

Short Fiction by Women from Wales: A Neglected Tradition

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Summary

This thesis traces the emergence of a distinct literary tradition of female-authored short fiction in Wales. It knits together a range of theoretical frameworks, including travel writing theories, ethnography and auto-ethnography, and ecofeminism, in order to adequately describe, elucidate and critique the evolution of the form from the late 1830s to the present day. The Introduction looks at the history of the theory of short fiction, especially the work of Frank O'Connor and Clare Hanson, as well as European models. Chapter One explores the interrelations between an emergent short fiction form, the sketch and travel literature, through the lenses of imperial travel writing theories, home tour writing, the sketch and Sandra A. Zagarell's 'narrative of community'. Chapter Two looks at writers from the 1920s to 1950, examining the ways in which discourses of anthropology, specifically ethnography and auto-ethnography, combined with further elements of Zagarell's theories, can shed light on narrative techniques and recurrent tropes. Chapter Three examines the politically volatile period of the 1960s and 1970s, focusing particularly on the ways in which short fiction is caught up in debates surrounding ecofeminism, the environment and women's bodies. The final chapter looks at current trends in contemporary short fiction, especially language loss, devolution and a sense of belonging. This chapter also considers how recent prestigious competitions are shaping trends in short fiction, as well as uncovering recurring metaphors which tie into movements in wider feminist theory, such as Adrienne Rich's work on salvage and recovery. The conclusion looks ahead to new directions in both theoretical stances and the form itself, such as electronic publishing and further avenues for recovering material.

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Introduction: Models of Short Fiction

Until very recently, the literary histories of Welsh women writers have been, like the literary histories of women more generally, unjustly overlooked. While there are now accounts, however, of some aspects of Welsh women writers' contribution to the nation's literary history, especially in texts such as Jane Aaron's *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* (2007) and Katie Gramich's *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (2007), there has been no sustained examination of their contribution to the genre of short fiction. This thesis takes the category of short fiction in its broadest sense, encompassing the sketch, life writing and elements of travel literature, in order to shift attention towards a more inclusive sense of the form than the rules laid out by famous practitioners and theorists such as Edgar Allan Poe, including the importance of 'unity of effect or impression'.¹ This thesis offers a critique of the ways in which Welsh women writers have adapted the short story form and created a distinct tradition of their own. It is also, in many ways, part of a wider project of recuperation which is currently on-going in the field of Welsh writing in English. One of the main aims of this thesis is to recover and re-evaluate women's voices that have been lost, overlooked or simply forgotten, often for no valid reason other than the gender of the author.

Virginia Woolf famously wrote, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), that one of the problems facing women writers was the perception that they 'had no tradition behind them, or one so short and partial that it was of little help'.² For Woolf this perception is caused by living in a patriarchy. While those literary grandmothers that she speaks of have existed, they had not, in Woolf's time at least, been incorporated into an accepted canonical tradition. Thanks to the painstaking work of feminist scholars and researchers, this perceived lack of a

¹ Edgar Allan Poe, 'Review of *Twice-Told Tales*', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed Charles E. May (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 59-64 (p. 60).

² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 76.

tradition has begun to be corrected with work by many forgotten, neglected or out of print female authors being recovered, rediscovered and re-evaluated. A crucial element of second wave feminism has been the recuperation of these texts to supplement, enrich and perhaps supplant the ‘traditional’ canon of literature. There have, of course, been problems with this project, often on the basis of merit, and the concern that simply replacing a male-dominated canon with a female one is not sufficient. When we turn our attention to a body of work, such as Welsh writing in English, that has only received sustained and serious critical attention in the latter half of the twentieth century, these problems again resurface. One of the major issues facing authors and scholars who work within this field is that important texts are still in the process of being recuperated and, in the area of women’s contribution to this field, recuperation is still a necessary and on-going project.³

Marginalisation is an issue that keeps recurring when we think about Welsh writing in English, let alone women’s writing in this field. Frequently excluded from companions to and essay collections on ‘British’ literature, there has been a clear and important need to redress this imbalance. When we narrow the focus even further – not just the writing of Welsh women but their use of the short story form – it becomes clear that this kind of writing has been marginalised on multiple levels. While there has been some critical engagement with female-authored short fiction – in work done by short-story specialist Tony Brown, critical introductions to reprinted versions of various collections of individual and collected editions of women writers, as well as entries in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, there has yet to be a comprehensive examination of the way in which Welsh women have utilised, adapted and transformed the short story. That there is a distinct tradition of

