the plight of this regiment to that of the three hundred warriors from the *Gododdin* tribe in Aneirin's sixth-century Welsh-language heroic poem, *Y Gododdin*.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, Aneirin's poem, which chronicles the heroic defeat of the *Gododdin* by English armies at the battle of Catraeth around the year 600,¹⁷¹ is a key piece – to reapply Conran's metaphor for Idris Davies's *Gwalia Deserta* – in the 'collage' of discourses or 'languages' that comprises Jones's text, functioning, in part, as a commemoration of the bravery of the soldiers who fought in the Great War. The epigraph to part six of the poem, for example, is taken from *Y Gododdin* and includes the lines, 'Men went to Catraeth: [. . .] death's sure meeting place, the goal of their

¹⁶⁶ Jeremy Hooker, *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 40.

¹⁶⁷ Patrick McGuinness, 'Preface', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), pp. ix-xxxix (p. xii).

¹⁶⁸ Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, p. 11.

¹⁶⁹ David Jones, 'Preface' in David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp. ix-xv (p. x).

¹⁷⁰ Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

marching'.¹⁷² Jones also hints at the eulogistic function of this intertext in his essay,

'Welsh Poetry' (1957), stating that

the poetry of the 'first-bards' was concerned with a recalling and appraisal of the heroes in lyric form¹⁷³ – '*Gwyr y aeth Gatraeth*, Men went to Catraeth'; how natural it is for us of this generation to substitute for Catraeth, *y ffosydd*, 'the trenches'.¹⁷⁴

As previously noted, however, *In Parenthesis*, like *Gwalia Deserta*, actually presents the reader with a melange of discourses – both literary and non-literary. In the following extract from part three, for example, a conversation between a Welsh corporal and a soldier on sentry duty visibly splinters, scattering shards of language which collectively recall the verbal deterritorializations not only of Idris Davies, but also of Glyn Jones and Gwyn Thomas:

Can you see anything, sentry.
Nothing corporal.
'01 Ball is it, no.
Yes corporal.
Keep a sharp outlook sentry – it is the most elementary
disciplines – sights at 350.
Yes corporal.
300 p'r'aps.
Yes corporal.
Starving as brass monkeys – as the Arctic bear's arse –
Diawll – starved as Pen Nant Govid, on the confines of
hell.

(p. 52)

In this passage, the phrase 'Starving as brass monkeys', as Jones informs the reader in his notes on the text, is derived 'from the popular expression among soldiers, 'Enough to freeze the testicles off a brass monkey'.¹⁷⁵ But echoing the deconstructive techniques of Glyn Jones and Gwyn Thomas, this English colloquialism is – to use David Jones's own words in the poem – 'unmade' (p. 60) and 'made newly real' (p. 28): 'brass monkeys' is

¹⁷² David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 133. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹⁷³ David Jones, 'Welsh Poetry', in *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, ed. Harman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), pp. 56-65 (pp. 57-58).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁷⁵ David Jones, 'Notes', p. 199.

used to convey hunger instead of cold. This new, deterritorialized metaphor then accrues a bizarre, almost Surrealistic and, in this sense, again, strikingly Gwyn Thomas-like dint through the phrase, 'Starving [. . .] as the Arctic bear's arse', with 'Arctic bear' connoting both a polar bear and Arcturus, the Great Bear of the solar system.

Subsequently, the corporal – we assume that we are hearing the voice of the corporal, although, as Paul Fussell notes, 'as readers, we don't always know who's speaking, and to whom'¹⁷⁶ in this text – exchanges this defamiliarised English slang for a Welsh-language expletive, '*diawl*', meaning 'Devil, one deprived of light',¹⁷⁷ and then, in an abrupt change of register that again recalls Idris Davies's collage-like praxis in *Gwalia Deserta*, shifts into the language of Welsh mythology: 'Pen Nant Govid, on the confines of/ hell' is derived from the dialogue between Culhwch and the giant, Ysbaddaden Bencawr, in the medieval Welsh tale, *Culhwch ac Olwen*. In this story, Ysbaddaden Bencawr sets a number of tasks for Culhwch to complete before he will allow him to marry his daughter – one of which is to retrieve 'the blood of the Very Black Witch, daughter of the Very White Witch, from Pennant Gofid in the uplands of hell'¹⁷⁸ so that he might 'straighten out'¹⁷⁹ his beard in preparation for it to be shaved for the wedding. There is an element of absurdity to Ysbaddaden Bencawr's request, which is consistent with what Dafydd Johnston calls the often 'extravagantly hyperbolic'¹⁸⁰ style of *Culhwch ac Olwen*,¹⁸¹ and, on one level, its appearance in Jones's text alongside the similarly dislocated and outlandish English-language simile, 'Starving [. . .] as the Arctic bear's arse', seems to represent Jones's attempt to recreate the idiolect of the Welsh soldiers in

¹⁷⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 154.

¹⁷⁷ Jones, 'Notes', p. 199.

¹⁷⁸ Sioned Davies (trans.), *How Culhwch Won Olwen*, in *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 179-213 (p. 197).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 22.

¹⁸¹ This reference to *Culhwch ac Olwen* also seems to relate to Jones's ironic treatment of the theme of heroism. As Johnston notes, 'the action [of *Culhwch ac Olwen*] is often farcical, and gives the impression of being a burlesque of the traditional hero tales'; Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 22.

his battalion; as he later suggested, the Londoners and the Welsh ‘both speak in parables, [and] the wit of both is quick’.¹⁸² Equally, however, from another vantage point, these lines embody – in a kind of ‘a consummation of all burstings-out’ (*In Parenthesis*, p. 24) – the manifold linguistic innovations previously observed in the work of Idris Davies, Gwyn Thomas and Glyn Jones. As Jones reveals in his preface to the poem, ‘this writing is called ‘In Parenthesis’ because I have written it in a kind of space between’.¹⁸³ To some extent, this interstitial zone is temporal – it is the ‘space between’ the Battle of Catraeth and the Battle of Mametz Wood, and also, perhaps, between 1914-18 and 1937. But it is also linguistic: like his Anglophone Welsh contemporaries, David Jones tendentially conceives an alternative, Modernist idiom in this poem through refracting his voice through ‘the local-global dialectic of inside and outside, belonging and exile’ – through purposively locating his writing within, and utilizing the ‘revolutionary conditions’ expedited by the deterritorialized ‘space between’ English-language and Welsh-language literary culture.

The ensuing ‘conversation’ between corporal and soldier lends support to such a reading:

Unwise it is to disturb the sentinel.

Do dogs of Annwn glast this starving air – do they ride the trajectory zone, between the tangled brake above the leaning walls.

This seventh gate is parked tonight.

His lamps hang in this black cold and hang so still; with this still rain slow-moving vapours wreathe to refract their clear ray – like through glassy walls that slowly turn they rise and fracture – for this fog-smoke wraith they cast a dismal sheen.

What does he brew in his cauldron,
over there.

What is it like.

(p. 52)

¹⁸² Jones, ‘Preface’, p. x.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

Here, Jones strays further away from the realistic, conversational mode in which this exchange began into an allusive, oneiric idiom that is self-consciously positioned, like Glyn Jones's equally estranging narrative in 'The Apple-Tree', between Welsh-language and English-language culture. 'Unwise it is to disturb the sentinel' is derived from the line, 'Difficult was a conversation with its sentinel'¹⁸⁴ in the medieval Welsh bard, Taliesin's poem, *Preiddeu Annwn*.¹⁸⁵ This text documents Arthur's descent into *Annwn* or *Annwfn* – the 'hell' to which Ysbaddaden Bencawr refers in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and which Jones identifies in his notes as 'the frozen regions of the Celtic underworld',¹⁸⁶ and it is also echoed in Jones's line, 'His lamps hang in this black cold and hang so still': Taliesin writes in *Preiddeu Annwn* that 'before the door of the gate of Uffern the lamp was/ burning' (p. 265).¹⁸⁷ The interrogative 'Do dogs of Annwn glast this starving air' sustains this interplay with *Preiddeu Annwn*, although it originates, Jones reveals in his notes, from Lady Charlotte Guest's claim that 'dogs of Annwn' are 'still heard by the peasants of Wales, riding the night sky'¹⁸⁸ – a superstition which finds parodic expression in Caradoc Evans's short story, 'Be this Her Memorial' (1915):

Mice and rats, as it is said, frequent neither churches nor poor men's homes. The story I have to tell you about Nanni – the Nanni who was hustled on her way by the Bad Man, [. . .] who saw the Spirit Hounds and heard their moanings two days before Isaac Penparc took wing – the story I have to tell contradicts that theory.¹⁸⁹

Evans's reference to the 'Spirit Hounds' of Annwn, like Jones's, pertains to a general, idiomatic contravention of normative language – though Jones does not construct 'a made-up language which mocks Welshness',¹⁹⁰ in the way that Tony Conran has

¹⁸⁴ Taliesin, 'Book of Taliesin XXX', translated from the Welsh by R Williams, in William F. Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales: Containing the Cymric Poems attributed to the Bards of the Sixth Century* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), I. 265. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹⁸⁵ David Jones, 'Notes', p. 200.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ 'Uffern' is the usual Welsh word for Hell, cognate with 'inferno'.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. Lady Charlotte Guest was the first translator of the *Mabinogion* into English (1849).

¹⁸⁹ Caradoc Evans, 'Be this Her Memorial', in *My People* (Bridgend: Seren, 1987), pp. 108-112 (p. 108). All further references to Evans's stories are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹⁹⁰ Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness*, p. 161.

concluded Evans does. On the contrary, he invokes an ‘obsolete’¹⁹¹ Welsh word, ‘glast’, meaning ‘to bark a lot’,¹⁹² which disrupts both the syntax and the logic of the question, and produces a Glyn Jones-like Delphic effect that is enhanced by the presence of a full stop instead of a question mark. The analogously closed questions, ‘What does he brew in his cauldron/ over there./ What is it like.’, also function in this way, re-inscribing and obfuscating two more lines from *Preiddeu Annwn*: ‘Is it not the cauldron of the chief of Annwyn? What is/ its intention?’ (p. 265). Although ‘This seventh gate is parked tonight’ entrammels Taliesin’s poem in a similar way (Arthur and his men pass through a series of gates as he journeys into the underworld), this intertext is juxtaposed with another Gwyn Thomas-esque reinvented English expression: ‘parked’, as Jones indicates, is created ‘from ‘parky’’,¹⁹³ meaning ‘cold’.¹⁹⁴ And finally, again evoking Idris Davies’s *Gwalia Deserta*, Jones stirs English Romantic discourse into his linguistic ‘cauldron’: ‘for this fog-smoke wraith they cast a dismal sheen’ is plainly concocted from part one of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ballad, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ (1817):

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken –
The ice was all in between.

[. . .]

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God’s name.

[. . .]

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ David Jones, ‘Notes’, p. 199.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
 It perched for vespers nine;
 Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
 Glimmered the white Moon-shine.”¹⁹⁵

Coleridge’s poem also resounds in Jones’s subsequent portrayal of a soldier named ‘Old Adams, Usk’:

Old Adams, Usk, sits stark, he already regrets his sixty-two years. His rifle-butt is a third foot for him, all three supports are wood for him, so chill this floor strikes up, so this chill creeps to mock his bogus ‘listing age.
 Forty-five – Christ – forty five in Her Jubilee Year, before the mothers of these pups had dug to nourish them.
 He grips more tightly the cold band of his sling-swivel; he’d known more sodden, darker ways, below the Old Working. He shifts his failing flanks along the clammy slats, [. . .].

(p. 53)

Ostensibly, the reference here to Old Adams’s ‘listing age’ recreates the speech patterns of soldiers in the trenches: ‘listing’ seems, at first glance, to be an abbreviated form of ‘enlisting’. But ‘listing’, connoting both a stricken ship and the posture of ‘Old Adams’ himself, leaning heavily on his ‘rifle-butt’, also seems to invoke and invert the following simile from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
 As who pursued with yell and blow
 Still treads the shadow of his foe,
 And forward bends his head,
 The ship drove [. . .]

(i. 45-49)

These enmeshed colloquial and English Romantic discourses are, in turn, also amalgamated with native Welsh literary tradition; ‘His rifle-butt is a third foot for him’ is sourced from the following ‘ninth-century Welsh stanza’¹⁹⁶ from *The Red Book of Hergest*:

Mountain snow – the hart on the slope;

¹⁹⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poems*, ed. John Beer (London: Dent, 1963), i. 51-78. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹⁹⁶ David Jones, ‘Notes’, p. 201.

The wind whistles over the ash-tops.
A third foot for the aged is his stick.¹⁹⁷

Here again we witness, in Jones's words, a 'dissolving and splitting of solid things' (*In Parenthesis*, p. 24), as assorted discourses collide and conflate to engender a poetic bricolage in which language is always unstable and diffuse, and therefore perpetually just beyond easy apprehension. In essence, language in *In Parenthesis* appears distanced – at times, remote – and the 'uncanny' prose of Glyn Jones is again called to mind in lines such as 'all three sup/ ports are wood for him, so chill this floor strikes up' and 'He shifts his failing flanks along the clammy slats'.

Jones's alternative, 'deterritorialized' mode of expression is perhaps most memorably displayed, however, at the scene of Corporal Aneurin Lewis's death in part seven:

And the place of their waiting a long burrow,
in the chalk, and steep clift –
but all too shallow against his violence.
Like in long-ship, where you flattened face to kelson for
the shock-breaking on brittle pavised free-board, and the gun-
nel stove, and no care to jettison the dead.

No one to care there for Aneurin Lewis spilled there
who worshipped his ancestors like a Chink
who sleeps in Arthur's lap
who saw Olwen-trefoils some moonlighted night
on precarious slats at Festurbert,
on narrow foothold on le Plantin marsh –
more shaven he is to the bare bone than
Yspaddadan Penkawr.

Properly organised chemists can let make more riving
power than ever Twrch Trwyth;
more blistered he is than painted Troy Towers
and unwholer, limb from limb, than any of them fallen at
Catraeth

(p. 155)

¹⁹⁷ D. S. Evans (trans.), 'Red Book of Hergest IV', in William F. Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales: Containing the Cymric Poems attributed to the Bards of the Sixth Century* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), I. 589.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner continues to figure prominently in this section of the poem; the ‘long burrow’ in which the soldiers lie, ‘flattened face’ to the ground, is compared to a ‘long-ship’ and the enemy fire is likened to waves crashing or ‘shock-breaking’ on the deck. Furthermore, just as the storm in *The Ancient Mariner* is personified – “And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he/ Was tyrannous strong” (ll. 41-42) – the narrator of Jones’s text regards the burrow as ‘too shallow against *his* violence [my emphasis], and the ‘steep [‘chalk’] clift’ of this fragile hideaway comports with the ‘snowy clifts’ encountered by the Mariner and his crew. The phrase, ‘no care to jettison the dead’, on the other hand, itself echoes the following vignette from part four of Coleridge’s ballad:

I looked upon the rotting sea,
and drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck;
And there the dead men lay.

(iv. 240-243)

Whereas ‘No one to care there for Aneirin Lewis spilled there’ maintains the Romantic tenor, the ensuing description of the corporal as a man ‘who worshipped his ancestors like a Chink’ first marks an abrupt diversion into contemporary army slang, and then again, more subtly, integrates historic Welsh-language literature. The lines, ‘who worshipped his ancestors like a Chink/ who sleeps in Arthur’s lap/ who saw Olwen-trefoils some moonlighted night’ seem to emulate the often repetitive syntax of *Y Gododdin*:

It was usual on a spirited horse to defend Gododdin
In the forefront of the battle of the ardent ones,
It was usual that on the track of a deer he was swift,
It was usual that before the war-band of the Deirans
He would attack,¹⁹⁸

[. . .]

¹⁹⁸ Aneirin, *Y Gododdin: Britain’s Oldest Heroic Poem*, translated from the Welsh by A.O.H. Jarman (Llandysul: Gomer, 1988), p. 64, ll. 947-969.

He charged before three hundred of the finest,
 He cut down both centre and wing,
 He excelled in the forefront of the noblest host,

(ll. 947-969)

'Olwen-trefoils', on the other hand, is a reference to the 'Four white clovers [that] would spring up behind [. . .] [Olwen] wherever/ she went' (p. 192) in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Jones cites this line in his notes as 'Four white trefoils sprang up wherever she trod').¹⁹⁹ And 'Who sleeps in Arthur's lap' brings another intertext into the fray, invoking the following passage from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, where, on the eve of war with France, Ensign Pistol, Lieutenant Bardolph, Corporal Nim and the Hostess lament the death of the knight, Falstaff:²⁰⁰

PISTOL [. . .] my manly heart dotherne. Bardolph,
 Be Blithe; Nim, rouse thy vaunting veins; boy, bristle
 Thy courage up. For Falstaff he is dead,
 And we must earn therefore.

BARDOLPH Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or
 In hell!

HOSTESS Nay, sure, he's not in hell: he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever a man
 went to Arthur's bosom.²⁰¹

This euphemistic Shakespearean language is shadowed, however, by Welsh mythological references freighted with the brutal physicality of death; 'more shaved he is to the bare bone than/ Yspaddadan Penkawr', for example, foregrounds the giant's demise in *Culhwch ac Olwen*:

And then Culhwch set out with [. . .] those who wished harm to Ysbaddaden Bencawr, and took the wonders with them to his court. And Caw son of Prydyn came to shave off Ysbaddaden's beard, flesh and skin to the bone, and both ears completely.

And Culhwch said, 'Have you been shaved, man?'

¹⁹⁹ David Jones, 'Notes', p. 220.

²⁰⁰ Ibid..

²⁰¹ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. Gary Taylor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), II. iii. ll. 1-10. Jones invokes Henry V throughout *In Parenthesis*, drawing parallels between the British army in the First World War and the uniting, in Shakespeare's play, of soldiers from various parts of the British Isles in battle against the French. Among the soldiers in *Henry V* is a Welshman, Captain Fluellen, who is aligned with the figure of Dai Greatcoat in Jones's poem.

‘I have,’ he replied.
 ‘And is your daughter now mine?’
 Yours,’ he replied. [. . .] And then Gorau son of Custennin grabbed him by the hair and dragged him to the mound and cut off his head and stuck it on the bailey post. And he took possession of his fort and his territory.

(p. 213)

Again, the explosive force of Jones’s ‘strenuously allusive’²⁰² and esoteric style dissipates through the account of Corporal Aneirn Lewis’s death. The lines, ‘Properly organised chemists can let make more riving/ power than ever Twrch Trwyth’, for instance – in which the speaker opines that not even Twrch Trwyth, ‘the mysterious destroying beast’²⁰³ from *Culwch ac Olwen*, could realise the carnage of modern warfare – are syntactically discomposed. And, recalling the work of Glyn Jones and Gwyn Thomas, an invented word, ‘unwholer’, replaces the standard English, ‘more unwhole’.

Indeed, in occupying this linguistic ‘space between’ English-language and Welsh-language culture, *In Parenthesis* can be regarded, as Chris Wigginton contends, as ‘writing which deals with the condition of Welshness’²⁰⁴ in the 1930s and 40s, and, more specifically, as writing which indexes the ‘epochal rupture’²⁰⁵ of language and culture in Wales during this period. Jones’s linguistic preoccupations could, as Jeremy Hooker writes, be said to ‘illuminate the complex situation of the modern Anglo-Welsh writer, a situation brought about by the social [. . .] pressures behind Anglicisation in his father’s generation’.²⁰⁶ Moreover, *In Parenthesis* can be viewed as a text that not only inhabits and dramatises the modern Welsh ‘crisis of language’, but also, effectively, turns it into a ‘language of crisis’, harnessing its explosive, estranging potential in order to create a ‘new verbal ikon’ capable of ‘overcoming the futility felt by David Jones and all other

²⁰² Fussell, p. 145.

²⁰³ David Jones, ‘Notes’, p. 211.

²⁰⁴ Wigginton, *Modernism from the Margins*, p. 111.

²⁰⁵ Joe Cleary, ‘Introduction: Ireland and Modernity’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-21 (p. 2).

²⁰⁶ Hooker, *Diversity in Unity*, p. 12.

combatants when trying to tell civilians what the war was really like'.²⁰⁷ For Jones, the linguistic 'parenthesis' or 'space between' – the deterritorialized, no-man's land – in which he self-consciously positions himself as a Welsh author writing in English, in a sense, becomes paradigmatic – representative of a more general feeling of disintegration, disjuncture and disorientation roused by the events of the First World War. Essentially, moreover, in *In Parenthesis*, as Duncan Campbell has said of Jones's later book-length poem, *The Anathémata* (1952), war is 'linked to *cultural* chaos and instability [my emphasis]';²⁰⁸ and Jones's association of the modern Welsh 'crisis of language' with the soldier's experience in the trenches is made explicit in part four of the text:

Lance-Corporal [Aneirin] Lewis looked about him and on all this
liquid action.

It may be remembered Seithenin and the desolated can-
Trefs, the sixteen fortified places, the great cry of the sea,
above the sigh of Gwyddno when his entrenchments stove
in. Anyway he kept the joke to himself for there was none
to share it in that company, for although Watcyn knew every-
thing about the Neath fifteen, and could sing *Sospan Fach* to
make the traverse ring, he might have been an Englishman
when it came to matters near to Aneirin's heart.

(p. 89)

The 'liquid action' that the narrator records here pertains to the 'continuing rain' (p. 88) and the failure of the 'trench-drain' (p. 88) to prevent flooding – a situation, which Lance-Corporal Lewis ironically likens to 'the inundation of [the city of] Cantref Gwaelod ruled over by Gwyddno, whose drunken dyke-warden, Seithenin, failed to attend his duties'²⁰⁹ in a poem from *The Black Book of Carmarthen*. The following extract from the poem illustrates 'the sigh of Gwyddno' 'above':

A cry from the roaring sea
Impels me from my resting-place this night;
Common after excess is far-extending destruction.

²⁰⁷ Dilworth, p. 20.

²⁰⁸ Duncan Campbell, 'David Jones: "No End to these Wars, No End, No End/ At All"', in *Wales at War: Critical Essays on Literature and Art*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), pp. 25-38 (p. 31).

²⁰⁹ David Jones, 'Notes', p. 211.

The grave of Seithenin the weak-minded
Between Caer Cenedir and the shore
Of the great sea and Cinran.²¹⁰

The corporal, however, is unable to share this ‘joke’ with Watcyn, who embodies the disjunction between traditional Welsh literary discourse and the new social discourses of South Wales. Watcyn’s knowledge of native Welsh-language culture, it seems, is limited to *Sospan Fach*, a song adopted by rugby supporters, and sung at matches.²¹¹ Indeed, as the narrator observes, Watcyn ‘might have been an Englishman when it came to matters near to Aneirin’s heart’ – ‘Aneirin’ connoting both the corporal and the poet.

In this sense, just as the ‘new verbal ikon[s]’ of Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies were compared to the new ‘languages’ of European Modernism, so Jones’s alternative idiom might be likened to the experimental evocations of war by other Modernist artists and writers: to the violent, chaotic dynamism represented in Tullio Crali’s Futurist painting, *Air Battle I* (1936-38, Figure 3),²¹² for example, or the sinisterly Expressionist use of colour in Otto Dix’s painting *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* (1914-15, Figure 4). We might also place Jones’s alternative ‘language’ alongside that exhibited in the war poetry of the German Expressionist writer, August Stramm, who fought, and was ultimately killed, in the First World War. ‘Guard-Duty’ (1915), a poem that strongly evokes part three of *In Parenthesis*, provides a particularly thought-provoking example:

A star frightens the steeple cross
a horse gasps smoke
iron clanks drowsily
mists spread

²¹⁰ D. S. Evans (trans.), ‘The Black Book of Carmarthen XXXVIII’, in William F. Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales: Containing the Cymric Poems attributed to the Bards of the Sixth Century* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), I. 302.

²¹¹ As Jones points out in his notes, *Sospan Fach* is ‘associated with Rugby Football matches’. Jones adds, ‘I am indebted to the secretary of Llanelly Rugby Football club, who kindly provided me with a copy of this song’; David Jones, ‘Notes’, p. 201. John Davies describes how ‘the rugby clubs could draw upon the strong tradition of communal activity which had taken root in the industrial districts of Wales’; John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 440.

²¹² In accordance with the Futurist philosophy, however, Tullio Crali’s painting is a celebration rather than an indictment of war.

fears
 staring shivering
 shivering
 cajoling
 whispering
 You!²¹³

Here, lines such as 'A star frightens the steeple cross' and 'a horse gasps smoke' have an estranging effect, which is amplified through the lack of punctuation and conventional syntax. The language of the poem is, therefore, fragmented, both in terms of its form and its meaning, with each word or phrase's relationship to the next seeming ambivalent. The reader is left unsure, for example, as to whether to read the final two lines as 'whispering, "You!"', or to view 'whispering' as another impression or perception, like 'shivering' and 'cajoling', and 'You!' as an intruding voice. Significantly, as Richard Sheppard notes, studying Stramm's poetry in the original German reveals how, like David Jones, he 'was [also] prepared to mutate and mutilate the conventional forms of words'²¹⁴ in order to reify the experience of war. Indeed, Jones's praxis also has much in common with that of the Austrian writer, Georg Trakl, in his poem, 'Night':

The fires of the nations gold-blaze
 all over, and across
 black streaked cliffs, drunken with death,
 plunges the glowing vortex,
 the blue glacier's wave.
 In the valley drones the huge
 bell-sound: flames, curses,
 and the occult games
 of voluptuousness.
 The sky
 is stormed by a petrified head.²¹⁵

Here, Trakl dreams up a nightmarish and abstract language of 'symbols and colours'²¹⁶ in an attempt to verbalise the horror and delirium of world war.

²¹³ August Stramm, 'Guard-Duty', translated from the German by Patrick Bridgewater, in *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, ed. Jon Silkin, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 240.

²¹⁴ Richard Sheppard, 'The Poetry of August Stramm: A Suitable Case for Deconstruction', *Journal of European Studies* n.s. 15:261 (1985). Available at <http://jes.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/15/4/261> [accessed 18 January 2008].

²¹⁵ Georg Trakl, 'Night', translated from the German by David McDuff, Jon Silkin and R. S. Furness, in *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, ed. Jon Silkin, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 231.

This chapter has demonstrated how, in accreting his own particular language of crisis, David Jones inhabits and, like Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies, *utilizes* the Modernistic ‘conditions’ established by the ‘crisis of language’ in early twentieth-century Wales. Moreover, as I have illustrated, David Jones’s ‘new verbal ikon’ operates by means of the very explosive, transformational linguistic practices witnessed in the writing of his marginalized Welsh contemporaries, foregrounding what Kronfeld recognises as ‘the decentering, deterritorializing, indeed the revolutionary and innovative force of minor writing’ –²¹⁷ particularly the ‘minor writing’ of early twentieth century Wales. Gwyn Jones, editor of the English-language Welsh journal, *The Welsh Review*, sensed this creative potency at the end of the 1930s:

A year or so ago I was writing in these words of the Welsh contribution to modern literature, and I see no reason to change them: “[. . .] the last few years have seen the emergence of a group of young writers (young in age or work) who for the first time are interpreting Wales to the world. They are as diverse as the land that gave them their rich if ragged heritage, but I believe firmly that they will soon be recognised as the most valuable leaven in English literature since the Irishmen opened insular eyes at the beginning of the century. Thus South Wales, in the nineteenth century the matrix of Great Britain’s industrial and imperial expansion, in this new age will shake with new impulse the weary body of English Literature.”²¹⁸

Moreover, this chapter has shown that, when considered in relation to the work of all these writers, Modernism, too, is no longer a ‘solid thing’, but a fluid concept, open to interrogation and diversification. In the words of Peter Nicholls, in his preface to the second edition of his expansive study, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, Modernism emerges ‘not [as] one thing but [as] many and [. . .] its divergent forms are profoundly determined

²¹⁶ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ‘Brief Biographies’, in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 613-640 (p. 637).

Trakl committed suicide in 1914 while serving on the Eastern Front; Bradbury and McFarlane, ‘Brief Biographies’, p. 637.

²¹⁷ Kronfeld, p. 4.

²¹⁸ Gwyn Jones, ‘Editorial’, *The Welsh Review*, n.s. 1 (February 1939), 3-7 (p. 3-4).

by specificities of time and place'.²¹⁹ This inclusive and searching approach to Modernism will continue to inform all of the discussions of Anglophone Welsh Modernism that follow.

²¹⁹ Peter Nicholls, 'Preface to the Second Edition', in *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. viii.

‘Always observant and slightly obscure’: Lynette Roberts as Welsh Modernist

David Jones was not, in fact, the only writer from outside Wales to avail himself of the potentially Modernistic ‘conditions’ of Anglophone Welsh writing. Neither was he the only artist to assimilate these conditions in a bid to render the experience of war. His contemporary, Lynette Roberts, was born in Buenos Aires and spent much of her early childhood in South America. Her family, however, was English-speaking (though her parents were of Welsh descent), and she received an English education in Bournemouth and then London, where she studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts.²²⁰ In 1939, Roberts married the Welsh poet, Keidrych Rhys, who had established the seminal Anglo-Welsh literary magazine, *Wales*, in 1937; and the couple took up residence in the small village of Llanybri in Carmarthenshire. Although Rhys was frequently called away on military service, and both he and Roberts made intermittent excursions to London,²²¹ Llanybri remained their home throughout the Second World War. During this period, Roberts produced a body of poetry that was published by T.S. Eliot’s Faber and Faber Press in two volumes: *Poems* (1944) and *Gods With Stainless Ears: A Heroic Poem* (1951). Faber and Faber had also published David Jones’s *In Parenthesis* in 1937. Indeed, just as Capel-y-ffin and the Black Mountains became sites of artistic inspiration for David Jones, Llanybri and the wider landscape of West Wales were formative to Lynette Roberts’s poetry.²²² ‘Poem from Llanybri’ (1944), where the poet-speaker gently encourages her friend, the poet Alun Lewis, to visit her in the village, attests to the centrality of this locale in her work:

²²⁰ Patrick McGuinness, ‘Introduction’, in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. vii–xvii (p. viii).

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. x.

If you come my way that is . . .
 Between now and then, I will offer you
 A fist full of rock cress fresh from the bank
 The valley tips of garlic red with dew
 Cooler than shallots, a breath you can swank

In the village when you come. At noon-day
 I will offer you a choice bowl of cawl
 Served with a 'lover's' spoon and a chopped spray
 Of leeks or savori fach, not used now,

In the old way you'll understand. The din
 Of children singing through the eyelet sheds
 Ringing smith hoops, chasing the butt of hens;
 Or I can offer you Cwmcelyn spread

With quartz stones from the wild scratchings of men:
 You will have to go carefully with clogs
 Or thick shoes for it's treacherous the fen,
 The East and West Marshes also have bogs.²²³

It is not only the topography of this area – the 'valley' and its flora, the 'village', and the sweeping marshland of 'Cwmcelyn' – but also Welsh tradition that Roberts fondly and enthusiastically invokes here: the poet-speaker resurrects the 'old way[s]' of the region, offering 'cawl/ Served with a 'lover's' spoon and a chopped spray/ Of leeks or savori fach'. And the form of the poem, too, owes much to Welsh literary history. Tony Conran notes that 'Welsh poetry is full of [the] social ritual' of 'asking', citing 'An Invitation to William Parry to visit Northolt' by the eighteenth-century poet, Goronwy Owen, as an example of this trend.²²⁴ Conran also claims that 'Poem from Llanybri' is adapted from the fifteenth-century Welsh 'request poem (*cynydd gofyn*), in which the poet would ask a patron for a gift (such as a horse, a weapon, or a garment), sometimes for himself but more often on behalf of a nobleman.'²²⁵ Roberts also seems to adapt stylistic techniques from ancient Welsh poetic tradition in this text; her use of assonance and

²²³ Lynette Roberts, 'Poem from Llanybri', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), p. 3. All further references to Roberts's poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

²²⁴ Tony Conran, 'Lynette Roberts: The Lyric Pieces', *Poetry Wales*, n.s. 19.2, 125-133 (p. 132).

²²⁵ Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 42.

rhyme in 'The din/ Of children singing through the eyelet sheds', for example, is reminiscent of the *cynghanedd* or 'sound correspondences' of 'Welsh strict-metre poetry'.²²⁶

Indeed, Roberts draws freely on native Welsh literature in her work, embracing it with what Conran has described as 'an inspired curiosity',²²⁷ and resisting its effacement and marginalisation both within and outside Wales. In 'The Circle of C' (1944), for instance, in which the poet-speaker seeks reassurance and consolation from the ancient, 'many-storied'²²⁸ landscape of Wales during wartime, she writes:

I walk and cinder bats riddle my cloak
I walk to Cwmcelyn ask prophets the way.

'There is no way they cried crouched on the hoarstone rock
And the Dogs of Annwn roared louder than of late.'²²⁹

Here, we witness the re-emergence of the 'Dogs of Annwn' (discussed in the previous chapter with reference to the work of David Jones and Caradoc Evans), who, Roberts informs the reader in her notes accompanying the poem, 'appear in early [Welsh] triads, and in the first story of *The Mabinogion*, (Pwyll Prince of Dyved)'.²³⁰ Roberts also makes extensive use of numerous Welsh-language literary sources in her book-length poem, *Gods With Stainless Ears* (which I explore in more detail below), including the medieval poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym, Aneirin's *Y Gododdin*, *Canu Llywarch Hen* or 'The Song of Llywarch the Old' (a collection of ninth-century *englynion*),²³¹ and the Bible of William Morgan (1545-1604). Some of these texts she cites in the original Welsh, as epigraphs. Moreover, Roberts was clearly inspired by Welsh culture in all its forms, for she also

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 35.

²²⁷ Conran, 'Lynette Roberts: The Lyric Pieces', p. 131.

²²⁸ Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, p. 40.

²²⁹ Lynette Roberts, 'The Circle of C', p. 7.

²³⁰ Lynette Roberts, 'Notes on Legend and Form', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), pp. 38-40 (p. 38).

²³¹ The *englyn* is 'the oldest recorded Welsh metrical form'; Meic Stephens (ed.), *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

atomised Welsh architecture in a commentary entitled ‘Simplicity of the Welsh Village’ (1945), and turned her attention to Welsh craft in her article, ‘Coracles on the Towy’, which was published in *The Field* magazine in 1945. Furthermore, in her essay accompanying the seven prose pieces that comprise her 1944 collection, *An Introduction to Village Dialect*, she sets out to prove, to those who would occlude the distinctive culture of Wales, that there is ‘a tradition and root to the Welsh dialect’,²³² and expresses her intention to ‘discuss, at a later interval, the history, mythology, weather, craft, custom, literal syntax and idiom of the Cymric language, in relation to the contemporary dialect in [Llanybri]’.²³³

Several of Roberts’s poems, however, reveal that her relationship with Wales and Welsh culture was not always entirely harmonious. In ‘Lamentation’ (1944), she recalls how

To the village of lace and stone
Came strangers. I was one of these
Always observant and slightly obscure.
I roamed the hills of bird and bone
Rescuing bees from under the storm.²³⁴

In these lines, Roberts conflates her move to Llanybri – ‘the village of lace and stone’ – with the dispersive tide of the Second World War, and her poetic voice, in contrast to the rooted, homely speaker of ‘Poem from Llanybri’, sounds like that of a wandering exile. Indeed, among the ‘strangers’ with whom Roberts identifies in ‘Lamentation’ are the women and children who were evacuated to West Wales to escape the bombing in London, and whose disparity she contemplated in her *Evacuees Report*, a diary entry for

²³² Lynette Roberts, ‘An Introduction to Welsh Dialect’, in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), pp. 107-124 (p. 124). As Patrick McGuinness notes, ‘this article precedes [...] seven stories in *An Introduction to Village Dialect*, which were conceived originally as illustrations of the continuities between the living speech of Llanybri and the ancient forms of Welsh’; Patrick McGuinness, ‘Notes’, in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. 221-229 (p. 223).

²³³ Roberts, ‘An Introduction to Welsh Dialect’, p. 124.

²³⁴ Lynette Roberts, ‘Lamentation’, p. 8.

February 2nd 1941. Here she writes that ‘A grown-up evacuee called on me this morning and this was roughly her opinion’: ‘What could they [that is, the people of Llanybri] have talked about before we came? Have you heard I sit on my ass all day and smoke?’ (In Llanybri no woman smokes).²³⁵ Another ‘stranger’ and, by extension, a figure with whom the poet-speaker feels a close affinity in ‘Lamentation’ is a young pilot named Petwick Lawrence, who, Roberts also reveals in her *Evacuees Report*, was ‘killed as his plane crashed into a meadow’ behind [her Llanybri] cottage’.²³⁶ Roberts’s empathy with the airman is subtly and movingly communicated in the poem as she associates his violent death with the miscarriage that she suffered in March 1940:

For I met death before birth:
Fought for life and in reply lost
My own with a cold despair.
I hugged the fire around the hearth
To warm the beat and wing
Yet knew the symbol when it came
Lawrence had found the same.

(p. 8)

Roberts conflates this event with the destructiveness of warfare in a similar way in part four of *Gods With Stainless Ears* (1951), composed between 1941-43 – though her poetic style is more obviously experimental and challenging in this text (a feature which I discuss more fully later in this chapter):

Rising ashly, challenge blood to curb – compose –
Martial mortal, face a red mourning alone.
To the star of the magnitude O my God,
Shriek, sear my swollen breasts, send succour
To sift and settle me. – This the labour of it. . .

But reality worse than the pain intrudes,
And no doctor for six days. This
Also is added truth. Razed for lack of
Incomputable finance. For womb was
Fresh as the day and solid as your hand.

²³⁵ Lynette Roberts, ‘A Carmarthenshire Diary’, in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. 3-93 (p. 32).

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

BLOOD OF ALL MEN. DRENCHED ANCESTORS OF WAR
 WHETHER GERMAN. BRITISH. RUSSIAN. OR HIDE
 FROM SOME OTHER FOREIGN FIELD: REMEMBER AGAIN
 BLOOD IS HUMAN. BORN AT COST. REMEMBER THIS²³⁷

Here, the trauma of miscarriage – the bleeding, pain and loss of life – is paralleled with the bloodshed of war. And Roberts uses her personal tragedy, as she informs the reader in the prose ‘argument’ that accompanies this section,²³⁸ to show ‘*that the birth of flesh and blood is everywhere a noble event and that lives of all nationalities must be considered sacred – not to be callously destroyed*’ (p. 60).

The poet-speaker’s isolation – ‘And no doctor for six days’ – adds a particular poignancy to these lines. Indeed, isolation is a recursive theme in Roberts’s work. In the lines from ‘The Circle of C’ noted previously, for example, Roberts again casts herself as a ‘stranger’ and interloper in Wales. The poet-speaker ‘ask[s] prophets the way’ to Cwmcelyn, but they avow that ‘There is no way’, as if to render her a permanent outsider. This impression is compounded by the attendance at this scene of the ‘Dogs of Annwn’. Roberts glosses this in her textual notes as ‘an interpretation of raiders droning over estuary and hill; their stiff and ghostly flight barking terror into the hearts of the villagers’;²³⁹ but the way in which these spectral dogs ‘roar louder than of late’ also intimates that they have been roused and provoked by the poem’s mysterious ‘cloak[ed]’ intruder. The ‘cinder bats’ that ‘riddle’ the poet-speaker’s ‘cloak’ have a similar effect. On one level, Roberts seems to be comparing these dark, flitting shapes to cinders jumping in a riddle or sieve as it is shaken; but to ‘riddle’ can also mean ‘to talk in riddles’, suggesting that the Welsh environment is somehow conspiring to bemuse and exclude her. The mention of a ‘cloak’ is significant here. Roberts dressed in a bright red cloak

²³⁷ Lynette Roberts, *Gods With Stainless Ears: A Heroic Poem*, pp. 60-61.