³ Imprints such as Honno Classics and, to a lesser extent, Parthian’s Library of Wales have helped to focus attention on previously unknown, forgotten or neglected Welsh women writers.

female-authored short fiction in Wales cannot be taken for granted, however. What, for instance, do we mean by a ‘tradition’ of women’s writing and what exactly makes it distinct?

Is there a female literary tradition?

Before we can even begin to define the short story and its place beside other genres, the concept of a female literary tradition must be examined thoroughly. Feminist theory has grappled with this issue since the inception of second wave feminism. Texts such as Ellen Moers’s *Literary Women* (1976) and Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) attempt to identify and theorise the issues surrounding a tradition of women’s writing.

Literature, Moers argues, ‘is the only intellectual field to which women, over a long stretch of time, have made an indispensable contribution’.⁴ She admits in the preface that ‘writ[ing] a straight history of women’s literature was never [her] intention, though the idea of there being such a history now intrigues rather than offends’ her.⁵ *Literary Women* is underpinned, however, by a belief in a female literary tradition, as Moers’s chapter ‘Women’s Literary Traditions and the Individual Talent’ suggests, itself a riposte to T. S. Eliot’s famous essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’:

Not loyalty but confidence was the resource that women writers drew from the possession of their own tradition. And it was a confidence that until very recently could come from no other source. Male writers have always been able to study their craft in university or coffeehouse, group themselves into movements or coteries, search out predecessors for guidance or patronage, collaborate or fight with their contemporaries. But women through most of the nineteenth century were barred from the universities, isolated in their own homes, chaperoned in travel, painfully restricted in friendship. The personal give-and-take of the literary life was closed to them. Without it they studied with a special closeness the works written by their own sex, and developed a sense of easy, almost rude familiarity with the women who wrote them.⁶

Elaine Showalter, while underlining the legitimacy of Moers’s claims, noting that ‘in terms of influences, borrowings, and affinities, the tradition is strongly marked’, also points to its

⁴ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: W.H. Allen, 1977), p. ix.

⁵ Moers, *Literary Women*, p. xi.

⁶ Moers, *Literary Women*, p. 43.

‘holes and hiatuses’.⁷ Drawing on Germaine Greer’s identification of the ‘phenomenon of the transience of female literary fame’, Showalter remarks that, in consequence, ‘each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex’.⁸ As this female literary tradition is, in effect, missing, critics such as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their ground breaking yet contentious *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), point to the issues raised for women writers by literary psychohistory where ‘the tensions and anxieties, hostilities and inadequacies writers feel when they confront not only the achievements of their predecessors but the traditions of genre, style, and metaphor that they inherit from their “forefathers”’.⁹ They draw particular attention to Harold Bloom and his theories concerning the ‘anxiety of influence’ – what Gilbert and Gubar describe as ‘the fear that he [the writer] is not his own creator and that the works of his predecessors, existing before and beyond him, assume essential priority over his own writings.’¹⁰ Bloom himself notes in the second edition of *The Anxiety of Influence* that ‘[a]ny reader of this book [...] will see that anxiety-influence does not so much concern the forerunner but rather is an anxiety achieved by the story, novel, play, poem or essay’.¹¹ Gilbert and Gubar adapt Bloom’s model to fit their own purposes but there is, of course, the issue that they cannot escape the inherently patriarchal nature of Bloom’s model.

Feminist critics have also been concerned with the ways in which the subject matter of women’s writing has been shaped by the particularities of female experience. In *The*

⁷ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own*, rev. edn (London: Virago, 2009), p. 9.

⁸ Showalter, *A Literature of their Own*, p. 10.

⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 46.

¹⁰ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 46.

¹¹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xxiii.