²³⁸ *Gods With Stainless Ears* is framed by a series of prose ‘arguments’, which Roberts included on the advice of the text’s editor, T.S. Eliot; Patrick McGuinness, ‘Notes’, in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), pp. 135-150 (p. 143).

²³⁹ Lynette Roberts, ‘Notes on Legend and Form’, p. 38.

when she went out walking in Llanybri and the surrounding area, suggesting, as John Pikoulis speculates, that she ‘made a vivid [and, surely, to some people at this frightening time, vaguely unsettling] impression’.²⁴⁰ Indeed, such was Roberts’s perceived eccentricity that some villagers decided that she was really a German spy,²⁴¹ a slight that she responded to in her poem, ‘Raw Salt on Eye’ (1944):

Stone village, who would know that I lived alone:
Who would know that I suffered a two-edged pain,
Was accused of spycraft to full innate minds with loam,
Was felled innocent, suffered a stain as rare as Cain’s.

[. . .]

Hard people, will wash up now, bake bread and hang
Dishcloth over the weeping hedge. I can not raise
My mind, for it has gone wandering away with hum
I shall not forget; and your ill-mannered praise.²⁴²

This situation calls to mind Jean Rhys’s pertinently titled 1966 short story, ‘I Spy a Stranger’, in which Laura, an unconventional, artistic, cosmopolitan woman from Prague, is suspected of being a spy by the residents of an English town during wartime. As Mrs Hudson, Laura’s sympathetic though circumspect cousin and landlady in the town, apprises:

Then the day came when I was going to give her [Laura] another hint, she said ‘I’ve started packing’. And all her things were piled on the floor. Such a lot of junk to travel about the world with – books and photographs and old dresses, scarves and all that, and reels of coloured cotton.

*A cork with a face drawn on it, a postcard of the Miraculous Virgin in the church of St Julien-le-Pauvre, a china inkstand patterned with violets, a quill pen never used, a ginger jar, a box full of old letters, a fox fur with the lining gone, silk scarves each with a history – the red, the blue, the brown, the purple [. . .], the bracelet bought in Florence because it looked like a stained glass window [. . .].*²⁴³

The coloured garments that the narrator catalogues here seem to function as markers of Laura’s difference in a way that invests with further symbolic significance the vision of

²⁴⁰ John Pikoulis, ‘Lynette Roberts and Alun Lewis’, in *Poetry Wales*, n.s. 19.2, 9-29 (p. 9).

²⁴¹ Patrick McGuinness, ‘Introduction’, in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), pp. xi-xxxix (p. xviii).

²⁴² Lynette Roberts, ‘Raw Salt on Eye’, pp. 6-7.

²⁴³ Jean Rhys, ‘I Spy A Stranger’, in *Jean Rhys: Collected Stories* (New York and London: Norton, 1987), pp. 232-255 (p. 251).

Roberts's red cloak against the 'stones' of Llanybri. Indeed, Jean Rhys's background is markedly similar to Roberts's. Rhys was born to a Welsh father and a Dominican Creole mother, of British descent, on the Caribbean island of Dominica,²⁴⁴ and was sent to school in London at the age of seventeen. She spent the ensuing years moving between London and Paris and, later, between various towns and villages in England;²⁴⁵ and her fiction, beginning with her Modernist novels of the 1930s and 40s, turns on themes of deracination, itinerancy and apartness. In her 1934 novel, *Voyage in the Dark*, for example, Rhys's heroine, Anna, moves to England to begin a new life, yet experiences a nostalgic longing for the Caribbean home that she has left behind:

I didn't like England at first. I couldn't get used to the cold. Sometimes I would shut my eyes and pretend that the heat of the fire, or the bed-clothes drawn up round me, was sun-heat; or I would pretend I was standing outside the house at home, looking down Market Street to the Bay. When there was a breeze the sea was millions of spangles; and on still days it was purple as Tyre and Sidon. Market Street smelt of the wind, but the narrow street smelt of niggers and wood-smoke and salt fishcakes fried in lard. (When the black women sell fishcakes on the savannah they carry them in trays on their heads, 'Salt fishcakes, all sweet an charmin', all sweet an' charmin'.) It was funny, but that was what I thought about more than anything else – the smell of the streets and the smells of frangipani and lime juice and cinnamon and cloves, and sweets made of ginger and syrup, and incense after funerals or Corpus Christi processions, and the patients standing outside the surgery next door, and the smell of the sea-breeze and the different smell of the land breeze.

Sometimes it was is [sic] if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together.²⁴⁶

This passage is strikingly similar, both in its subject matter and in its impressionistic, almost stream-of-consciousness style, to Lynette Roberts's 1944 poem, 'Royal Mail', in which the poet-speaker recalls the South America of her childhood:

I would see again São Paulo;
The coffee coloured house with its tarmac roof
And spray of tangerine berries.
I again climb the mountain cable
And see Pernambuco with its dark polished table
The brilliance of its sky piercing through the trees

²⁴⁴ Lilian Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Portrait of Jean Rhys* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 7.

²⁴⁵ Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour*, pp. 46-280.

²⁴⁶ Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 7.

[. . .]

The peacock struts and nets mimicrying butterflies,
 And the fazenda shop clinking like ice in an enamel jug
 As you open the door. The stench of wine-wood,
 Saw-dust, maize flour, pimentos, and basket of birds,
 With the ear-tipped 'Molto bien signorit' and the hot mood
 Blazing from the drooping noon. Outside sweating gourds
 Dripping rind and peel; yet inside cool as lemon,
 Orange, avocado pear.
 While in this damp and stony stare of a village
 Such images are unknown:
 So would I think upon these things
 In the event that someday I shall return to my native surf
 And feel again the urgency of sun and soil.²⁴⁷

Rhys and Roberts's comparable geographical and cultural displacement seems to account, at least in part, for their shared Modernist aesthetics: as Chana Kronfeld points out, 'Modernism is famous for its affinity for the marginal, the exile, the "other"'.²⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Roberts's, in some ways, apparently wilful 'outsider's [appearance] and perspective'²⁴⁹ is balanced by a countervailing impetus to be accepted and assimilated into the Llanybri community, as suggested in the following lines from her diary entry for March 20th 1940: 'The wind was cold', she reflects. 'I drew my scarlet cape around me and walked leisurely, as village people do'.²⁵⁰

While Roberts clearly gained some sense of belonging during her time in Llanybri through emulating the habits and customs of its residents, her awareness of her similarly peripheral position as a writer seems to have been more difficult to assuage. As previously established, Roberts was a resolute explorer of Welsh literary culture, 'roaming' – as she writes in 'Lamentation' – its ancient terrain and salvaging or 'rescuing' it from homogenisation and elision by creatively invoking it in her own work. The image of the poet-speaker rescuing 'bees from under the storm' in 'Lamentation' also possesses

²⁴⁷ Lynette Roberts, 'Royal Mail', p. 27.

²⁴⁸ Kronfeld, p. 2.

²⁴⁹ McGuinness, 'Introduction', in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, p. xii.

²⁵⁰ Lynette Roberts, 'A Carmarthenshire Diary', p. 9.

a quasi-allegorical timbre, for the bee positively embodies this potential for dissemination, vitality and survival. Despite her dedication to Welsh literature, however, Roberts never learnt [to speak] Welsh';²⁵¹ rather, her husband, who was a native Welsh speaker, seems to have been the main conduit for her knowledge of the language. Moreover, it would be fair to say that Roberts effectively remained, as she suggests in 'Lamentation', a kind of cultural '*stranger*' in Wales – a cosmopolitan outsider who produced avant-garde English-language poetry and prose. When we consider the 'Dogs of Annwn' from 'A Circle of C' with this mind, they may be seen as prohibitive avatars and custodians of an ultimately inaccessible established Welsh literary tradition; and the isolated space occupied by the poet-speaker suggests Roberts's participation in a remote, hermetic form of Anglophone Welsh writing, which is only able to speak *for* and not *to* Welsh-speaking Wales. A similar sense of cultural alienation underlies Roberts's description of herself in 'Lamentation' as 'Always observant and slightly obscure'. These words are freighted with the opinions of Roberts's urbane, Anglo-American literary mentors, T.S. Eliot and Robert Graves, who remarked on her 'unusual gift for observation'²⁵² and her tendency towards opacity and abstruseness respectively. As Graves wrote in a letter to Roberts on December 3rd 1944:

You are saying [in your poetry that] 'To interpret the present god-awful complex confusion one must unconfusedly use the language of god-awful confusion'. . . [T]here are a great many small points I'd like to question you about: such as your views on how much interrelation of dissociated ideas is possible in a single sentence without bursting the sense.²⁵³

It is this notion, imaged in 'Lamentation' and 'The Circle of C', of Lynette Roberts, the poet, as cultural 'stranger' that I intend to pursue and expand in the remainder of this chapter in relation to the subject of Anglophone Welsh Modernism.

²⁵¹ Conran, 'Lynette Roberts: The Lyrical Pieces', p. 131.

²⁵² T.S. Eliot cited in Patrick McGuinness, 'Introduction', in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, p. ix.

²⁵³ Robert Graves cited in Patrick McGuinness, 'Introduction', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, p. xxxiii.

For, in effect, the opening lines of both 'Lamentation' and 'A Circle of C' illustrate the culturally '*detrterritorialized*' position of the Anglophone Welsh writer, analysed in the previous chapter: that 'common experience', to reiterate M. Wynn Thomas's thesis – 'simultaneously [. . .] liberating and inhibiting – of belonging to a place apart; a historical [and cultural] region which was certainly not assimilable to England, but which could not be integrated into traditional Wales either'.²⁵⁴ The two poems, in a sense, manifest twentieth-century Anglophone Welsh writers' proclivity to find themselves – or actively become – in Deleuze and Guattari's words, 'stranger[s] *within* [their] own [and also within the Welsh] language'.²⁵⁵ Indeed, Roberts's multinational background may well have elicited even more profound feelings of cultural 'detrterritorialization' than those experienced by the writers discussed in the foregoing chapter. Whereas Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies were purposefully 'detrterritorializing' language and simultaneously 'reterritorializing' it in the form of a new, self-consciously Anglo-Welsh 'verbal ikon', Lynette Roberts also appears to have distanced her work from that of her English-speaking Welsh literary peers. In 'An Introduction to Welsh Dialect', for instance, she identifies the term 'Anglo-Welsh' as '*having no origin but a superficial one*',²⁵⁶ and in her 1955 sketch of the contemporary English and Welsh-language literary scene in Wales for the *Times Literary Supplement*, 'The Welsh Dragon' – an article in which she only very briefly mentions her own publications²⁵⁷ – she concludes:

Many Welsh writers have not been mentioned, but however wide the net is stretched it is unlikely to include a higher proportion of the forceful and the unexpected. For what the Welsh dragon lacks at present is fire [. . .].²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 26.

²⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 26.

²⁵⁶ Lynette Roberts, 'An Introduction to Welsh Dialect', p. 107.

²⁵⁷ Roberts simply writes that 'Miss Lynette Roberts published her second book of poetry last year'; Lynette Roberts, 'The Welsh Dragon', in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. 139-142 (p. 140).

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

Thus, while Roberts's creative relationship with Wales was always founded on a genuine interest in and admiration for its culture and its people, she, like David Jones, was also fully aware of the potentially explosive – or to extend her metaphor from 'The Welsh Dragon' – incendiary conditions in which the Anglophone Welsh writer of the early twentieth century operated, and made extensive use of those 'liberating', transformational circumstances in her poetry. In essence, through adopting the position of 'Anglo-Welsh' writer – and it is important to remember that, as Patrick McGuinness stresses, Roberts was 'Welsh by a combination of choice and imaginative will'²⁵⁹ – she harnessed the Anglophone Welsh writer's potentiality to become 'a stranger within [. . .] language' and cultivated the edgy or (again, in her own words) 'unexpected' and 'forceful' modes of writing that this entailed. Whereas Saunders Lewis, who also fought to preserve and promote the indigenous culture of Wales, (and whose lecture, 'Is there an Anglo-Welsh Literature?', I discussed in the previous chapter) accused 'Anglo-Welsh' writers of being 'too clearly deracinés',²⁶⁰ it was precisely the artistic potential of the Anglophone Welsh writer's deterritorialized position that Roberts sought to utilise in her poetry.

This is apparent, for example, in the poem, 'Crossed and Uncrossed' (1944), in which Roberts recalls walking through the East End of London after a bombing raid. In these stanzas specifically, she imaginatively poeticizes her diary account from June 12th 1942, where she observes 'library buildings [. . .] still smouldering' and a burnt-out Church, 'wet and empty like a grotesque seashell'.²⁶¹

Heard the steam rising from the chill blue bricks
Heard the books sob and the buildings huge groan
As the hard crackle of flames leapt on firemen
and paled the red walls.

Bled their hands in anguish to check the fury

²⁵⁹ McGuinness, 'Introduction', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, p. xii.

²⁶⁰ Saunders Lewis, 'Is there an Anglo-Welsh Literature?', p. 11.

²⁶¹ Lynette Roberts, 'A Carmarthenshire Diary', p. 46.

Knowing fire had raged for week and a day:
Clung to buildings like swallows flat and exhausted
under the storm.

Fled the sky: fragments of the Law, kettles and glass:
Lamb's ghost screamed: Pegasus melted and fell
Meteor of shining light on to stone court
and only wing grave.

Round Church built in a Round Age, cold with grief,
Coloured Saints of glass lie buried at your feet:
Crusaders uncross limbs by the green light of flares,
burn into Tang shapes.

Over firedrake floors the 'Smith' organ pealed
Roared into flames when you proud window
Ran undaunted: the lead roof dripping red tears
curving to crash.²⁶²

Roberts acknowledges her debt to Greek poetry – more specifically, to the Sapphic stanza form – in her notes to 'Crossed and Uncrossed';²⁶³ and the style of this poem is also reminiscent, at times, of H.D.'s 'The Walls Do Not Fall' (1944), another poetic meditation on the devastation of parts of London during the Second World War:

ruin everywhere, yet as the fallen roof
leaves the sealed room
open to the air,

so, through our desolation,
thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us
through the gloom:

[. . .]

trembling at a known street-corner,
we know not nor are known;
the Pythian pronounces – we pass on

to another cellar, to another sliced wall
where poor utensils show
like rare objects in a museum;

Pompeii has nothing to teach us,
we know crack of volcanic fissure,
slow flow of lava,

²⁶² Lynette Roberts, 'Crossed and Uncrossed', p. 20.

²⁶³ Lynette Roberts, 'Notes on Legend and Form', p. 38.

pressure on heart, lungs, the brain
 about to burst its brittle case
 (what the skull can endure!)

Over us, Apocryphal fire,
 under us, the earth sway, dip of floor,
 slope of pavement²⁶⁴

The subject matter, elegiac mood and religious thematics of 'Crossed and Uncrossed' also call to mind Dylan Thomas's 'Ceremony After a Fire Raid', which was written in the same year, 'during the months when Thomas moved his family to Bosham, Sussex, because of the heavy bombing on London':²⁶⁵

Myselfes
 The grievors
 Grieve
 Among the street burned to tireless death
 A child of a few hours
 With its kneading mouth
 Charred on the black breast of the grave
 The mother dug, and its arms full of fires.

Begin
 With singing
 Sing
 Darkness kindled back into beginning
 When the caught tongue nodded blind.
 A star was broken
 Into the centuries of the child
 Myselfes grieve now, and miracles cannot atone.

Forgive
 Us forgive
 Give
 Us your death that myselfes the believers
 May hold it in a great flood
 Till the blood shall spurt,
 And the dust shall sing like a bird
 As the grains blow, as your death grows, through our heart.

Crying
 Your dying
 Cry,
 Child beyond cockcrow, by the fire-dwarfed

²⁶⁴ H.D., 'The Walls Do Not Fall', in H.D., *Trilogy* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1973), pp. 3-4. All further references to H.D.'s poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

²⁶⁵ Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (eds), 'Notes', in *Dylan Thomas: Collected Poems 1934-1953* (London: Phoenix, 2000), pp. 175-258 (p. 241).

Street we chant the flying sea
 In the body bereft.
 Love is the last light spoken. Oh
 Seed of sons in the loin of the black husk left.²⁶⁶

Indeed, comparing these two poems reveals how, as Nigel Wheale suggests, Lynette Roberts's poetry sometimes evokes the 'high-risk word associative writing of Dylan Thomas'.²⁶⁷ We might compare Thomas's line, 'Charred on the black breast of the grave', for example, with 'the lead roof dripping red tears' in 'Crossed and Uncrossed'. The greater 'frequency of initial verbs' in 'Crossed and Uncrossed', however, as Conran has also argued, seems to indicate that Roberts is invoking 'a Welsh-language sentence structure' of 'verb-subject-object'. This, in turn, produces an exploded, defamiliarised English syntax that is distinct from that of both H.D.'s 'The Walls Do Not Fall' and Thomas's 'Ceremony After a Fire Raid', and that mirrors the estranging, detrital cityscape of the poem. Indeed, we could say that, like David Jones, Roberts creatively utilizes Welsh to engender her own new 'verbal ikon' of war; and this process is also discernable in the equally elliptical phrase, 'for week and a day'. Here, instead of adhering to the conventional English phrase, 'for a week and a day', Roberts seems to mirror the syntactical pattern of the Welsh, '*am wythnos ac am ddiwrnod*'. More specifically, Roberts is experimenting in this poem with '*intensives* or *tensors*' (as Deleuze and Guattari call them): using Welsh as a means to become 'a stranger within her own language' in a similar way to her contemporaries, Glyn Jones and Gwyn Thomas. She employs the same technique in another poem, 'Seagulls' (1944):

Seagulls' easy glide
 Drifting fearlessly as voyagers' tears:
 Quay and ship move as imperceptibly,
 Without knowing we weep.

²⁶⁶ Dylan Thomas, 'Ceremony After a Fire Raid', in *Dylan Thomas: Collected Poems 1934-1953*, ed. Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 107. All further references to Thomas's poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

²⁶⁷ Nigel Wheale, 'Beyond the Trauma Stratus: Lynette Roberts's *Gods With Stainless Ears* and the Post-War Cultural Landscape', in *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, n.s. 3 (1997), 98-117 (p. 106).

Cry gulls who recall
 An ocean of uncertainty;
 Greed of rowing men
 Mere flies at the ship's sides.²⁶⁸

Although the form of these lines is broadly conventional, 'Cry gulls who recall/ An ocean of uncertainty' replicates the Welsh 'verb-subject-object' paradigm seen in 'Crossed and Uncrossed' and underscores, on a syntactical level, both the temporal dislocation of the stanza, and the 'uncertainty' of the archaic seascape that it envisages. Indeed, again, as in 'Crossed and Uncrossed', Roberts seems to effect '*intensive*' syntactical disarray in order to formally enact the upheaval of war: the avaricious 'rowing men' evoke armies of invaders bound for enemy shores, and 'Quay and ship move as imperceptibly/ Without knowing we weep' seems to connote the modern-day deployment of soldiers and the distress of wives, mothers and sisters left behind; as previously noted, Roberts herself spent long periods alone in Llanybri while Keidrych Rhys was away on military postings.

Keidrych Rhys's 'Poem for a Green Envelope' (1942) documents his own wartime experiences:

[. . .] too soon I stumble over rough ground to the guns
 slip past the Command Post dragon flag to the tune of
 whistles
 respirator under arm, shell in fuse-setter for tray
 inside emplacement report
 "Ready for action"
 under the extraordinary blue of the breech-light
 warm hands at the white of cartridge shell cases
 while others placed cooled charge-cases aside
 and box them methodically
 oh surely we won't go back to a pre-war world
 every night killing becomes more automatic
 as we rest huddled in beach huts like animals
 writhing in the equality of barrackroom language²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Lynette Roberts, 'Seagulls', p. 16.

²⁶⁹ Keidrych Rhys, 'Poem for a Green Envelope', in Keidrych Rhys, *The Van Pool and Other Poems* (London: Routledge, 1942), p. 25.

The concrete realism of Rhys's poem counterpoints Roberts's 'Seagulls', in which the poet-speaker can only conjure vague, mental apprehensions of war from the quotidian tableau – the wheeling 'gulls' – that surround her. Roberts's poem, in a sense, demonstrates how, as Gill Plain contends, 'just as the poets of 1914-18 [David Jones included] struggled to find a language adequate to express the unprecedented extent of their suffering, so, in the Second World War, the average person was confounded by the impossibility of articulating the scale of the conflict that confronted them'.²⁷⁰ This sense of the remoteness of war re-emerges in 'Plasnewydd' – a poem in which Roberts transcribes or poetically inhabits the idiom of Rosie, her Welsh-speaking friend in Llanybri, enabling her, once again, to become a 'stranger within her own language' and, therefore, to give verbal expression to the strangeness of wartime:

WAR. There's no sense in it.
 Just look at her two lovely eyes
 Look at those green big big eyes
 And the way she hangs her tail.
 Like a weasel. Ferret. Snowball
 Running away on the breast of a hill.
 WAR. There's no sense in it
 For us simple people
 We all get on so well.
 Hal-e-bant.
 The cows are on the move.
 I must be off on the run:
 Hal-e-bant. *Pussy drug*.
 Hal-e-bant Fan Fach
 Hal-e-bant for the day is long
 We must strengthen it:
Ourselves.
 To the cows
 Fetch them in.²⁷¹

Like 'Crossed and Uncrossed', this poem has its origins in a diary entry which Roberts wrote on July 17th 1940. The precise passage is cited below:

'Well, you see, it's like this, Mrs Rhys'. . . and Rosie stands on one foot with her hand on her hip, she licks around her mouth, then begins talking again and it is

²⁷⁰ Gill Plain, *Women's Fiction of the Second World War: Gender, Power and Resistance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 11.

²⁷¹ Lynette Roberts, 'Plasnewydd', p. 5.

always the same, 'Well, you see, it's like this, Mrs Rhys. I can't imagine the war or fighting at all, I've never travelled at all, only go to Cardiff, so I can't imagine this war at all. She's very wrong mind you (meaning the WAR), and what I feel is they're all flesh and blood like you or I, Mrs Rhys, aren't they? If you were to be stabbed you would feel it just as much as they, wouldn't you? WAR there's no sense in it. We're simple people we all get on. War there's no sense in it.'²⁷²

A more orthodox, familiar English-language rendering of 'Just look at those big big green eyes' would be 'Just look at those big green eyes' or, more accurately in this context perhaps, 'Just look at those great big green eyes'. Roberts also uses this technique in 'Poem from Llanybri' – in phrases such as '*If you come my way that is . . .*' and 'it's treacherous the fen'. Just as Glyn Jones uses language in a way that elicits 'a sense of shock, strangeness, wonder',²⁷³ however, in 'Plasnewydd' Roberts seems to revel in the linguistic oddness and expressive potency of this vernacular mode, registering what she describes in her literary memoir, 'Visit to T.S. Eliot', as 'the metallic *convergence* of words, heavy, colourful, rich and unexplored'.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, as these diverse individual words – words such as 'WAR', 'Feret', 'Snowball' and the Welsh phrase, '*Pussy drwg*' (meaning 'naughty cat') – are singled out for emphasis, they collectively enact and underscore the intangibility and, as the voice of the poem insists, senselessness of the war to people in this small rural community. Roberts's use of the Welsh dialectal phrase, 'Hal-e-bant', meaning 'send it away or shoo it away' in relation to both an errant cat and to world war amplifies this sense of the remoteness and insubstantiality of the conflict to those people – the majority of whom were women – not directly involved. This also finds typographical expression in the poem. Through capitalising 'WAR', Roberts draws our attention to each individual letter, endowing the word with a starkly one-dimensional and abstract quality. In 'Seagulls' and 'Plasnewydd', then, Roberts's new 'verbal ikon' – her own 'language of crisis' – is not that of the embattled soldier, as is the case in David

²⁷² Lynette Roberts, 'A Carmarthenshire Diary', p. 16.

²⁷³ Glyn Jones, '18 Poems Again', p. 24.

²⁷⁴ Lynette Roberts, 'Visit to T.S. Eliot', in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed. Patrick McGuiness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. 149-153 (p. 150).

Jones's *In Parenthesis*. Rather, it is a language 'of those left behind [both] in rural Wales',²⁷⁵ and in provincial locations the length and breadth of Britain; as she writes in her preface to the poem, 'the background [to *Gods With Stainless Ears*] is similar to any rural village: only the surface culture is superimposed or altogether distinct' (p. 43). So Roberts's Modernism is chiefly a rural Modernism which, like the work of Glyn Jones and also Caradoc Evans (who I discuss further in chapters four and five of this thesis), along with that of Gwyn Thomas and Idris Davies, set in the industrialised valley communities of South Wales, problematizes the conventional critical view that Modernism was essentially metropolitan in character. In particular, through adopting the peripheral, estranged position of the 'Anglo-Welsh' poet, Roberts is able to engender a 'new verbal ikon', which articulates the 'problematic relationship',²⁷⁶ identified above, between war 'and the women who stay[ed] behind'—²⁷⁷ an uneasy relationship which, Gill Plain argues, was 'repressed and disguised [during the Second World War] by the veneer of national [or British] unity', of 'superficial togetherness' in the face of a common threat.²⁷⁸

Roberts's 1944 poem, 'Curlew', can also be read in this way:

A curlew hovers and haunts the room.
On bare boards creak its filleted feet:
For freedom intones four notes of doom,

Crept, slept, wept, kept, under aerial gloom:
With Europe restless in his wing beat,
A curlew hovers and haunts the room:

Fouls wire, pierces the upholstery bloom,
Strikes window pane with shagreen bleat,
Flicking tongue to a frenzied fume

Splints his curved beak on square glass tomb:
Runs to and fro seeking mudsilt retreat;

²⁷⁵ Katie Gramich, 'Welsh Women Writers and War', in *Wales at War: Critical Essays on Literature and Art*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), pp. 122-141 (p. 128).

²⁷⁶ Plain, p. 20.

²⁷⁷ Gramich, 'Welsh Women Writers and War', p. 132.

²⁷⁸ Plain, p. 20.

Captured, explodes a chill sky croon

[. . .]

*Wail-ing...pal- ing...a desolate phantom
At the bath rim purring burbling trilling soft sweet
Syllables of sinuous sound to a liquid moon*²⁷⁹

Roberts wrote in a letter to Robert Graves, dated December 18th 1944, that her main objective in this poem – which at times, like Glyn Jones’s prose, also faintly echoes the rhythms of Hopkins’s verse – was ‘to use the exact [qualities] of the curlew’s call which so often breaks with [. . .] four shrill notes’;²⁸⁰ and this technique is clearly visible in the reference to ‘four notes of doom,/ *Crept, slept, wept, kept*’ in stanzas one and two. Yet the manner in which the poem’s speaker lingers over these, and other individual words – most notably ‘*purring burbling trilling*’ and ‘*Wail-ing...pal- ing...*’ – experiencing and exploring their sound, texture and composition, almost as if she were turning objects never before seen over in her hands, also recalls the linguistic praxis of the Anglophone Welsh writers discussed in the previous chapter. Tony Brown has observed how Glyn Jones, for example, employs a similar approach in his work, positing that he handles ‘words in a way which is [. . .] almost tactile’.²⁸¹ Moreover, Roberts seems to be recreating in ‘Curlew’ the Anglophone Welsh writer’s sense of a new, unexplored domain of English, which in turn verbally enacts the poet-speaker’s and, more broadly, many women’s experience of the Second World War. The strange remoteness of the war to the women left at home to continue with their day-to-day lives is also symbolically conveyed through the curlew itself. Within the secluded, domestic and obviously feminine space of the poem, the presence of war is figured as an elusive, phantasmal bird bearing ominous, encrypted news. Just as Branwen’s starling carried news of her imprisonment in Ireland across the sea to her brother in Wales in *The Mabinogion*, there is a message of disturbance

²⁷⁹ Lynette Roberts, ‘Curlew’, p. 15.

²⁸⁰ Lynette Roberts, ‘Letters to Robert Graves’, in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. 167-188 (p. 181).

²⁸¹ Tony Brown, ‘Introduction: The Making of a Writer’, p. lix.

and urgency across the water on the continent of 'Europe' in the curlew's insistent 'wing beat', and the suggestion of aerial assault as it 'explodes a chill sky croon'. Indeed, it seems likely that Roberts is consciously drawing on this Welsh mythological tale in her poem; like Branwen, embroiled in and yet secluded from a simmering conflict between Ireland and Wales,²⁸² Roberts's female poet-speaker feels herself intensely involved and yet detached from, and disempowered in the face of, world war. Roberts's strategy of becoming a stranger within language in order to express this, as well as a wider feminine, material and psychological estrangement from the war, in this poem is especially salient in her treatment of the pronoun 'his' in her references to the curlew: she places an accent instead of the usual dot above the 'i', which both abnormally stresses the sound of the vowel (in imitation, perhaps, of the curlew's cry) and defamiliarises the word in a typographical as well as an aural sense.

It is in *Gods with Stainless Ears*, however, that Roberts exploits the experimental conditions of 'Anglo-Welsh' writing to greatest effect:

This is Saint Cadoc's Day. All this Saint Cadoc's
Estuary: and that bell tolling, Abbey paddock.
Sunk. – Sad as ancient monument of stone.
Trees vail, exhale cyprine shade, widowing
Homeric hills, green pinnacles of bone.

Escaping from these, tomb and cave, quagmires
Migrate; draw victim eyes with lustre sheen, suck
Confervoid residue from gillette veins: who talk
Now yield, calling others, those who walk
From Llanstephan, Llangain, and Llanybri.

No watereyes squinting or too near madness
Could fail such a trek. In this same old soddenness
In deep corridor graves culverts open; their
Gates kedged in mud, preening feathered air
Elucidating shapes flecked with woolglints

And small affiliated tares. – So walk swiftly by,

²⁸² Branwen's marriage to Matholwch, King of Ireland, ultimately leads to war between Ireland and Wales.

For today, *pridian*, tears ravens wings to grate
 The bay, and John Roberts covered with lingustrum,
 Always sanitary and discreet, rows to and fro from
 Bell house to fennel, floating quietly on the tide.

(pp. 44-45)

In the prose 'argument' accompanying this section, Roberts elucidates the above stanzas as follows:

The poem opens with a bay wild with birds and somewhat secluded from man. And it is in front, or within sight of this bay that the whole action takes place: merging from its natural state into a supernatural tension within the first six stanzas. War changes its contour.

(p. 44)

The 'supernatural tension' that Roberts refers to here recalls the mood of 'Curlew', and, as in that poem, the uncanny atmosphere is generated by the absent presence of war. More specifically, again, we experience wartime from the perspective of the female poet-speaker – the rural West Wales coast, like the home in 'Curlew', becoming imbued with, or assuming the 'contours' of, her own, diffuse awareness of the conflict. Here, this awareness is configured as an adumbrative preoccupation with death and mourning. The tolling bell, to which Roberts's syntax lends particular emphasis, is like a death knell resounding across the estuary, and the funereal mood is enhanced by the 'Sad' Abbey paddock; the 'exhal[ing]' and 'vail[ing]' trees – to 'vail' is to 'bow or bend'²⁸³ out of 'respect or submission',²⁸⁴ and conjures images of mourners standing before a coffin or grave – the 'widowing [of]/ Homeric hills'; and the portrayal of John Roberts as 'a benign Charon'²⁸⁵ or 'Old Charon and his coracle' (p. 49). Charon was, of course, the 'ferryman of the dead, who transported the spirits over the marsh of Acheron'²⁸⁶ in Greek mythology. Another reference to ancient Greece, to the epic poet, Homer, more

²⁸³ *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [accessed February 4th 2010].

²⁸⁴ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (eds), *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁸⁵ Gramich, 'Welsh Women Writers and War', p. 132.

²⁸⁶ Pierre Grimal, *The Penguin Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, ed. Stephen Kershaw, trans. A.R. Maxwell-Hyslop (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 94.

explicitly associates this threnodic atmosphere with the theme of war, evoking the battles between the Greeks and the Trojans that are the focus of the *Iliad* and from which Odysseus returns in the *Odyssey*. Roberts even points towards an actual historical connection between these Bronze Age wars and the landscape of *Gods With Stainless Ears*, writing in her notes on the poem that

there are historians who believe the Trojans came and settled on this coast. In years to come archaeologists may discover both the Temples and City as Sir Arthur Evans and Schliemann discovered Knossos and Troy – by studying the legends in the locality.²⁸⁷

Whereas David Jones draws on the battle of the *Gododdin* in *In Parenthesis* in order to proximate the soldier's experience of war, however, Roberts invokes these conflicts from antiquity in a way that elicits and maintains a sense of distance, of remoteness, from contemporary hostilities. And this remoteness also finds expression in the traces of violence that the speaker, her mind nevertheless troubled by this more immediate conflict, detects or invests in her environment. The 'gillette veins' are, presumably, channels in the saturated earth, along which water from 'migrat[ing]' 'quagmires', teeming with 'conferva' or 'freshwater algae',²⁸⁸ runs. But this collocation also evokes injury, blood loss and suicide, Gillette being a manufacturer of razors. Roberts re-invokes this line of imagery later in the poem, when the speaker directs that 'the whaleback of the sea/ Fall back into a wrist of ripples, slit' (p. 57). Roberts's descriptions of the hills as 'pinnacles of bone' and the trees' 'cyprine shade' have similarly brutal undertones. Cyprine is a 'blue vesuvianite':²⁸⁹ a mineral pertaining to the infamous volcano, Mount Vesuvius, whose eruption in AD 79 obliterated the Roman city of Pompeii. We recall that H.D. contemplates this event in her own long war poem, 'The Walls Do Not Fall', cited previously:

²⁸⁷ Lynette Roberts, 'Notes to *Gods With Stainless Ears: A Heroic Poem*', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), pp. 70-78 (p. 71).

²⁸⁸ Patrick McGuinness, 'Notes', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, p. 143.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

Pompeii has nothing to teach us,
 we know crack of volcanic fissure,
 slow flow of lava

Whereas the metropolitan poet-speaker of H.D.'s poem confidently 'know[s] crack of volcanic fissure/ slow flow of lava' – or feels that she truly knows the experience of war – for Roberts's speaker this violence is ossified in mineral form: taciturn, dormant, remote. Roberts again speaks as a rural woman who feels herself a stranger to the actuality of war.

As in 'Seagulls', 'Plasnewydd' and 'Curlew', Roberts identifies and reifies this experience by assuming the Anglophone Welsh writer's position as a stranger within language. The manner in which Roberts treats Welsh words in these stanzas recalls her approach to individual words in 'Curlew'. The speaker seems to scrutinize the sound and texture of the Welsh place names, 'Llanstephan, Llangain, Llanybri', just as she meditatively intones the English verbs, '*Crept, slept, wept, kept*' in 'Curlew'; it is as if (to cite Roland Barthes) these 'words *glisten*, [as if they were] distracting, incongruous apparitions'.²⁹⁰ The speaker seems to treat the archaic English noun, '*pridian*', with a similarly ennobling curiosity, italicising it and affording it particular emphasis in the line by isolating it between two commas. This syntactical sleight of hand further underlines Roberts's cultivation in this poem of the role of linguistic stranger. *Pridian* means 'on the previous day',²⁹¹ yet the syntax of the line leads us to assume, or at least momentarily anticipate, that this is an antiquarian or esoteric synonym of the preceding word, 'today'; the result is a moment of linguistic uncanniness, where the poetic voice does not seem quite 'at home' in the English language. Roberts also creates a sense of the linguistic uncanny that is cognate with that generated by Glyn Jones in his Modernist poetry and

²⁹⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated from the French by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 42.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

short stories; like Jones, Roberts conjoins orthodox English words to fashion hybrid neologisms such as ‘watereyes’ and ‘woolglints’. Roberts’s account in her notes on the poem of the etymology of ‘woolglints’ only accentuates its strangeness:

I had the image of iridescent bits of dust which float about in the sunbeams like pieces of flock. As the estuary is covered with sheep, and the atmosphere I wanted to create, a supernatural one, I felt that there was bound to be some density – a stifling quality in the air. I therefore imagined these woolglints, which were bound to float about from the backs of the sheep, and the minute weeds – almost-green invisible cells – hovering over the quagmires.²⁹²

Moreover, ‘even when the meaning is clear’, as Conran observes, language in Roberts’s poem acquires ‘a curiously rootless quality [. . .] – almost as if English were being used by a foreigner with a very large vocabulary learnt entirely from dictionaries’;²⁹³ we recall, from chapter one of this thesis, Glyn Jones’s description of the Anglophone Welsh character, Gwydion, in *The Valley, the City, the Village*, as ‘a dictionary reader, a neologist’ (p. 298). In the above stanzas this quality emanates from esoteric geological and biological words such ‘cyprine’ and ‘confervoid’, and also ‘lingustrum’, which, Roberts informs us in her notes, is ‘the botanical name for privet’.²⁹⁴ Roberts also points out here that privet is ‘one of the sacred trees mentioned in Taliesin’s *Battle of the Trees*’,²⁹⁵ or *Câd Godden*, referring the reader to Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948) for a translation of this medieval Welsh poem:

When the trees were enchanted
There was hope for the trees,
That they should frustrate the intention
Of the surrounding fires. . . .

[. . .]

The alder trees in the first line,
They made the commencement.
Willow and quicken tree,
They were slow in their array.
The plum is a tree

²⁹² Lynette Roberts, ‘Notes to *Gods With Stainless Ears*’, p. 71.

²⁹³ Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness*, pp. 190-191.

²⁹⁴ Lynette Roberts, ‘Notes to *Gods With Stainless Ears*’, p. 71.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

Not beloved of men;
 The medlar of a like nature,
 Overcoming severe toil.
 The bean bearing in its shade
 An army of phantoms.
 The raspberry makes not the best food.
 In shelter live,
 The privet and the woodbine,
 And the ivy in its season.
 Great is the gorse in battle.
 The cherry-tree had been reproached.
 The birch, though very magnanimous,
 Was late in arraying himself;
 It was not through cowardice,
 But on account of his great size.²⁹⁶

This gnostic intertextual allusion both subtly upholds the theme of war and augments the overall sense in these stanzas of the poet-speaker's removal from its real, contemporary form; this is made more explicit later in the section when the speaker asks, 'To what age can this be compared?' (p. 46) Indeed, the poet-speaker's sequestered, indeterminate position in relation to the war, which she shares with the ethereal ferryman, John Roberts, 'covered with lingustrum' and 'floating quietly on the tide', is echoed in Taliesin's poem. Whereas the alder, willow and birch trees 'array' themselves and the gorse is 'great [. . .] in battle', the privet 'in shelter live[s]', along with the ivy and the woodbine; as Graves puts it in his own arrangement of the poem:

In shelter linger
 Privet and woodbine
 Inexperienced in warfare;
 And the courtly pine.²⁹⁷

Graves supports the scholarly position, moreover, that *The Battle of the Trees* is not, in fact, 'a battle physically fought, but a battle fought intellectually in the heads and with the tongues of the learned'.²⁹⁸ This again contributes to the pervasive sense, in the opening

²⁹⁶ Taliesin, 'The Battle of the Trees', translated from the Welsh by D.W. Nash, in Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), pp. 31-32, ll. 57-87.

²⁹⁷ Taliesin, 'The Battle of the Trees', translated from the Welsh by Robert Graves, in Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 46.

²⁹⁸ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 38.

stanzas of Roberts's poem, of the war as a psychological construct, gleaned from the rural female poet-speaker's imagination, knowledge and immediate surroundings, rather than a graspable reality.

Indeed, war is represented in Roberts's poem as a kind of dreamed or hallucinated surreality:²⁹⁹

In fear of fate, flying into land Orcadian birds pair
And peal away like praying hands; bare
Aluminium beak to clinic air; frame
Soldier lonely whistling in full corridor train,
Ishmaelites waling through the windowpane,

O the cut of it, woe sharp on the day
Scaled in blood, the ten-toed woodpecker,
A dragon of wings 1 6 2 0 B 6
4 punctuates machine-gun from the quarry pits:
Soldiers, tanks, lorry make siege on the bay.

Freedom to boot. CONCLAMATION. COMPUNCTION.
Kom-pungk'-shun: discomforts of the mind deride
Their mood. Birds on the stirrups of the waterbride
Flush up, and out of time a tintinnabulation
Of voice and feather fall in and out of the ocean sky.

(p. 45)

In these lines the tranquil bay becomes more obviously coloured by war: Birds 'bare/ Aluminium beak to clinic air', evoking the aluminium bodies of planes, and inducing thoughts of soldiers lying wounded in hospital wards, and these associative images, in turn, 'frame', or blur and refocus in the mind of the speaker, to form a cinematic vision of a 'Soldier lonely whistling in full corridor train'. Similarly, as Roberts indicates in the 'argument' that elucidates this section, a 'machine-gun is suggested by the tapping of a woodpecker' ('the ten-toed woodpecker/ [. . .]/ punctuates machine-gun') and 'gives out the identity of the gunner' (p. 44): '1 6 2 0 B 6 / 4' was Keidrych Rhys's army number.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Katie Gramich also comments on the 'fictionalised, surrealist and often hallucinatory style' of *Gods With Stainless Ears*; Gramich, 'Welsh Women Writers and War', p. 132.

³⁰⁰ Patrick McGuinness, 'Notes', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, p. 143.

Moreover, the poet-speaker effects her movement into this projected ‘martial zone’³⁰¹ – this imaginatively conceived (*sur*)reality of war – through immersing herself still further in her role as deterritorialized ‘Anglo-Welsh’ writer. The Welsh grammatical patterns of ‘verb-subject-object’ and ‘noun-adjective’ (outlined in the previous chapter) are again clearly decipherable in ‘frame/ Soldier lonely’, and Roberts continues to overturn normative English grammar in the second half of this line – ‘whistling in full corridor train’. Indeed, Roberts reemploys and exaggerates all of the strategies of lexical defamiliarisation seen in ‘Plasnewydd’ and ‘Curlew’. Conran’s figuration of the speaker of *Gods With Stainless Ears* as ‘a foreigner’ who has internalised an English dictionary rings true again here: the words ‘CONCLAMATION’ and ‘COMPUNCTION’, though arresting and polemically expressive – in this context, they seem to denote ‘a loud calling out of many together especially of lament for the dead’ and a ‘pricking or stinging of the conscience or heart’³⁰² respectively – are not regularly heard or seen, and their capitalisation lends them the same stark patina as the word ‘WAR’ in ‘Plasnewydd’. And Roberts produces even more linguistic ‘alienation effect[s]’ (to borrow Brecht’s phrase)³⁰³ in the following line; here she spells ‘compunction’ phonetically, as ‘Kom-pungk’-shun’, regarding language, once again, with the concentrated, analytical attention of a non-native-speaker or student, and generating, in the process, what Nigel Wheale terms ‘the challenging vocabulary of a new synthetic English’,³⁰⁴ with its own unorthodox orthography.

This ‘new synthetic English’ is also visible in the description of ‘Birds on the stirrups of the *waterbride* [my emphasis]’ – a phrase that also estranges in the way that Robert Graves identified in his epistolary appraisal of Roberts’s work. Recalling the work

³⁰¹ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 14.

³⁰² *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [accessed February 4th 2010].

³⁰³ Brecht’s phrase is used loosely here. Its actual meaning is discussed in chapter one of this thesis.

³⁰⁴ Wheale, p. 102.

of her 'Anglo-Welsh' contemporaries Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and also David Jones, Roberts interrelates many 'dissociated ideas [. . .] in a single sentence', amassing and inflating language almost to the point (in Graves's words) of 'bursting' its 'sense'. Graves could, plausibly, also have cited the following stanzas from *Gods With Stainless Ears* to illustrate his concerns:

Trees crisp with Maeterlinck blue, screen
 Submarine suns and baskets of bees: but
 Men nettled with pie-powdered feet, angry
 As rooks on their pernickety beds 'training
 For another Cattraeth' said Evans shop.

DISIMILAR. DISSUNDERED. CRANCH-CRAKE CRANCH-CRAKE
 ASHIVER. ANHUNGERED ANHELATION.
 CERAUNIC CLOUDS CRACK IN THEIR BRAIN.
 Who was to be ring carrier for Jerrymandering
 Gerontocracy. The officer yellow with argyria?

(p. 46)

These stanzas are not vessels for linguistic iconoclasm and anarchy, however – for 'the language of god-awful confusion', as Graves put it. While they demonstrate how, as Roland Barthes observes,

the text can, if it wants, attack the canonical structures of the language [. . .]: lexicon (exuberant neologisms, portmanteau words, transliterations), syntax (no more logical cell, no more sentence),³⁰⁵

they also index a carefully wrought, progressive 'verbal ikon' of rural women's wartime experience, made possible through Roberts's self-conscious choice to utilize the peripheral 'Anglo-Welsh' writer's position as a stranger within language. 'Maeterlinck blue' seems to allude to the Belgian playwright and poet, Maurice Maeterlinck's play *L'Oiseau bleu* or *The Blue Bird: A Fairy Play in Six Acts* (1909) – a theatrical fairytale centred on two children's quest to find a bluebird that promises happiness. The 'Maeterlinck blue' of the trees, therefore, suggests the childlike innocence and naiveté of the rural locale

³⁰⁵ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 20.

juxtaposed with the realities of the contemporary, war-torn world. The way in which these trees ‘screen’ or obscure ‘*submarine* suns [my emphasis]’ and ‘basket of bees’ – Maeterlinck also wrote *La Vie des abeilles* (1901), ‘a protracted tragedy of the life of the bee’, which earned the admiration of the French Surrealist playwright and ‘theorist of the ‘theatre of cruelty’’, Antonin Artaud³⁰⁶ – corroborates this reading. This sense of distance between the speaker’s environment and the realities of war is enhanced through the description of the trees as ‘crisp’ and ‘blue’; this imagery gestures towards coldness and ice, whereas the war – represented by the ‘*submarine suns* [my emphasis]’ – is associated with heat and fire. Moreover, once again, Roberts displays (to reuse Nigel Wheale’s phrase) a ‘high-risk word associative’ poetic mode in these stanzas, where language is governed by an abstruse new logic. Characteristically, Roberts’s ‘verbal ikon’ in these lines is made all the more alienating by her recondite lexical choices – most notably ‘pie-powdered’, ‘ANHUNGERED’, ‘CERAUNIC’ and ‘argyria’. These last two examples are derived from scientific discourses, with ‘ceraunic’ pertaining to ‘a branch of physics that deals with heat and electricity’ and ‘argyria’ denoting ‘silver poisoning’;³⁰⁷ and this defamiliarising technical vocabulary also enables Roberts to envisage a barely imaginable, dystopian image of the future in part five of the poem, where the Carmarthenshire landscape is blighted by ‘progressing’ ‘industrial [and] ‘chemical’ war’ (‘Argument’, p. 64):

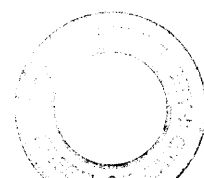
Air white with cold. Cycloid wind prevails.
On ichnolitic plain where no step stirs
And winter harden into plate of ice:
Shoots an anthracite glitter of death
From their eyes, – these men shine darkly.

[. . .]

Over wails of boraic and tundra torn wounds,
Darkening ‘peaked’ Fujū-yama, clearing
Cambrian caves where xylophone reeds hide
Menhir glaciers and appointed feet.

³⁰⁶ Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7.

³⁰⁷ McGuinness, ‘Notes’, in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems*, p. 144.



Out of this hard. Out of this zinc.
We [the speaker and her lover] by centrifugal force. . . rose softly. . .

(pp. 64-65)

Here, along with the more well-known ‘zinc’ and ‘centrifugal force’, Roberts assimilates ‘cycloid’, which denotes ‘the curve traced in space by a point in the circumference of a circle as it moves along a straight line’; ‘ichnolitic’ (‘the science of studying fossil footprints’); ‘anthracite’, ‘a kind of coal’; and ‘boracic’, a ‘white salt crystal’.³⁰⁸ In ‘CRANCH-CRAKE CRANCH-CRAKE’, from part two of the poem cited previously, moreover, Roberts invokes and conjoins two more ‘definitively obscure’³⁰⁹ words – ‘cranch’, meaning ‘to crunch’, and ‘craque’ meaning ‘to utter a harsh grating cry: said of the crow, quail [and] corn-craque’.³¹⁰ Together, these words have a kind of linguistic *déjà-vu* effect, visually estranging and yet aurally prompting the reader by onomatopoeically evoking the familiar sound of tramping or marching footsteps.

In *Gods With Stainless Ears*, then, and in many more of her poems, Roberts exploits the revolutionary conditions of Welsh writing in English in order to reach new plains of Modernist experimentation. Through actively embracing the Anglophone Welsh writer’s potentially liberating position as linguistic stranger or ‘deraciné’, she is able, like her ‘Anglo-Welsh’ contemporaries Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones, Idris Davies and David Jones, to engender a ‘new verbal ikon’ of modernity, of a rural women’s day-to-day life during the Second World War – the ‘very eccentricity and obscurity’ of which, as Tony Conran contends, ‘arise[s] from a truly modern unwillingness to be less than totally open to [this neglected] experience, even the [for her, remote] experience of total war’.³¹¹ As Chana Kronfeld points out, although Modernism ‘valoriz[es] [. . .] the marginal and

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 146.

³⁰⁹ Wheale, p. 99.

³¹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [accessed February 10th 2010].

³¹¹ Conran, ‘Lynette Roberts: War Poet’, p. 202.

the eccentric',³¹² 'the representative examples of this marginality typically are those writers who have become the most canonical high modernists'.³¹³ The synchronic poetry of Lynette Roberts demands that we look beyond the canonical outsiders of high modernism and recognise Wales, and particularly marginal Anglophone Welsh writing, as a rich and important site of Modernist innovation.

³¹² Kronfeld, p. 57.

³¹³ Ibid., p. 2

3

Vernon Watkins's 'modern country of the arts'

In chapter one of this thesis I argued that Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies utilize the 'revolutionary conditions' associated with their linguistically and culturally 'deterritorialized' position as Anglophone Welsh writers to forge experimental new modes of expression, appropriate to the modern, Anglicised Wales of their experience. I then went on to suggest that the various linguistic innovations of these writers converge in David Jones's *In Parenthesis*, as Jones also exploits the revolutionary potential of the deterritorialized 'space between' English-language and Welsh-language culture, developing a fragmentary and estranging poetic idiom that verbally enacts the soldier's experience of the First World War. In chapter two, I showed that David Jones was not the only writer to recognise the expressive and creative vibrancy of Anglophone Welsh writing: Lynette Roberts, too, through actively embracing the Anglophone Welsh writer's position as linguistic 'stranger' in her poetry, conceives her own 'new verbal ikon' of modernity – of rural women's experience of the Second World War. Whereas Roberts maintains her position as cultural *déraciné* in her work, however, in the case of Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies, as I have shown, this Modernist pursuit of a new 'verbal ikon' essentially entails a process of linguistic deterritorialization and *reterritorialization*, where language is uprooted from the territory of the established culture in a move to delineate a separate and distinct cultural territory for Wales and its Anglophone literature. In the present chapter I will propose that, in a related but distinct way, a pattern of 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization' underlies the Modernism of

another Anglophone Welsh writer – ‘Swansea’s other poet’³¹⁴ (in Rowan Williams’s words), Vernon Watkins.

Like Swansea’s most famous poet, Dylan Thomas, and his contemporaries, Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies, Vernon Watkins was born into a family in which English, to cite Tony Conran, ‘was no more than a generation or two old’.³¹⁵ Watkins’s mother and father, who were living in the industrial town of Maesteg in South Wales at the time of his birth,³¹⁶ were Welsh speakers, whose families originated from Carmarthenshire and Breconshire respectively.³¹⁷ Indeed, as Glyn Jones adduces in his commemorative essay on Vernon Watkins, ‘Whose Flight is Toil’ (1970),

[Watkins] was closely related [through his mother] to a family well known in Wales for their devotion to Welsh culture, particularly Welsh drama and poetry, the Phillips family of Gwaelodygarth, near Cardiff [. . .].³¹⁸

Following a social trend that has already featured prominently in this thesis, however, Watkins’s parents did not pass the Welsh language on to their son. In fact, Watkins was, arguably, particularly bereft of contact with Welsh culture during his youth. As Roland Mathias elaborates, his father (who was a successful bank manager) and his mother (who had attended school in London, where she had studied both English and German)³¹⁹ were, like other ‘more educated’³²⁰ Welsh parents, ‘peculiarly susceptible to the feeling that to remain inside the Welsh cocoon was to be deliberately ‘parochial’, uninterested in

³¹⁴ Rowan Williams, ‘Swansea’s Other Poet: Vernon Watkins and the Threshold between Worlds’, *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, n.s. 8 (2003), 107-120 (p. 107).

³¹⁵ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 51.

³¹⁶ Richard Ramsbotham, ‘Introduction’, in *Vernon Watkins: Selected Poems*, ed. Richard Ramsbotham (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2006), pp. xi-xxviii (p. xii).

³¹⁷ Roland Mathias, *Vernon Watkins: Writers of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974), pp. 4-5.

³¹⁸ Glyn Jones, ‘Whose Flight is Toil’, in *Vernon Watkins 1906-1967*, ed. Leslie Norris (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 23-26 (p. 25).

³¹⁹ As Mathias notes, Watkins’s mother ‘enjoyed an educational experience unusual in that day for a girl from a West Wales town like Carmarthen’. Not only was she sent to a school in London, but she was also afforded the opportunity to develop her interest in languages by attending, for a time, ‘a school at Bolkenhein, in one of the German-speaking regions later known as Sudetenland’. Mathias suggests that ‘it was probably this that disposed her to wish for her son a wider education than a purely Welsh background might allow’; Mathias, p. 6.

³²⁰ Mathias, p. 9.

world issues, and devoid of ambition'.³²¹ This sentiment seems to have led Watkins's parents to decide largely to withhold the rich literary history of Wales from their child – though his father did read to him sporadically from English translations of Aneirin and Taliesin³²² – and to send him to preparatory school in Sussex, and then to Repton, a public school in Derbyshire.³²³

Watkins became more estranged from Welsh culture at school, where his Anglican religious education set him apart from his Nonconformist family, and his mind became 'stocked', in Mathias's words, 'with material [that his parents presumed to be] of greater importance'³²⁴ than that which Wales had to offer – particularly English, German and French poetry.³²⁵ Indeed, Watkins developed a keen interest in European languages, and went on to study for a degree in German and French at Cambridge. Finding the course to be more focused on language than on literature,³²⁶ and the university unsupportive of his growing poetic ambitions, however, he withdrew after a year,³²⁷ and returned to Wales, finally settling on the Gower Peninsula near Swansea. Watkins remained in Wales for most of his life – though he died in Seattle in 1967, having moved to the American city that year to take up the position of Visiting Professor of Poetry at its University of Washington.³²⁸ Despite his obvious attachment to Wales, however, Watkins did not learn Welsh as his contemporary, Glyn Jones, did.³²⁹ Jones later wrote, in fact, that 'in spite of some rudimentary *cynganedd* in 'The Sure Aimer' [1968] it is vain to look in his [Watkins's] work for the influence of Welsh-language poetry, ancient or

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ramsbotham, p. xii.

³²⁴ Mathias, p. 9.

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ramsbotham, p. xii.

³²⁸ Mathias, p. 117.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

modern'.³³⁰ Jones's observation is not strictly accurate: Watkins memorably invokes the Welsh bard, Taliesin, in poems such as 'Taliesin in Gower' (1954) and 'Taliesin and the Spring of Vision' (1959). 'So sang the grains of sand', he writes in the second of these later poems,

and while they whirled to a pattern
Taliesin took refuge under the unfledged rock.
He could not see the cave, but groped with his hand,
And the rock he touched was the socket of all men's eyes,
And he touched the spring of vision. [. . .]³³¹

In these lines, Watkins invokes the image of Taliesin, constructed in the mythological tale, *Hanes Taliesin*, and in *The Book of Taliesin* (a collection of Welsh poetry from the fourteenth century), as a 'wild inspired seer' and 'possessor of arcane knowledge'³³² yet, essentially, as M. Wynn Thomas argues, the minutiae of Watkins's early life form an impression of a 'socially and culturally displaced person',³³³ in relation to whom the notion of linguistic and cultural 'deterritorialization' rings especially, and poignantly, true: Wynn Thomas even links these circumstances to the psychological breakdown that Watkins suffered at the age of twenty-three, suggesting that 'it seems likely that the instabilities of his [Watkins's] early background had long been preparing the way for his collapse'.³³⁴

Unlike Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies, Watkins did not even appear to feel at home within the newly forming 'territory' of Anglophone Welsh writing. Just as Lynette Roberts dismissed the term 'Anglo-Welsh' as '*having no origin but a superficial one*',³³⁵

³³⁰ Glyn Jones, 'Whose Flight is Toil', p. 25. As Dafydd Johnston notes, and previously mentioned, *cynganedd* 'refers to the complex system of sound correspondences which adorns Welsh strict-metre poetry'; Dafydd Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 34.

³³¹ Vernon Watkins, 'Taliesin and the Spring of Vision', in *The Collected Poems of Vernon Watkins* (Ipswich: Golgonooza, Press, 1986), p. 224. All further references to Watkins's poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

³³² Dafydd Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, p. 16.

³³³ M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 36.

³³⁴ M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, p. 69.

³³⁵ Lynette Roberts, 'An Introduction to Welsh Dialect', p. 107.

Watkins 'did not relish inclusion' in the roll of 'Anglo-Welsh poets of the twentieth century [. . .], preferring to call himself *a Welshman and an English poet*' [emphasis in the original].³³⁶ According to M. Wynn Thomas, Watkins 'found release from [this sense of Englishness] by making contact [in his poetry] [. . .] with a great European tradition that included, in his eyes, [Friedrich] Hölderlin [1770-1843],³³⁷ [Heinrich] Heine [1797-1856], Novalis [1772-1801], the French Symbolists, [Stefan] George [1868-1933] and [Rainer Maria] Rilke [1875-1926]'.³³⁸ And he also entered what he described as 'the whole orbit' of each European poet's 'thought'³³⁹ through translating their work. His *Selected Verse Translations*, published in 1977, for instance, includes English translations of works by all of the aforementioned poets – with the French Symbolists represented by Charles Baudelaire, Jules Laforgue, Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Valéry. This collection also encompasses extracts from Homer's *Iliad* and Dante's *Purgatorio* from his *Divine Comedy*, and omits further translations of Hungarian and Spanish poetry.³⁴⁰ The capacious range of European poetry that Watkins translated, however, as well as the concomitant cultural diversity of his own poetry, posit a more complex motive than the need to escape, or 'find release' from his own 'Englishness'. Indeed, in a number of Watkins's poems, continental European and English culture appear to be deliberately synthesised. This is, arguably, most strikingly evident in 'Discoveries', a poem first published in Watkins's inaugural collection, *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd and Other Poems* (1941); and, as such, a substantial section of this chapter – what immediately follows – will be devoted to a very close and detailed analysis of this text:

Ptolemy's planets, playing fast and loose,
Foretell the wisdom of Copernicus.

³³⁶ Watkins cited in Mathias, p. 1.

³³⁷ For a discussion of the various affinities between the lives and works of Friedrich Hölderlin and Vernon Watkins, see Ian Hilton, 'Vernon Watkins and Hölderlin', in *Poetry Wales*, n.s. 12.4 (Spring 1977), 101-117.

³³⁸ M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, p. 71.

³³⁹ Vernon Watkins, 'The Translation of Poetry', in *Vernon Watkins: Selected Verse*, ed. Ruth Pryor (London: Enitharmon Press, 1977), pp. 15-22 (p. 15).

³⁴⁰ Ian Hilton, 'Vernon Watkins as Translator', in *Vernon Watkins 1906-1967*, ed. Leslie Norris (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 74-89 (p. 85).

Dante calls Primum Mobile, the First Cause:
‘Love that moves the world and the other stars.’

Great Galileo, twisted by the rack,
Groans the bright sun from heaven, then breathes it back.

Blake, on the world alighting, holds the skies,
And all the stars shine down through human eyes.

Donne sees those stars, yet will not let them lie:
‘We’re tapers, too, and at our own cost die.’

The shroud-lamp catches. Lips are smiling there.
‘Les flammes – déjà?’ – The world dies, or Voltaire.

Swift, a cold mourner at his burial-rite,
Burns to the world’s heart like a meteorite.

Beethoven deaf, in deafness hearing all,
Unwinds all music from sounds funeral.

Three prophets fall, the litter of one night:
Blind Milton gazes in fixed deeps of light.

Beggar of those Minute Particulars,
Yeats lights again the turmoil of the stars.

Motionless motion! Come, Tiresias,
The eternal flies, what’s passing cannot pass.³⁴¹

Both in terms of form and content, these stanzas resemble a chain of epitaphs – the use of the present tense and of direct quotation (from Dante in the second stanza cited above, from John Donne in the fourth, and from Voltaire, in the fifth)³⁴² immortalising, in literary form, an array of deceased artists and thinkers from both English and European cultures. This epitaphic mode, which may owe something to the ancient Welsh *Engylion y Beddau*, or ‘stanzas of the graves’ – a collection of ‘lyrical and elegiac’ poems, ‘which name the graves of heros’³⁴³ – is underscored in the reference to the Anglo-Irish writer and political activist Jonathan ‘Swift’ (1667-1745) as ‘a cold mourner at his burial-

³⁴¹ Vernon Watkins, ‘Discoveries’, p. 38.

³⁴² These quotations are discussed in more detail below.

³⁴³ Meic Stephens (ed.), *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, p. 220. Stephens notes that in these poems, ‘the vigour of the hero in life [is often] contrasted with the desolation of his grave’; Stephens, *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, p. 220.

rite'. Here, Watkins alludes to the similarly immortalising, instructive words that Swift decreed should appear in Latin on his tombstone:

Here lies the body of Jonathan Swift, Doctor of Divinity and Dean of this Cathedral Church, where savage indignation can no more lacerate his heart. Go, traveller, and imitate if you can one who strove with all his might to champion liberty.³⁴⁴

This sense of creative immortality is underscored in the final stanza cited above, through Watkins's reference to the blind soothsayer, Tiresias,³⁴⁵ a figure from ancient Greek mythology (and also, famously, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*), whom the God, 'Zeus gave the privilege of retaining the gift of prophecy even after his death'.³⁴⁶

W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), whose name appears in the tenth stanza cited above, also translated Swift's epitaph into English, thereby, in a sense, allowing Swift to continue to speak vicariously to the world from beyond the grave:

Swift has sailed into his rest;
Savage indignation there
Cannot lacerate his breast.
Imitate him if you dare,
World-besotted traveller; he
Served human liberty.³⁴⁷

And there are also echoes, in Watkins's description of Swift as 'a cold mourner at his burial-rite', of Yeats's 1938 poem, 'Under Ben Bulbin' – the closing four lines of which Yeats selected as his own epitaph:

Under bare Ben Bulbin's head
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid,
An ancestor was rector there
Long years ago; a church stands near,
By the road an ancient Cross.
No marble, no conventional phrase,
On limestone quarried near the spot

³⁴⁴ Jonathan Swift cited in David Nokes, *Jonathan Swift: A Hypocrite Reversed – A Critical Biography* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 412.

³⁴⁵ Grimal, *The Penguin Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, p. 439.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

³⁴⁷ W.B. Yeats, 'Swift's Epitaph', in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 2nd edn, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp. 245-246. All further references to Yeats's poems, unless stated otherwise, are to this edition and are given in the text.

By his command these words are cut:

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!³⁴⁸

Indeed, Watkins forms an impression in 'Discoveries' of a timeless and sacred stratum of artists and thinkers, of intellectual visionaries, which he marks out through an intricate array of inter- and cross-cultural echoes, interactions and affinities. 'Dante calls Primum Mobile' is adapted from Dante's *Paradiso* – the third and final part of the medieval Italian poet's Christian epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*. Dante's poem, as Peter Armour notes, is 'structured on ancient Greek astronomy as systematized by Ptolemy',³⁴⁹ and Watkins dramatises this connection through his reference to 'Ptolemy's planets' in the first stanza cited above. Watkins also appears to trace the origins of Ptolemy's celestial model back to Aristotle through the declarative 'Motionless motion!' in the eleventh cited stanza, which evokes Aristotle's proposition that 'the heavenly bodies revolve eternally in perfect circles, kept in steady motion (somehow) by an Unmoved Mover'³⁵⁰ that European Christians presumed to be God.³⁵¹ Indeed, Aristotle, Ptolemy and Dante are placed within a kind of eternal order of creative thinkers in Watkins's poem. 'Ptolemy's planets, playing fast and loose' – a line which seems to draw on Ptolemy's argument that the planets 'travel with variable speeds'³⁵² and not in a 'uniform motion'³⁵³ as Aristotle originally claimed – 'Foretell the wisdom' of the Polish cosmologist, 'Copernicus' (1473-1543), who challenged Ptolemy's assumption that the earth is at the centre of the universe by claiming that, in contrast, the earth and the other planets in the solar system

³⁴⁸ W.B. Yeats, 'Under Ben Bulbin', p. 328, ll. 84-94.

³⁴⁹ Peter Armour, 'Notes: *Paradiso*', in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, translated from the Italian by Allen Mandelbaum (London: Everyman's Library, 1995), pp. 707-791 (p. 707).

³⁵⁰ Patricia Fara, *Science: A Four Thousand Year History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 21.

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁵² Ibid., p. 24.

³⁵³ Ibid.

revolve around the sun.³⁵⁴ The Italian astronomer, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), who is also commemorated in Watkins's poem, corroborated and expanded on Copernicus's theories, but was prosecuted by the Catholic Inquisition for his views.³⁵⁵ Watkins's description of Galileo as 'twisted by the rack' as he repositions 'the bright sun' in the heavens seems to act as a metaphor for the way in which Galileo was pulled in opposing directions by the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the Christian ideology of his day – a conflict which, later, Bertolt Brecht also explored in his 1943 play, *Leben des Galilei* or *The Life of Galileo*.

To return to the stanza of Watkins's poem that explicitly engages with the work of Dante, however: 'Dante calls Primum Mobile' is adapted from canto XXVIII of the *Paradiso*, in which the hero, accompanied by his love and guide, Beatrice, arrive at 'the ninth heavenly sphere or Primum Mobile' – a region 'moved by its love for God and [. . .] held [by Dante] to communicate motion to the rest of the universe'.³⁵⁶ As Peter Armour explains,

the earth [in Dante's poem] is stationary at the centre of the universe; around it revolve nine transparent circular spheres, bearing the visible heavenly bodies – the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the Fixed stars – beyond which is the Primum Mobile (the First Moved Heaven or Crystalline Heaven), which exists in the Empyrean. Through these and their light, God's creative power and providence are transmitted down to earth.³⁵⁷

Dante references this deep structure at the close of the *Paradiso*, describing 'the Love that moves the sun and the other stars' (canto XXXIII, l. 145); and Watkins also assimilates this line from Dante's text into his poem. The 'First Cause' that Watkins refers to is God, who in canto XXVIII of the *Paradiso*, is manifested as 'an infinitesimal point of pure

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

³⁵⁶ John A. Scott, *Understanding Dante* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), p. 233.

³⁵⁷ Armour, 'Notes: *Paradiso*', p. 707.

light, surrounded by nine revolving circles (the nine orders of the angels)'.³⁵⁸ Dante initially sees this image of God glowing in the 'lovely eyes' (canto XXVIII, l. 11) of Beatrice, and Watkins imports this event into the proceeding stanza, which admits the English poet and visual artist, William Blake (1757-1827) into the poem's immortalising realm of visionaries. In *The Divine Comedy*, the stars or '*stelle*'³⁵⁹ – with which Dante concludes all the three parts of his poem, the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* – are 'blazing emblems of divinity'³⁶⁰ and 'the highest heavenly spheres which humans can see in their aspiration to God'.³⁶¹ As Dante reveals, for example, when he turns to face the divine light in canto XXVIII,

I saw a point that sent forth so acute
a light, that [. . .]
[. . .] any star that, seen from earth, would seem
to be smallest, set beside that point,
as star conjoined with star, would seem a moon.³⁶²

In 'Blake [. . .] holds the skies/ And all the stars shine down through human eyes', Watkins seems to be invoking the moment at which the divine light appears in Beatrice's eyes in canto XXVIII of the *Paradiso* and relating it to Blake's conception of God as the 'Divine Humanity'³⁶³ – his notion of 'Humanity' or 'man' as 'the image of God in which he was created'³⁶⁴ – and, in particular, to what Robert Ryan identifies as the 'unconventional theological conception that persists in Blake's work from first to last, the identification of God or Jesus with the human imagination'.³⁶⁵ Blake gives poetic form to

³⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 778.

³⁵⁹ Joseph Gallagher, *A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante's The Divine Comedy* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 1996), p. 64.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Peter Armour, 'Notes: *Purgatorio*', in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, translated from the Italian by Allen Mandelbaum (London: Everyman's Library, 1995), pp. 625-706 (p. 706).

³⁶² Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), *Paradiso* xxviii. 16-20.

³⁶³ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, 2nd edn (Hanover, NH: University of New England, 1988), p. 191.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

³⁶⁵ Robert Ryan, 'Blake and Religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 150-168 (p. 62).

his theological vision in, for example, 'The Divine Image', from his 1789 collection, *Songs of Innocence*:

Then every man of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine
Love Mercy Pity Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen turk or jew.
Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too.³⁶⁶

And these ideas find similar, though more ambiguous, expression in the final lines of 'Auguries of Innocence', from the 'Pickering Manuscript', published posthumously in 1863:

God appears, and God is light,
To those poor souls who dwell in night;
But does a human form display
To those who dwell in realms of day.³⁶⁷

Indeed, Watkins seems to be drawing directly on the opening lines of 'Auguries of Innocence' in his stanza on Blake. 'Blake, on the world alighting, holds the skies' evokes the opening lines of 'Auguries', while preserving the celestial imagery of the *Paradiso*:

To see the world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

(ll. 1-4)

The conceit of Blake 'alighting' on 'the world' and holding 'the skies' indicates the propinquity of earthly life to 'eternity', and the above lines from Blake's poem also create this impression. Indeed, 'Auguries of Innocence' pivots on this notion of terrestrial and metaphysical proximity – the speaker declaims that 'A robin redbreast in a cage/ Puts all Heaven in a rage' (ll. 5-6); 'A skylark wounded in the wing, A cherubim does cease to

³⁶⁶ William Blake, 'The Divine Image', in *Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. W.H. Stevenson, 3rd edn (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), p. 75, ll. 13- 20. All further references to Blake's poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

³⁶⁷ William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence', p. 612, ll. 1-4.

sing' (ll. 15-16); 'Every tear from every eye/ Becomes a babe in eternity' (ll. 67-68); and 'Kill not the moth nor butterfly,/ For the Last Judgement draweth nigh' (ll. 39-40) – though in these examples Blake's main objective seems to be to criticise the psychological tyranny of the established church in contemporary English society.³⁶⁸ Through subtly interweaving the work and thought of Blake and Dante in 'Discoveries', moreover, Watkins dramatises a genuine creative 'relationship' – just as he illustrates the actual creative influence of Aristotle on Ptolemy and of Ptolemy on Dante elsewhere in the poem. For although Blake often found fault with Dante's writings,³⁶⁹ he 'ranked [. . .] [the Italian Poet] with Shakespeare',³⁷⁰ and 'in his old age began a vast project of illustrating the entire *Divine Comedy*', producing one hundred and two water-colour paintings in all (Figure 5).³⁷¹

The next stanza of 'Discoveries' focuses on the English Metaphysical poet, John Donne (1572-1631), whom Watkins integrates into his transcendental territory of artists and thinkers by extending the theme of stars, observed previously in the stanzas on Dante and Blake: 'Donne sees those stars, yet will not let them lie'. On one level, the stars appear to be figured here as deceptive markers of permanence in the eyes of the seventeenth-century beholder. For in 1572, shortly before Galileo (as Watkins's speaker recognizes) began corroborating and developing Copernicus's revolutionary ideas about the structure of the cosmos, the Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), observed what appeared to be a new star in the night sky. The object, later identified as a supernova,³⁷² or an exploding, self-destructing star, emitted an unusually brilliant light

³⁶⁸ Ryan suggests that Blake's work also constitutes 'a sustained prophetic denunciation of the cruelties, mental and corporeal, everywhere propagated in the name of God by those who claim to be doing his will'; Ryan, p. 150.

³⁶⁹ Foster Damon, p. 96.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Bradley W. Carroll and Dale A. Ostlie, *An Introduction to Modern Astrophysics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1996), p. 25.

before steadily diminishing and finally vanishing from sight in March 1574.³⁷³ This event contradicted the astronomical configurations of Aristotle and Ptolemy, who had envisaged a distinct sphere of ‘fixed stars’, lying ‘outside the [seven] planets’.³⁷⁴ Indeed, as John Carey notes in his study, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*, ‘the appearance and disappearance of new stars [at this time] shook the semi-mystic belief in the changelessness of the heavens’,³⁷⁵ and Donne himself criticised ‘Aristotle’s followers [in *Biathanatos. A declaration of that paradoxe, or thesis, that Self-homicide is not so Naturally Sinne, that it may never be otherwise* (1648)] because they insist[ed] on considering the heavens unalterable’.³⁷⁶ In keeping with the central theme of astronomy in the poem – as well as with the poem’s title, ‘Discoveries’ – Watkins’ seems to be articulating this contemporary realisation of the mutability of ‘the skies’ by suggesting that the stars, as conceptualised by Aristotle, Ptolemy and also Dante (whom Donne read in the original)³⁷⁷ mislead or ‘lie’: they are, in actuality, not ‘fixed’ but protean and apparently subject to the same mortality as life on earth. Watkins makes this explicit in the following line, which he adapts from Donne’s 1633 poem, ‘The Canonization’ (‘We’re tapers too, and at our own cost die’);³⁷⁸ in this context, Donne’s words impress upon the reader that both stars and humans (a commonality that Watkins stresses by adding a comma before ‘too’ rather than quoting Donne verbatim) are cognate with ‘tapers’– ‘self-consuming candles’,³⁷⁹

³⁷³ John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 251.

³⁷⁴ Fara, p. 26.

³⁷⁵ Carey, p. 252. Carey notes that ‘Tycho’s pupil, [Johannes] Kepler [1571-1630] identified two other new stars, one in [. . .] 1600, and one [. . .] in 1604. Kepler published his observations in the *De Stella Nova* of 1606’, which Donne mentions in *Biathanatos*. Carey points out that ‘then came Galileo with his telescope and the map of the heavens was revolutionized. In his *Siderius Nuncius* of 1610, Galileo announced that he had discovered multitudes of stars never suspected before, and also the four satellites of Jupiter’; Carey, pp. 251-252.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. It should be noted, however, that Donne did not express this view in all of his writings; Carey, p. 18.

³⁷⁷ According to Carey, Donne was ‘one of the few Englishmen of his day to know Dante in the original’; Carey, p. 18.

³⁷⁸ John Donne, ‘The Canonization’, in *John Donne’s Poetry: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Donald R. Dickson (New York and London: Norton, 2007), p. 78, l. 21. All further references to Donne’s poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

³⁷⁹ Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy (eds), *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th edn (London and New York: Norton, 2005), p. 297.

whose very 'life' is, necessarily, also a process of material extinction. In this way, Watkins effectively develops or replies to his previous stanza on Blake by emphasising the fundamental difference between the 'humanity of man'³⁸⁰ and the 'Divine Humanity' of God.

But Watkins also seems to be concerned – in his own words – with the wider 'orbit' of Donne's 'thought' in this stanza. The intimation that both stars and humans are 'self-consuming candles' calls to mind Donne's theory, expounded in *Paradoxes, Problems, Essayes, Characters* (1652), that 'all things kill themselves'³⁸¹ – Donne, in fact, as the full title of *Biathanatos* cited above suggests, studied and argued a case for the legitimacy of suicide³⁸² – and this theme of self-sabotage also finds expression in 'The Canonization' itself; in the original context of Donne's poem, the speaker's assertion that he and his mistress 'die' at their 'own cost' reflects the popular seventeenth-century credence that 'lovers shorten their lives by sexual emission'.³⁸³ Broadly, moreover, Watkins seems to be attempting in these lines to epithetically represent Donne's well-known preoccupation with death as a philosophical and poetic theme, as evidenced, for instance, in the 'Holy Sonnets' (1633) – 'Death, be not proud, though some have called thee/ Mighty and dreadful [. . .]'³⁸⁴ – and in love poems such as 'The Dissolution' (1633) and 'The Relic' (1633), which is centred on the seventeenth-century practice of reusing graves.³⁸⁵ Another example is 'The Expiration' (1633), in which Donne hyperbolically invokes the theme of death in order to dramatise the parting of two lovers:

"Go." And if that word have not quite kill'd thee,
Ease me with death, by bidding me go too.

³⁸⁰ Foster Damon, p. 191.

³⁸¹ John Donne cited in Carey, p. 204.

³⁸² Carey, p. 204. Carey notes that *Biathanatos* was 'probably composed in 1608, [and was] the first English defence of suicide to be published'; Carey, p. 204.

³⁸³ Donald R. Dickson (ed.), *John Donne's Poetry*, p. 78.

³⁸⁴ John Donne, 'Holy Sonnet 6', p. 138, ll. 1-2.

³⁸⁵ Donald R. Dickson (ed.), *John Donne's Poetry*, p. 110.

Oh, if it have, let my word work on me,
 And a just office on a murderer do.
 Except it be too late, to kill me so,
 Being double dead, going, and bidding, "Go."³⁸⁶

Donne's suspicion of 'those stars' in 'Discoveries', however – which, as previously discussed, on one level, seems to index Watkins's continuing engagement with the great astronomical 'discoveries' of antiquity – could quite plausibly have another, parallel meaning. Indeed, the poem seems actively to invite plural readings and cultivate semantic instability: Watkins opens up and concatenates entire lifetimes of thought through cryptically terse and allusive two-line stanzas, encouraging the reader, in a sense, to assume the role of 'discoverer' or (to cite Yeats's translation of Swift's epitaph) 'world besotted traveller'. Indeed, the reader begins to resemble the speaker of John Keats's 1816 poem, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer': as we encounter each of Watkins's pedestalled poets and thinkers, just as Keats's speaker encountered George Chapman's translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, we are, in a sense, positioned as 'watcher[s] of the skies/ When a new planet swims into [our] ken'.³⁸⁷ Donne was born into a Roman Catholic family, but famously 'betrayed his Faith'³⁸⁸ by converting to Anglicanism³⁸⁹ – an apostasy that, arguably, finds expression in 'The Canonization', where the speaker invokes 'Catholic languages of ritual, miracle and transubstantiation'³⁹⁰ in order to defend and exalt illicit sexual love. As Carey explains, seventeenth-century Protestant doctrine held that Christian

faith meant belief in your own salvation. It necessitated a psychological belief by which you accepted Christ consciously as your personal saviour. But this psychological act could not come about by your own effort. Faith, the Protestant

³⁸⁶ John Donne, 'The Expiration', p. 114, ll. 7-12.