Female Imagination (1976), for example, Patricia Meyer Spacks argues, in language recalling Emily Dickinson's suggestion to tell the truth 'slant', that

for readily discernible historical reasons women have characteristically concerned themselves with matters more or less peripheral to male concerns, or at least slightly skewed from them. The differences between traditional female preoccupations and roles and male ones make a difference in female writing.¹²

Showalter takes this view further, arguing that 'when we look at women writers collectively we can see an imaginative continuum, the recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems, and images from generation to generation.'¹³ There has, of course, been much criticism of these early accounts of women's writing, notably in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), by Toril Moi, which lambasted *A Literature of Their Own*, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and Anglo-American feminist criticism in general. Moi's argument is that Anglo-American feminist criticism:

has waged war on [the] self-sufficient canonization of middle-class male values [...] but [has] rarely challenged the very notion of such a canon. [...] The role of the feminist critic is still to sit quietly and listen to her mistress's voice as it expresses authentic female experience.¹⁴

The idea of replacing a traditional canon of literature with an alternative is, clearly, riddled with problems and contradictions. Since this particularly energetic period of dialogue about women's writing there have, of course, been continuing and more nuanced debates concerning its position. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the pioneering work these female critics did in opening up women's writing as a serious field of academic study. In terms of Welsh women's writing, where so much work has yet to be done on women writers in terms of actual recovery, let alone critique, some of the issues and questions that were raised in the late 1970s and 1980s still helpfully illuminate different ways of thinking

¹² Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), p. 3.

¹³ Showalter, *A Literature of their Own*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 77.

about the contribution women have made to literature in Wales, especially when thinking in terms of a 'tradition', as this thesis contends.

Despite the acknowledged problems of canon formation, critics such as Jan Montefiore have continued to examine the issues surrounding a tradition of women's writing. While discussing the difficulties surrounding women's poetry rather than prose, some of Montefiore's arguments have a clear bearing on women's writing as a whole. She argues:

The idea of an alternative women's tradition is obviously attractive, since it offers a way out of the poetic (and critical) dilemma faced by women of inheriting conventions and definitions which deny us authority. The idea of a woman's tradition would enable feminists not only to rewrite our independent history of women poets, but to construct a context of poetic meaning in which women's poems were not constantly over-determined or undermined by patriarchal suggestion and symbol; finally, it would work more generally to help make a woman's discourse thinkable. All of these make the (re)creation of a woman's tradition into an ambition well worth pursuing, even though the magnitude and importance of the project make it problematic and controversial.¹⁵

She goes on to conclude that '[w]hat emerges [...] is the difficulty of making a woman's tradition workable as a critical construct without either oversimplifying its components or losing sight of what is specific to women.'¹⁶ Other critics have made similar observations, such as Mary Eagleton in her insightful essay on the short story form, 'Gender and Genre'. In this piece, Eagleton notes that 'any attempt to locate the specificity of women's writing is fraught with difficulties.'¹⁷ She goes on to ask several key questions which are still clearly relevant:

The queries are all still before us. What is the relationship of gender to writing? Should we talk of the female author or of feminine writing? Does the relationship differ with different literary forms and is there, therefore, a particular scope in relating gender to the short story? Can we create a criticism which is non-essentialist, non-reductive but subtly alive to the links between gender and genre?¹⁸

¹⁵ Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*, rev. edn (London: Pandora, 2004), p. 56.

¹⁶ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, p. 63.

¹⁷ Mary Eagleton, 'Gender and Genre', in *Re-Reading the Short Story*, ed. Clare Hanson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 55-68 (p. 65).

¹⁸ Eagleton, 'Gender and Genre', p. 66.

There are clearly connections between women's specific experience and the kind of writing they produce. However, articulating this relationship, which is far from straightforward, demands a careful, critical balance that avoids slipping into essentialist notions of what it means to be female.