³⁸⁷ John Keats, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', in *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 72, ll. 1-14.

³⁸⁸ Carey, p. 15.

³⁸⁹ Donald R. Dickson (ed), 'Preface', in *John Donne's Poetry: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York and London: Norton and Company, 2007), pp. xi-xiv (p. xi).

³⁹⁰ Andrew Mousley, 'Introduction', in *New Casebooks: John Donne – Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Andrew Mousley (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 1-24 (p. 3). As Carey suggests, canonization or 'the intercession of saints was Catholic doctrine, disowned by Anglicans'; Carey, p. 43.

theologians believed, was wholly in God's gift. Man could do nothing to attain it. Nor was there any point in his trying to qualify for it by virtuous behaviour. God selected those whom He would save according to an inscrutable process, known only to Him.³⁹¹

When this is taken into consideration, the stars, as Watkins presents them in his stanzas on Dante and Blake, inevitably 'lie' in his stanza on Donne because they attest to a knowable God and promise that all souls may aspire to heaven; and the emphasis on the inevitability and 'cost' of death in the second, ventriloquised line of this stanza pertains to a fear of damnation.³⁹² Indeed, Donne poeticises these very anxieties in the *Holy Sonnets*; in 'Sonnet 19', for example, the speaker reveals that 'In prayers and flattering speeches I court God:/ Tomorrow I quake with fear of his rod',³⁹³ and in 'Sonnet 1', addressing God, Donne writes:

Oh I shall soon despair, when I do see
That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not choose me,
And Satan hates me, yet is loath to lose me.³⁹⁴

Regardless of how we read Watkins's richly suggestive stanza on John Donne, however, what is clear is that he uses its central theme of death as a means to link Donne with the French Enlightenment writer and philosopher, Voltaire (1694-1778), thereby introducing another eminent name into the poem's timeless fold of artists and thinkers. The opening clause of the proceeding stanza, 'The shroud-lamp catches', records the moment at which a lamp next to Voltaire's deathbed is reputed to have caught fire.³⁹⁵ Voltaire is thought to have reacted to this event by exclaiming '*Les flammes déjà?*' or 'The flames [that is, of Hell] already?'³⁹⁶ – a sardonic reference (which appears in Watkins's poem in the original French and is alleged to have been Voltaire's last utterance before

³⁹¹ Carey, p. 57.

³⁹² As Carey suggests, Donne, 'like every other Protestant of his day, was deeply influenced by Calvinism'; Carey, p. 240.

³⁹³ John Donne, 'Holy Sonnet 19', p. 145, ll. 10-11.

³⁹⁴ John Donne, 'Holy Sonnet 1', p. 136, ll. 12-14.

³⁹⁵ D.J. Enright (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Death* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 330.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

he died³⁹⁷) to the liberal, controversial and, to many ecclesiastics, blasphemous writings about institutional religion that he produced throughout his lifetime.³⁹⁸ As Voltaire wrote in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* or *Philosophical Dictionary*, published in 1764, for instance:

If I were permitted to reason consistently in religious matters, it would be clear that we all ought to become Jews, because Jesus Christ our Saviour was born a Jew, lived a Jew, died a Jew, and said expressly that he was accomplishing, that he was fulfilling the Jewish religion. But it is clearer still that we [people of different denominations and faiths] ought to be tolerant of one another, because we are all weak, inconsistent, liable to fickleness and error. Shall a reed laid low by the wind say to a fellow reed fallen in the opposite direction: "Crawl! As I crawl, wretch, or I shall petition that you be torn up by the roots and burned"?³⁹⁹

Voltaire's closing rhetorical question in the above call for religious tolerance has a particular resonance in relation to John Donne – a writer who, as previously noted, experienced, on a deeply personal level, the historical division and hostilities between Anglicans and Catholics. Indeed, Donne and Voltaire (and also Galileo, 'twisted by the rack', as I discussed earlier) found themselves in similarly vexed positions with regards to the religious institutions of their day; King Louis XV even banished Voltaire from Paris and Versailles for his writings.⁴⁰⁰ Watkins appears to recognise this affinity and, as with Dante and Blake, unites these two figures in inventive and subtle ways. '*Les flammes déjà?*' seems to function in 'Discoveries' as both a wry counterpoint to – Watkins underscores Voltaire's grim humour by describing 'smiling' lips and by placing a dash each side of '*déjà?*' – and an ominous echo of Donne's terror of damnation, adumbrated in the previous stanza. The burning 'shroud-lamp', too, clearly re-inscribes and reworks Donne's metaphor of the 'taper', associating 'self-consuming' light with human mortality, while 'The world dies, or Voltaire' is strikingly evocative of Donne's 'The Will' (1633), in

³⁹⁷ Enright, p. 330.

³⁹⁸ As Ian Davidson notes, 'throughout his life, Voltaire's iconoclasm had frequently got him into trouble with Church and State'; Ian Davidson, *Voltaire in Exile: The Last Years, 1753-78* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), p. xvi.

³⁹⁹ Voltaire, 'Reflections on Religion', in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1996), pp. 115-133 (p. 131).

⁴⁰⁰ Davidson, p. xvi.

which the speaker opines, in a similar way, that his own death will signify the demise of the world:

Therefore I'll give no more, but I'll undo
The world by dying, because love dies too.
Then all your beauties will be no more worth
Than gold in mines, where none doth draw it forth;
And all your graces no more shall have,
Than a sundial in a grave.⁴⁰¹

Principally, as previously discussed, the opening line of Watkins's next stanza seems to be an allusion to Swift's famous epitaph to himself on his grave in Dublin. And Watkins may also be referring here to how, after Swift's death, 'his ghost was said to haunt the aisles of St Patrick's Cathedral [. . .] [where he was buried], complaining that 'The Pamphlets wrote against me, would have form'd a Library'.⁴⁰² At the same time, however, as in Watkins's stanza on John Donne, the text proffers another meaning that creates a nexus between Swift, Voltaire and, by implication, the larger edifice of progressive minds that comprises 'Discoveries'. This is because, having proclaimed the 'death' of Voltaire at the end of the previous stanza, the speaker advances with 'Swift, a cold mourner *at his* burial-rite' (my emphasis), generating a sense of ambiguity regarding exactly whose 'burial-rite' the speaker is envisaging. Watkins also creates this effect in his next stanza on Beethoven – the account of 'Beethoven, in deafness hearing all' both honouring the composer's musical genius and intimating a kind of metaphysical communion between Beethoven and the other artists and thinkers of the poem. The reference to Swift as a 'cold' or lifeless 'mourner' sustains this dualism: not only did Swift die thirty-three years before Voltaire, but also the two men respected each other and

⁴⁰¹ John Donne, 'The Will', p. 106, ll. 46-51.

⁴⁰² Christopher Fox, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-13 (p. 1). Swift was buried 'in the great aisle of the cathedral'; Nokes, p. 412.

corresponded during their lifetimes,⁴⁰³ with Voltaire, at one point, hailing Swift as ‘the English Rabelais’.⁴⁰⁴ It was Swift’s aptitude as a satirist that prompted Voltaire to draw this comparison, and the subject of satire adds further credence to this plural reading of Watkins’s stanza. Swift and Voltaire are equally renowned for their controversial satires of seventeenth and eighteenth-century society. Indeed, Swift’s short story, *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) is, as Joseph McMinn notes, ‘a satire on divisions within Christianity, written [. . .] in imitation of theological extremism’⁴⁰⁵ and targeting both ‘Catholicism and Puritanism’⁴⁰⁶ – subjects which, as his novel, *Candide*,⁴⁰⁷ and the extract from his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* cited above attest, also preoccupied Voltaire. Watkins also unites the two writers, it seems, by playing on the notion, introduced in his stanza on Voltaire, of the individual artist’s death as signifying the ‘undoing’ of the world: ‘Swift [. . .]/ Burns to the world’s heart like a meteorite’. Again, Watkins may well be giving poetic expression to a genuine affinity here. In suggesting, like the egoistic speaker of Donne’s ‘The Will’, discussed previously, that the world is afflicted by the event of a single individual’s death, Watkins captures the ‘new individualism’⁴⁰⁸ of the Enlightenment age that Swift and Voltaire inhabited – a mood that is captured in Swift’s immortal words: ‘Go, traveller, and imitate if you can one who strove with all his might to champion liberty’.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰³ As A. Owen Aldridge notes, for example, ‘in June 1727, Swift was planning a trip to France, perhaps at Voltaire’s instigation, for he provided Swift with letters of introduction to the comte [de] Morville, secretary of state, and other French notables. Although Swift eventually changed his mind about the journey, his gratitude for Voltaire’s consideration never diminished, and he did what he could to repay in kind by promoting subscriptions for [Voltaire’s poem,] the *Henriade*, A. Owen Aldridge, *Voltaire and the Century of Light* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 64-65.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 64.

⁴⁰⁵ Joseph McMinn, ‘Swift’s Life’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 14-30 (p. 20).

⁴⁰⁶ Judith C. Mueller, ‘*A Tale of Tub* and early prose’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 202-215 (p. 207).

⁴⁰⁷ As Davidson notes, ‘through the medium of a knowingly unrealistic and picaresque international travel adventure’, which Swift also uses in *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Candide* ‘makes sceptical fun of the pretensions of all institutions of Church and State, starting with the theologians, metaphysicians, Jesuits and inquisitors’; Davidson, p. 54.

⁴⁰⁸ Fox, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁹ Swift cited in Nokes, p. 412.

The proceeding stanza enables John Milton (1608-1674) to take his place alongside Swift and Voltaire in Watkins's holy order of minds. Here, the speaker seems to be drawing on *Paradise Lost* (1667), and, more specifically, on the following excerpt from book three of Milton's poem:

[. . .] thee I revisit safe,
 And feel thy sov'reign vital lamp; but thou
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
 To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
 So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs,
 Or dim suffusion veiled. Yet not the more
 Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
 Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,
 Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief
 Thee Sion and the flow'ry brooks beneath
 That wash thy hallowed feet, and warbling flow,
 Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget
 Those other two equalled with me in fate,
 So were I equalled with them in renown,
 Blind Thamyras and blind Maeonides,
 And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old.⁴¹⁰

Milton famously lost his sight (he is introduced as 'Blind Milton' in Watkins's poem) and hence the poet-speaker of the above lines can only sense God's presence – he can only 'gaze' at 'fixed deeps' and 'feel [his] sov'reign vital lamp' – and cannot perceive his divine light: 'thou/ Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain'. The 'fixed deeps' into which Milton stares emphasise the darkness of the poet's world because Milton, as John Leonard notes, 'repeatedly refers to the infinite space outside our universe as 'the deep''⁴¹¹ in *Paradise Lost*; and whereas 'the interstellar space within Milton's universe is bright',⁴¹² 'illuminated by God's love'⁴¹³ (a conviction outlined previously with reference to

⁴¹⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin, 2000), iii. 21-36. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

⁴¹¹ John Leonard, 'Introduction', in John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. vii -xliii (p. xviii).

⁴¹² Ibid., p. xxi. As Leonard points out, 'the old astronomy held that the darkness of night was an illusion. The darkness is not really out there between the stars. The night sky just looks dark because we see it through our earth's shadow. This view of the universe was standard in ancient and medieval times and it survived into the Renaissance. The celestial heavens above and around the earth's shadow are a brilliant blue, with sun, moon, planets and stars all visible at once'; Leonard, 'Introduction', p. xxi.

Dante's *Divine Comedy*), 'outside [this domain] [. . .] is unremittingly dark'.⁴¹⁴ Milton's predicament causes his poetic persona in *Paradise Lost* to feel an affinity with Homer or 'Maeonides', who is also thought to have been blind; 'Thamyris' – 'a legendary Thracian poet [who appears in Homer's *Iliad*], punished with blindness for boasting that he could outsing the Muses'; 'Tiresias', 'the blind Theban prophet' who Watkins mentions earlier in his poem; and 'Phineus', 'a Thracian prophet, blinded by the Gods'.⁴¹⁵ Conceivably, Watkins may be referring to Thamyris, Tiresias and Phineus, as they appear in book three of Milton's poem, in his phrase, 'Three prophets fall'; but he also seems to be assimilating Milton's fatalistic lines, 'Those other two equalled with me in fate,/ So were I equalled with them in renown,/ Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides'. From this perspective, Thamyris, Maeonides and Milton himself are the 'three prophets', and they 'fall' or die and are immortalised in Watkins's stanza because they are, as Milton proclaims, 'equalled with [him] in fate'. Milton is also 'equalled' in 'Discoveries' with other members of Watkins's sublimated constellation of artists and thinkers. His description of 'fixed deeps of light', for example, also evokes the language of William Blake's 1794 poem, 'The Tiger':

Tiger tiger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
[. . .]

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?⁴¹⁶

Indeed, a similar interplay between Milton and Blake is perceptible earlier in Watkins's poem. As well as echoing Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' (as discussed previously) the phrase, 'Blake, on the world alighting' seems to allude, again, to book three of *Paradise Lost*, in which the poet-speaker explains that 'Satan alights upon the bare convex of this

⁴¹³ Ibid., p. xxii.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. xxi.

⁴¹⁵ John Leonard, 'Notes', in John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 289-453 (p. 325).

⁴¹⁶ William Blake, 'The Tiger', p. 163, ll. 1-6.

world's outermost orb [. . .]; thence comes to the gate of Heaven' (iii. 20-24). In drawing a parallel between Blake and Milton's Satan, Watkins seems to be acknowledging Blake's irreverence towards the institutional religion of his day and alluding, in particular, to his infamous assertion in his prose piece, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) that 'the reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when he wrote of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it'.⁴¹⁷ Moreover, again, as with Blake and Dante, and Swift and Voltaire, Watkins poeticises a genuine artistic relationship in his poem; as S. Foster Damon notes, 'Milton [. . .], in Blake's opinion, was England's greatest poet,⁴¹⁸ and a considerable source of inspiration. Blake completed *Milton, a Poem in Two Books* (1804), for example, and he also illustrated many of Milton's poems, including *Paradise Lost*.⁴¹⁹

If Milton had a profound influence on Blake's oeuvre, then Blake was equally influential in shaping the life and poetry of W.B. Yeats. As Keith Alldritt notes, Yeats co-wrote with E.J. Ellis 'a commentary on the mystical system of William Blake as articulated in his Prophetic Books',⁴²⁰ which was published in 1893, and 'Blake's vision' formed 'an important part of Yeats's mystical understanding'⁴²¹ of art and the world. Watkins dramatises this creative bond in 'Discoveries' by hailing Yeats as a 'Beggard of those Minute Particulars' – 'Minute Particulars' being the term that Blake invented to denote

the outward expression in this world of the eternal individualities of all things. God, "the Divine-Humanity" [as discussed earlier], is ultimately "the only General and Universal form"; he contains all things, including the various Universal Forms, the sources of the Particulars. The Minute Particulars of God are men; of men, they are their children; of life, the joys of living, especially the

⁴¹⁷ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1948), pp. 181-193 (p. 182).

⁴¹⁸ S. Foster Damon, p. 274.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁴²⁰ Keith Alldritt, *W.B. Yeats: The Man and the Milieu* (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 86.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

embraces of love' of ethics, forgiveness instead of judgement; of art, the vision and the finished product; of science, the basic facts. In short, they are reality as we encounter it. They are not negligible aberrations from a Platonic norm, but are highly organised and direct expressions of their eternal and individual existences.⁴²²

There are also clear echoes of Blake in Watkins's subsequent account of how 'Yeats lights again the turmoil of the stars'. While the trope of the 'stars' again links Yeats with all of the aforementioned figures that delimit Watkins's transcendental realm, this line is especially evocative of Blake's poem 'The Tyger', discussed earlier vis-à-vis Watkins's stanza on Milton. In this poem, Blake writes:

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

(ll. 17-20)

The 'turmoil' that Watkins observes concords with Blake's representation of the stars in the above stanza, where they '[throw] down their spears' and cry 'their tears' on 'heaven'. Moreover, in declaring that 'Yeats lights again the turmoil of the stars', Watkins's speaker seems to be registering how Yeats revived and promoted the creative achievements of Blake, stimulating 'an enormous increase in interest' in the poet's work during the twentieth century.⁴²³ Watkins may also be foregrounding and playing on a recursive motif in Yeats's own work here. The stars function as a kind of poetic muse in many of Yeats's poems – for example, in 'Brown Penny' (1910): 'For he would be thinking of love/ Till the stars had run away/ And the shadows eaten the moon';⁴²⁴ in 'When You are Old' (1895) –

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead

⁴²² Foster Damon, pp. 280-281.

⁴²³ Margaret Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 6th edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 108.

⁴²⁴ W.B. Yeats, 'Brown Penny', in *W.B. Yeats: Selected Poems*, ed. Timothy Webb (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 71, ll. 12-14.

And hid his face amid a crowd of stars⁴²⁵

– and in ‘The Song of Wandering Aengus’ (1899):

And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.⁴²⁶

Other notable examples can be found in ‘The Secret Rose’ (1899): ‘When shall the stars
be blown about the sky,/ Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?’⁴²⁷ and in
‘Anashuya and Vijaya’ (1895), a poem inspired by Indian mysticism:

*Anashuya [sings out of the temple].
A sad, sad thought went by me slowly:
Sigh, O you little stars! O sigh and shake your blue apparel!
The sad, sad thought has gone from me now wholly:
Sing, O you little stars! O sing and raise your rapturous
carol
To mighty Brahma, he who made you as the sands,
And laid you on the gates of the evening with his quiet hands.*⁴²⁸

I have analysed ‘Discoveries’ in some detail in order to demonstrate clearly that, like Lynette Roberts, Watkins, in his own way, embraces and utilizes his ‘deterritorialized’ position as an ‘Anglo-Welsh’ writer; he develops a rootless, roving poetic voice – the experimental idiom (in Yeats’s words) of ‘a world-besotted traveller’ – which acts as a ‘verbal ikon’ for his, and also, effectively, other contemporary Anglophone Welsh writers’ experience of social and cultural dislocation. The semantic instability and plurality of this poetic mode – the manifold and labyrinthine interpretive paths that Watkins lays for the reader – reinforce this overall impression of homelessness and itinerancy. Moreover, Watkins’s socio-cultural position and poetic praxis link him with many other, canonical Modernist writers and artists. As Malcolm Bradbury argues,

much Modernist art has taken its stance from, [and] gained its perspectives out of, a certain kind of distance, an exiled posture – a distance from local origins,

⁴²⁵ W.B. Yeats, ‘When You are Old’, p. 41, ll. 9-12.

⁴²⁶ W.B. Yeats, ‘The Song of Wandering Aengus’, p. 59, ll. 5-8.

⁴²⁷ W.B. Yeats, ‘The Secret Rose’, p. 70, ll. 29-30.

⁴²⁸ W.B. Yeats, ‘Anashuya and Vijaya’, p. 11, ll. 16-23.

class allegiances, the specific obligations and duties of those with an assigned role in a cohesive culture'.⁴²⁹

Bradbury cites the work of T.S. Eliot as an outstanding example of this trend, but Watkins's 'Discoveries' is an equally apposite case in point. Indeed, we might say that Watkins makes use of his 'deterritorialized', peripatetic cultural perspective, just as Eliot, an American who, Peter Ackroyd points out, 'was never completely at home anywhere and, even after he adopted British citizenship, [. . .] would sometimes sign himself 'metoikos', the Greek for 'resident alien',⁴³⁰ creatively utilized his position as 'wandering, culturally inquisitive'⁴³¹ émigré. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', for example, which I touched on in chapter one of this thesis, interweaves references and allusions to Dante, Homer, Hesiod, Andrew Marvell, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Jules Laforgue, and the French philosopher, Henri Bergson (1859-1941), among others. Furthermore, in *The Waste Land* – Eliot's most densely intertextual poem – the voices of all of the aforementioned figures converge with those of Ovid, Virgil, Milton, St Augustine, the Buddha, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Joseph Conrad, the German composer, Richard Wagner (1813-83), the German novelist, Herman Hesse (1877-1962), and many more besides.

The work of Watkins and Eliot, whose Faber and Faber Press published Watkins's poetry along with that of Lynette Roberts and David Jones, actually intersects at several points. Both in terms of its subject matter and its self-conscious connective and connotative strategies, 'Discoveries' accords with the distinctly Eliotic belief that creative progressiveness and ingenuity arise from engagement or dialogue with the past – from what Eliot calls in his influential essay of 1919, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', an 'historical sense [. . .] that the whole literature of Europe from Homer [. . .]

⁴²⁹ Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', p. 100.

⁴³⁰ Peter Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p. 88.

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 101.

has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order'.⁴³² Eliot's essay points towards the innovatory potential of just the kind of cultural expansiveness and 'sense of the timeless as well as the temporal'⁴³³ that we encounter in Watkins's poem; both texts, in a sense, intimate that 'not only the best, but the most individual parts of his [the poet's] work may be those in which dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously'.⁴³⁴ Watkins posited a very similar outlook on poetry to that expressed by Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in a lecture which he presented at Swansea University in 1966. Here, he insisted that

the perceptions of a poet must be composite, as he is a witness for the living and the dead at the same time. If he observes the two responsibilities, he will begin to see what is ancient in the contemporary scene and what is contemporary in the ancient; and his style will emerge from that collision [. . .].⁴³⁵

Watkins also seems to evoke the ideas that Eliot expressed in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in the following stanza from his later 'Ode: to T. S. Eliot' (1962):

Art is various, verse develops unsearchably.
See, from the mid-leaf born,
Growth may copy the cactus
Yet adhere to its ancient root.⁴³⁶

Here, Watkins suggests that 'art' in the modern world may advance and assume apparently divergent, unfamiliar forms, just as the cactus, which is 'without leaves, [. . .] armed with curious clusters of spines; [. . .] and [. . .] often of grotesque shape',⁴³⁷ deviates from other plants, but it always 'adhere[s] to its ancient root' – always grows out of and carries the trace of the art that has gone before. Echoing 'Discoveries', Watkins also seems to be directly assimilating Eliot's verse in this stanza; Eliot invokes the image of

⁴³² T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *T.S. Eliot: Selected Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), pp. 13-33 (p. 14).

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Vernon Watkins, 'Prose: excerpts from Vernon Watkins's lecture notes used at University College, Swansea, in 1966', *Poetry Wales*, n.s. 12.4 (Spring 1977), 52-56 (p. 52).

⁴³⁶ Vernon Watkins, 'Ode: to T. S. Eliot', p. 294.

⁴³⁷ *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, [accessed March 15th 2010].

the cactus in 'The Hollow Men' (1925), where the speaker declares, 'This is the dead land/ This is cactus land',⁴³⁸ and intones:

*Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.*

(p. 80)

Moreover, again following Eliot – and also conforming to a pattern traced previously in the Welsh Modernist work of Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones and Idris Davies – Watkins's new mode of expression entails a process not only of cultural deterritorialization, but also of Modernist *reterritorialization*. Whereas Thomas, Jones and Davies seek reterritorialization within an emerging territory of 'Anglo-Welsh' writing, however, and the early Eliot – the author of 'Prufrock' and *The Waste Land* – seeks a grounding, as Bradbury argues, within 'a [kind of] modern country of the arts', where 'the place of art's making [. . .] become[s] an ideal distant city',⁴³⁹ Watkins employs a different strategy. Owing, perhaps, to the centrally religious nature of his detachment from his home culture – we recall that Watkins's Anglican religious education set him apart from his traditional Welsh Nonconformist family – he opts for 'a religious or spiritual reterritorialization'⁴⁴⁰ (to use Deleuze and Guattari's phrase) within an elite, Christianised 'country of the arts', with 'its own [culturally expansive] society [. . .] [of thinkers and artists] from other countries, other languages, other ages'.⁴⁴¹ In this respect, Watkins's poem bears comparison with the later Eliot – in particular his *Four Quartets* (1935-1942). Eliot locates each of the four poems that make up this collection in real, worldly places of personal significance to him – at 'Burnt Norton', a manor house that he encountered during a visit to Gloucestershire; 'East Coker', a village in Somerset where his family

⁴³⁸ T.S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', p. 81.

⁴³⁹ Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', p. 101.

⁴⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 24.

⁴⁴¹ M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 37.

lived before they emigrated to America in the seventeenth century; 'The Dry Salvages', a cluster of rocks lying off the coast of Massachusetts, New England, where his ancestors had settled 'in the 1650s and [. . .] established themselves as social and cultural leaders',⁴⁴² and 'Little Gidding', a Church in Cambridgeshire.⁴⁴³ He is primarily concerned, however, with pursuing a kind of mystical reterritorialization within a sacred, timeless state or imagined realm:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance
is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from
nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still
point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, *there*, we have been: but I cannot say where.
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.
The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood⁴⁴⁴

F.O. Matthiessen has described the transcendental 'point' that the poet-speaker identifies above as 'Eliot's poetic equivalent in our cosmology for Dante's 'unmoved mover' [a concept which I discussed earlier in this chapter], another way of symbolising a timeless release from the outer compulsions of the world';⁴⁴⁵ and this imagined ground accrues a more overtly Christian significance in the third poem of the collection, 'The Dry Salvages' (1941):

Men's curiosity searches past and future

⁴⁴² John Xiros Cooper, *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁴⁴³ F.O. Matthiessen, 'The Quartets', in *T.S. Eliot Four Quartets: A Casebook*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 88-104 (p. 89-90).

⁴⁴⁴ T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', p. 208.

⁴⁴⁵ Matthiessen, p. 94.

And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
 The point of intersection of the timeless
 With time, is an occupation for the saint –
 No occupation either, but something given
 And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
 Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
 For most of us, there is only the unattended
 Moment, the moment in and out of time,
 The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
 The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
 Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
 That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
 While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
 Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
 Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
 The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
 Here the impossible union
 Of spheres of existence is actual,
 Here the past and future
 Are conquered, and reconciled.⁴⁴⁶

Furthermore, recalling Watkins's transcultural and transhistorical approach in
 'Discoveries', in addition to Dante, Eliot again incorporates the ideas of Bergson, and the
 ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, in *Four Quartets*,⁴⁴⁷ and, as in *The Waste Land*, he
 also looks beyond Western cultural tradition, to India and the Hindu scripture, the
Bhagavad-Gita.⁴⁴⁸

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant –
 Among other things – or one way of putting the same
 thing:
 That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender
 spray
 Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret,
 Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been
 opened.

(p. 196)

⁴⁴⁶ T.S. Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages', p. 199.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

Indeed, the format of 'Discoveries' seems almost to anticipate and actualise Eliot's assertion in the final poem of *Four Quartets*, 'Little Gidding' (1942), that 'Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,/ Every poem an epitaph'.⁴⁴⁹

Watkins's wandering poetic idiom, which is the voice of Anglophone Welsh deterritorialization reterritorialized within an almost Eliotic 'modern country of the arts', is also evident in 'The Collier' (1941) – though here it has a different, more ballad-like complexion:

When I was born on Amman hill
A dark bird crossed the sun.
Sharp on the floor the shadow fell;
I was the youngest son.

And when I went to the County School
I worked in a shaft of light.
In the wood of the desk I cut my name:
Dai for Dynamite.

The tall black hills my brothers stood;
Their lessons all were done.
From the door of the school when I ran out
They frowned to watch me run.

The slow grey bells they rung a chime
Surly with grief or age.
Clever or clumsy, lad or lout,
All would look for a wage.

I learnt the valley flowers' names
And the rough bark knew my knees.
I brought home trout from the river
And spotted eggs from the trees.

A coloured coat I was given to wear
Where the lights of the rough land shone.
Still jealous of my favour
The tall black hills looked on.
They dipped my coat in the blood of a kid
And they cast me down a pit,
And although I crossed with strangers
There was no way up from it.

⁴⁴⁹ T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', p. 208.

Soon as I went from the County School
 I worked in a shaft. Said Jim,
 'You will get your chain of gold, my lad,
 But not for a likely time.'

And one said, 'Jack was not raised up
 When the wind blew out the light
 Though he interpreted their dreams
 And guessed their fears by night.'

And Tom, he shivered his leper's lamp
 For the stain that round him grew;
 And I heard mouths pray in the after-damp
 When the picks would not break through.

They changed words there in darkness
 And still through my head they run,
 And white on my limbs is the linen sheet
 And gold on my neck the sun.⁴⁵⁰

This poem differs from 'Discoveries' in that it is located within a real, earthly space: the industrialised South Wales valleys of Watkins's birth. And yet, recalling Eliot's *Four Quartets*, the poetic voice is distanced from this geographical territory. Like the figures in 'Discoveries', the poetic voice is elevated and immortalised. The speaker looks down at his body covered with a 'white [. . .] linen sheet' and recalls the events of his life leading up to his death following an explosion in a coalmine; he and his co-workers, it seems, were unable to dig themselves to safety ('the picks would not break through'), and were suffocated by the 'after-damp' – the noxious atmosphere generated when 'carbonic acid gas' rises and combines with 'nitrogen, steam, smoke and dust'.⁴⁵¹ Moreover, again recalling 'Discoveries', Watkins's speaker shares his transcendental territory with other voices that sound or, as Rowan Williams suggests, 'echo' within his own.⁴⁵² Most obviously, the poem is structured around the biblical story of Joseph. But, more specifically, as Richard Ramsbotham notes, Watkins is drawing here on Richard Strauss' dramatic adaptation of this narrative in his ballet, *Josephslegende* or *The Legend of Joseph*

⁴⁵⁰ Vernon Watkins, 'The Collier', pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* [accessed March 10th 2010].

⁴⁵² Rowan Williams, 'Swansea's Other Poet: Vernon Watkins and the Threshold between Worlds', p. 115.

(1914).⁴⁵³ Ramsbotham points out that Watkins attended a performance of *Josephslegende* in Nuremburg in 1930, and notes that he found it to be, in his own words,

a work of immortal beauty and most wonderfully portrayed. It . . . shows the pagan rule of tyranny, savagery, lust and monarchical pride penetrated by the subtle spirit of free untamed aesthetic beauty evolved from innocent childhood in the figure of Joseph.⁴⁵⁴

In Watkins's poem, the 'pagan rule of tyranny, savagery, lust and monarchical pride', so vividly portrayed by Strauss, takes the form of industry in the South Wales valleys, and this milieu threatens the young speaker's 'innocent' 'spirit of free untamed aesthetic beauty' – the spirit in which he 'learnt the valley flowers' names', felt 'rough bark' on his skin and 'brought home trout from the river/ And spotted eggs from the trees'. This commercial menace is symbolised by the dark hills with their concealed networks of coal pits and shafts, which are likened to the grasping, envious brothers of the Joseph story. But Watkins is not only invoking Strauss's production here. Rather, in his initial portrayal of a solitary and sensitive child's uniquely intimate communion with nature, he also seems to be assimilating the themes of William Wordsworth's autobiographical narrative poem, *The Prelude* (1805). As Wordsworth writes in book one of this text, in which he recalls his '*Childhood and School-Time*':⁴⁵⁵

[. . .] I believe
That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
A favoured Being, from his earliest dawn
Of infancy doth open out the clouds,
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentlest visitation

(i. 362-367)

⁴⁵³ Richard Ramsbotham, 'Notes', in *Vernon Watkins: New Selected Poems*, ed. Richard Ramsbotham (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), pp. 103-112 (p. 103).

⁴⁵⁴ Watkins cited in Ramsbotham, 'Notes', p. 103.

⁴⁵⁵ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, in *The Oxford Authors: William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), i. 375. All further references to Wordsworth's poems are to this edition and are given in the text.

The young poet-speaker of Wordsworth's poem is constructed as such a 'favoured Being'. In the following passage, for example, it is as if 'Nature' itself is assisting him in his endeavours to observe the most sublime and inaccessible natural sights:

[. . .] and when the Vales
 And woods were warm, was I a plunderer then
 In the high places, on the lonesome peaks
 Where'er, among the mountains and the winds,
 The Mother Bird had built her lodge. Though mean
 My object, and inglorious, yet the end
 Was not ignoble. Oh! When I have hung
 Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
 And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
 But ill sustained, and almost, as it seemed,
 Suspended by the blast which blew, amain,
 Shouldering the naked crag; Oh! At that time,
 While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
 With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
 Blow through my ears! The sky seemed not a sky
 Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!

(i. 335-346)

Not only does Wordsworth's preoccupation with childhood 'favour' chime with Watkins's poem, Strauss's ballet, and the original biblical tale of Joseph, but the above image of the young Wordsworth 'plundering' the treasures of the natural world finds an echo in 'The Collier' when the speaker scours the river for 'trout' and gathers birds' 'eggs from the trees'. Wordsworth also concedes that 'not the less,/ [. . .],/ does it delight her [Nature] sometimes to employ/ severer interventions' (I, ll. 367-371); and, evoking Watkins's poem, this threatening quality is registered in the recurring image of the hills. The speaker in *The Prelude* describes, for example, how he 'heard among the hills/ Low breathings coming after me' (I, ll. 329-330) and recalls how

The leafless trees, and every icy crag
 Tinkled like iron; while the distant hills
 Into the tumult sent an alien sound
 Of melancholy, not unnoticed;

(i. 468-471)

Watkins's allusions to *The Prelude* add further poignancy to the collier's narrative; for while Wordsworth's young poet-speaker proceeds on an artistic and spiritual journey of self-discovery, Watkins's speaker is unable to free himself, at least in his lifetime, from the constrictions of his social environment. As he ruefully suggests:

They dipped my coat in the blood of a kid
And they cast me down a pit,
And although I crossed with strangers
There was no way up from it.

Watkins also differs from Eliot, however, in his use of Romantic tropes and allusions. Whereas Eliot 'professed to depise' Romanticism,⁴⁵⁶ and was able to repudiate the Romantics because he was incontrovertibly their heir, Watkins – and also, as I demonstrated in chapter one of this thesis, Idris Davies – with no 'Anglo-Welsh' Romanticism to rebel against, instead, seems to have approached the Romantic poets in the manner of 'culturally inquisitive' outsiders within the English poetic tradition.

Also perceptible in 'The Collier' is the voice of W.B. Yeats – a poet who, as previously discussed, features prominently in 'Discoveries', and for whom Watkins reserved particular admiration. 'But Yeats, Yeats the poet/ Under Dublin skies', he wrote in his 1945 poem 'Yeats in Dublin', for example, after meeting the Irish poet for the first time; 'After ten years' journey/ [. . .]/ After the waves of silence/ I look him in the eyes.'⁴⁵⁷ Yeats's presence is felt, specifically, in the rhyme and rhythm of 'The Collier', which call to mind 'The Song of Wandering Aengus', from Yeats's 1899 collection *The Wind Among the Reeds*. The opening lines of this poem, in which Yeats's speaker utilizes the bounties of the natural world, also overlap thematically with stanza five of 'The Collier', where the young collier catches 'trout from the river' and plucks 'spotted eggs from the trees':

⁴⁵⁶ Ackroyd, p. 138.

⁴⁵⁷ Vernon Watkins, 'Yeats in Dublin', p. 59.

I went out to the hazel wood,
 Because a fire was in my head,
 And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
 And hooked a berry to a thread;
 And when white moths were on the wing,
 And moth-like stars were flickering out,
 I dropped the berry in a stream
 And caught a little silver trout.

(ll. 1-8)

In 'The Collier', then, as in 'Discoveries', Watkins grounds his deracinated poetic voice within a kind of transcendental, sacred territory of art, constructing a 'new verbal ikon' that functions, as Rowan Williams argues, 'not by simple imitation', but through what might be described as 'the semi-ventriloquism of allusion and delicate pastiche' – through, to cite Williams again, 'a sort of transmutation [of other voices] into a slightly but significantly different medium'.⁴⁵⁸ Another of Watkins's poems in which this particular Welsh Modernist process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization is especially palpable is 'Ophelia' (1948) – a poem which takes as its subject the fate of the tragic character of Ophelia in Shakespeare's 1604 play, *Hamlet*:

Stunned in the stone light, laid among the lilies,
 Still in the green wave, graven in the reed-bed,
 Lip-read by clouds in the language of the shallows,
 Lie there, reflected.

Soft come the eddies, cold between your fingers.
 Rippling through cresses, willow-trunk and reed-root,
 Gropes the grey water; there the resting mayfly
 Burns like an emerald.

Haunting the path, Laertes falls to Hamlet;
 He, the young Dane, the mover of your mountains,
 Sees the locked lids, your nunnery of sorrows,
 Drowned in oblivion.

Dense was your last night, thick with stars unnumbered.
 Bruised, the reeds parted. Under them the mud slipped,
 Yielding. Scuttling and terrified, the moorhen
 Left you to sink there.

⁴⁵⁸ Rowan Williams, 'Swansea's Other Poet: Vernon Watkins and the Threshold between Worlds', p. 14.

[. . .]

Bride-veils of mist fall, brilliant are the sunbeams,
Open the great leaves, all the birds are singing.
Still unawake in purity of darkness
Whiter than daylight

Dream the soft lids, the white, the deathly sleeping;
Closed are the lashes: day is there a legend.
Rise from the fair flesh, from the midnight water,
Child too soon buried.⁴⁵⁹

In Shakespeare's play, Ophelia is sent mad with grief when Hamlet mistakenly kills her father, Polonius. While deliriously picking flowers, she falls into a river and drowns; and in the above lines, Watkins envisages the scene of her death, combining his 'Shakespearean subject with a Ruskinian intensity of natural observation'⁴⁶⁰ – the speaker perceives a 'resting' 'emerald' 'mayfly', for example, and observes water 'Rippling through cresses, willow-trunk and reed-root' – in a kind of poetic rendering of the Pre-Raphaelite visual artist, Sir John Everett Millais's famous 1852 painting, *Ophelia* (Figure 6). Watkins was, after all, as Ian Hilton notes, always 'concern[ed] with the links created between poetry, music and the visual arts, and [with] the possession of the imagination by a melody, painting or carving'.⁴⁶¹ There are not only echoes, or touches, of Millais here, however: the language of Shakespeare's play itself is woven into the poem. The reference to Ophelia's 'nunnery of sorrows', for example, assimilates Hamlet's acerbic remark in act three scene one, 'Get thee to a nunnery',⁴⁶² and 'Lie there, reflected' seems to adapt Queen Gertrude's recollection, in act four scene seven, of 'the glassy stream' (VI. vii. 165) in which Ophelia's body is discovered. Moreover, the form and content of the poem is redolent of Arthur Rimbaud's representation of the same event in his 1870 poem, 'Ophélie':

⁴⁵⁹ Vernon Watkins, 'Ophelia', pp. 114–115.

⁴⁶⁰ Christopher Wood, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Seven Dials, 2000), p. 33.

⁴⁶¹ Hilton, p. 80.

⁴⁶² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Cyrus Hoy, 2nd edn (New York and London: Norton, 1991), III. i. 119.

I

In the calm black stream where stars sleep,
 White Ophelia floats like a great lily,
 Very slowly floats, lying in long veils...
 – Up in the woods, dogs bark, men shout.