This also leads into another important issue, again discussed by Montefiore. She calls into question the reason we value texts by women, especially when that value is bound up in a particularly self-conscious style of writing. She argues: 'To read the women poets of the past and present for their covert or declared awareness of themselves as women is to lay a kind of grid of feminism over the map of poetry.'¹⁹ She goes on to say that 'criticism based on the assumption that what makes a [text] valuable and interesting is its author's awareness, enacted within it, of her own dilemma as a woman (which in practice generally means her sexual/domestic life) risks reducing everything to the personal.'²⁰ Clearly, we must be careful to avoid this potentially stifling 'grid of feminism' when looking at texts by women writers, as it is a practice which excludes far more than it includes. Stories which utilize the male voice, including those that feature ventriloquism, would be discounted, as would stories that examine settings outside the usual domestic 'sphere'.²¹ For a genre such as Welsh women's writing that has been thus far neglected, narrowing the scope of what we value is unlikely to be productive. In the context of this thesis, however, it is important to take into account how Welsh women considered their relationship with the idea of tradition as well as the personal. Kate Roberts, who is now considered one of the most important short story writers of the twentieth century, is sceptical of the idea that her own work is influenced by a tradition as

¹⁹ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, p. 5.

²⁰ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, p. 5.

²¹ See Chapter Two for a discussion of male ventriloquism in stories by Kathleen Freeman and Dorothy Edwards.

such. In conversation with Saunders Lewis, broadcast as a radio interview, Roberts counters Lewis's suggestion that she has been influenced by the tradition of tales told at the fireside:

the tradition you speak about could have come indirectly to the quarrymen of my district, because many of them originated from Llŷn, where I believe traditional story-telling took place. But if I may say so, I don't see that tradition is important in this connection. Whatever tradition we speak of would have been fairly recent, and someone has to start everything. If Adam had written stories, he wouldn't have had tradition or influences. And I don't think the influence of foreign authors counts for much either. What reading stories from other languages did to me was not to make me want to imitate their style, or borrow from them in any way, but to show me that there was material for literature in the life of my own area: especially after reading writers who didn't use the technique of ingenious endings. Indeed, it made me decide on a style entirely different from their own.²²

While Roberts, in this interview, tries to distance herself from several different traditions – including both local and international traditions as well as common techniques such as borrowing, there is still a sense that she is writing in a tradition – a counter tradition, perhaps, that defines itself by what makes it different from other types of writing. Nevertheless, as Chapter Two argues, Roberts's own work does have a strong connection with auto-ethnographic short fiction by Anglophone Welsh women writers – a connection which is emphasised by Roberts's own words, that she felt able to find 'material for literature in the life of [her] own area'.

History and Definitions of the Short Story Form

Many studies of the short story, especially early critical accounts, have focused much attention on defining what the term 'short story' actually encompasses. Definitions range from the very broad, tracing the form's origins in folk tale, oral traditions and fables to more specific examples based around particularly well-known exponents, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Anton Chekhov and Edgar Allan Poe. Some point to the form's name deriving, very simply, from its brevity while others underline the fact that it is simply *not* a novel.

²² 'Kate Roberts in Interview with Saunders Lewis', trans Rob Mimpriss. Available at http://www.robmimpriss.com/Kate_Roberts2.html [accessed 24 August 2013].

Many critical accounts cite Poe's 1842 review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* as a foundational text in the genre's emerging theoretical framework. Poe argues that, amongst other prose forms, '[t]he tale proper [...] affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent'.²³ He goes on to argue that the form produces a 'unity of effect or impression' that can only be found in the short story, mainly because of the brief amount of time which is needed to read one in its entirety.²⁴ For Poe, it is a form which is swift yet extremely concentrated.

Early twentieth-century accounts of the genre, such as H. E. Bates's *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (1941), underline the paradoxical nature of the form's history – at once ancient but yet somehow new and fresh:

The history of the short story, through its phases of myth and legend, fable and parable, anecdote and pictorial essay, sketch, and even down to what the crudest provincial reporter calls "a good story", cannot be measured. [...] At what date, then, shall we begin an examination of its history? The paradoxical answer is that the history of the short story, as we know it, is not vast but very brief.²⁵

He goes on to list several definitions, citing Poe, Chekhov, John Hadfield and Elizabeth Bowen amongst others, but finds that they are all in some way deficient: 'All of these definitions have one thing in common. None of them has a satisfactory finality; none defines the short story with an indisputable epigrammatic accuracy which will fit all stories.'²⁶ Ian Reid, in *The Short Story* (1977), argues that 'the history of the modern short story embraces diverse tendencies, some of which have stretched, shrunk or otherwise altered previous conceptions of the nature of the genre'.²⁷

²³ Edgar Allan Poe, 'Poe on Short Fiction', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed Charles E. May (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 59- 72 (p. 60)

²⁴ Poe, 'Poe on Short Fiction', p. 60.

²⁵ H. E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1972), p. 13.

²⁶ Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, p. 17.

²⁷ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 3.

H. E. Bates has pointed to the parallels that have been made between the short story and other forms, including the visual arts, noting that

In its various stages of development the short story has frequently been compared with some other literary form, sometimes with some artistic form outside literature. It is thus declared to have affinities with the drama; with the narrative ballad; with the lyric and the sonnet. In the last thirty years it has shown itself, as in fact much other writing has, to be pictorial rather than dramatic, to be more closely allied to painting and the cinema than to the stage.²⁸

Ian Reid has also made parallels with other forms, notably the preoccupations of Romantic-era poetry, emphasising that ‘the short story, like much characteristically Romantic poetry, tends to concentrate on some significant moment, some instant of perception’.²⁹ He goes on to make interesting comparisons between key poets and short story writers:

Just as Wordsworth records in *The Prelude* certain ‘spots of time’, and Keats celebrates in his odes the intense sensation or insight that transcends time, so one could say that the short story typically centres on the inward meaning of a crucial event, on sudden intuitions, ‘epiphanies’ in James Joyce’s sense of that word; by virtue of its brevity and delicacy it can, for example, single out with special precision those occasions when an individual is most alert or most alone.³⁰

Reid is careful to note, however, that although ‘the thrust of Romanticism was one of the main forces propelling the nineteenth-century short story into the salient position it came to occupy’ and that the genre generally continues ‘to exhibit “Romantic” attitudes’, there are certain issues which make this description problematic. The genre’s ‘development cannot be explained solely and sufficiently in a context of literary culture’ because, as Reid underlines, there are larger, material issues at play.³¹ This points to the fact that, although English writers were influenced as much as American writers by the Romantic legacy, the amount of short fiction produced by them was far less. Unlike the novel, which focused on ‘manners, marriage and money’, the short story became the genre of choice among ‘small groups of

²⁸ Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, pp. 20-21

²⁹ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 28.

³⁰ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 28.

³¹ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 28.

working men, especially in those many areas of the American continent which by the early nineteenth century had come to consist of regional settlements still lacking social cohesion.’³² If Reid has in mind writers such as Sherwood Anderson, with his somewhat pessimistic studies of small town characters in *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) there could be much to say about parallels between his work and that of Caradoc Evans.³³ The point about ‘regional settlements still lacking social cohesion’ could be opened up to Wales as a whole, especially since, as Katie Gramich has noted, it is ‘a small country where transport and communication links have been – and to an extent still are – difficult. In such a setting, allegiance and a sense of belonging to one’s “square mile” can be very strong’.³⁴ If we think of America as a huge conglomerate of small towns and communities, there are potentially many fruitful comparisons to be made with Wales.

While many critical studies have traditionally cited Poe’s views on the ‘well-made story’ as a starting point for analysing and classifying short stories, critical perspectives have clearly shifted significantly over the last 150 years. The issue of what separates ‘modern’ short stories from their literary precursors has continued to cause much debate. Suzanne C. Ferguson has asked, for instance: ‘What accounts, then, for the persistent notion that the “modern” short story is a new genre, something different from the tale and sketch that preceded it?’³⁵ She goes on to argue that it is ‘in the realm of plot that the modern short story is most different from earlier short fiction’.³⁶ The questions concerning plot relate to the

³² Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 29.

³³ Comparisons between the language, style and subject matter of Anderson and Evans could well be very fruitful, though unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. See Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion of the nature of Caradoc Evans’s short fiction.

³⁴ Katie Gramich, *Twentieth century women's writing in Wales: land, gender, belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 2-3.

³⁵ Suzanne C. Ferguson, ‘Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 28.1 (1982), 13-24 (p. 13).