For a thousand years or more, sad white phantom
 Ophelia has moved down the long black river.
 A thousand years or more her sweet song
 Of madness has charmed the evening air.

The wind kisses her breasts and like a flower opens
 Her long veils gently moving with the water.
 On her shoulder willows weep and shiver,
 Over her wide dreaming face rushes lean.

Around her, jostling water-lilies sigh;
 In a drowsy alder, when sometimes she disturbs
 A nest, there's a quick flurry of wings
 – Mysterious music tumbles from the golden stars.

II

O pale Ophelia, beautiful as snow!
 Yes, poor child, downstream you died.
 – Because great Norway mountain winds
 Moaned their message of harsh freedom

[. . .]

III

– The Poet says that when the stars come out
 You come looking for flowers you picked;
 He says he's seen, lying in her long veils,
 White Ophelia, like some great lily, float by.⁴⁶³

Like the stream in which Ophelia floats, the surface of Watkins's poem ripples with the imagery of Rimbaud's 'Ophélie'. For example, in Watkins's text, the speaker imagines Ophelia as 'Whiter than daylight' and states, 'Dream the soft lids, the white, the deathly sleeping'; and in Rimbaud's poem we also encounter a 'White Ophelia', like a 'sad white phantom', whose death is figured as a kind of sleep or dream: 'Over her wide dreaming face rushes lean'. Similarly, just as Watkins's Ophelia is 'laid among the lilies', around the

⁴⁶³ Arthur Rimbaud, 'Ophelia', pp. 29-31.

Ophelia of Rimbaud's poem 'jostling water-lilies sigh'; and in the same way that the Ophelia of Watkins's poem alarms a 'moorhen', sending it 'Scuttling' into the undergrowth, the Ophelia of Rimbaud's poem 'sometimes [. . .] disturbs/ A nest, [and] there's a quick flurry of wings'. In both poems, too, Ophelia is identified as a child: in Watkins's poem she is a 'Child too soon buried', while Rimbaud's speaker avers that 'Yes, poor child, downstream you died'. But most significantly, in the context of Watkins's impulse towards reterritorialization within a transcendental, sacred realm of art or, in M. Wynn Thomas's words, 'a spiritual refuge beyond the flux of things',⁴⁶⁴ both poems also effectively immortalise Ophelia, securing and celebrating her afterlife as an artistic muse. Watkins encourages Ophelia to 'Rise from the fair flesh, from the midnight water,/ Child too soon buried'; and indeed in making her the subject of his poem he poetically enacts this resurrection. Ophelia is artistically revived in a comparable way in Rimbaud's text; indeed, in the final stanza she is observed by 'The Poet', alive, and 'looking for the flowers [that she] picked'.

According to James A. Davies, 'in [. . .] Watkins's intertextual procedure [. . .] we [. . .] encounter a modernist flourish',⁴⁶⁵ and this 'intertextuality is [also] a potent reminder that Watkins is another poet of the interstice in which geographical Welshness meets English literature'.⁴⁶⁶ This chapter has aimed to explore and elucidate the relationship between these qualities of Watkins's verse: between the insistent intertextuality of his poetic idiom, his firmly 'interstitial' or 'deterritorialized' position as an Anglophone Welsh writer, and his particular form of Modernism. That Watkins's Modernism is rarefied, resolutely internationalist and aestheticist, and often intensely spiritual in nature – quite different, often, from that of his Anglo-Welsh contemporaries, Gwyn Thomas,

⁴⁶⁴ M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, p. 70.

⁴⁶⁵ James A. Davies, 'Dylan Thomas and his Welsh Contemporaries', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature: Welsh Writing in English*, ed. M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), VII, 120-164 (p. 149).

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Glyn Jones and Idris Davies – seems to reflect his more complex and deep-rooted feelings of detachment from his home culture and indeed from any real sense of social and cultural belonging in the physical, contemporary world. Instead, like the similarly nomadic T.S. Eliot, Watkins seeks reterritorialization within, and cultivates a sense of belonging and stability from, his own timeless society of fellow writers and intellectuals – his own, self-made ‘modern country of the arts’.

4

**Cadaqués and Carmarthenshire: The Modernist ‘heterotopias’ of Salvador Dalí
and Dylan Thomas**

The previous chapter and, indeed, all of the chapters that have made up this thesis so far, have been concerned, in various ways, with the issue of territoriality – with the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which are, as I have demonstrated, fundamental to Anglophone Welsh Modernism. This chapter aims to pursue this theme of territoriality, or (to use Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel’s term) ‘positionality’, further and to explore some of the Modernist locations or spaces that are found in the work of Vernon Watkins’s close friend and fellow Swansea poet, Dylan Thomas.

In contrast to Vernon Watkins, who is generally labelled simply as a metaphysical, religious or romantic poet, Dylan Thomas has been readily accepted and widely regarded as a creator of Welsh Modernism. As I suggested in chapter one, this is due, in part, to Thomas’s radically inventive approach to language in his early work. But another reason for Thomas’s comparatively easy admission into the canon of ‘British’ Modernism, aside from his enduring popular and critical appeal, seems to be his well-documented involvement and interest in the European avant-garde. Not only was Thomas, as Christopher Wigginton points out, ‘an avid reader of and contributor to [the Paris-based avant-garde journal], *transition*’,⁴⁶⁷ but he also famously

attended the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries in London, [. . .] which played host to, amongst others, green-haired André Breton, Paul Éluard and Herbert Read, who delivered their lecture on ‘Art and the Unconscious’ [. . .], and Salvador Dalí, who was almost asphyxiated after giving his paper clad in a diving suit, whose helmet became stuck. (Thomas offered visitors cups of boiled string, asking ‘weak or strong?’ and later read his work at one of the evening events [. . .].)⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ Wigginton, *Modernism from the Margins*, p. 43.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

This anecdote reveals that, although Thomas often dismissed Surrealism – in a letter written in the same year, he identifies it as among ‘the clever things one (me) doesn’t want to understand’⁴⁶⁹ – he was, in reality, obviously attracted to the movement, particularly to its element of humour and its principle of irrationality. His critically neglected friend and contemporary, Glyn Jones, by contrast – whose early work, as previously discussed, is often no less surreal in its effects than Thomas’s – assumes a more detached position, and takes a more measured approach, writing in ‘Notes on Surrealism’:

And here, as far as I can see it, is one of the main weaknesses of the Surrealists; they are trying to base their art, as it were, on one element, the element of incongruity, shutting out important and fruitful experience.⁴⁷⁰

The relationship between Dylan Thomas’s work and European Surrealism has been theorised recently by Christopher Wigginton in his book, *Modernism from the Margins: The 1930s Poetry of Louis MacNeice and Dylan Thomas*, which I mentioned earlier in the introduction to this thesis. Referring to Thomas’s 1936 poem, ‘Altarwise by owl-light’, Wigginton argues that Thomas

guys and mimics the attributes of a European metropolitan style [that is, Surrealism] where it can be made to coincide with his own contexts and tactics of estrangement. In both embracing and rejecting surrealism [. . .] he creates a provincial simulacrum of surrealism (‘surrealist imitations’), or what might thus be called *surregionalism*.⁴⁷¹

The distinction between ‘Surrealism’ and ‘regionalism’, however, implicit in Wigginton’s new term ‘*surregionalism*’, is problematic. This is because the term ‘*surregionalism*’, which Wigginton coins to distinguish Dylan Thomas’s style from European Surrealism, could be just as easily applied to the work of many of the practitioners of the movement,

⁴⁶⁹ Dylan Thomas, Letter to Edith Sitwell, 17 January 1936, in *Dylan Thomas: The Collected Letters*, ed. Paul Ferris (London: Paladin, 1987), p. 210.

⁴⁷⁰ Glyn Jones, ‘Notes on Surrealism’, p. 22.

⁴⁷¹ Wigginton, *Modernism from the Margins*, p. 49.

including perhaps the most well-known and influential European Surrealist artist of all, Salvador Dalí. Dalí may have been based in Paris and, therefore, ostensibly, a creator of 'a European metropolitan style', but many of his paintings are inspired by an alternative, regional or provincial location – 'the coastline of Cadaqués in north-east Spain'.⁴⁷² Dalí was born and grew up in Figueras – a town on the Empordà (also known as the Ampurdán) plain, detached from Cadaqués by mountains.⁴⁷³ He spent his summer holidays, however, at Cadaqués, and this location, as Ian Gibson notes, became his 'childhood paradise'.⁴⁷⁴ Indeed, according to Jonathan Jones, 'it is the persistent reappearance, endlessly metamorphosed, of the rocks and cliffs of this unique coast that anchors his [Dalí's] art in a real, physical context of memory and longing'.⁴⁷⁵ As Dalí once admitted:

This is the spot which all my life I have adored with a fanatical fidelity which grows with each passing day. I can say without fear of falling into the slightest exaggeration that I know by heart each contour of the rocks and beaches of Cadaqués, each geological anomaly of its unique landscape and light, for in the course of my wandering solitudes these outlines of rocks and these flashes of light clinging to the structure and the aesthetic substance of the landscape were the unique protagonists on whose mineral impassiveness, day after day, I projected all the accumulated and chronically unsatisfied tension of my erotic and sentimental life.⁴⁷⁶

Cadaqués is indeed the subject of many of Dalí's early paintings, even before the advent of Surrealism. The Impressionistic *View of Cadaqués from Playa Poal* (Figure 7, 1920) is a notable example, as is *View of Cadaqués from Mount Pani* (Figure 8, 1921). But this regional location also seems to reappear, 'metamorphosed', as Jonathan Jones suggests, in many of Dalí's Surrealist paintings – in *The Persistence of Memory (Soft Watches)* (Figure 9, 1931), for example, which depicts three watches melting, and another crawling with ants, on

⁴⁷² Jonathan Jones, 'The Riddle of the Rocks', *The Guardian*, 5 March 2007. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/mar/05/spain.art> [accessed 31 March 2008].

⁴⁷³ Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 4.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ Salvador Dalí quoted in Robert Descharnes and Gilles Néret, *Salvador Dalí: The Paintings 1904-1946* (Köln: Benedikt Taschen, 1997), p. 41.

what appears to be a desolate, rocky seashore. However unfamiliar, bizarre and removed from the recognisable external world Dalí's work appears, then, he can also be seen as invoking and engaging with a regional space outside the metropolitan centre, by means of a European metropolitan style.

This calls into question Christopher Wigginton's analysis of Dylan Thomas's style as simply 'a provincial simulacrum of surrealism', which reflects a more general critical inclination towards viewing Welsh writers only as marginal and even inferior 'imitators' and adaptors, rather than as active creators, of European Modernism. Indeed, the previous chapters of this thesis, in viewing the work of Welsh writers as a product of the distinct social and cultural conditions of Wales in the early twentieth century, have also challenged this trend. The kind of critical perspective that Wigginton adopts might, contrastingly, be compared in principle, with some theoretical paradigms of modernity in Ireland. As Joe Cleary points out:

Any account that describes Irish [or, I would add, Welsh] modernisation primarily in terms of local reactions to wider tendencies leaves itself vulnerable to the objection that in such accounts modernity is always one-way traffic, with the modern inevitably disseminated outwards from a given centre [. . .] to the retarded margins. In such paradigms, marginal cultures (like Ireland [and, I believe, Wales]), reduced to the status of the recipients of modernity, can only progress to the extent that they imitate the centre [. . .]; the marginal culture's destiny is to emulate; it does not inaugurate, initiate or invent.⁴⁷⁷

Luke Gibbons also challenges this 'one-way' model of modernity in Ireland, suggesting that

Irish society did not have to await the twentieth century to undergo the shock of modernity: disintegration and fragmentation were already part of its history so that, in a crucial but not always welcome sense, Irish culture experienced modernity before its time. This is not unique to Ireland, but is the common inheritance of cultures subjected to the depredations of colonialism. [. . .] Due to a[n] [. . .] uprooting of Irish experience after the atrocities of the 1798 rebellion and the devastation of the Great Famine, Irish literature in the nineteenth century (especially in its romantic or gothic register) often evinced a 'proto-modernist' outlook, whether in the dishevelled, multiple narratives of Charles Maturin or William Carleton, the colloquy of voices in

⁴⁷⁷ Cleary, 'Introduction: Ireland and Modernity', p. 5.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, or the heightened, montage effects of [Dion] Bouicault's melodramas.⁴⁷⁸

The present chapter does not aim to refute the idea that Welsh writers were importing and adapting Modernist styles. In the previous chapter, for example, I demonstrated how Vernon Watkins delineates his own 'modern country of the arts' in his work in a manner reminiscent of T.S. Eliot; and Watkins acknowledges his creative affinity with Eliot in his 'Ode' to the poet. Rather, in the current chapter I aim to go beyond this approach and suggest that Dylan Thomas, like the other writers considered so far in this thesis, can be seen as engaged in Modernist experimentation that is not necessarily and straightforwardly influenced by, but independently comparable and often concurrent with, other European Modernisms, such as the Surrealism, or *surreregionalism* of Dalí.

The comparability of Dalí's '*surreregionalist*' paintings and Dylan Thomas's short stories from the 1930s comes sharply into focus when these works are viewed through a particular theoretical lens – that is, when they are considered in the context of Michel Foucault's essay, 'Different Spaces'.⁴⁷⁹ In this essay, Foucault discusses his concept of 'heterotopia', which Andrew Thacker, in *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism*, summarises as follows:

A heterotopia [. . .] is a real space that acts as a counter-site [. . .]. It is a place that is outside all places, but which can be located in reality, unlike a utopia. Foucault cites the mirror as an instance of heterotopia. The mirror is actually located in reality; but the image of myself I see within it is located nowhere, in a virtual space. The mirror functions heterotopically because it contains both the real space and the unreal space simultaneously; or more precisely, it functions as a kind of 'counteraction' upon the person who gazes at the mirror [. . .] The important point is that heterotopia involves a sense of *movement* between the real and the unreal; it is thus a site defined by a process, the stress being upon the fact that it contests another site.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸ Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 6.

⁴⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Different Spaces', translated from the French by Robert Hurley and others, in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Fausion (New York: The New Press, 1998), II, 175-185.

⁴⁸⁰ Andrew Thacker, *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 24-25.

'Heterotopia' is a term that we might use to describe the '*surregional*' spaces of Dalí's paintings, because they convey, as Thacker explains, 'a sense of *movement* between the real and the unreal' – between the real, regional space of Cadaqués, and the 'unreal', 'virtual' space of the unconscious mind. Significantly, this 'movement' or 'process' registers Dalí's paintings as 'sites of contestation'⁴⁸¹ – as spaces that invert, challenge and resist, in André Breton's words, the oppressive 'control exercised [both] by reason' and by 'aesthetic or moral concern'⁴⁸² in the conscious, social world. In *Vertigo – Tower of Pleasure* (Figure 10, 1930), for example, the familiar, rocky coast of Cadaqués forms a backdrop to an imposing, square tower. On the roof of the tower is an arbitrary blue sphere; what appears to be a cartoon-like head of a lion; and a long, formless shadow. Accompanying these images is that of a naked man and woman in a simultaneously, and explicitly, erotic and violent embrace. The woman is sitting on the floor facing the man and holding a knife, as if about to stab him; the man, on the other hand, is standing over her in a position suggestive of oral sex. Although the man is depicted with one hand over his face, seemingly expressing his anguish or shame (a theme which this chapter will return to) this painting manifestly constructs a space in which moral propriety is transgressed and questioned – where, to cite Dalí, 'the chronically unsatisfied tension of [. . .] erotic and sentimental life' finds a release. Clearly, logicity and reason in the external, social world are also interrogated here; and we can see this again in Dalí's 1934 painting, *The Spectre of Sex Appeal* (Figure 11, 1934), in which a young boy is confronted, in a sandy cove – again, unmistakably, the landscape of Cadaqués – by a grotesque, phallic apparition. Male sexuality is similarly, though more explicitly, manifested in Dalí's work in his 1933 untitled representation of William Tell and Gradiva (Figure 12). In this

⁴⁸¹ Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 201.

⁴⁸² André Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 309.

painting, Dalí depicts William Tell on the Cadaqués shoreline, grasping Gradiva⁴⁸³ by the hair and masturbating. Indeed, ‘Dalí was’, as Gibson points out, ‘the first serious artist in history to make onanism one of the principal themes of his work’.⁴⁸⁴ To varying degrees, then, the spaces of all the paintings mentioned can be further delineated as what Foucault calls ‘heterotopias of deviation’, or ‘those in which [. . .] behaviour’ – such as the artistic representation of masturbation and its apparent location in a public place – is [in some way] deviant with respect to the required norm’.⁴⁸⁵

In a letter to John Goodland in 1938, Thomas is as dismissive of Salvador Dalí as he often is of the Surrealist movement as a whole, identifying him, along with the poet Edmund Blunden, as a ‘popular-at-the-time dud’.⁴⁸⁶ Yet the heterotopic spaces of Dalí’s paintings can be compared to the locations of many of Dylan Thomas’s short stories from the 1930s. The foundations of this comparison lie in Dalí and Thomas’s shared childhood fascination with a particular regional space, and their use of that space as a locus of Modernist possibility. Just as the young Dalí, as previously noted, spent his holidays exploring the rock pools of Cadaqués, Thomas, who was born and brought up in suburban Swansea, spent his summers in rural Carmarthenshire, playing on his aunt’s farm, Fernhill – a location that, Paul Ferris suggests, ‘became fixed in his imagination’.⁴⁸⁷ Thomas invokes this particular psycho-geographical space in his semi-autobiographical short story, ‘The Peaches’ (first published in 1938 and reprinted in the collection, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, in 1940), replacing ‘Fernhill’ with the fictional name, ‘Gorsehill’:

⁴⁸³ Dalí’s use of the name Gradiva was inspired by Wilhelm Jensen’s short story, ‘Gradiva’ and Sigmund Freud’s analysis of that text; Gibson, p. 220.

⁴⁸⁴ Gibson, p. 167.

⁴⁸⁵ Foucault, p. 180.

⁴⁸⁶ Dylan Thomas, Letter to John Goodland, 22 December 1938, in *The Collected Letters*, p. 345.

⁴⁸⁷ Paul Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2006), p. 29.

Down the thick dingle Jack [Williams] and I ran shouting, scalping the brambles with our thin stick-hatchets, dancing, hallooing. We skidded to a stop and prowled on the bushy banks of the stream. [. . .] We crawled and rat-tatted through the bushes, hid at a whistled signal, in the deep grass, and crouched there, waiting for the crack of a twig or the secret breaking of boughs. On my haunches, eager and alone, casting an ebony shadow, with the Gorsehill jungle swarming, the violent, impossible birds and fishes leaping, hidden under four-stemmed flowers the height of horses, in the early evening in a dingle near Carmarthen [. . .].⁴⁸⁸

Here, Fernhill is nostalgically configured as an enchanting, exhilarating childhood paradise, where boughs ‘secretly break’, ‘impossible’ fishes leap and flowers are ‘the height of horses’. Like Dalí, Thomas ‘anchors his art in a real, physical context of memory and longing’ that seems to encompass not only Fernhill itself, but also the surrounding area – the narrator consciously identifying his temporal and geographical position as ‘in the early evening in a dingle near Carmarthen’.

Thomas’s representation of Carmarthenshire in this extract seems more comparable with Dalí’s early, Renoir-esque depictions of the landscape of Cadaqués,⁴⁸⁹ than with the heterotopic spaces of his Surrealist paintings, evoking what Dalí once described as ‘the instantaneous, luminous moment’⁴⁹⁰ of the Impressionist painting. Yet, fundamentally, ‘The Peaches’ does function heterotopically. As previously mentioned, the location of this story, ‘Gorsehill’, is both existent and fictitious, necessitating ‘movement between the real and the unreal’;⁴⁹¹ the setting is ‘located in reality’ and yet, at the same time, ‘located nowhere, in a virtual space’, like a reflection in a mirror. Indeed, crucially, there is also evidence in Thomas’s story of the kind of contestation that

⁴⁸⁸ Dylan Thomas, ‘The Peaches’, pp. 122-137 (p. 132).

⁴⁸⁹ The intense colours and light of Dalí’s early paintings evoke, for example, Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s 1879 painting, *Boats on the Seine* (*The Seine near Asnières*).

⁴⁹⁰ Dalí quoted in *Salvador Dalí: The Paintings*, p. 25.

⁴⁹¹ Ferris touches on the ‘movement between the real and the unreal’ in ‘The Peaches’ in his biography of Dylan Thomas. Gibson notes that ‘curiously, [given his ‘love of the macabre’] in ‘The Peaches’ Thomas made scarcely any capital from the fact that, as he knew, the Carmarthen hangman was supposed to have lived in the house [at Fernhill], as recently as the end of the nineteenth century. [. . .] In ‘The Peaches’ Thomas identifies the hangman’s home as a deserted house down the road; probably he wanted to confuse local readers and stop them recognising Fernhill too easily’; Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, p. 31.

characterises the heterotopic space. The narrator, playing on the farm, for example, watches his friend Jack climb a tree and reveals:

I climbed too, and we clung to the top branches and stared down at the lavatory in the corner of the field. Gwilym was sitting on the seat with his trousers down. He looked small and black. He was reading a book and moving his hands.

‘We can see you!’ we shouted.

He snatched his trousers up and put the book in his pocket.

(p. 133)

This ‘vignette’, which, as Ferris notes, ‘somehow slipped past the publishers in 1940’,⁴⁹² sees the narrator’s God-fearing older cousin, Gwilym, masturbating – ‘reading a book and moving his hands’ – in the lavatory in the corner of a field. Perhaps one of the reasons why this passage escaped censorship was because here, masturbation (that most Dalí-esque of themes, and an activity that ‘English dictionaries were calling ‘self-abuse’ up to the 1960s’⁴⁹³) is encoded in language – and in the nostalgically childlike register seen earlier in Thomas’s description of ‘the dingle near Carmarthen’⁴⁹⁴ – that simultaneously suggests that Gwilym is engaged in an innocent, and characteristically eccentric, act of religious devotion. Gwilym is described as looking ‘small and black’, reminding the reader of his habit of dressing in ‘minister’s black’ (p. 126), even on ‘a weekday morning’ (p. 126). This description, in turn, underscores and destabilises the meaning of the already ambiguously-worded ‘reading a book and moving his hands’ – a phrase that equally calls to mind a ‘minister’ reading fervently and expressively from a Bible or prayer book. Indeed, the idea that Gwilym could be simply preaching to himself on the lavatory is not so surprising given that he regularly delivers sermons to whoever will listen in an ‘old barn’ (p. 128) – which he identifies as his ‘chapel’ (p. 128) – on a

⁴⁹² Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, p. 31.

⁴⁹³ Gibson, p. 167.

⁴⁹⁴ As Jeni Williams notes, ‘Questions [. . .] arise over the role and status of texts which deploy a child protagonist for an *adult* audience. By blurring the categories of innocence and experience, child and adult, such a text destabilises a belief in a trustworthy adult world’; Jeni Williams, ‘Oh, for our vanished youth’: Avoiding Adulthood in the Later Stories of Dylan Thomas’, in *New Casebooks: Dylan Thomas*, ed. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 172-191 (p. 174).

‘mucky hill’ (p. 128) using a ‘broken’ cart (p. 128) for a pulpit. The narrator witnesses this routine, recalling:

I sat on the hay and stared at Gwilym preaching, and heard his voice rise and crack and sink to a whisper and break into singing and Welsh and ring triumphantly and be wild and meek. The sun through a hole, shone on his praying shoulders, and he said: ‘O God, Thou art everywhere all the time, in the dew of the morning, in the frost of the evening, in the field and the town, in the preacher and the sinner [. . .]. Thou canst see us when the sun is gone; Thou canst see us when there aren’t any stars, in the gray blackness [. . .]. Thou canst see and spy and watch us all the time, in the little back corners [. . .]. Thou canst see everything we do, in the night and day, in the day and the night, everything, everything [. . .].’

(p. 128)

Thomas’s account of Gwilym’s activities in the ‘Gorsehill’ lavatory of ‘The Peaches’ can be seen to contest ‘[an]other site[s]’ in a manner characteristic of the heterotopic space; taboo sexual behaviour and religious piety appear momentarily indistinguishable, contesting what Thomas appears to view as the oppressive moral respectability both of Anglophone literary culture – his publishers often censored his work, and several critics ‘charged him [. . .] with sexual immaturity’⁴⁹⁵ – and of the ‘Welsh way of life’ or ‘*buchedd*’, discussed in chapter one, with its doctrine of self-denial and sexual shame expressed in Gwilym’s tortured prayer: ‘Thou canst see and spy and watch us all the time [. . .] Thou canst see everything we do, in the night and day, in the day and the night, everything, everything’.⁴⁹⁶ In this sense, Thomas’s work can be linked to that of his contemporary Caradoc Evans, who, as John Davies notes, ‘believed that prejudice, philistinism and sexual guilt were the foundations of ‘the Welsh way of life’ and ‘said so

⁴⁹⁵ John Goodby and Christopher Wigginton, ‘Shut, too, in a tower of words’: Dylan Thomas’ modernism’, in *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*, ed. Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 89-112 (p. 104). Ferris details the frequent censorship of Thomas’s stories in his biography. He describes, for example, how when, in 1939, ‘a new book of prose and poems, *The Map of Love*, was being discussed with Dent, [Thomas’s publisher,] Richard Church refused to print some of [the stories], in particular the one that Thomas regarded as the best, ‘A Prospect of the Sea’, because it contained ‘unwarrantable moments of sensuality’; Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, p. 178.

⁴⁹⁶ The narrator also describes how, on their way to see the makeshift chapel, Gwilym ‘began to talk about the towns he had visited on a religious tour, Neath and Bridgend and Bristol and Newport, with their lakes and luxury gardens, their bright, coloured streets roaring with temptation’ (p. 128).

without any attempt at self-restraint [most famously in his collection of short stories, *My People*], to the great entertainment of English readers and to the great fury of the Welsh'.⁴⁹⁷ Later in the narrative, Thomas again subversively, and perhaps self-reflexively, portrays lust and devoutness as interchangeable, when the narrator reveals:

‘I found a lot of poems in his [Gwilym’s] bedroom once. They were all written to girls. And he showed them to me afterwards, and he’d changed all the girls’ names to God.’

(p. 135)

As Conran notes, ‘the *buchedd* represented [. . .] an alliance between the peasantry, the respectable working class and the petty [sic] bourgeoisie’,⁴⁹⁸ and the heterotopic space of ‘The Peaches’ seems, particularly, to ‘counteract’ the respectable suburban Swansea in which Thomas grew up: what Ferris describes as the ‘society of teachers and shopkeepers – Welsh nonconformity still lapping at its feet, easily scandalised and quick to condemn deviants’.⁴⁹⁹ Indeed, the story hinges on a visit that Mrs Williams ‘from Swansea’ (p. 129), a representative of this society, makes to Gorsehill in her ‘motor car’ (p. 129). Significantly, when Mrs Williams arrives, Annie, the narrator’s aunt, is seen fretfully ‘upsetting the [family] Bible on the floor, picking it up, [and] dusting it hurriedly with her sleeve’ (p. 131). While ‘The Peaches’ clearly lacks the formal experimentation and overt shock-tactics of paintings such as Dalí’s *William Tell and Gradiwa* and *Vertigo – Tower of Pleasure*, then, the space that Thomas creates can, nevertheless, be analysed, in the same Foucauldian terms: as a heterotopic space of Modernist ‘deviation’ from the respectable social world.

⁴⁹⁷ John Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 567. Thomas admired Evans’s work and visited him with Glyn Jones in 1934; Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, p. 115.

⁴⁹⁸ Conran, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁹ Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, p. xvii. Ferris notes that, in particular, Thomas’s ‘autobiographical stories make symbols of sinful pleasure out of actresses and dancers, once good for a delicious shudder in nonconformist Wales’; Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, p. 66.

The devout and sexually prohibitive ‘Welsh way of life’ from which Thomas ‘deviates’ in ‘The Peaches’ might, in fact, be compared with certain aspects of the social and cultural climate of Dalí’s Spain in the early twentieth century. G.G. Brown notes, for example, how in the work of the Spanish novelist Benjamin Jarnés (1888-1949), the ‘Church and contemporary bourgeois ideas of respectability’⁵⁰⁰ are held responsible for the ‘senseless repression of innocent joy’,⁵⁰¹ and this is also the case in several plays written by Dalí’s close friend, Federico García Lorca. The action of Lorca’s *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*, or *The House of Bernarda Alba: A Drama about Women in the Villages of Spain* (1936), for instance, is centred on a sexually repressed and oppressively religious, traditionalist and class-conscious Spanish household, presided over by the uncompromising matriarch, Bernarda. The latter’s world view is encapsulated in the following exchange from act one:

BERNARDA. Women in church shouldn’t look at any man but the priest – and him only because he wears skirts. To turn your head is to be looking for the warmth of corduroy.

FIRST WOMAN: Sanctimonious old snake!

PONCIA [THE MAID], *between her teeth*. Itching for a man’s warmth.

BERNARDA, *beating with her cane on the floor*. Blesséd be God!

ALL, *crossing themselves*. For ever blessed and praised.⁵⁰²

Bernarda’s expectations, and those of the culture that she represents, weigh particularly heavily on her five daughters, frustrating their desire for emotional and sexual fulfilment – a sentiment that is echoed in Dalí and Luis Buñuel’s film, *Un Chien Andalou*, already mentioned in chapter one of this thesis. In one scene of Dalí and Buñuel’s film, a man is sexually aroused by a woman, but finds that he cannot physically reach her because he is tied with ropes to ‘two Marist brothers’,⁵⁰³ two grand pianos, and the corpses of two

⁵⁰⁰ G.G. Brown, *A Literary History of Spain: The Twentieth Century* (London: Ernest Benn, 1972), p. 59.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Federico García Lorca, *The House of Bernarda Alba: A Drama about Women in the Villages of Spain*, translated from the Spanish by James Graham-Luján and Richard L. O’Connell, in *Federico García Lorca: Collected Plays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976), pp. 398-453 (p. 404).

⁵⁰³ Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 90.

donkeys; he is literally impeded both by the religious establishment and by middle-class values (as symbolised by the grand pianos), which are, in turn, suggestively associated with decay. This symbolism is particularly telling, given that the young Dalí, reflecting a popular trend in Spanish middle-class families, was sent to both the state school in Figueras and a private school – the Marist Brothers’ College – where as Gibson notes, there was ‘religious instruction, with early morning masses, the rosary and improving homilies’.⁵⁰⁴ Buñuel’s 1930 film, *L’Age d’or*, in which Dalí was also initially involved,⁵⁰⁵ poses a similar, though more overt, challenge to the Catholic Church’s attitude to sexuality, and features a scene in which a sexually exasperated man pushes a priest out of his bedroom window.

The man’s sexual frustration in *L’Age d’or* is, essentially, comparable with that of Gwilym in ‘The Peaches’, except that in Buñuel’s film it has, of course, escalated to the point of frenzy and violence. Indeed, Thomas’s reconfiguration of Carmarthenshire as a ‘heterotopia of deviation’ from sexually repressive social and cultural ideals of morality and respectability is not confined to this story; on the contrary, it can be traced back to Thomas’s earliest writings – to the opening, for example, of the first poem in his first collection, *18 Poems* (1934), ‘I see the boys of summer’:

I see the boys of summer in their ruin
 Lay the gold tithings barren,
 Setting no store by harvest, freeze the soils;
 There in their heat the winter floods
 Of frozen loves they fetch their girls,
 And drown the cargoed apples in their tides.

These boys of light are curdlers in their folly,
 Sour the boiling honey;
 The jacks of frost they finger in the hives;
 There in the sun the frigid threads
 Of doubt and dark they feed their nerves;

⁵⁰⁴ Gibson, p. 51.

⁵⁰⁵ Gibson, pp. 245-249.

The signal moon is zero in their voids.⁵⁰⁶

The 'boys of summer' in these stanzas are, effectively, prototypes of Gwilym: sexually inhibited and unenlightened – in 'doubt and dark' – they simply 'feed their nerves', or amplify the guilt and anxiety that they associate with their sexual urges through masturbation. In this respect, the boys, or 'dark deniers' (p. 8) as they are later called, are reminiscent of the central figure in Dalí's 1930 painting, *The Hand – Remorse* (Figure 13, 1930), who looks down morosely from a remote, shadowy seat at people walking and playing below, while holding out a grossly exaggerated hand – a symbol, surely, of his own excessive, debilitating and remorseful 'solitary pleasure'.⁵⁰⁷ Indeed, Dalí's painting and Thomas's poem are, essentially, comparable in that they both audaciously voice the 'unmentionable' issue of masturbation, while, appealing to contemporary views of masturbation as 'self-abuse', employing this theme as a means to question intransigent social attitudes towards supposedly 'normal' sexual behaviour: the man in Dalí's painting has become a pitiful grotesquery, segregated from 'normal' society – one figure standing below, for example, is pointing at 'the hand', while looking down at a child as if to warn him of what he might become. Similarly, in the first stanzas of Thomas's poem, the boys are portrayed as sabotaging the relationship between humanity and nature. They are 'curdlers' (connoting, simultaneously, the spoiling and wasting of semen and milk), who 'Lay the gold tithings barren,/ Setting no store by harvest', 'freeze the soils', 'sour the [. . .] honey' and 'drown the cargoed apples in their tides'. What is particularly striking about these lines, however, is the way in which Thomas repeatedly couches – or locates – the act of masturbation in an explicitly rural and agricultural linguistic landscape; it is almost as if, just as the sands at Cadaqués transmute into an unsettling, otherworldly environment – a heterotopic 'place that is outside all places' – in Dalí's *The Hand – Remorse*, the psycho-geographical space of Thomas's Carmarthenshire summer holidays is

⁵⁰⁶ Dylan Thomas, 'I see the boys of summer', p. 7.

⁵⁰⁷ Dalí cited in Gibson, p. 71.

similarly invoked, embellished and metamorphosed in 'I see the boys of summer', to form a comparable, poetic 'counter-site'.

As previously inferred, the 'counter-sites' that Dalí and Thomas construct in *The Hand – Remorse* and 'I see the boys of summer' are, as this term suggests, 'defined by a process' – by a progression, not just from the real to the unreal, but towards the articulation of sexual taboo, and the contestation of, or movement away from, repressive social codes; and, as if to prolong and reinforce this effect, Thomas situates the third stanza of his poem in the womb:

I see the summer children in their mothers
Split up the brawned womb's weathers,
Divide the night and day with fairy thumbs;
There in the deep with quartered shades
Of sun and moon they paint their dams
As sunlight paints the shelling of their heads.

(p. 7)

John Goodby and Christopher Wigginton argue that 'in pushing back to pre-natal origins' the speaker of this poem is 'attempting to reach the point at which [he] can [both] escape [and 'exorcise'] the anxieties of sexual maturity facing Thomas himself'.⁵⁰⁸ Yet the womb is not just a space of 'origin' but precisely 'a space defined by a process' – a site of change, growth and development, of 'splitting', 'dividing' and proliferating cells. Indeed, as Walford Davies argues, "Process', organic, emotional, physical, sexual, etc., is perhaps the commonest theme in Thomas's early, notebook-derived poetry', and this, he contends, is exemplified in the 1934 poem, 'A process in the weather of the heart',⁵⁰⁹ which this chapter will return to. Furthermore, the womb is resistant to the social and sexual limitations of the outside world; in Thomas's poem, it is a space in which the individual is empowered, as the babies creatively separate night from day and 'paint' their

⁵⁰⁸ Goodby and Wigginton, "Shut, too, in a tower of words': Dylan Thomas' modernism', p. 104.

⁵⁰⁹ Walford Davies, 'The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Welsh Contexts, Narrative and the Language of Modernism', p. 122.

maternal, watery world. Contrastingly, when they are born, it is the sunlight – the external world – that ‘paints the shelling of their heads’, branding them with the mark of conformity or ‘sameness’.⁵¹⁰ In essence the womb seems to act, here, almost as an allegory of the heterotopic process observed in stanzas one and two; and, moreover, like Dalí in *The Hand – Remorse*, Thomas does not just seem to be expressing ‘anxieties of sexual maturity’, but also pointing out and contesting their underlying social cause.

The short stories that Thomas wrote around the time of the publication of ‘I see the boys of summer’ can certainly be interpreted in this way. Whereas in ‘The Peaches’, the Carmarthenshire of Thomas’s boyhood becomes the fictionalised ‘Gorsehill’, in many of the early short stories – in ‘The Enemies’ (1934), for example – this region is recast as ‘the Jarvis hills’⁵¹¹ and ‘the green acres of the Jarvis valley’ (p. 16).⁵¹² This poses a challenge to the tenacious critical view, discussed by Jeni Williams, that ‘Dylan Thomas wrote two distinct kinds of stories’.⁵¹³ The early stories, Williams notes, are generally regarded as ‘bizarre allegories, often brutal and surreal’, while the later stories, such as those collected in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, are seen as more ‘realist’ and autobiographical. Williams goes on to dispute this reading and suggests that ‘in their focus on excess, his [Thomas’s] later short stories are as selectively ‘unreal’ as his early ones’.⁵¹⁴ The mutually real yet unreal ‘Gorsehill’ and ‘Jarvis Valley’ reinforce Williams’s argument; and these two locations are also linked through their functioning as sites that enervate the values of ‘respectable’ society. In ‘The Enemies’, for instance, ‘the Reverend

⁵¹⁰ Katie Gramich, ‘Daughters of Darkness’, in *Dylan Thomas: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. John Goodby and Christopher Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 65-84 (p. 70).

⁵¹¹ Dylan Thomas, ‘The Enemies’, pp. 16-20 (p. 17).

⁵¹² M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 31. According to M. Wynn Thomas, ‘the whole farm [i.e. Fernhill] as portrayed in the *Portrait* is a splendid adventure playground for the ebullient young imagination [. . .]. Later, [. . .] this corner of rural Carmarthenshire became, in ‘Fern Hill’, the simply enchanted country of childhood, just as in the thirties it obligingly served as a surrealist landscape moulded to fit the contours of the subconscious’; M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 31.

⁵¹³ Williams, ‘Oh, for our vanished youth’: Avoiding Adulthood in the Later Stories of Dylan Thomas’, p. 175.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Mr Davies' (p. 18), whom the narrator identifies as 'the rector of a village some ten miles away' (p. 18), becomes lost while walking on the Jarvis hills and is taken into the home of a Mr and Mrs Owen:

Soon the meal was ready, and Mr Owen came in unwashed from the garden.

'Shall I say grace?' asked Mr Davies when all three were seated around the table.

Mrs Owen nodded.

'O Lord God Almighty, bless this our meal,' said Mr Davies. Looking up as he continued his prayer, he saw that Mr and Mrs Owen had closed their eyes. 'We thank Thee for the bounties that Thou hast given us.' And he saw that the lips of Mr and Mrs Owen were moving softly. He could not hear what they said, but he knew that the prayers they spoke were not his prayers.

'Amen', said all three together.

Mr Owen, proud in his eating, bent over his plate [. . .]. Outside the window was the brown body of the earth, the green skin of the grass, and the breasts of the Jarvis hills; [. . .]; there was creation sweating out of the pores of the trees; [. . .] He saw, with a sudden satisfaction, that Mrs Owen's throat was bare.