³⁶ Ferguson, ‘Defining the Short Story’, p. 16.

view found in many theoretical discussions that there are two distinct types of short-story writing:

Most critics note two categories of short fiction, called variously “simple narrative” and short story, “realistic and symbolic”, “mimetic and lyric”, “anecdotal and epiphanic”, “linear and spatial” [...] Each of these sets of terms attempts to illustrate an essential bifurcation in the short story form: some stories are simply anecdotes that sketch a realistic narrative in a linear fashion; others (sometimes via a realistic narrative) probe the nature of reality through a symbolic structure and epiphany wherein meaning is realized in the discernment of pattern in the whole.³⁷

While there may be an implicit suggestion in this description that anecdotal and linear narratives are somehow inferior to their more ‘complex’ or symbolic relations, clearly historical context must be taken into account. Fiction written during the height of Modernism, for example, would tend towards the second term in each pair, while earlier, more sketch-like stories would tend towards the first. Clare Hanson has also pointed to this bifurcation in the short story. In line with the previous descriptions, she states: ‘[i]n the short story the primary distinction which can be made is between those works in which the major emphasis is on plot and those in which plot is subordinate to psychology and mood.’³⁸ She adds that ‘[t]he first type of story, with a primary emphasis on plot, is that most closely linked to the traditional oral tale’.³⁹ For a field of writing such as Welsh writing in English, itself strongly connected to an oral tradition, questions concerning the extent to which plot features, or is lacking, become highly significant, especially as there has been a tendency to view stories that have a strong focus on plot as inferior and less worthy of study. While Rhondda writer Gwyn Thomas’s work is rooted in the high-spirited talk of this predominantly working class region, and so could be considered an integral part of a modern sense of oral fiction, ‘[p]lot is usually of less importance than the array of characters, the hilarious episodes and the verbal

³⁷ Ellen Burton Harrington, ‘Introduction: Scribbling Women and the Outlaw Form of the Short Story’, in *Scribbling Women and the Short Story Form: Approaches by American and British Women Writers* ed. Ellen Burton Harrington (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 1-14 (p. 5).

³⁸ Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 5.

³⁹ Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions*, p. 5.

wit’;⁴⁰ Thomas is now considered an influential and important author within the field of Welsh writing in English, not least for the perceived authenticity of his depiction of working-class life. Caradoc Evans’s stories also seem to have been partly influenced by the oral traditions of music hall, particularly Marie Lloyd’s *risqué* narratives, as well as the Biblical models of the Old Testament, themselves part of an oral tradition, in a sense, having been told over and over again in chapels and Bible readings at home. Yet the fictions of a female writer such as Allen Raine take on new significance when considered in the context of plot and the oral tradition. Plot, rather than psychology or symbolism, in her stories is fundamentally important and is often focused on social or gender-based critique, as in ‘Home, Sweet Home’, one of the most anthologised of her stories from her posthumous 1908 collection, *All in a Month*. What we need to be asking here is if these models of short fiction, drawn from Anglo-American examples, adequately describe Welsh short fiction in English and, perhaps just as importantly, whether this fiction has the capacity to create fault lines in these theories. We must ask whether there are texts which have the potential to blur the line between these two types as well as consider the position of texts that are generically hybrid, including, for example, Anne Beale’s *The Vale of the Towey* (1844), which slips between the form of the novel, the sketch, the short story and travel writing.

One shift that has undoubtedly occurred is that of terminology. In recent studies the term ‘short fiction’ has been put forward as a more adequate name for a body of work that, in terms of genre boundaries, is extremely diverse, unstable and is itself constantly shifting. In a recent collection of essays entitled *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis* (2004), editors Per Winther, Jakob Lothe and Hans H. Skei note their own ‘privileg[ing] of the term “short fiction” over “short story”’, which ‘reflects the fact that

⁴⁰ ‘Gwyn Thomas’, in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, ed Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 715-6 (p. 716).

genre theory in recent decades has moved away from essential notions of what texts [...] may be said to be, speaking instead of genres as sets of textual tendencies and practices that are present in varying degrees in different texts.’⁴¹ While the practice of describing and categorising the formal features of short fiction remains an important element in many recent critical studies, it is in order to seek out points of comparison, contrast and interrelation rather than to shut down meaning.