(p. 19)

In this passage – which, in some ways, evokes 'the Respected [minister,] Josiah Bryn-Bevan's' (p. 109) visit to old Nanni's cottage in Caradoc Evans's short story, 'Be This Her Memorial' (1915), mentioned in chapter one of this thesis – an agent of 'respectable' society strays into a highly sensual, fecund and eroticised space, conveyed through Thomas's descriptions of the 'brown body of the earth', the 'breasts of the Jarvis hills', 'the flesh of the green grass' (p. 17), and 'the copulation in' (p. 20) and 'creation sweating out of [. . .] the trees'. Mr and Mrs Owen's behaviour, too, reflects the character of their environment, as Mr Owen gazes with lustful 'satisfaction' at Mrs Owen's 'bare' throat, and instructs the worms that he unearths in his garden to 'Multiply, multiply' (p. 18). Indeed, the Jarvis Valley appears even more sexually intoxicating in 'The Holy Six' (1937), Thomas's sequel to 'The Enemies', in which 'The Holy Six of Wales'⁵¹⁵ – six clergymen, for whom, 'the holy life', Thomas provocatively writes, is 'a constant erection'

⁵¹⁵ Dylan Thomas, 'The Holy Six', pp. 95-103 (p. 95).

(p. 95) – venture, with the clerical Miss Myfanwy, into the Jarvis Valley to rescue Mr

Davies:

before they knew that they were there, and before the first Jarvis field had groaned beneath them, [. . .] morning suddenly came down; the meadows were oak-sided, standing greener than a sea as a lull came to the early light, lying under the wind as the south-west opened; the ancient boughs had all the birds of Wales upon them, and, from the farms among the trees and the fields on the unseen hillside, the cocks crew and the sheep cried. The wood before them, glowing from a bloody centre, burned like a cantharides, a tuft of half-parting blooms and branches erect on the land that spouted up to the summits of the hills, angelically down through ribbed throats of flowers [. . .]. The grass that was heavy with dew, though the crystals on each blade broke lightly, lay still as they walked, a woman's stillness under the thrust of man lying in the waking furze and the back of the bedded ribs of the hill's half heather, the halves of gold and green staining a rich shire and a common soil. And it was early morning, and the world was moist [. . .]. His [Mr Owen's] beard was wagging as he bowed. Your holiness, said Mr Owen to the Six. Battered and bruised, the soles of their boots dragging like black and muddy wings along the ground, piously the six responded. Mr Owen bowed to Miss Myfanwy who, as his shirt wagged like a beard from his open trousers, curtsied low and blushed.

(pp. 97-98)

Here again Thomas images the Jarvis Valley through language that is loaded with erotic meaning: the 'moist' Jarvis fields, below the 'bedded' hills, 'groan' and the trees stand 'erect' beside 'half-parting blooms', creating a sexually symbolic topography reminiscent of Dalí's *The Red Tower (Anthropomorphic Tower)* (Figure 14, 1930), where an aqueous image of sexual fantasy rises out of the sea, while on the distant shore, a wood and tower with a gateway also represent the male genitalia. The narrator's account of how 'the early light [was] lying under the wind as the south-west opened', and how the branches of the phallic Jarvis trees 'spouted up to the summits of the hills' and 'angelically down through ribbed throats of flowers' is also intensely erotic. Thomas's ironic use of the adverb 'angelically' in conjunction with this second example is especially inflammatory, and the irreverent tone of the story is maintained as the 'pious' Holy Six are, like the 'unrespectable' Mr Owen, with his unbuttoned trousers and phallic beard, assimilated

into their profligate surroundings – the grass beneath their feet assuming ‘a woman’s stillness under the thrust of man’.

Thomas, in fact, often constructs a kind of mythology of dissoluteness around the Jarvis Valley in his early stories. In ‘A Prospect of the Sea’ (1937), its hills and trees are said to be ‘as Jarvis had known them when he walked there with his lovers and horses for half a century, a century ago’.⁵¹⁶ Similarly, in ‘The Map of Love’ (1937) – in which two children embark on a hallucinatory journey across what Annis Pratt has detected is ‘the map [. . .] of sexual intercourse’⁵¹⁷ – the narrator identifies

The first field wherein mad Jarvis, a hundred years before, had sown his seed in the belly of a bald-headed girl who had wandered out of a distant county and lain with him in the pains of love.

(p. 110)

Later in the narrative, the children run ‘down the Jarvis flank’ (p. 112) and into this infamous field, where they are confronted by the voice of ‘mad Jarvis’ himself:

The children stopped, the moonlight night went on, a voice spoke from the darkness.
Said the voice, You are the children of love.
Where are you?
I am Jarvis.
Who are you?
Here, my dears, here in the hedge with a wise woman.
But the children ran away from the voice in the hedge.
Here in the second field.
They stopped for breath, and a weasel, making his noise, ran over their feet.
Hold harder.
I’ll hold you harder.
Said a voice, Hold hard, the children of love.
Where are you?
I am Jarvis.
Who are you?
Here, here, lying with a virgin from Dolgelley.
In the third field the man of Jarvis lay loving a green girl, and, as he called them the children of love, lay loving her ghost and the smell of buttermilk on her

⁵¹⁶ Dylan Thomas, ‘A Prospect of the Sea’, pp. 87-94 (p. 90).

⁵¹⁷ Annis Pratt, *Dylan Thomas: Early Prose: A Study in Creative Mythology* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), p. 36. Pratt cites the lines, ‘Here seed, up the tide, broke on the boiling coasts; the sand grains multiplied’; see Dylan Thomas, ‘The Map of Love’, pp. 109-114 (p. 109).

breath. He loved a cripple in the fourth field, for the twist in her limbs made loving longer, and he cursed the straight children who found him with a straight-limbed lover in the fifth field marking the quarter.

A girl from Tiger Bay held Jarvis close, and her lips marked a red cracked heart upon her throat; this was the sixth and the weather-tracked field. My rose, said Jarvis, but the seventh love smelt in his hands, his fingering hands that held Glamorgan's canker under the eighth hedge. From the convent of Bethel's Heart, a holy woman served him the ninth time.

(pp. 112-113)

Like the young boy gazing timidly up at the grotesque 'spectre of sex appeal' in Dalí's painting of that name, the children in Thomas's story are both intrigued and terrified by the elusive, intangible and hyperbolic sexual force that is 'Jarvis'. In both painting and story, sexuality and sexual desire are viewed from the perspective of the child, as at once alarming and captivating, reflecting the particular psycho-geographical spaces – the childhood 'adventure playgrounds' of Cadaqués and Carmarthenshire – from which Dalí and Thomas's 'counter-site[s]' are derived. Yet, at the same time, in juxtaposing sexual desire with the child in such an obvious way, it seems likely that both Dalí and Thomas are consciously drawing on Sigmund Freud's controversial and, as Jerome Neu notes, often very 'unpopular ideas [. . .] involving the postulation of infantile sexuality and so the denial of the presumed innocence of childhood'.⁵¹⁸ Dalí revered Freud to the point of considering him a 'father figure',⁵¹⁹ and the influence of Freud's writings on his work is similarly evident in *The Enigma of Desire – My Mother, My Mother, My Mother* (Figure 15, 1929), where the sands of Cadaqués shift to form a heterotopic, Yves Tanguy-esque landscape of the unconscious in which Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex,⁵²⁰ or the male child's sexual desire for his mother and jealous resentment of his father, is visualised. Similarly, Thomas, who, as previously noted in the discussion of his

⁵¹⁸ Jerome Neu, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

⁵¹⁹ Gibson, p. 380.

⁵²⁰ As Bennett Simon and Rachel B. Blass note, the Oedipus complex 'was coined and defined as a constellation of desire for the mother as a sexual object and hate of the father as a rival'; Bennett Simon and Rachel B. Blass, 'The development and vicissitudes of Freud's ideas on the Oedipus complex', in *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*, ed. Jerome Neu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 161-174 (p. 163).

relationship with Surrealism, was notoriously reluctant to reveal his literary influences, responded in 1934 in the 'Answers to an Enquiry' section of *New Verse* to the question, 'Have you been influenced by Freud and how do you regard him', with 'Yes' – 'whatever is hidden should be made naked. To be stripped of darkness is to be clean'.⁵²¹ In 'The Map of Love', Thomas seems to be undermining Welsh society's particularly unshakable faith in the 'innocence of childhood' – a tradition which Glyn Jones also attends to in his novel, *The Valley, the City, the Village*, discussed in chapters one and two of this thesis. As the narrator of Jones's novel reveals:

The generations of my grandmother and my uncle, faithful to the reticent and fastidious Puritanism in which they were nurtured, saw childhood as symbolic of some Edenish innocence and so cherished it, accepting regretfully the signs of its departure.

(p. 34)

Thomas seems to uphold his Freudian proposal in *New Verse* that 'whatever is hidden should be made naked. To be stripped of darkness is to be clean' in 'The Map of Love'. According to Freud, the 'superego' or 'agency of morality',⁵²² which is responsible for 'hiding' or banishing the unruly desires of the unconscious to the 'dark' recesses of the psyche, is formed during childhood, when adult, and particularly parental intervention – intervention that concentrates on 'sexual' and 'aggressive desires' – is internalised and exerts 'power over the child's ego or self'.⁵²³ In Thomas's story, however, the adult/ parent figure, Sam Rib, intervenes, it appears, in order to elucidate and endorse sexual desire, rather than to curb or conceal it:

Here dwell, said Sam Rib, the first beasts of love. In the cool of a new morning the children listened, too frightened to touch hands. He touched again the sagging hill [on the map] above the island, and pointed the progression of the skeleton channels linking mud with mud, green sea with darker, and all love hills

⁵²¹ Dylan Thomas cited in Paul Ferris (ed.), *Dylan Thomas: The Collected Letters*, p. 311.

⁵²² Jennifer Church, 'Morality and the internalized other', in *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*, ed. Jerome Neu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 209-223 (p. 209).

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

and islands into one territory. In the cool the grass mates, the green mates, the grains, said Sam Rib, and the dividing waters mate and are mated for the bearing and fostering of the globe. Sam Rib had mated with a green woman, as Great-Uncle Jarvis with his bald girl; he had mated with a womanly water for the bearing and fostering of the child who blushed by him.

(p. 111)

Similarly, 'Great-Uncle Jarvis' (p. 111), as he is sometimes referred to in this story – another authoritative familial figure – openly displays a 'superhuman promiscuity'⁵²⁴ that is felt across Wales, from 'Dolgelley' to 'Glamorgan', undermining the collective 'moral conscience'⁵²⁵ of respectable society. More specifically, Jarvis's sexual voraciousness and pervasiveness seem to constitute both an ironic comment on contemporary English views, inherited from the 1847 'Blue Books' report on education in Wales, of the Welsh as 'lax in their sexual habits',⁵²⁶ and a statement intended to rile those in Wales who defined Welsh society as intrinsically moral, pious and temperate.⁵²⁷ In stark contrast to this ideology, Jarvis's 'fingering hands' seduce 'a holy woman' and 'a girl from Tiger Bay' (a playful allusion, perhaps, to 'the popular image of [Cardiff's] Tiger bay' as a 'lascivious hotbed of prostitution'⁵²⁸); and his other sexual conquests include a 'wandering', 'bald-headed girl' – a description that hints at her insanity – and 'a cripple' because 'the twist in her limbs made loving longer'. These last two examples seem particularly calculated to unsettle and offend, as Jarvis appears to seek out both vulnerable and marginalised members of society in his pursuit of sexual pleasure.

⁵²⁴ Pratt, p. 67.

⁵²⁵ Church, p. 216. As Church notes, 'Freud considered the presence of a superego – an inner critic and ideal – and the presence of a moral sense to be one and the same'; Church, p. 219.

⁵²⁶ John Davies, *A History of Wales* p. 391.

⁵²⁷ This view of Wales emerged from the 'campaign to redeem Wales, and the Welsh woman particularly, from the condemnation expressed in [. . .] [the Blue Books Report]'; Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales*, p. 53.

⁵²⁸ Alison Benjamin, 'Mixed Metaphor', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2001. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2001/mar/14/guardiansocietysupplement5> [accessed 6 September 2008].

The ensuing passage from 'The Map of Love', in which Thomas's 'children of love' swim naked in a river, also seems to draw on the Freudian sense of conflict between unruly, unconscious sexual urges and the proscriptive superego or 'moral conscience', and further undermines what Mike Spilka has called, in his discussion of Henry James's proto-Freudian short story, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), middle-class society's 'cult of childhood innocence':⁵²⁹

[. . .] as Beth [Rib] swam, the water tickled her; the water pressed on her side.
 My love, cried Reuben, excited by the tickling water and the hands of the weeds.
 And, as they stood naked on the twentieth field, My love, she whispered.
 First fear shot them back. Wet as they were, they pulled their clothes on them.

(p. 111)

Like the terrain of Dalí's *The Enigma of Desire*, the Jarvis valley acts almost as a landscape of the unconscious here, as the children are sexually 'excited' and drawn to each other by 'the tickling water and the hands of the weeds' before being 'corrected' by fear. Moreover, to expand on the initial parallel drawn between 'The Map of Love' and *The Turn of the Screw*, Thomas's 'mad Jarvis', and indeed Dalí's 'spectre of sex appeal', might arguably be viewed as modern, more extreme versions of what Spilka describes as the 'sex-ghosts',⁵³⁰ Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, in James's story – reputed transgressors of Victorian sexual and class boundaries in life, who, in death, have returned, according to James's unreliable governess-narrator, to collaborate with two ostensibly innocent children, Miles and Flora. More specifically, Thomas's 'mad Jarvis' and Dalí's 'spectre' might be viewed as, to borrow James's term, erotic 'horrors':⁵³¹ as 'monstrous outgrowth[s] of mental sexuality,⁵³² or grotesque materializations of 'accumulated and chronically unsatisfied', unresolved and unarticulated sexual 'tension', present since early

⁵²⁹ Mark Spilka, 'Turning the Freudian Screw: How Not to Do It', in Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1966), pp. 245-253 (p. 251).

⁵³⁰ Ibid., p. 247

⁵³¹ Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 22.

⁵³² Robert Descharnes and Gilles Néret, *Salvador Dalí: 1904-1989* (Köln: Taschen, 2006), p. 51.

childhood, which, in the real space of polite society, are repressed or 'hidden'. Indeed, Thomas denudes society's mask of respectability in a similar way in the following extract from a letter written to Pamela Hansford Johnson in 1934:

I wish I could see these passing men and women in the sun as the motes of virtues, this little fellow as a sunny Fidelity, this corseted hank as Mother-Love, this abusing lout as the Spirit of Youth, and this eminently beatable child in what was once a party frock as the walking embodiment of Innocence. But I can't. The passers are dreadful. I see all their little horrors.⁵³³

In the case of Dalí's 'spectre', sexual repression is given a physical form: the 'erotic' apparition is maimed and subjugated – there are what appear to be sacks or pillow-cases pulled over its two heads – and supported by crutches. While Thomas's notably similar conflation of eroticism and disfigurement – as previously mentioned, Jarvis loves 'a cripple' in 'the fourth field' – seems more a representation of the 'unrespectable' nature of repressed unconscious desires, these apparitions, nevertheless, each manifest what Katie Gramich terms both artists' 'wilful' or 'perverse' 'focus on the unspeakable'.⁵³⁴ Thomas's Jarvis can, effectively, be viewed in the same light as Dalí viewed the 'spectre of sex appeal' in his painting: as 'an erotic bogie [sic] of the first order'.⁵³⁵

Dalí's words also resonate strongly with the following passage from Thomas's 'A Prospect of the Sea', in which another less-than-innocent child, 'a boy on a holiday' (p. 89) in the Jarvis Valley, encounters a 'girl', described in markedly erotic terms, with 'bare brown legs' (p. 88) and wearing a 'torn cotton frock' (p. 88):

'What were you doing up the tree?' he asked her, ashamed of his silence in front of her smiling, and suddenly shy as she moved so that the grass beneath her rose bent and green between her brown legs. 'Were you after nests?' he said, and sat down beside her. But on the bent grass in the seventh shade, his first terror of her sprang up again like a sun returning to the sea that sank it, and burned his

⁵³³ Dylan Thomas, Letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, 15 April 1934, in *Dylan Thomas: The Collected Letters*, p. 111.

⁵³⁴ Katie Gramich, Unpublished paper: "Sick to death of Hot Salt": The Mother's Body in the Poetry of Dylan Thomas' (presented at the annual Association for Welsh Writing in English conference Gregynog Hall, Powys, 1996).

⁵³⁵ Dalí cited in Gibson, p. 313.

eyes to the skull and raised his hair. The stain on her lips was blood, not berries; and her nails were not broken but sharpened sideways, ten black scissor-blades ready to snip off his tongue. If he cried aloud to his uncle in the hidden house, she would make new animals, beckon Carmarthen tigers out of the mile-away wood to jump around him and bite his hands; she would make new, noisy birds in the air to whistle and chatter away his cries.

(p. 89)

Here, growing yet unspoken and unfulfilled sexual desire, evocatively conveyed through the image of the girl moving and causing the grass to rise and bend between her 'brown legs', again assumes 'terrifying', monstrous proportions; the girl's lips become stained with blood and her nails sharpen into 'scissor-blades', poised – reinforcing the theme of sexual desire as 'unspeakable' – to cut off the boy's 'tongue'. The girl's scissor-hands also echo the children's story of 'Little Suck-a-Thumb' by Heinrich Hoffman, which Thomas read as a child. In this story, contained in the collection *Struwwelpeter* (1845), a young boy's thumbs are severed by a castigating tailor with giant scissors.⁵³⁶ As Ferris notes, Freud thought that Hoffman's stories 'touch[ed] on childhood complexes',⁵³⁷ and both 'Little Suck-a-Thumb' and Thomas's story itself seem to engage, in particular, with the Freudian 'fear of castration as a motive for repression'.⁵³⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that, according to Freud, 'people threaten him [the child] [. . .] with cutting off his penis during the phallic phase, at the time of his early masturbation, and hints at that punishment [. . .] regularly find a phylogenetic reinforcement in him',⁵³⁹ the symbolism that Thomas employs here also, in many ways, echoes that used by Dalí in his 1929 painting, *The Great Masturbator* (Figure 16, 1929). In this work, an enormous, grossly misshapen head, containing many other images, including an overtly sexual one of a

⁵³⁶ Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, p. 26.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Lecture XXXII: Anxiety and Instinctual Life', in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 773-783 (p. 778). Freud suggests that thumb-sucking is a manifestation of 'pregenital sexual organisation' and signifies the point at which 'the sexual activity, detached from the nutritive activity [that is, sucking at the mother's breast], has substituted for the extraneous object one situated in the subject's own body'; Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Infantile Sexuality', in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 239-293 (p. 273).
pp. 239-293

⁵³⁹ Freud, 'Anxiety and Instinctual Life', pp. 777-778.

man's lower body and 'a woman positioned [as in *Vertigo – Tower of Pleasure*] for fellatio',⁵⁴⁰ rests on the Cadaqués sands, which have been transformed into an apparently unbounded environment. Dalí provides further analysis of the painting in his autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (1942), recalling that the

face had no mouth, and in its place was stuck an enormous grasshopper. The grasshopper's belly was decomposed, and full of ants. Several of the ants scurried across the space that should have been filled by the non-existent mouth of the great anguishing face, whose head terminated in architecture and ornamentations of the style of 1900.⁵⁴¹

In this work, then, as in Thomas's story, unrealised and unvoiced desire – the former captured in the themes of sexual fantasy and, as in *The Hand – Remorse*, 'anguished' masturbation, and the latter symbolised by the absence of a mouth and the presence, in its place, of a huge rotting insect – assumes a shape. The presence of an image of a lion's head, with a suggestively elongated tongue, within the grotesque face – a motif observed previously in *Vertigo – Tower of Pleasure*, which, as Ian Gibson notes, 'in Dalí's paintings of this period tend[s] to symbolize raging and terrifying desires'⁵⁴² – enhances its meaning and also comports with the boy's fear in 'A Prospect of the Sea' that the girl will 'beckon Carmarthen tigers out of the mile-away wood to jump around him and bite his hands'. Indeed, the girl in Thomas's story becomes more and more frightening until the boy's sexuality is finally expressed:

This is death, said the boy to himself, consumption and whooping-cough and the stones inside you ... and the way your face stays if you make too many faces in the looking-glass. Her mouth was an inch from his. Her long forefingers touched his eyelids. This is a story, he said to himself, about a boy on holiday kissed by a broom rider; [. . .] she stroked his eyes and put her chest against him; and when she had loved him until he died she carried him off inside her to a den in a wood. But the story, like all stories, was killed as she kissed him; now he was a boy in a girl's arms, and the hill stood above a true river, and the peaks and their trees towards England were as Jarvis had known them when he walked there with [. . .] his lovers [. . .].

(pp. 89-90)

⁵⁴⁰ Descharnes and Néret, *Salvador Dalí: 1904-1989*, p. 50.

⁵⁴¹ Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life* (New York: Dover, 1993), p. 248.

⁵⁴² Gibson, p. 217.

The boy's description of the girl here as 'the way your face stays if you make too many faces in the looking-glass' further suggests that her appalling transformation is, in fact, a manifestation of his own frustrated desires – of the sexually repressed self or ego. Moreover, Annis Pratt suggests that the phrase 'now he was a boy in a girl's arms' – the point at which this 'monstrous outgrowth of mental sexuality' is dispelled – is the moment when the boy 'makes love to the girl'.⁵⁴³ The fact that the landscape subsequently appears the same to the boy as it had done to the legendarily virile, sexually fulfilled Jarvis also implies that his desires have been realised.

While, on one level, the 'death' that the boy initially associates with his desire in this story seems to allude to the idea, derived from the French '*la petit mort*', of orgasm as 'the little death', this juxtaposition of the erotic with the morbid and macabre also again connects Thomas's story with Freud's writings, and, more specifically, with his theory of the coexistence of 'life [or 'sexual'] instincts'⁵⁴⁴ and the 'death instinct' or 'drive'⁵⁴⁵ – that is, 'the urge inherent in life to restore an earlier state of things'.⁵⁴⁶ Indeed, Dalí's 1933 painting, *Average Atmospherecephalic Bureaucrat in the Act of Milking a Cranial Harp* (Figure 17), in which a figure is 'milking' an exaggeratedly phallic skull, also seems to have this double meaning. It is precisely this Freudian notion of a natural world motivated by conflicting yet inextricable death and life 'drives', that Thomas seems to be exploring in his well-known 1934 poem, 'The force that through the green fuse':

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose

⁵⁴³ Pratt, p. 70.

⁵⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 594-627 (p. 620).

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 612.

My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.⁵⁴⁷

The boy's association of his repressed sexuality with violence and death in 'A Prospect of the Sea', however, might, more specifically, be said to dramatise what Ivan Phillips identifies as 'Freud's notion of [. . .] death as the ego's ultimate escape from contradiction and frustration'⁵⁴⁸ – an idea that Dalí and Buñuel also seem to dramatise in *Un Chien Andalou*, when the sexually frustrated male cyclist imagines touching the naked body of the woman he desires and subsequently assumes a deathly appearance, with rolled-back eyes and blood trickling from his mouth.⁵⁴⁹

A sense of the interrelatedness of sex and death also dominates Thomas's 'The Enemies'. In this story, Mrs Owen gazes into 'the depths of her crystal' (p. 16) ball, which, the narrator reveals,

like an open grave, gave up its dead to [. . .] [her]. She stared on the lips of women and the hairs of men that wound into a pattern on the face of the crystal world.

(p. 17)

Here, as Mrs Owen 'stares' fetishistically at 'the lips' and 'hairs' of the dead, sensuality and morbidity, life and death, once again coalesce; and the way in which her husband 'cut[s] the brown worms' that he unearths in his garden 'in half, so that they might breed and spread their life over the garden and go out contaminating into the fields and the bellies of the cattle' (p. 18) also has this effect – as does the narrator's account of how Mr Owen 'patiently strangled the weeds' (p. 16) along the path, while 'each weed [he] [. . .] pulled out of the ground screamed like a baby' (p. 17). The language of this second quotation evokes the moment of birth, and calls to mind another of Thomas's poetic

⁵⁴⁷ Dylan Thomas, 'The force that through the green fuse', p. 13.

⁵⁴⁸ Ivan Phillips, 'Death is all metaphor': Dylan Thomas's Radical Morbidity', in *Dylan Thomas: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. John Goodby and Christopher Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 124-139 (p. 126).

⁵⁴⁹ As Linda Williams suggests, 'this transformation begins a pattern of association linking passion with the paroxysms of violence and death'; Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire*, p. 87.

meditations on the interconnected life and death instincts, 'A process in the weather of the heart' (1934):

A process in the eye forwarns
The bones of blindness; and the womb
Drives in a death as life leaks out.⁵⁵⁰

The 'process' referred to here seems to be the formation of the 'death drive' within the developing foetus or new 'life', with 'forwarns the bones of blindness' connoting decomposition and the darkness of burial. In particular, Mr Owen's actions in 'The Enemies' call to mind Freud's theory that

instincts are readily modified and, in particular, readily take on new objects. Thus, though originally directed onto oneself, the death instinct can be easily turned around and directed outwardly onto others. When this happens, the instinct takes the form of an outwardly destructive or aggressive instinct.⁵⁵¹

As John Deigh notes, Freud identified 'sadism' as 'an instance of the transformation of the death instinct into an aggressive instinct, an instant whose manifest erotic component is explained by the fusion of the sexual instinct with the aggressive instinct'.⁵⁵² Thomas joked about this aspect of Freud's work a year before the publication of 'The Enemies', writing in a letter to Trevor Hughes in 1933: 'Are you playing Freud to me as I tell you that [. . .] I [. . .] cut a pigeon's throat as I copulate?';⁵⁵³ yet he clearly exploits the transgressive impetus of Freud's theory in 'The Enemies' – in the image, for example, of Mr Owen gazing with 'satisfaction' on his wife's 'bare throat' as if he were fantasising about 'strangling' her. Moreover, this, in turn, once again connects the Jarvis Valley with Dalí's paintings. As previously noted, the interfacing sexual and aggressive instinct is a salient theme in Dalí's *Vertigo – Tower of Pleasure*, and it also finds expression in *Illuminated Pleasures* (Figure 18, 1929). In this painting, Dalí places an array of images – many of them recognisable from his other works, including the 'grasshopper', the dumb or

⁵⁵⁰ Dylan Thomas, 'A process in the weather of the heart', p. 10.

⁵⁵¹ John Deigh, 'Freud's later theory of civilisation: changes and implications', in *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*, ed. Jerome Ness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 287-308 (p. 307).

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Dylan Thomas, Letter to Trevor Hughes, summer 1934, in *Dylan Thomas: The Collected Letters*, p. 162.

‘mouthless’ face (seen previously in *The Great Masturbator*) and the sexually symbolic lion’s head – in a defamiliarised yet also of course, for Dalí, intimately familiar landscape of rocks, sand and sea. In the foreground there is an image of a man who has his arm around a woman’s waist, his hand apparently edging upwards towards her semi-naked breasts, while his other hand is clasping her throat. The woman’s hands, too, are covered with blood, and draw the spectator’s eyes across to a separate image of a hand holding a blood-stained knife aloft, and another clasped around its wrist. In *Illuminated Pleasures*, as in Thomas’s ‘The Enemies’ – and as in much of the work of these two artists from the 1930s – society’s veneer of respectability is stripped away to reveal an alternative, distinctly Freudian reality of anarchic unconscious drives, processes and conflicts.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the origins of the alternative reality that Dalí and Thomas construct are entrenched in a very specific location; both artists repeatedly invoke particular regional sites, and reconstruct and re-imagine those sites as heterotopias of Modernist deviation – spaces in which repressive, traditionalist social and cultural mores are variously dramatised, transgressed and contested. In this respect, both Dalí and Thomas can be seen as ‘*surregionalists*’ – or as ‘geomodernists’, like all of the Welsh writers considered so far in this thesis – whose Modernism is a direct product of their acute ‘self-consciousness about positionality’.⁵⁵⁴ In addition, I have shown that Thomas’s *surregionalism* can be viewed as independently comparable with that of Dalí, thus presenting a challenge to the similarly reductive view of Modernism in Wales as inevitably derivative in nature. In this comparative context, moreover, Thomas’s *surregionalism* emerges as an example, in Joe Cleary’s words, of the ‘marginal culture’s’ capacity to ‘invent’, and not just a peripheral, Welsh imitation or ‘simulacrum’ of a more prominent, canonical Modernist style.

⁵⁵⁴ Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, ‘Introduction’, in *Geomodernisms*, p. 3.

The Grotesque Modernism of Gwyn Thomas and Rhys Davies

All of the chapters in this thesis have, in their own ways, resisted the critical tendency to view Welsh Modernist writing as purely derivative: as simply a collection of belated, peripheral imitations and appropriations of a more genuinely innovative, authentically Modernist body of work. Moreover, I would argue that Welsh Modernism should not necessarily be regarded in the same way that Tyrus Miller, for instance, views other manifestations of so-called 'late Modernism':

in the empty spaces left by modernism's dissolution, late modernists reassembled fragments into disfigured likenesses of modernist masterpieces: the unlovely allegories of a world's end.⁵⁵⁵

To apply Miller's analysis to Welsh Modernism is to overlook the specifics, the individuality and, in particular, the novelty of the cultural and societal conditions in which Anglophone Welsh writers were operating in the 1930s and 40s. Indeed if, as Terence Brown argues, the combination of the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses* and the formation of the Irish Free State invites us to regard 1922 as a Modernist moment in Ireland in both an artistic and a social sense,⁵⁵⁶ then Welsh writers can also be seen as witnesses to, and participants in, a comparable (albeit more protracted) Modernist moment or 'event'⁵⁵⁷ in Wales, where an unprecedented process of, or 'experiment'⁵⁵⁸ in, linguistic, cultural and social change was taking place. This mood was captured by Glyn Jones who, writing in 1980, revealed: 'in the Thirties, I was [. . .] conscious [. . .] of being in at the beginning as it were, of being part of something quite new in Wales'.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁵ Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), p. 14.

⁵⁵⁶ Terence Brown, 'Ireland, Modernism and the 1930s', in *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp. 24-42 (p. 24).

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Meic Stephens (ed.), 'What was before the Big Bang?: Extracts from the 1980s jottings of Glyn Jones', in *The New Welsh Review*, n.s. 39 (Winter, 1997-98) 40-42 (p. 41).

As I stressed in the previous chapter, to view Welsh Modernism from this perspective is not to refute the idea that Welsh writers were, to some extent, importing and adapting or 'reassembling' aspects of established 'Modernist masterpieces' in their work. On the contrary, as Pascale Casanova has suggested, it might be argued that

authors living [. . .] on the edge of the literary world [such as those of Anglophone Wales during this period], who [. . .] [have] learned to confront the laws and forces that sustain the unequal structure of this world and who are keenly aware that they must be recognised in their respective centres in order to have any chance of surviving as writers, [. . .] [are likely to be] the most sensitive to the newest aesthetic inventions of international literature [and art] [. . .].⁵⁶⁰

My aim, rather, has been to propose a less restricted and more searching critical understanding of the relationship between Modernism and Welsh writing, and Modernism and marginal literatures more generally. Welsh Modernism, as Tony Conran suggests, is potentially both 'home-grown' and 'part of an international climate',⁵⁶¹ and this more open, inclusive approach will continue to frame my analysis in this final chapter, on the role of the grotesque in the Modernism of Gwyn Thomas and Rhys Davies.

I

According to Tony Conran, 'modernism in Wales is most at home with the grotesque. It is there', he contends,

that modernism characteristically shows itself, in Saunders Lewis as much as in Caradoc Evans or Dylan Thomas. The nightmare of monstrosity underlies the middle-class rejection of the buchedd [or 'Welsh way of life', which I discussed in chapters one and four of this thesis], the sense of being suffocated by its hypocrisy and narrowness.⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, translated from the French by M.B. Debevoise (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 43.

⁵⁶¹ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 113.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

Conran bases this theory both on the thematic preoccupations of Welsh Modernist literature and on what he calls ‘the grotesquerie of [its] language’⁵⁶³ – a feature which he traces back to Caradoc Evans’s *My People*. Another Welsh writer whose mode of expression possesses a grotesque or incongruous quality is, of course, Gwyn Thomas; but, as I demonstrated in chapter one of this thesis, the motivation behind Thomas’s ‘new verbal ikon’ (and indeed, it might be argued, behind Evans’s similarly experimental, Welsh-language-inflected idiom) is not just estrangement from *buchedd* values. Indeed, the grotesque seems to play an altogether more complex role in Gwyn Thomas’s fiction than Conran suggests, and this becomes apparent in, arguably, Thomas’s most experimental narrative – his novella, *Oscar*.

At the centre of this text, which, like all of Thomas’s early works, is set in the industrialised South Wales valleys during the 1930s, is the figure of Oscar, whom we see through the eyes of Thomas’s narrator, Lewis. A wealthy industrialist and land-owner,⁵⁶⁴ Oscar is repeatedly dehumanised: the only aspect of the newspaper that appears to interest him, for example, is ‘a photograph of two old chimpanzees scratching a young chimpanzee’ (p. 71), and he is identified as ‘a great, busy ram’ (p. 5), a ‘goat’ (p. 6) and, most frequently and evocatively, ‘a hog’. Lewis reasons that ‘for a hog, Oscar did very well out of being a man’ (p. 6), and remarks that, since he had started working for Oscar, ‘lads who [. . .] would always say, ‘Hullo, Lewis’ [. . .] in a very friendly way, grew either to saying just ‘Hullo’, or nothing at all [. . .]. All because Oscar was a hog and owned a mountain’ (p. 6). Oscar’s behaviour is also more like that of a pig than a human. The narrator observes, for example, how he ‘shook his great fat head stupidly from side to

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ The narrator describes ‘the broad mountain that Oscar owned’, and reveals that ‘on top of this mountain a colliery company had built its tip, its dump, the stuff that had to be got from underground to let the elements that work there get at the coal. Oscar owned that tip too’; Gwyn Thomas, *Oscar*, in *The Dark Philosophers* (Cardigan: Parthian, Library of Wales Series, 2006), pp. 3-101 (p. 5). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

side' (p. 25), and states: 'I wiped Oscar's mouth and eyes with my sleeve, which was thick and rough and made him grunt' (p. 19). From one perspective, we might see Oscar as a capitalist counterpart to the tyrannical pig, Napoleon, in George Orwell's famous satire of Stalinism, *Animal Farm* (1945). Indeed, the subtitle of the volume in which *Oscar* was first published, *Folk Tales from the Modern Welsh*, also calls to mind Orwell's text, which is subtitled 'A Fairy Story'. Thomas's narrative does not operate in the same way as Orwell's, however. *Animal Farm* is, fundamentally, an allegorical fairytale, which relies on 'the active participation of the reader'⁵⁶⁵ in its generation of socio-political meaning. Thomas, by contrast, is concerned with 'maintaining [. . .] the primacy of the *social image* [my emphasis] through its subjective expression',⁵⁶⁶ and presents the reader with a distorted yet, at the same time, pellucid and instructive social reality. More specifically, Oscar represents a point in the narrative at which the 'objective representation of reality disappears behind [a subjective] vision, which is called upon to express a deeper truth, a more essential insight'.⁵⁶⁷ Thomas's portrayal of Oscar is not simply grotesque, but also Expressionistic, evoking the European Expressionist premise that

if the creative individual is a conscious and active participant in the structure of the reality of which he forms a part, then his will manifests itself by representing, criticising and changing that structure by means of self-expression, since his subject, in an aesthetic sense, represents objective reality. Therefore objective reality emerges through his subject, and the objective social goal through his art.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁵ Lynette Hunter, 'Animal Farm: From Satire to Allegory', in *George Orwell: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Graham Holderness, Bryan Loughrey and Nahem Yousaf (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 31-46 (p. 34).

⁵⁶⁶ Fordham, p. 90.

⁵⁶⁷ György M. Vajda, 'Outline of the Philosophic Backgrounds of Expressionism', in *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon*, ed. Ulrich Weiststein, translated from the German by Linda Brust (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1973), pp. 45-58 (p. 48).

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 58. The Expressionist movement came to prominence in Germany around 1910. The first group of Expressionist painters were the Dresden-based Die Brücke group, comprising Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, Erich Heckel and Otto Mueller. The Munich-based Blaue Reiter group, consisting of Franz Marc, the Russian painter, Wassili Kandinsky, and Auguste Macke, followed in 1912-13. During the interwar years, Expressionism infiltrated other artistic media in Germany, including the theatre of Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser, the poetry of Johannes R. Becher, and the prose of Kasimir Edschmid. Paul Wegener's *The Golem* (1920), Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) are important German Expressionist films.

The ‘more essential insight’ that Thomas’s ‘Rhondda Expressionist style of writing’⁵⁶⁹ elicits is that of Oscar’s inhumanity – a ‘truth’ which is conveyed in a more conventionally realist way in, for example, the image of Oscar’s destitute employees ‘waiting to pick up [. . .] scraps of coal that went to fill Oscar’s bags and Oscar’s pockets’ (p. 28). Oscar’s seeming identity as ‘a hog’ and his hoggish behaviour also conveys his greed and corruption, as does Lewis’s account of how his employer’s ‘huge, fat body poured over the sides of the chair on which he sat’ (p. 15). Moreover, through his Expressionistic approach, Thomas achieves his ‘objective social goal’: the exaggerated, distorted and grotesque⁵⁷⁰ Oscar is clearly an expression – or, as Raymond Williams suggests, a ‘cry’⁵⁷¹ – of outrage at the capitalist system and its consequences in industrial South Wales;⁵⁷² Expressionism, Williams writes, is ‘the language of the cry, the exclamation’, which

in some later Expressionist work [. . .] is a consciously liberating, indeed revolutionary moment: [. . .] that cry which fights to be heard above the news bulletins, the headlines, the false political speeches of a world in crisis’.⁵⁷³

This invites us to view Oscar, not only as a vitally modern incarnation of the unfriendly giants of Welsh mythology, as Stephen Knight suggests,⁵⁷⁴ but also as a figure akin to the grotesques that populate German Expressionist visual art. He recalls the monstrous characters in Otto Dix’s *Prager Strasse* (1920, Figure 19) and *The Skat Players* (1920, Figure

Expressionism significantly influenced the arts in other European countries, especially in France, Italy, Belgium, Spain and Czechoslovakia.

⁵⁶⁹ M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 43.

⁵⁷⁰ Norbert Wolf identifies ‘the factors of exaggeration, distortion and grotesqueness’ as central to Expressionism; Norbert Wolf, *Expressionism*, ed. Uta Grosenick (Köln and London: Taschen, 2004), p. 38.

⁵⁷¹ Raymond Williams, ‘Language and the Avant-Garde’, in *Raymond Williams, Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney, 2nd edn (London and New York: Verso, 2007), pp. 65–80 (p. 74).

⁵⁷² Thomas’s expression of political outrage seems to refer to the effects of the Depression in industrial South Wales, particularly the Rhondda valley where he was born and brought up, during the 1930s. John Davies notes that ‘the fate of thousands of Welsh people in the 1930s was to stay at home in idleness. In 1938, 62 per cent of the Rhondda had been out of work for three years or more, and life on the dole was the reality for vast numbers of the people of Wales. [. . .]. Rising late, loitering on street corners, scratching for coal on the tips [. . .] – these were the experiences of perhaps the majority of unemployed men’; John Davies, *A History of Wales*, pp. 579–580.

⁵⁷³ Raymond Williams, ‘Language and the Avant-Garde’, p. 75.

⁵⁷⁴ Stephen Knight suggests that Oscar is a ‘modern version of a native unfriendly giant fable, with some resemblance to ‘Culhwch ac Olwen’; Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, p. 99.

20), for example, whom Dix deployed to rail against German militarism and expose the corruption of the Weimar Republic. And he would also merge seamlessly into what George Grosz referred to as the ‘hellish procession of dehumanised figures’⁵⁷⁵ in his appalled visualisation of modern urban society, *Dedicated to Oskar Panizza* (1917-18, Figure 21) – a scene which he claimed he ‘painted [. . .] [in] protest against a humanity that had gone insane’.⁵⁷⁶

In resorting to the grotesque, then, Gwyn Thomas does not, primarily, seem to be reacting to the suffocating ‘hypocrisy’ and ‘narrowness’ of the ‘Welsh way of life’ in the same way as Dylan Thomas and Caradoc Evans, but articulating and criticising the mercenary exploitation of working-class communities in industrialised South Wales during the first half of the twentieth century – exploitation which he witnessed first hand. As Glyn Jones points out,

when short working and unemployment first began to be felt in the valleys in 1923, [Thomas] was ten years of age; when prosperity was restored with the outbreak of the Second World War, he was twenty-six; so that part of his childhood and the whole of his young manhood were lived in a period of crippling poverty, emigration and unprecedented unemployment, and the widespread frustration, bitterness, suffering and despair that inevitably followed.⁵⁷⁷

If Thomas’s use of the grotesque does also pertain to his ‘rejection’ of the *buchedd*, then it might be interpreted as a challenge to its Liberal politics – a manifestation, in Conran’s words, of ‘a genuinely proletarian consciousness [. . .] in the south Wales mining valleys’.⁵⁷⁸ Moreover, the grotesque effects of capitalism and social inequality on a particular community are externalised in this way in other Modernist works – in the German visual artist, Conrad Felixmüller’s emotively distorted representations of workers and families in the industrialised Ruhr area of Germany, such as *Industrie-*

⁵⁷⁵ George Grosz cited in Wolf, p. 42.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Glyn Jones, ‘Gwyn Thomas’, p. 101.

⁵⁷⁸ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 3.

Regenlandschaft (1922, Figure 22) and *Ruhrrevier I* (1920, Figure 23); and in the plays of the Spanish dramatist Ramón del Valle-Inclán, which Thomas, a competent and enthusiastic reader of Spanish, may well have encountered.⁵⁷⁹ Valle-Inclán's 1920 play, *Luces de Bohemia* or *Bohemian Lights*, for instance, is an Expressionistic representation of

Madrid and Barcelona, between 1917 and 1922: the long smouldering industrial strife, the strikes and demonstrations, clashes with the police, political assassinations, the right-wing backlash in the form of vigilante groups like the *Acción ciudadana*, the impact of Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution, workers' meetings in the *Casa del pueblo*.⁵⁸⁰

Valle-Inclán's poet-protagonist and anti-hero in *Bohemian Lights*, Max Estrella, defines this turbulent socio-political milieu as 'a grotesque deformation of European civilisation',⁵⁸¹ and opines that, by extension, all 'forms of expression' should be distorted 'in the same mirror that [. . .] contorts the whole miserable life of Spain' (p. 161). These lines are, in fact, self-conscious references to Valle-Inclán's own aesthetic in the play. The world of *Bohemian Lights* is indeed 'systematically deformed' (p. 160), or 'reflected in concave

⁵⁷⁹ Thomas studied Spanish at Oxford University, and spent six months at Madrid's *Universidad Complutense* in 1934. When he graduated in 1936, he returned to Wales to become a teacher of Spanish and French; Parnell, p. 23. Thomas admitted his particular interest in the literature, and especially the theatre, of the Spanish Romantic period; Parnell, p. 188. His knowledge of Spanish writing, however, was clearly wide-ranging. In 1965, for example, he published an essay on Spanish literature in the magazine *Holiday* entitled 'The Passionate Authors'. The article 'reviewed the whole range of narrative writing from the medieval epic of *The Song of El Cid* to [José] Ortega y Gasset [– a key member of the Spanish avant-garde generation of 1919 –] and [the nineteenth-century realist novelist] Benito Pérez Galdós'; Parnell, p. 187. Thomas also wrote a novel, *The Love Man* (1958), which was set in Spain and based on the Spanish legend of Don Juan.

⁵⁸⁰ John Lyon, *The Theatre of Valle-Inclán* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 107. As Maria Delgado notes, 'although the [First World] War had initially brought prosperity to Spain – she was able to supply the allies with much needed raw materials – the boom had been short lived and had led to inflation, political instability and industrial problems. In effect these events politicised [Valle-Inclán], creating an awareness of the need to express his disenchantment with the political regime and its brutal handling of proletarian disputes witnessed in Madrid and Barcelona in 1919. Domestic unrest was also aggravated by the impact of the Russian revolution, felt in Spain more deeply than in any other European country: the impact of Socialism evident not only in the labour disputes which rocked Spain's two major cities but also in the increasing hostility to the monarchy which was eventually to lead to the exile of the King and the establishment of the Second Republic in 1931'; Maria Delgado, 'Introduction', in *Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Valle-Inclán Plays: One*, translated from the Spanish by Maria Delgado (London: Methuen Drama, 1993), pp. xiii–xlii (p. xxi).

⁵⁸¹ Ramón del Valle-Inclán, *Bohemian Lights*, in *Valle-Inclán Plays: One*, translated from the Spanish by Maria Delgado (London: Methuen Drama, 1993), pp. 91–184 (p. 160). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

mirrors' (p. 160), and Valle-Inclán calls his particular 'version of the Expressionist grotesque'⁵⁸² '*esperpento*', meaning literally a frightful 'sight' or 'piece of nonsense'.⁵⁸³

Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* aesthetic and Gwyn Thomas's grotesque narrative in *Oscar* actually overlap in a number of ways. In scene two of *Bohemian Lights*, we are introduced to a bookseller, Zarathustra:

ZARATHUSTRA's cave-like bookshop along Calle Consegos. Randomly stacked piles of books litter the floor and cover the walls. Four sordid illustrations from a serialized story are pasted over the glass plates of the door. In the 'cave' the cat, the parrot, the dog and the bookseller are having a literary gathering. The repellent puppet-like ZARATHUSTRA, a hunched figure with a face reminiscent of rancid bacon and with a green, serpent-like scarf wrapped around his neck, is at once sharply distant and painfully immediate. Enveloped in the torn stuffing of a tiny chair, his feet buried in rags and wrapped in vines around the brazier stand, he minds the shop. A mouse sticks his prying snout through a hole.

(p. 100)

Zarathustra is a nonsensical 'sight', distorted and exaggerated in the concave mirror of contemporary Spanish society. Hunched and 'puppet-like', he is expressly dehumanised. Indeed, he appears overtly animalistic, lurking in a 'cave' with a cat, a parrot and a dog, and attracting the attention of a prying mouse. The 'green, serpent-like scarf wrapped around his neck' and the macabre comparison of his face to 'rancid bacon' reinforce this effect, as does his name, which alludes to Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical work, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-84), in which humanity is identified as 'a rope suspended between animal and Superman'.⁵⁸⁴ What is most arresting about Zarathustra, however, is his similarity to Oscar. He and Oscar are each repellantly materialistic representatives of an entrepreneurial middle class,⁵⁸⁵ who have been rendered (in Valle-Inclán's words) 'at once sharply distant and painfully immediate'. They are Expressionist grotesques,

⁵⁸² Derek Harris, 'Squared horizons: the hybridization of the avant-garde in Spain', in Derek Harris (ed.), *The Spanish avant-garde* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 1-14 (p. 6).

⁵⁸³ *The Collins Spanish Dictionary Plus Grammar* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1998).

⁵⁸⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book For All And None*, translated from the German by Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora, 2003), p. 9.

⁵⁸⁵ Delgado, p. xxiii.

dehumanised and disfigured in a manner reminiscent of the work of the Spanish painter Francisco Goya (1746-1828)⁵⁸⁶ – Max Estrella actually claims in Valle-Inclán's play that 'it was Goya who invented the Grotesque' (p. 160)⁵⁸⁷ – and starkly emblematic of an abhorrent, modern capitalist reality. Indeed, both Valle-Inclán and Thomas seem to invoke the grotesque 'as a reaction against the constraints of capitalist society at its ugliest and most mediocre';⁵⁸⁸ and this is reinforced when, just as Oscar employs the impoverished people of the valley to pick coal 'at fivepence a bag' (p. 23), and then sells 'each bag for one and sevenpence' (p. 23), Zarathustra defrauds the blind and penniless Max by purchasing his books from his associate, Don Latino, for 'three measly pesetas' (p. 98). When, outraged, Max visits Zarathustra's shop in person to demand that the transaction be reversed, Zarathustra tells him that he has already sold the books on, while, at the same time, hastily secreting them in 'a murky backroom' (p. 101).

Zarathustra and Oscar do not just incite feelings of revulsion, however. They have been 'transformed', in Mikhail Bakhtin's words, 'into [. . .] funny monster[s]'.⁵⁸⁹ both Valle-Inclán and Thomas use 'the grotesque and its corresponding sense of interchange and disorder'⁵⁹⁰ to blur the distinction between amusement and disgust, comedy and tragedy. This is evident in *Bohemian Lights* when Valle-Inclán indicates that 'only half of [Zarathustra's] face can be seen: the rest remains in shadow, giving the appearance that his nose is folded over one ear' (p. 102), and in Thomas's novella following Oscar's confession that 'I'd like to kill somebody, Lewis. That's the thing to make you tingle I bet' (p. 48):

⁵⁸⁶ Many of Goya's paintings contain elements of social and political satire.

⁵⁸⁷ As Gwynne Edwards suggests, 'the world of *Luces de Bohemia* look[s] back [. . .] to [the Spanish Golden Age poet, Francisco de] Quevedo and Goya'; Gwynne Edwards, *Dramatists in Perspective: Spanish Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1985), p. 60.

⁵⁸⁸ Delgado, p. xxiii.

⁵⁸⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, translated from the Russian by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 49.

⁵⁹⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Looking: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 105.

I [Lewis] jumped to my feet thinking he was going to pass into a fit. I moved back a little from the bed and looked at the door. I did not wish to be in that room if Oscar was going to be taken in such a fashion. I did not know how I would handle a man with a body shaped so much like a whale, and a mind shaped so much like another man's rear.

(p. 48)

The passage cited below, in which Lewis attends to Oscar in his bedroom, provides another memorable example:

I found him [. . .] sitting in [. . .] bed with his legs drawn up and, between his vast gut and his legs, look[ing] as if he had taken another bed into bed with him to start some new fashion that only landowners could afford. The colour had drained from his face. It might have gone lower down his body for a change, being sick of Oscar's face as I sometimes got, but his face was like the fine ash when the cinders have been riddled away. His lower lip was hanging down over his chin like a pale red sunshade. [. . .] He did not stop gazing at himself in the huge mirror on the wall opposite. He seemed afraid that his reflection would vanish and never return if he turned his eyes away from it for a second.

(p. 44)

Oscar almost seems to enact the reader or spectator's reaction to the grotesque here; he appears startled, horrified, repulsed, but at the same time, enthralled, entertained, unable to 'turn his eyes away'. Indeed, again evoking *esperpento* theatre in particular, he stares at his own reflection – at what should be a recognizable and commonplace sight – with the same puzzled intensity as someone contemplating the bizarre, unfamiliar image looking back at them from a fairground mirror. It is almost as if, like Valle-Inclán, Thomas is self-reflexively drawing attention to his own distorting aesthetic.

The unsettling tragicomedy that infuses *Oscar* itself assumes grotesque shapes in Thomas's Expressionistic fairground mirror, swelling and contorting into a 'gallows-humour',⁵⁹¹ which finds expression, for example, when Lewis observes 'the people who stood waiting to pick up the scraps of coal' (p. 28) from Oscar's tip:

⁵⁹¹ David Smith, 'The Early Gwyn Thomas', p. 74.

I had seen the same look on all their faces, the look of people who are being fed in parts through a mangle. And at the handle of the mangle, turning away like blue hell in case anybody should have a little less pain than he paid rent on, stood Oscar.

(p. 28)

Lewis evaluates his own job, on the other hand, in the following terms:

All I had to do was to stand there, far enough away from the tipping machine to be out of the dust, and count the number of elements who had turned up to do the picking and count the number of sacks picked. Then I had to see that these sacks were picked up in the proper order to be taken away by the cart that came for them at the end of the afternoon. Any job connected with counting I consider to be very easy, especially when you are in hearing and seeing distance of other elements whose jobs cause them to be scratching about bent up like monkeys for bits of coal, getting their guts turned half solid with coal dust and their limbs occasionally knocked inside out by those small rocks that came flying down from the trains emptied by the tipping machine.

(p. 51)

In the first extract cited above, the narrator combines an image of human cruelty with overt, wry humour. Indeed this scene calls to mind Kafka's Expressionist short story, 'In the Penal Colony' (1919), in which a machine comprising a Bed, a Designer and a Harrow, subjects prisoners to a protracted and excruciating death. As the Officer, the operator of this apparatus and another agent of an oppressive socio-political system, explains,

'As soon as the [condemned] man is strapped down, the Bed is set in motion. It quivers in minute, very rapid vibrations, both from side to side and up and down. You will have seen similar apparatus in hospitals; but in our Bed the movements are all precisely calculated; you see, they have to correspond very exactly to the movements of the Harrow.

[. . .]

Whatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body by the Harrow. This prisoner, for instance [. . .] will have written on his body: HONOUR THY SUPERIORS!⁵⁹²

In the second quotation from Thomas's novella, cited above, on the other hand, injury in the coalfield is depicted in the form of a gruesome, but also comically understated and slapstick account of workers' limbs being 'occasionally knocked inside out'. Once again,

⁵⁹² Franz Kafka, 'In the Penal Colony', in *The Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, translated from the German by Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 140-167 (pp. 143-144).

these passages resonate with *Bohemian Lights*, which is pervaded with an equally macabre humour, exemplified in Valle-Inclán's portrayal of the Home Secretary, whose 'glasses hang from the end of a string like two absurd eyeballs dancing on his belly' (p. 139), and through his attention to the journalist Don Filiberto's 'yellow, ink-stained hands – the hands', he writes, 'of a diligent skeleton on the biblical Day of Judgement!' (p. 135). Fittingly, however, Valle-Inclán reserves his most outrageously warped comedy for the disorientating climax of the scene in which Max expounds the concept of *esperpento*:

MAX. Latino, I think I'm beginning to see again. How did we get to this funeral? [. . .] Latino, how did we come to preside over such an affair?

DON LATINO. Stop hallucinating, Max. [. . .]

MAX. The sun's shining so brightly on the funeral hearse!

DON LATINO. If everything you say wasn't one big joke it would have some theosophical significance. . . . If I presided over a funeral, I would be the corpse. All these wreaths seem to suggest that you must be the corpse.

MAX. Allow me to oblige. To calm your fear, let me lie here in wait. I am the corpse! [. . .]

MÁXIMO ESTRELLA lies down against the door. A stray dog, running in a zig-zag, crosses the steep, narrow street. He stops in the middle, lifts a hind leg and urinates. His bleary eyes, like those of a poet, are raised up to the sky's remaining star.

MAX. Latino, prepare for the Gloria.

DON LATINO. If you don't put a stop to this macabre joke, I am leaving.

MAX. I'm the one who's leaving. Forever!

DON LATINO. Get up Max. Let's move on.

MAX. I'm dead.

DON LATINO. You're frightening me! Max, let's go. Stand up and stop twitching you silly bastard! Max! Max! Damned fool! Say something!

MAX. Dead people can't talk.

DON LATINO. I'm definitely leaving.

MAX. Goodnight!

(pp. 162-163)

This exchange is made all the more disconcerting when a neighbour, 'lean[ing] over [Max] to peer at the half-open eyes, beneath his pale forehead' (p. 165), makes the horrific discovery that he is, in fact, dead; and the whole 'macabre joke' takes another grotesque turn when the people at his funeral begin to suspect that Max has been alive all along:

BASILIO SOULINAKE. My dear concierge, please inform the funeral service coachman that the burial has been postponed. [. . .].

MADAME COLLET. Ask him to wait! . . . You could be mistaken, Basilio. . .

MADAME COLLET. Oh, Jesus! I don't know what to do.

SEÑORA FLORA THE CONCIERGE. It'll cost you double. Is it really worth keeping the corpse in the house for a couple more hours. Let them take him away, Madame Collet!

MADAME COLLET. What if he's not dead?

SEÑORA FLORA THE CONCIERGE. Not dead! You haven't left the room So you don't notice the stench.

BASILIO SOULINAKE. Señora, would you be so kind as to tell me whether you have ever studied medicine at a university? If you have I will shut my mouth and say nothing more. But if you have not, then I will refrain from entering into an argument and simply state that he is not dead but merely cataleptic.

SEÑORA FLORA THE CONCIERGE. Not dead? He's dead and rotting! . . .

THE FUNERAL SERVICE COACHMAN. Just put a lit match to his thumb. If it burns to the end, he's as dead as my grandfather.

(pp. 170-172)

The mourners' crass approach to Max Extrella's death in this scene calls to mind

Lewis's comically unfeeling attitude towards his uncle at the beginning of Oscar:

I wore a waterproof jacket [which] [. . .] had belonged to an uncle of mine. I took it from his house without telling anybody, just after he died. The rain did not bother him anymore. It bothered me.

(p. 3)

Furthermore, like the description in Oscar mentioned earlier of workers' limbs 'getting occasionally knocked inside out' by falling debris, the scene has a farcical, slapstick quality, which chimes with Valle-Inclán's portrayal of The Porter in scene seven as 'a stumpy, sour-faced man with a moustache and a beer gut, looking like one of those dashing colonels who always manage to fall off their horses during a parade' (p. 129), and his image of the Home Secretary in scene eight, emerging from his office with 'his flies [. . .] undone' (p. 139). We recall that Valle-Inclán emphasised the bookseller, Zarathustra's grotesqueness by identifying him as 'puppet-like',⁵⁹³ and the often farcical tenor of *Bohemian Lights* is an extension of this theme, echoing and alluding to the Spanish tradition of puppet-theatre.⁵⁹⁴ Whether or not Gwyn Thomas was drawing on *esperpento* theatre during the writing of Oscar, or indeed whether, like Valle-Inclán, he was independently invoking and experimenting with Spanish puppet theatre, or even the British 'Punch and Judy' show⁵⁹⁵ in this text, his prose certainly has the air of a puppet-play; and this is exemplified in the following scuffle which breaks out between Lewis and Oscar:

He [Oscar] rolled like a flash on to his side and shot his hand beneath the bed. His hand swung wildly back and fore in search of the chamber. For a second I couldn't see what was meant by all this activity. Then I saw he had a notion of swinging this article up from under the bed and breaking it over my head. I kicked his hand as hard as I could. The vessel shot from his grasp and landed with cracking force against a farther wall.

'You'd better not try any of those tricks with me, Oscar.'

I pushed him back into the bed. He was weak as a baby now and crying and sucking his hand where I had kicked it, sucking it slowly as if he liked it, as if it were a toffee apple.

(p. 49)

⁵⁹³ Some critics even translate *esperpento* figuratively, as 'puppet' or, in the case of Delgado, 'scarecrow'; Delgado, p. xxxiii.

⁵⁹⁴ As Gwynne Edwards notes, 'the puppet-theatre [. . .] has been popular in Spain for centuries. [Miguel de] Cervantes [for example] had introduced a puppet show – El retablo de Maese Pedro – (Master Peter's Puppet Show) – into the second part of Don Quixote [1615]'; Edwards, p. 85. Edwards also points out that 'in the Madrid of [Valle-Inclán's] time there were frequent puppet-shows' and that 'the tradition of farce [is] also an old one in Spanish literary history'; Edwards, p. 85.

⁵⁹⁵ The British Punch and Judy puppet-show also features grotesque puppets, farcical violence and slapstick comedy.

This passage clearly displays the grotesquely exaggerated, ungainly physical action and comical violence that are the hallmarks of puppet theatre, and Thomas creates a similar atmosphere when Lewis reacts to a comment made by the fruit and vegetable seller, Waldo Williamson, about his position as ‘Oscar’s boy’ (p. 4):

I drove my open hand into his face and he went down into a puddle. He laughed at that too. [. . .] He looked altogether like a duck as he sat there, his lips stuck outwards like the beginnings of a beak, and wondering how the hell he got down there so near the ground with waves all around him.

(p. 8)

Indeed, these passages also evoke the Modernist puppet-plays of another Spanish dramatist, and contemporary of Valle-Inclán, Federico García Lorca – particularly Lorca’s *Tragedia de Don Cristóbal y la seña Rosita*, or the *Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Miss Rosita* (1922-25), in which the puppet, Mosquito (another grotesque, described as ‘part ghost, part leprechaun, part insect’⁵⁹⁶) ‘strikes [the sleeping] Cristobita a sharp blow on the head with [a] trumpet and wakes him up’ (p. 115).⁵⁹⁷ Thomas’s vignette of Oscar ‘crying and sucking his hand [. . .] slowly [. . .] as if it were a toffee apple’, on the other hand, calls to mind the infantile behaviour of Rosita and Cocoliche in scene two of Lorca’s play:

Pause, during which Rosita, gasping for breath, sobs comically.

I can’t marry you!

COCOLICHE: Rosita!

ROSITA: You’re the apple of my eye, but I can’t marry you!
She sobs.

COCOLICHE: Are you going to act as balky as a nun now?
Have I done anything wrong? Oh, oh, oh!

⁵⁹⁶ Federico García Lorca, *The Billy-Club Puppets: Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Miss Rosita*, in *Frederico García Lorca: Collected Plays*, translated from the Spanish by James Graham-Luján and Richard L. O’Connell (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976), pp. 77-119 (p. 115). All further references to Lorca’s plays are to this edition and are given in the text.

⁵⁹⁷ As Gwynne Edwards notes, ‘Lorca’s opposition to the naturalistic theatre is reflected [. . .] in his allegiance to the traditions and techniques of puppet-theatre and farce; Edwards, p. 84.

His weeping is halfway between childish and comic.

ROSITA: You'll find out all about it later. But now, goodbye.

COCOLICHE, shouting and stamping his feet. Oh, no, no, no, no, no!

(p. 89)

Additionally, Oscar's absurdly childlike and melodramatic stance is cognate with the exaggerated, clownish poses assumed by Charlie Chaplin in his comic films; after all, Thomas was, as Parnell notes, 'always a great devotee of the cinema'.⁵⁹⁸ This again invites us to compare his narrative style with the grotesque Modernism of Lorca and Valle-Inclán, which was inspired, in part, by the silent comedies of Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd.⁵⁹⁹ As G.G. Brown points out, 'several of the techniques of the *esperpento* [in particular] clearly derive from [their] silent comedies'.⁶⁰⁰

One of the ways in which Valle-Inclán educes the puppet-like essence of his characters in his *esperpentos* is by emulating what Gwynne Edwards terms the puppet-theatre's 'simplification and undermining of the complexity and dignity of human behaviour' and 'emotions',⁶⁰¹ – its reduction of human nature to a comically 'simple, spontaneous level'.⁶⁰² This is evidenced, for example, in the figure of the 'dirty tramp' (p. 109) in scene three of *Bohemian Lights*, who 'begins maniacally shaking his shoulders', 'like a dog who is trying to rid itself of fleas' (p. 109), and it is also a feature of Lorca's *La zapatera prodigiosa* or *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife* (1930). A human puppet-play which shares many similarities with Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* theatre, *The Shoemaker's Prodigious*

⁵⁹⁸ Parnell, p. 35.

⁵⁹⁹ G.G. Brown describes 'the extraordinary veneration in which [. . .] Chaplin and Keaton [in particular] were held by many Spanish writers' during this period. 'The tragic undertones of their melancholy alienation from modern society, in the midst of grotesque slapstick', Brown suggests, 'appealed to Spanish taste [. . .] and the [. . .] puppet-like movements and gestures of these films seemed to many thoughtful Spaniards to reflect the absurdity of modern existence'; G.G. Brown, p. 9.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Edwards, p. 69.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

Wife features a Shoemaker who is ‘constantly swallowing’,⁶⁰³ and a character called Don Blackbird, who ‘moves his head like a wire doll’ (p. 141).⁶⁰⁴ The childlike behaviour of Rosita and Cocoliche in Lorca’s *Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Miss Rosita* and, significantly, the image of Oscar ‘crying’ and ‘sucking his hand [. . .] slowly [. . .] as if it were a toffee apple’ also register this process. It is when, having finished his own dinner, Oscar grabs Lewis’s plate of ‘bacon and kidneys’ (p. 72) and eats them, shouting ‘More for me. More for me More for me,’ [. . .] in a high, childish voice’ (p. 73), however – an outburst that additionally recalls the ‘vigorous, repeated [verbal] patterns’⁶⁰⁵ of puppet-theatre – that Thomas’s use of this technique is most obvious; as well as at the novella’s brutal climax:

We [Lewis and Oscar] came to the fence that had been put up to keep people away from the quarry, the fence that various voters had made it their business to kick down. I told Oscar to lift his legs to keep them free of the tangled tracks of wood and wire which were all that was left of the fence. He did that. He lifted his legs up a lot higher than was necessary and he screamed that the movement made him feel like a bloody woman.

‘That’s right, Oscar,’ I said. ‘Like a woman. Go on, boy.’

And on he went, right over the quarry.

(p. 99)

Indeed, it is not only Oscar who is characterised in this way. The other figures in Thomas’s novella are similarly distorted and dehumanised, and they too register a puppet-theatre-esque flattening or caricaturing of human behaviour and emotions. There is Waldo Williamson, mentioned earlier, for example, whose ‘lips [stick] outwards like the beginnings of a beak’, and who wears multiple layers of clothing all year round in order to ward off rheumatism, only to visit ‘every pub he [passes] to get cool from all the heat he [works] up from wearing such a load of leggings and capes’ (p. 7); there is Clarisse, who has ‘lips [. . .] like good chops of meat’ (p. 9) and who makes a ‘glugging sound’ (p.

⁶⁰³ Federico García Lorca, *The Shoemaker’s Prodigious Wife: A Violent Farce in Two Acts and a Prologue*, pp. 125–172 (p. 135).

⁶⁰⁴ As Edwards suggests, in *The Shoemaker’s Prodigious Wife* the ‘puppets have become more human’ (p. 93). Edwards also identifies Valle-Inclán as an important influence on Lorca; see Edwards, p. 85.

⁶⁰⁵ Edwards, p. 98.

11) which, the narrator decides, she ‘must have picked up from the pictures or the chickens’ (p. 11); and then there is Macnaffy – a woman described as ‘tired, thin and savage’ (p. 14), and looking ‘as if she were going to rip you open’ (p. 15) – who incessantly caresses ‘her right leg [. . .] as if, Thomas writes, her ‘bulging calf were a good friend’ (p. 14). Perhaps the most memorable example, however, is No Doubt, who wears ‘a fisherman’s hat [. . .] pulled down towards his neck’ (p. 40), giving him ‘the look of something growing out of the earth’ (p. 40), and who responds to whatever anyone says to him with the phrase, ‘No doubt’, in order to avoid being ‘fined or put in jail’ (p. 40). In essence, No Doubt’s identity, emotions and behaviour condense into one simplistic, perfunctory phrase, as the following exchange illustrates:

‘God, it’s a lovely morning,’ I [Lewis] said.
 ‘No doubt,’ said No Doubt, taken aback a bit, because he must have thought I was addressing him as God, which he was not, being little, grey, overworked and limping.
 ‘What are you doing up here so early?’ I asked.
 ‘No doubt,’ said No Doubt, cautiously.

(p. 41)

Lewis subsequently remarks that No Doubt

was like Meg [Oscar’s housekeeper] and Danny and Hannah [Lewis’s friends in the Terraces] because they, too, seemed to be going round with a rope on their necks jerking them to a halt every time they tried moving forward.

(p. 42)

And this idea of people in the valley being ‘jerked’ into life by some higher, controlling force, while echoing Caradoc Evans’s infamous short story, ‘Lamentations’ (1919), in which Evan Rhiw leads his daughter, Matilda, by a rope to the ‘madhouse’ in Carmarthen,⁶⁰⁶ reinforces their marionette-like complexion. Lewis seems to resist his own puppet-like status, boasting that ‘I could not see the moon and had no wish to jerk my

⁶⁰⁶ Caradoc Evans, ‘Lamentations’, pp. 140-144 (p. 144).

head round looking for it' (p. 28), yet, seeing Oscar approach Danny on the coal tip, he reveals:

I turned my head towards Oscar. He was standing beside his horse, his gun levelled at Danny.

'Watch out Danny,' I shouted and I did not feel I could do any more than that. I fixed my eyes on the ground, expecting a great noise when the gun went off. It went off. The noise of it was not as great as my promise of it. The zip of it passing dragged my eyes to the tip. I saw the earth a yard to the right of Danny shoot up. Startled, Danny swung round, his arms above him in the air, off balance. His legs shot from beneath him and he came plunging down, somersaulting. He slithered the last two feet and his head came to a stop against one of the large stones that littered the tip.

(pp. 59- 60)

Something prevents Lewis from intervening here; as if held in suspension by a rope or strings, he does not feel that he can do any more than shout 'Watch out Danny' and then 'fix his eyes on the ground', anticipating the inevitable gunshot. The way in which Danny is said to have 'swung round, his arms above him in the air', also evokes the limp, involuntary movement of a string-puppet, as do Lewis's glimpses of how Danny's 'legs shot from beneath him', and how he came 'plunging down' and 'slither[ing] [. . .] to a stop'. Indeed, the action and overall mood of this scene is redolent of Valle-Inclán's

Esperpento de Los cuernos de Don Friolera or *Esperpento of The Horns of Don Friolera* (1921):

DON FRIOLERA, tripping over himself, rushes into the garden [. . .]. He fires the pistol, and with a yell the moonlit puppets climbing the wall tumble into the next-door garden. Doña Loreta reappears, her hair standing on end, her arms extended.⁶⁰⁷

According to John Lyon, Valle-Inclán's first *esperpento* play, *Bohemian Lights*, documents 'the metamorphosis of the heroic into the absurd under the influence of a trivialised and grotesque social context',⁶⁰⁸ which, as previously noted, is an expression, or distorted reflection, of contemporary Spanish socio-political reality; as Max Estrella avers in scene twelve of that play, 'classical heroes reflected in concave mirrors give us the

⁶⁰⁷ Ramón del Valle-Inclán, cited in Edwards, p. 70. The extract is translated from the Spanish by Edwards.

⁶⁰⁸ Lyon, p. 109.

Grotesque or Esperpento' (p. 160).⁶⁰⁹ In other words, the grotesque world of *Bohemian Lights* (and the 'deformed' Spanish society that it represents) elicits 'an atmosphere in which the hero can no longer breathe' – in which 'collective social pressures and circumstances have become the controlling agents over the life of the individual';⁶¹⁰ to cite Gwynne Edwards, 'the viewpoint of the esperpento [. . .] sees [man] as a tragic puppet, his humanity glimpsed still but rendered farcical and futile'.⁶¹¹ Lyon's exegesis seems equally appropriate to Gwyn Thomas's *Oscar*. That is, within the grotesque social context of this novella – a context distorted so as to convey more effectively a social reality where, to cite Thomas, 'lunacy [is] established [. . .] as an apparently normal stable companion'⁶¹² – individuals metamorphose into absurdities or *esperpentos*; the contemporary socio-political climate reduces them, like the people of Madrid and Barcelona in *Bohemian Lights*, to tragicomic, puppet-like figures. Indeed, this notion of transmutation from the heroic to the grotesque is echoed in Thomas's own theories about humour, which he explicated in an interview with Glyn Jones in 1950. Here, he divulged:

people tell me there are comic undertones in even my most sombre imagery. I can quite believe it. Humour is a sense of the incongruous or absurd, an aggravated contrast between man's divine promise and his shambling, shabby reality.⁶¹³

This 'aggravated contrast' is perceptible throughout *Oscar*, in Thomas's panoply of strangely vital characters. Even the novella's apparently debonair and streetwise narrator, Lewis, as Victor Golightly observes, effectively embodies a conflict between 'the Hero'⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁹ Lyon notes that 'the vision of man and society formulated in scene 12 of *Lucas* is a complete reversal of the heroic view'; Lyon, p. 109.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶¹¹ Edwards, p. 71.

⁶¹² Gwyn Thomas, 'The Central Wound', in *A Welsh Eye* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), pp. 9-24 (p. 18). Thomas uses this analogy to convey his personal experience of the climate of industrial strife and socio-economic adversity in the Rhondda valley during the 1920s and 30s.

⁶¹³ Gwyn Thomas cited in Jones, 'Gwyn Thomas', p. 103.

⁶¹⁴ Victor Golightly, 'Gwyn Thomas's American 'Oscar'', *New Welsh Review*, n.s. 22 (Autumn, 1993) 26-31 (p. 30). Golightly argues that Lewis embodies 'two coincidental and antagonistic narrators'. One of these narrators, he suggests, appropriates 'the laconic style of the American detective hero that had been

and ‘the murdering buffoon’.⁶¹⁵ Moreover, while we might detect in many of Thomas’s characters a Dickensian comedic energy and a Caradoc Evans-like hyperreality – we might view the rural Welsh community of Manteg in Caradoc Evans’s *My People* as ‘a model of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal’⁶¹⁶ – they most strongly evoke the citizens of Madrid and Barcelona in *Bohemian Lights* and the urbanites in Grosz’s *Dedicated to Oscar Panizza*. Lewis, Oscar, No Doubt, Waldo Williamson, Macnaffy and Clarisse, to name a few, are all ultimately cast as ‘shambling’ figures, analogous with ‘*the row of puppets [or characters] pinned to the wall*’ (p. 168) in scene thirteen of *Bohemian Lights* – as tragicomic grotesques, defined, degraded and manipulated by modern socio-political forces beyond their individual control.⁶¹⁷

II

While in *Oscar*, the grotesque principally marks the dehumanising and demoralizing effects of industrial capitalism and its collapse on the people of the South Wales valleys, in Rhys Davies’s 1931 short story, ‘Arfon’, it is more ingrained in the fabric of the community. This is certainly not to imply that Davies overlooked the effects of industrialisation and economic collapse in South Wales in his work. On the contrary, like Gwyn Thomas, Davies was born and raised in the Rhondda valley, and ‘was in the first half of his writing career’, as Stephen Knight points out, ‘substantially committed to considering the condition and plight of the people among whom he grew up’.⁶¹⁸ In

developed by [Dashiell] Hammett and [Raymond] Chandler’, and the other is a ‘buffoon [who also] has an American accent [. . .], and [. . .] is derived from the cinema and popular fiction’, particularly the novels of Damon Runyon; Golightly, pp. 27-30.

⁶¹⁵ Golightly, p. 30.

⁶¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated from the French by Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 1.

⁶¹⁷ Thomas’s technique can also be compared to that of Lorca in *The Shoemaker’s Prodigious Wife*, where, as Edwards suggests, ‘the idea of manipulation has [also] acquired resonances beyond the traditions of the puppet-theatre, touching instead on the nature of human life itself and on the theme of man manipulated by his nature and his circumstances’; Edwards, p. 93.

⁶¹⁸ Stephen Knight, ‘Not a Place for Me’: Rhys Davies’s Fiction and the Coal Industry’, in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 54-70 (p. 55).

‘Arfon’, however, he seems to have a different objective, and this becomes apparent in the story’s opening:

Mr. and Mrs. Edwards did not deserve such a child. There was nothing peculiar about them, they were chapel people and a respected business couple, he selling oil, soap, candles, and oddments from a cart in the streets, and she, a thin staid woman, making savoury pasties on Tuesdays and Fridays, eight for sixpence and very delicious. So no one could understand why such a funny little boy was born to them.

Odd he was to look at, too. He never grew beyond the stature of a small boy of ten, but his head was ridiculously large, and the expression on his heavy grey face was of such gravity that no one felt at ease in his presence. . . His mother and father were convinced he was of idiotic tendencies. Mrs. Edwards never forgave him for appearing in a deformed state. So silly he looked, her only child, with his paltry thin body and massive head, she shut herself away from him in resentment and became angry at the continual ache in her heart when she looked at him. His father roared at him, protruding his thick lips and rolling his violent eyes, beating him for the sulky gravity of his face.⁶¹⁹

Arfon, with his ‘ridiculously large head’, ‘paltry thin body’ and disconcerting ‘heavy grey face’, instantly calls to mind the characters in Thomas’s *Oscar* and Valle-Inclán’s *esperpento* theatre; and he, too, would not be out of place among the grotesques of German Expressionist art – his ‘heavy-fleshed head’ (p. 18) and brooding expression evoking, in particular, the distorted figure in Erich Heckel’s painting, *Portrait of a Man (Self-Portrait)* (Figure 24, 1919). Indeed, it seems likely that Davies would have been aware of the aesthetics of European Expressionism, and of the European avant-garde in general. He records in his autobiography, *Print of a Hare’s Foot* (1969), how he ‘dream[t] of becoming a painter’⁶²⁰ in his youth; moved in artistic circles in London (where, he later revealed, ‘he felt [. . .] more en rapport with European exiles [. . .] than English people’⁶²¹); and first published his work in the avant-garde magazine, *The Coterie*, edited by the German bookseller, Charles Lahr.⁶²² He also travelled in Germany and France,⁶²³ and read and

⁶¹⁹ Rhys Davies, ‘Arfon’, in *Rhys Davies: Collected Stories*, ed. Meic Stephens (Llandysul: Gomer, 1996), I. 17–43 (p. 17). All further references to Davies’s stories, except ‘The Fashion Plate’, are to this edition and are given in the text.

⁶²⁰ Rhys Davies, *Print of a Hare’s Foot: An Autobiographical Beginning* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), p. 95.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶²² Meic Stephens, ‘Introduction’, in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 1–28 (p. 6).

admired a variety of European literary works.⁶²⁴ R.L. Mégroz argues, in fact, that ‘Arfon’ reflects Davies’s affinity with French fiction writers of the last [the nineteenth] century – most notably Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant and Anatole France.⁶²⁵

Moreover, recalling Tony Conran’s comments concerning the origins of the grotesque in Welsh Modernist literature, Arfon is the product of parents who are firmly entrenched in what remains of the *buchedd* or ‘Welsh way of life’ in the Rhondda. ‘Chapel people and a respected business couple’, Mr. and Mrs. Edwards are the epitome of Welsh ‘respectability’, and they also embody the ‘alliance [discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis] between the peasantry, the respectable working class and the petty [sic] bourgeoisie’;⁶²⁶ Davies writes that Mrs. Edwards ‘had her own little pasties business before she married [Mr. Edwards]’ (p. 17), who ‘had come to the valley from another [probably a rural] part of Wales’ (p. 17).⁶²⁷ Mrs Evans later tells her husband

You got funny blood in your family, [. . .] blood that’s mad and bad. Found out I have that your aunt was put away in an asylum and your grandfather in jail for whatnot. Gipsy blood is in you.

(p. 17)

And this again implicitly associates Mr Edwards with the rural Welsh peasantry, who are portrayed as similarly ‘mad and bad’ or ‘non-respectable’ in other Anglophone Welsh

⁶²³ Meic Stephens points out that Davies wrote the short story, ‘Cherry-Blossom on the Rhine’ (1936) ‘after a visit to Germany [. . .] in 1927’. He also notes that Davies visited Nice in 1928 and Paris in 1929; Stephens, ‘Introduction’, in *Decoding the Hare*, p. 6.

⁶²⁴ J. Lawrence Mitchell notes, for example, that Davies read and admired Gustave Flaubert’s novel, *Madame Bovary* (1857) – see J. Lawrence Mitchell, ‘“I Wish I Had a Trumpet”: Rhys Davies and the Creative Impulse’, in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 147-161 (p. 151) – while Barbara Prys Williams discusses Davies’s enjoyment of Oscar Wilde’s play *Salome*, illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley (1894); see Barbara Prys Williams, ‘Rhys Davies as Autobiographer: Hare or Houdini?’, in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 104-137 (p. 110). Davies particularly admired the novels and short stories of his friend D.H. Lawrence, however. The relationship between Davies’s work and that of Lawrence is explored in detail by Jeff Wallace in ‘Lawrentianisms: Rhys Davies and D.H. Lawrence’, in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 175-190.

⁶²⁵ R.L. Mégroz, *Rhys Davies: A Critical Sketch* (London: W. and G. Foyle, 1932), p. 5.

⁶²⁶ Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, pp. 2-3.

⁶²⁷ As Meic Stephens notes, Rhys Davies’s own family, ‘on both his father’s and his mother’s side’, ‘had their remote origins in north-west [rural] Carmarthenshire’; Meic Stephens, ‘Introduction’, in *Rhys Davies: Collected Stories*, ed. Meic Stephens (Llandysul: Gomer, 1996), I. 7-16 (p. 9).

writing at this time – most notably, in the work of Caradoc Evans and, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Dylan Thomas. Davies's account of how, together, Mr and Mrs Edwards 'became of similar temperament, thrifty and mean in the house, regular chapel-goers, [. . .] nicely prosperous' (p. 18) and 'of that simple class that respects school masters and learning' (p. 19) emphasises their allegiance to the 'Welsh way of life'. As the ironic tone of this narrative voice intimates, however, the text builds up an impression of the stifling conservativeness and double standards of *buchedd* ideology; and this is particularly apparent in Mr. and Mrs. Edwards's attitude towards Arfon. Calling to mind Evan Rhiw's treatment of his daughter in Caradoc Evans's 'Lamentations', Mr. and Mrs. Edwards ostracise and brutalise their son in a decidedly unchristian way for deviating from what they consider to be the 'respectable' norm. This sense of hypocrisy is underscored through the figure of Mr. Jeb Watkin-Watkins, the local chapel minister, who, like Mr. Edwards, shouts at Arfon and beats him, accusing him of being 'possessed with a devil' (p. 20), even after he has displayed an ability to 'recite from the Book, without discrimination, including a great many verses from the Old Testament' (p. 19):

Rising, the minister, who had begun to heave with anger [. . .], told him [Arfon] to take off his clothes. Arfon did so and looked down with meek, silent resignation at his frail body.

'You lie on that mat,' said the minister sternly. 'And don't you cry out. The hand of God is in this. A sacred task it is for your benefit. You be grateful now for what I am doing to you. [. . .].'

Arfon waited, lying on his stomach. The minister took a long cane from a cupboard and, muttering imprecations and curses, began to beat Arfon.

'Out devil, out!' rose Mr. Watkin-Watkin's voice.

Arfon had never endured such pain. [. . .]. He almost swooned away.

(pp. 20-21)

Thomas's narrative appears more and more grimly ironic as Davies portrays those members of 'respectable' Rhondda society who chastise Arfon for his grotesqueness as far from 'Normal' (p. 19). The narrator's pointed insistence that Mr. and Mrs. Edwards 'did not deserve such a child', that 'there was nothing peculiar about

them', and that 'no one could understand why such a funny little boy was born to them' has the effect of ironically gesturing towards the 'peculiarity' of their 'way of life' and of the wider community that upholds it. Furthermore, they too are distinctly 'odd [. . .] to look at': Mr. Edwards has a 'mottled blue' (p. 36) face and is seen 'protruding his thick lips and rolling his violent eyes' at his son – an image that is not only grotesque but also has a malevolently carnivalesque quality. Mrs. Evans, on the other hand, has 'worn, dried cheeks' (p. 23), 'thin, spotted hand[s]' (p. 23) and a 'brow' that is 'brownish and spotted like an old lemon' (p. 29), while Mr. Jeb Watkin-Watkins – recalling Gwyn Thomas's portrayal of Oscar – is figured as 'an ugly fat shape, heaving and snorting' (p. 21), with 'small elephant's eyes' (p. 19) that turn 'red, like an infuriated boar's' (p. 19). Ironically, then, Arfon does not seem especially out of place in *buchedd* society; on the contrary, as the 'sulky gravity of his face' suggests, he seems to be, in Valle-Inclán's words, 'distorted in the same mirror that distorts' what Davies appears to view in this text as 'the whole miserable ['Welsh way of'] life' in the Rhondda.

A number of Davies's narratives, in fact, feature characters that appear to have been warped in the 'concave mirror' of *buchedd* society. Another example is the 1936 short story, 'Resurrection', which begins:

Half a day before the lid was to be screwed down on her, Meg rose in her coffin and faintly asked for a glass of water. Her two sisters were bustling about the room, tidying and dusting the flowers, and both, after a few moments of terrified shock, looked at the recently deceased with a bitter anger. Once again she was doing something improper.

'Water!' stuttered Bertha. 'Go on with you now. What you want with water?' Gathering strength at the sound of her own voice, she went on sternly as if speaking to a nuisance: 'Lie back thee [sic], lie back. Dead you are.'

'Yes, indeed,' breathed Ellen, 'dead these four days and the mourning ordered.'⁶²⁸

⁶²⁸ Rhys Davies, 'Resurrection', pp. 166-171 (p. 166).

This morbidly farcical opening clearly has much in common with Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* theatre – the sisters' crass response to Meg's 'resurrection' evoking, in particular, the mourners' treatment of Max Estrella's death and funeral in *Bohemian Lights*. Moreover, Bertha and Ellen's absurd preoccupation with the 'impropriety' and, later, the financial cost of their sister's 'recovery' – Bertha complains that they had to 'spend money on mourning and that five-guinea coffin' (p. 166) – aligns them with the respectable, 'thrifty and mean' Mr. and Mrs. Edwards in 'Arfon'. Their *buchedd* principles are subsequently confirmed as the narrator tells how,

Bleak and raddled and wintry, the sisters, who were in the [sic] fifties, pursed their lips. They were twins. Both wore a piled-up mass of coarse, dour hair in which was jabbed small combs and tortoise-shell prongs. Their faces were puckered in, secretive, and proud. In chapel and street they liked to swank: they liked people to think they were well off and to treat them with ceremony. They were daughters of a semi-successful builder, and in a hole behind some loose bricks in the cellar was the money he had made, for he trusted no bank; his daughters thought likewise.

(p. 167)

With their 'raddled', 'puckered in' faces and 'coarse', 'piled-up' hair 'jabbed' with 'combs and [. . .] prongs', the sisters are also, like Mr. and Mrs. Edwards and Mr. Jeb Watkin-Watkins, physically 'peculiar' – external projections of a grotesque socio-cultural climate.

In their different ways, then, both Rhys Davies and Gwyn Thomas use the grotesque as a means to, in José Ortega y Gasset's words, Expressionistically 'objectify the subjective' or "worldify" the immanent'.⁶²⁹ Yet Arfon's grotesqueness is also more complex than this. More specifically, it not only reflects and criticises a particular social situation, but also actively subverts it, as the following passage from Davies's story evinces:

⁶²⁹ José Ortega y Gasset, 'The Dehumanisation of Art', in *The Dehumanisation of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*, translated from the Spanish by Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 3-54 (p. 38).

He [Arfon] wouldn't grow beyond the stature of a young boy. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards continued to lament their lot; they didn't know what to do with Arfon, now he had left school. He was too fragile for the mines, and because of his strange look no tradesman would employ him.

'What you want to do?' bellowed his father. 'What d'you think you've got talent for?'

'I want to make drawings,' sulked Arfon.

'What d'you want to work at?' continued his father impatiently. 'To earn money. Think we're going to keep you? And dead we'll be soon. What'll you do then?'

Arfon wished his father would die. 'Draw pictures for papers I can,' he muttered.

'The only thing left,' moaned his mother, who would have liked him to be a preacher, if there had been money for his training, 'is for him to help you sell your things in the streets. A hawker he must be, like you.'

'Don't you call me a hawker, Mrs. Edwards,' snapped her husband. 'I am a respectable tradesman of twenty years standing.'

(p. 22)

The way in which Arfon will not 'grow beyond the stature of a young boy' might be said to anticipate Günter Grass's 1959 novel, *Die Blechtrommel* or *The Tin Drum*, where the narrator and protagonist, Oskar Matzerath, elects to remain 'the three-year old, the gnome, the Tom Thumb, the pigmy, the Lilliputian, the midget, whom no one could persuade to grow'⁶³⁰ throughout his life, in an expression of, and a form of protest against, the stunted, warped nature of German society during the first half of the twentieth century. Arfon's comparably 'deformed state' means that 'he can't go out into the world and work like ordinary well-grown chaps' (p. 24), and this prompts an exchange that reveals the fault-lines in *buchedd* ideology. Class division and conflict surface when Mrs. Edwards suggests that Arfon must become 'a hawker' like her husband, and the way in which she blames Mr. Edwards's 'funny blood' (p. 17) for 'her son's oddness' (p. 17) at the beginning of the narrative also has this effect.⁶³¹ Furthermore, Arfon's grotesqueness destabilizes the traditional gender roles that act as a strengthening framework for this 'respectable' society. He is 'too fragile for the mines'

⁶³⁰ Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum*, translated from the German by Ralph Manheim (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 46.

⁶³¹ As Conran notes, 'the *buchedd* was not as homogenous as it tried to make out. There were class divisions, particularly in the industrial areas'; Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry*, p. 3.

and too strange-looking to be employed as a 'tradesman'. Indeed, he tells his father that he only wants to 'make' drawings, appropriating the tradesman's vocabulary in order to justify an occupation that is other than that expected of 'ordinary [. . .] chaps' in the community.

Arfon's difference from quintessential images of masculinity is, in fact, crucial to his grotesqueness. The narrator tells how, undermining his parents' ethos of upward mobility, Arfon

followed his father and the cart in the streets and sold oil and oddments. He did his work with the uncomplaining delicacy of a saintly martyr; he deftly measured out the oil with his thin fingers and counted threepennyworth of clothes pegs in a manner that made the transaction memorable to the women customers. His old-world courtesy, his large eyes slowly looking at them, his darling small body, tickled the women and girls. Sometimes they did their best to flirt with him.

But Arfon became a very grave youth. His mind was always occupied with visions. He still imagined a different race of beings in the world. These fanciful persons were always tall, vigorous, and gentle in a proud way. He made pictures of them: walking, sitting, lying, naked or draped idly; and though their behaviour was earthly, their beauty was not of this world as we know it.

(p. 22)

Arfon's 'large eyes' contrast sharply with Mr. Jeb Watkin-Watkins's 'small elephant's eyes', and his 'thin fingers' echo the 'thin, spotted hand[s]' of his mother. His grotesqueness endows him, on one level, with a childlike, but also with an effeminate or androgynous quality, which is underscored through the 'delicacy' of his movements, through the description of his 'darling small body', and in his unusual affinity with 'the women customers'. This sense of gender ambiguity is also distilled through Davies's account of how Arfon 'almost swooned away' after his punishment at the hands of Mr. Jeb Watkin-Watkins – a reaction normally associated with women in literature – and it is also manifested in the 'tall, vigorous, and gentle' 'persons' that Arfon depicts in his drawings, and in Mrs. Edwards's apparent inability to classify them:

Once, his [Arfon's] mother, who sat watching him for some time, got up and began to examine the drawing on the table. [. . .].

'What are these, boy?' she cried shrilly.

'Men and women,' he said, without raising his head.

He saw her [. . .] snatch up the drawings. . . .

'You do pictures,' she cried, dropping them, 'like that in my house!'

'They are good,' he cried indignantly [. . .].

'Good! She muttered, moving away. 'There's awful your mind must be.'

She crouched over the fire. There was no doubt he was daft. She had never seen such evil things put on paper. His mind was horrible.

(p. 23)

Arfon only identifies the figures in his drawings as 'men and women' for the benefit of his mother and the 'Normal' society that she represents, and even when he does this, he appears reluctant and noncommittal, saying 'men and women' 'without raising his head'. Moreover, just as another of his drawings, of 'a shirt dripping over the fireplace' (p. 22), seems to be a subjective representation of his domestic unhappiness – the narrator observes how the image of the shirt 'seemed to brood in such dejection that it wept' (p. 22) – these figures are clearly projections of Arfon's 'androgynous imagination',⁶³² of a 'mind' that is not conventionally masculine or gendered and, therefore, that is (in the eyes of 'Normal' Rhondda society) 'awful' and 'daft', or grotesque.

Arfon's 'grotesque' imagination, as manifested in his drawings, might also reflect what M. Wynn Thomas has expressed as 'Welsh Nonconformity's mistrustful highlighting of the artfulness of art' and, in particular, its 'stress on the dangers of the unregulated [artistic] imagination to the actual possessor of it'.⁶³³ Glyn Jones also seems to be touching on this issue in his novel, *The Valley, the City, the Village*, mentioned at various points in this thesis, when Trystan, an aspiring painter and aesthete, is not permitted to go to 'art school', and encouraged instead to attend university and 'qualify as

⁶³² M. Wynn Thomas, 'Never Seek to Tell thy Love': Rhys Davies's Fiction', in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 260-282 (p. 263).

⁶³³ M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, p. 80. M. Wynn Thomas suggests that this Nonconformist 'awareness of the sinister potency of the imagination' is evident throughout Dylan Thomas's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures*, p. 80.

a teacher' – a route which, his staunchly Nonconformist grandmother and guardian hopes, might eventually lead to 'the ministry or mission field' (p. 99). From this perspective, Arfon's otherness appears to be symbolic of his incongruous and disconcerting would-be artist status within *buchedd* society. Equally, in rendering the figure of the artist as a grotesque outcast, Davies might be Expressionistically reflecting both 'the middlebrow character of ageing establishment Nonconformity' and 'the aggressive anti-intellectualism of proletarian valleys society'.⁶³⁴ The distinctively androgynous image of Arfon that repeatedly appears in the 'concave mirror' of Davies's text, however, also has more profoundly transgressive implications. For Arfon's 'grotesque' androgyny might additionally be said to allow Davies to recall, in literary form, his own emerging consciousness of homosexual feelings – his 'early, bewildered sense', to cite M. Wynn Thomas again, 'of difference, of not being as other men were, or at least of not being as other men seemed to be in the 'heavily masculine' Rhondda of his youth'.⁶³⁵ Indeed, Arfon's marginal status as artist might be viewed as complicit with – or as masking and, therefore, enabling – this articulation of homosexual experience. Davies can be seen (as Joseph Allen Boone has said of some American Modernist writers) to

presage the contemporary understanding of queer subjectivity as the assumption of a defiantly non-normative identity that defines itself primarily in terms of its opposition to the status quo rather than [just] in terms of an opposition between heterosexual and homosexual categories.⁶³⁶

There are, in fact, many instances where Arfon's 'queerness' might be construed as a tacit acknowledgment of homosexuality. Davies writes, for example, that

Other youths would have no truck with him [Arfon] because of his queer look and reputation, and though there were girls who were ready enough to be approached, interested in his oddness, he was at the age when, to some sensitive

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

⁶³⁵ M. Wynn Thomas, 'Never Seek to Tell thy Love': Rhys Davies's Fiction', p. 261.

⁶³⁶ Joseph Allen Boone, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 210. As Boone notes, 'the term queer emerged in the interwar period among homosexuals to signal an innate orientation toward persons of the same sex'; Boone, p. 208.

natures, living young women were more fearsome than horned and tailed devils that have brimstone shining under their skin.

(p. 23)

Arfon's 'oddness' is explicitly connected with sexuality here: it intrigues young women and, therefore, attracts them to him. This association, in turn, draws out the latent double meaning in the narrator's reference to Arfon's 'queer look and reputation'; that is, the word 'queer' appears to be potentially 'coded'⁶³⁷ – to denote both 'grotesque' and, covertly, 'gay'. Indeed, the word 'queer' is etymologically linked with the grotesque; as Simon Baker and Joanna Furber point out, it is related to the 'Latin *torquere* (to twist [or contort])'.⁶³⁸ Arfon's effeminate or androgynous physical features and demeanour discussed earlier, then, though appertaining to stereotypical images of male homosexuality, might also point towards the subversive duality of his 'queerness', as might his initial indifference to, and extreme sense of alienation from women as sexual beings.⁶³⁹

Arfon's 'horrible' drawings also have these sexually transgressive overtones. 'Vigorous', 'proud' and depicted 'naked or draped idly', his 'men and women' are collectively eroticised, and exude a decadence redolent of the illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley (Figures 25 and 26). Sexually ambiguous during his life and famous for depicting 'fanciful', androgynous figures in his work,⁶⁴⁰ Beardsley became publicly

⁶³⁷ M. Wynn Thomas, 'Never Seek to Tell thy Love': Rhys Davies's Fiction', p. 268.

⁶³⁸ Simon Baker and Joanna Furber, 'Unspeakable Rites': Writing the Unspeakable in Rhys Davies', in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 244-259 (p. 247).

⁶³⁹ This second example, however, could also be interpreted – like the boy's vision of the monstrous girl in Dylan Thomas's 'A Prospect of the Sea' discussed in the previous chapter – in terms of the Freudian 'fear of castration as a motive for repression'.

⁶⁴⁰ Aubrey Beardsley was associated with Oscar Wilde's circle of aesthetes in the 1890s. Ian Fletcher describes how 'Wilde's circle [. . .] was composed of homoerotics, most of whom were practising homosexuals.' Fletcher points out that 'Beardsley's sexual tastes were either muted or equivocal', but 'he showed no signs of actually "coming out"'. Ian Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. Herbert Sussman (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1987), p. 11.

connected with homosexuality when he illustrated Oscar Wilde's play, *Salome*⁶⁴¹ – a text which, as previously noted, Davies knew well, and which he discusses at length in *Print of a Hare's Foot*:

I was surly when I arrived home. But in my overcoat I had a thin book, bought that afternoon [. . .]. After examining its illuminations in startled consternation I had left the shop, taken a walk, and returned to buy it. Random little bombs go off inside one with secret detonations. I took the book up to bed. It was an edition of *Salome* with the Beardsley drawings. Delight restored my nerves. I kept absorbing the drawings in my feather bed. . . .
Beardsley taught me that I couldn't draw.⁶⁴²

Davies's account of how the figures in Arfon's drawings possessed a 'beauty [that] was not of this world' and his revelation that Arfon also drew 'fanciful things out of the Bible – the tablets of Moses, the doses of Solomon, and the strange beasts of St. John the Divine' (p. 22) – in a way that 'made people either laugh or ill-tempered' (p. 22), reinforce this connection with Beardsley's often grotesque and also, at times, extremely sexually explicit drawings⁶⁴³ – the latter, in particular, echoing Beardsley's depiction of biblical characters in *Salome*. Arfon's impression of young women as 'fearsome' devils, in fact, recalls the figure of Salome in Wilde's play, who demands that the head of Iokanaan be presented to her on a plate after he resists her sexual advances.

'At last', Davies finally writes,

late, he [Arfon] began to long for girls, being seventeen. He forced himself to court one or two in the traditional manner: winking at the favoured across the gallery of the chapel and approaching them after the service for a walk. Some went with him. But he did not like their amusement. They seemed to treat him as a joke and he suffered deeply when they tittered at his high, romantic love-making, that was courteous and poetic.

(p. 24)

⁶⁴¹ As Ian Chilvers notes, 'the scandal of Wilde's arrest for homosexual offences in 1895 led to his [Beardsley's] dismissal from [his position as editor of the periodical] *The Yellow Book*'; Ian Chilvers, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, 3rd edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁴² Davies, *Print of a Hare's Foot*, p. 95.

⁶⁴³ Many of these drawings are exaggeratedly phallic.

Yet, even at this point, there is a sense that Arfon has merely learned to accept and conform to an intransigent social code. The way in which Arfon 'at last' becomes sexually curious about women recalls the ironic narrative voice of the story's opening ('Mr. and Mrs. Edwards did not deserve such a child. There was nothing peculiar about them'), and registers Davies's use of free indirect discourse in order to convey the superficial perceptions of an anxiously relieved, 'normal' society. Davies's account of how Arfon belatedly 'forced' himself to 'court one or two [girls] in the traditional manner' is equally suggestive. Indeed, it almost seems, from the way in which he winks 'at the favoured' across the chapel gallery and from his 'courteous and poetic' 'high, romantic love-making', that Arfon is simply impersonating or dramatising what Judith Butler refers to in her essay, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' (1991), as 'hegemonic heterosexual norms'.⁶⁴⁴ Arfon almost seems to become a kind of grotesque parody of both the typical Rhondda male and the 'gentleman' intellectual – particularly the male 'artist'.

While the girls laugh and joke about this tragicomic posturing, Arfon's behaviour might actually be seen to interrogate and deconstruct both their own, and society's, conception of normality. More specifically, it might be argued that Arfon's behaviour produces what Butler identifies as a 'parodic or imitative effect' akin to that created by 'gay identities', which in turn, like those identities, 'works not to copy or emulate heterosexuality, but rather, to expose heterosexuality as an incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization'.⁶⁴⁵ As Butler affirms,

heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself – and failing. Precisely because it is bound to

⁶⁴⁴ Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 365-380 (p. 368).

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

fail, and yet endeavours to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself.⁶⁴⁶

Moreover, in portraying heterosexuality as imitative and grotesque in this way, Davies effectively denaturalises it, contravening its perpetual, idealised construction of itself as 'the original, the true, the authentic'⁶⁴⁷ and, therefore, as 'the normative measure of the real'.⁶⁴⁸

Indeed, heterosexual relationships in Davies's narratives, far from seeming authentic, normal and ideal, often appear fraudulent, deranged and absurd. The narrator of 'Arfon' reports that

the day after [. . .] [Mr. and Mrs. Edwards] married, Mr. Edwards took thirty pounds of [. . .] [Mrs. Edwards's] money and bought a new horse and cart for his hawking, replacing the old donkey he possessed. He brought her nothing but himself. He bossed her into continuing her pasties business too. Gradually, especially over their mutual disgust for their son, they became of similar temperament [. . .].

(p. 17)

And the relationship that Arfon eventually forges with Dilys is similarly warped – founded on, and sustained by, greed, deceit, frustration and disgust:

She [Dilys] often kissed Arfon in a sweet, delicious way. Within a month she had received from him the amber beads, a gold-plated watch, and some ear-rings. He cunningly cheated his customers and stole out of the takings and lied to his father about the value of the goods that remained in stock. Nothing mattered but Dilys's pleasure.

But there came a time when he could steal and cheat no more and was left with only a few shillings of pocket money. October came, and Dilys was fancying a little fur to put round her neck [. . .].

'A darling little fur I saw in Lewis's window,' she said, 'just like a real fox it looked.'

'How much was it?' he asked, beginning to be angry.

'Only forty-five shillings.' She sighed again. 'I wish I wasn't so poor. I don't get a chance to save a shilling a week. My aunt is so miserly.'

He felt, like a mutter deep within him, a revulsion from her rise up, dark and strange. And he thought how mean she was with herself.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 371.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 372.

(pp. 31-32)

The grotesque dynamics of Arfon's relationship with Dilys are also laid bare in his drawings. Like the child in Katherine Mansfield's Modernist short story, 'The Woman at the Store' (1912), whose series of 'repulsively vulgar'⁶⁴⁹ drawings culminates in a picture of her mother murdering her negligent, apparently estranged husband 'with a rook rifle and then digging a hole to bury him in' (p. 19), Arfon seems to function as artist truth-teller, revealing the 'ugly' (p. 18) reality underlying a supposedly normal and natural relationship:

And with a fierce spurt of inspiration he began some new drawings. Of Dilys, clothed and unclothed, as he imagined her. He worked with quick, nervous energy, a heat in his limbs, his mind warmed through. It was as though he was possessing her as he drew.

His inflamed vision did not see what came through in the drawings. In spite of the untamed beauty of his line there was a sinister ugliness in the portraiture of the young girl. A cruel meanness hovered in her face. Had he been aloof from his personal reactions to the living girl he would have seen the masterly vulgarity his strange talent had worked into the drawings. The cruelty of that ugliness emerged in a desperately triumphant way from the luminous beauty of her physical form.

(p. 29)

This relationship takes an even more grotesque turn at the end of the story when Arfon lures Dilys onto a mountain and strangles her with the fur from 'Lewis's window':

He gripped each end of the fur and, crossing them, pulled them tight, at the same moment rising to his feet and thrusting her on her back. He knelt over her, never losing his firm grip of the fur. Her choking cries were strange and awful. He had never heard the like. His own voice uttered quick, deep sighs, that were like groans, while his chest heaved and sank. Tighter and tighter he pulled the fur. And she went silent, though her body continued to throb beneath his legs.

(pp. 41-42)

⁶⁴⁹ Katherine Mansfield, 'The Woman at the Store', in *Katherine Mansfield: Selected Stories*, ed. Angela Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 10-19 (p. 17). All further references to Mansfield's stories are to this edition and are given in the text.

The sexual connotations of Davies's language in this passage – Linden Peach even goes as far as to suggest that the murder is 'redolent of intercourse'⁶⁵⁰ – makes the event that it depicts all the more disturbing; and this ending also again foregrounds a connection between Davies's narrative and the fiction of Katherine Mansfield. As Andrew Bennett notes, 'an enduring feature of Mansfield's writing is her analysis of the way that both psychological and physical violence – violent, forced sexuality, in particular – underlie relationships between men and women';⁶⁵¹ in Mansfield's 1910 short story, 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding', for example, the narrator observes how Frau Brechenmacher 'lay down on the bed and put her arm across her face like a child who expected to be hurt as [her drunken husband] Herr Brechenmacher lurched in'.⁶⁵² Davies's particular association of heterosexual desire with the macabre, however, is perhaps most reminiscent of *Salome*, calling to mind the closing scene of Wilde's play, in which the heroine eroticises the severed head of Iokannan (Figure 27):

THE VOICE OF SALOME

Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Iokannan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood? . . . Nay; but perchance it was the taste of love They say that love hath a bitter taste But what matter? what matter? I have kissed thy mouth, Iokannan, I have kissed thy mouth.⁶⁵³

Through portraying sexual attraction and interaction between men and women as grotesque, Davies, Wilde, Beardsley and even Mansfield, who, as Bennett points out, was 'fascinated by Wilde'⁶⁵⁴ and herself had several lesbian relationships,⁶⁵⁵ might be seen as

⁶⁵⁰ Linden Peach, 'Eccentricity and Lawlessness in Rhys Davies's Fiction', in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 162-174 (p. 168).

⁶⁵¹ Andrew Bennett, *Katherine Mansfield* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), p. 54.

⁶⁵² Katherine Mansfield, 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding', pp. 3-9 (p. 9).

⁶⁵³ Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley and translated from the French by Lord Alfred Douglas (New York: Dover, 1967), p. 67.

⁶⁵⁴ Bennett, p. 45.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

engaged in a similar, Modernist project to denaturalise 'compulsory heterosexuality',⁶⁵⁶ as Adrienne Rich calls it, and invert its repeated 'idealization' in society.

Indeed, the heterosexual relationships at the centre of two other short stories by Davies, 'The Nature of Man' (1942) and 'Wrath' (1936), are so grotesque that, recalling Gwyn Thomas's *Oscar*, they accrue a puppet-like aura. Although the opening of 'The Nature of Man', for example, has the cadences of Caradoc Evans's *My People*, the action is far more reminiscent of Lorca's *Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Miss Rosita*:

Though Catti found that Dan the carrier fitted her nature like a key fits its lock, in the end she chose Selwyn, who was the fishmonger in the little market town six miles away. . . .

The evening she made up her mind she went down to the cottage where Dan lived [. . .] and from the patch of garden shouted at him through the open window:

'Come out of there, you old sluggard, and listen to a lady.'

When the great hook of his nose came out of the door, she went on:

'Give me back the brodered spread I brodered last winter. No wedding for you and me, you snail. Month after next I'm marrying Selwyn the Fish, so there!' And she snapped her fingers at him [. . .] in a temper.

Dan, swarthy of hair and skin as a gipsy, bared his yellow eyes. Just by the front door was the butt that caught the thatch drippings. In a flash he scooped a pan of water and sprung it over her as, too late, she jumped back.

'Go and marry the dirty mackerell!' he shouted in fury. 'Be off!' He scooped another panful.

She picked out a stone from the black loam and threw it at him, hitting his chest. She dodged the second lot of water but did not leave the garden. He remained on the doorstep, his muscled belly heaving up out of his loose-strapped corduroys.⁶⁵⁷

Catti finally becomes dissatisfied with her marriage to Selwyn – for whom, the narrator reports, 'only the whiskey of the Shepherd's Staff inn across the road' gave any 'meaning to life' (p. 226) – and returns to Dan's house to endeavour to rekindle their relationship. When she arrives, however, he locks her out and she freezes to death on the doorstep, in a scene that possesses all the morbidity of Caradoc Evans's 'Be this Her Memorial',

⁶⁵⁶ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York and London: Norton, 1993), pp. 203–224 (p. 203).

⁶⁵⁷ Rhys Davies, 'The Nature of Man', pp. 224–228 (p. 224).

referred to in the previous chapter (in which the local minister returns to Nanni's cottage to find rats crawling over her dead body), as well as the 'gallows humour' of Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* theatre:

In the morning he opened the door and her body fell at his feet. Her blue face and hands gleamed with frost, her ashen hair crackled. He propped her against the frozen water-butt, locked the door and went in his van up to the policeman's cottage in the village.

'What do you think that old Catti has done, Emrys!' he complained. 'Died on my doorstep! Best for you to speak on your 'phone and tell the parish to fetch her an ambulance, for I am full up and very busy with crates of eggs and two dozen poultry for Powell's farm.'

(p. 228)

The focus of 'Wrath', on the other hand, is the day-to-day married life of Matthew and Alice, where affection and sexual fulfilment have been bizarrely displaced by 'the pleasures of the table'⁶⁵⁸ and, particularly, by the meat that Alice buys from the virile butcher, Lloyd, and slavishly serves to her husband each day. The couple's relationship is briefly revived when Alice is sexually awakened by the attention and 'gross good looks' (p. 129) of the butcher, but Davies again traces this improvement in grotesque, farcical terms:

'Alice,' he [Matthew] said suddenly, 'you've plucked your eyebrows out!' 'Oh,' she said offhandedly, 'I made them a bit thinner that's all.' 'I liked them better bushy. It's no good,' he went on, half jocular, half severe, 'you trying to look like a jane off the pictures. You keep steady old girl. I don't want you looking like a prize in a raffle. See!'

At the same time he was rather fascinated by her new oddness. That night he made love to her. He did not know why. But she spread a different warmth about her. True, he still scrambled through the business too hastily; and she dug her elbows painfully into his ribs, whether accidentally or deliberately he could not tell.

(p. 128)

The story ends with another disturbing, puppet-like scene, reminiscent of 'The Nature of Man', in which Alice finally tires of her husband's behaviour:

⁶⁵⁸ Rhys Davies, 'Wrath', pp. 125-133 (p. 126).

He [Matthew] was seated now, bending over his plate. Arched and taut she crept behind him, snatched up the hot joint and brought it down on his head with majestic force. He yelped in surprise, then roared as the red and brown blood trickled down his face. But before he had time to rise from his chair she had swung the tough lump flat into his face.

She did not scream. But in a low agonised voice she hissed: 'Take that. And that. And perhaps from now on you'll never talk of meat again.' Then she threw the joint in grand contempt on the table.

(p. 132)

Meat is similarly related to a crass heterosexuality in 'The Fashion Plate' (1946) – a story about a young boy, Nicholas's, regular visits to the home of a childless couple, Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell. Mrs. Mitchell spends all the money that her husband earns managing 'the slaughter-house [. . .] down by the river'⁶⁵⁹ on glamorous dresses, shoes, hats and handbags, forcing Mr. Mitchell to 'mortgage his house' (p. 137) and seek help from 'moneylenders' (p. 137). While she parades through the streets in her 'fine clothes' (p. 128), 'graceful as a swan, clean as a flower, [. . .] dazzl[ing] the eye' (p. 128) and earning the admiration of all the women in the valley, her marginalised and emotionally distant husband occupies a pitiful, helpless position that is little better, Davies Expressionistically implies, than that of an animal destined for slaughter in his abattoir:

Mr. Mitchell came in before the housework was finished. 'Good evening *sir*,' he greeted Nicholas. 'Doing my accounts for me?' He seemed to look at the boy and yet not look at him. [. . .] He had a full, dahlia-red, rather staring face of flabby contours, sagged in on its own solitude, and the eyes did not seem to connect with the object they looked at. His face had affinities with the face of some floridly ponderous beast. He had a very thick neck. It was strange, and yet not strange, that his work had to do with cattle.

'Do you want a meal now,' Mrs. Mitchell asked in the heavy silence, 'or can you wait?' Her voice was crisper; she stitched in calm withdrawal; she might have been an indifferent daughter. Though bent at the table, the boy sensed the change. There was a cold air of armistice in the room, of emptiness. Nervously he opened his bottle of lemonade. The explosion of the uncorking sounded very loud.

(p. 131)

⁶⁵⁹ Rhys Davies, 'The Fashion Plate', in *Rhys Davies: Collected Stories*, ed. Meic Stephens (Llandysul: Gomer, 1996), II. 128-139 (p. 131).

Finally, one evening, telling his wife that he has ‘Got a job to do’ (p. 135), Mr. Mitchell goes to his slaughter-house and commits suicide. The proceeding, gruesome passage captures the moment that Mrs. Mitchell discovers his body:

‘Go back,’ she said.

Sharpened by her tone of command, he [Nicholas] looked up at her. Her nostrils, blue in the gaslight, were quivering. He looked down quickly. From under a door a stream of dark thick liquid had crawled. It was congealing on the stone flag into the shape of a large root or strand of seaweed. He looked at it, only distantly conscious of her further cry and her fingers pressing into his shoulders. ‘Go back; go home,’ she exclaimed. He did not move.

She stepped to the door as if oblivious to him. But she carefully avoided the liquid root. . . .

She gave a queer cry, not loud, a low hunted cry broken in her mouth. And Nicholas never forgot the gesture with which her hand went to her throat.

(p. 136)

Both Gwyn Thomas and Rhys Davies, then, invoke Modernist techniques of the grotesque in their work in order to challenge the contemporary socio-political status quo. In *Oscar*, Thomas develops a narrative style that replicates many of the techniques of European Expressionist art – particularly the *esperpento* plays of Valle-Inclán and the avant-garde puppet-theatre of Lorca – in order to represent and condemn the capitalist exploitation of people in the industrialised South Wales valleys in the 1930s and 40s. Rhys Davies’s grotesque narratives, on the other hand, expose the inner workings of this society, Expressionistically manifesting what Davies appears to see as its endemic, suffocating ‘hypocrisy and narrowness’. Just as Thomas’s distortive narrative in *Oscar*, however, can also be interpreted more broadly, as a critique of the capitalist system as a whole, the grotesque also has a more expansive role in Davies’s work. Through portraying the relationships that are formed between men and women in his narratives as disturbingly and often outrageously grotesque, Davies effectively denaturalises ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ and creates a progressive textual space in which there is apparently no ‘normal’ sexuality – a territory in which, moreover, homosexuality cannot legitimately be singled out, or comparatively defined and dismissed as warped, unnatural

and perverse. In essence, the Modernism of Thomas and Davies is politically ambitious and concerned with representing and commenting on social reality – often, specifically, working-class reality – in a way that challenges narrow literary histories that polarise ‘aesthetics and politics’,⁶⁶⁰ and define Modernism as inherently detached and rarefied in nature and bourgeois in origin. This includes more recent studies such as Kristin Bluemel’s *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London*, in which Bluemel feels it necessary to coin a new term for politically committed writing of this kind. ‘In contrast to modernist writers’, she argues, ‘intermodern writers tend to have their origins in or maintain contacts with working- or lower-class cultures’, have a propensity to ‘attend to politics, especially politics that may improve working conditions’, and ‘pursue narrative strategies that are intellectually and culturally available to ordinary, non-elite, working English men and women’.⁶⁶¹ As her reference to ‘ordinary, non-elite, working *English* men and women’ suggests, Bluemel does not take into account in her study what I have shown in this thesis to be the distinct, Modernist socio-cultural conditions of Wales during the first half of the twentieth century. To view Thomas and Davies not as creators of Welsh Modernism, but as British ‘intermodernists’, moreover, would, effectively, be to undermine the central aim of this thesis – to continue to overlook and marginalise an important facet of literary Modernism in Wales.

⁶⁶⁰ Keith Williams and Steven Matthews, ‘Introduction’, in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 1-4 (p. 1).

⁶⁶¹ Kristin Bluemel, *George Orwell and the Radical Extremists: Intermodernism in Literary London* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 5.

Conclusion

In *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics*, Chana Kronfeld suggests that

Modernism, with its disruptions of bipolarities and its valorization of the marginal and the eccentric, could train us to look at the old question of literary periodization and typology with a more nuanced, kaleidoscopic gaze.⁶⁶²

I have aimed to view the ‘periodization’ and ‘typology’ of Modernism in this thesis with just the kind of ‘nuanced’ and expansive or ‘kaleidoscopic gaze’ that Kronfeld advocates. Deleuze and Guattari’s *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* and Kronfeld’s appraisal and expansion of this study in *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics*, have illuminated the Modernist potentiality of a ‘minor’ literature such as that of Anglophone Wales – a potentiality which (to reiterate Raymond Williams’s argument, outlined in the introduction to this thesis) until now, has been occluded and stultified by critics’ confinement of Modernism to ‘a specific phase or period’ and to a ‘highly selective field’. Indeed, Kronfeld’s approach, along with the work of Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, which see Modernism not as a fixed or ‘solid thing’ (to adapt David Jones’s phrase), but as a phenomenon significantly inflected by particulars of time and location, has helped to uncover a distinctive and diverse Anglophone Welsh Modernism in the 1930s and 40s, and should encourage the critical exploration of other marginal, non-canonical Modernisms and ‘alternative modernities’.⁶⁶³ There is still much scope for the continued study of Welsh Modernism alongside other international Modernisms, however – both non-canonical and canonical. It would be interesting to compare Welsh Modernism with regional Modernisms in America, for example – an area that I could not have adequately addressed within the parameters of this thesis. Indeed, this thesis only constitutes an initial enquiry into the subject of Modernism in Wales: there are many more areas to investigate, including the

⁶⁶² Kronfeld, p. 57.

⁶⁶³ Nicholls, p. vii.

role of women writers, in addition to Lynette Roberts, in the creation of a Welsh Modernism – not to mention the nature and significance of Modernism in the Welsh language and its relationship with its Anglophone counterpart. So Glyn Jones's words, which I cited in chapter four, have, we might say, come full circle: there is, once again, a palpable sense of something 'beginning', 'of something quite new in Wales'. But equally, in turn, there is also a sense that we are entering new territory in Modernism studies – a sense (to re-invoke Gwyn Jones's rallying editorial from *The Welsh Review*) that Anglophone Welsh writers could, in this, another 'new age', 'shake with new impulse the weary body of English Literature.'

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