European Models of the Short Story

Another important element of Ian Reid’s discussion in *The Short Story* focuses on the European context of the form. His book helpfully examines several different models available to writers, particularly from Europe, including the German *Novelle* and *Kunstmärchen*, French *contes*, and Russian short prose fiction. Tracing the tradition, as previously noted, through the Romantic era, Reid draws attention to writers who, following on from the Renaissance novella, represent the ‘next upsurge of short fiction’ and ‘the most energetic initiatives’.⁴² In Germany, Reid argues, ‘the Novelle quickly became during the early nineteenth century a highly developed literary form, taken up by numerous talented authors and subjected to serious theorizing.’⁴³ He notes that ‘the emerging Novelle was not the only kind of short prose fiction to attract German writers’ as it was, ‘after all, a time of interest in German folk-lore’ and points to the famous collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805-8), a collection of songs compiled by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, as well as the Grimm brothers’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Childhood and Household Tales).⁴⁴ What is

⁴¹ Per Winther, Jakob Lothe and Hans H. Skei, ‘Introduction’, in *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*, ed. Per Winther, Jakob Lothe and Hans H. Skei (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004) pp. vii-xix (p. ix).

⁴² Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 22.

⁴³ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 23.

interesting here is that the recurring ‘interfusion of natural and supernatural, mundane and marvellous’ which appears in these texts is also ‘conjured up’ in many *Kunstmärchen* (‘Art’ Tales).⁴⁵ It may also be useful to bear in mind that the *Novelle* ‘presents events as being logically and causally interconnected’ while ‘very often the *Kunstmärchen* [...] indicates no rationally explicable motivation for the actions and situations it depicts.’⁴⁶ Later, according to Reid, during the second half of the century German narrative prose shifts into ‘more soberly realistic channels’.⁴⁷ It is worth asking, given this interrelation with folkloric models, whether there may be a certain degree of correlation between Welsh writers working with the short story form.

Much has been written on the *Novelle* form, both in English and in German, including much more formal theorisation than other variants. Roger Paulin points to the contrast between ‘the parlous state of the novel’ and the ‘conversely strong state of the *Novelle*’ as being commonly held to be the result of a ‘lack of social cohesion, the lack of a Paris or a London or a St Petersburg to provide the political and social focus for [German] literature. The novel is the product of the city, the *Novelle* of the province’.⁴⁸ If we make parallels with the structure of Wales here, the fact that the country had no modern capital city until 1955 is especially relevant. Earlier accounts of the *Novelle*, such as E. K. Bennett’s, focus on its central preoccupations, ‘a narrative in prose, usually shorter than a novel, dealing with one particular situation, conflict, event, or aspect of a personality; it narrates something ‘new’ in the sense of something unusual or striking’.⁴⁹ More significantly, Bennett also notes the existence of a form called the ‘Village Story’ (‘*Dorfgeschichte*’) which has its roots in moral

⁴⁵ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 23.

⁴⁷ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Roger Paulin, *The Brief Compass: The Nineteenth-Century German Novelle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 5.

⁴⁹ E. K. Bennett, *A History of the German Novelle: from Goethe to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 1.

anecdotes which were written for peasant calendars in the early nineteenth century.⁵⁰ This particular strand of the *Novelle* (although Bennett is at pains to point out that not all *Village Stories* are necessarily *Novellen* because some lack a ‘conscious artistry’⁵¹) became a recognised literary form from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Bennett remarks

The whole tendency of the time not only in literature, but in philosophy as well, was in the direction of a realistic view of the universe. Meanwhile, economic changes, the establishment of railways, the growth of industry, were threatening the existence of the village life. For the town dwellers, tossed hither and thither by the conflicting ideas of the time, the life of the village seemed to represent some solid enduring element, something that had existed unchanged for centuries, and had been fundamentally undisturbed by the Napoleonic wars. It was a world that was perhaps on the point of disappearing before the advent of new social forces. Literature discovered it as a field that could be cultivated.⁵²

Bennett’s description of the fascination the *Village Story* had for readers in the nineteenth century has very striking parallels with Sandra A. Zagarell’s discussion of ‘narrative of community’ (discussed in Chapters One and Two), in which writers try to capture the processes that make up the life of villages and small towns in the wake of industrialisation and is echoed in many women writers’ short fiction throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Besides parallels with German literature, Welsh writers may well have been influenced by other European models, such as in the case of French and Russian authors. Discussing French authors, Ian Reid refers to the ‘pastoral freshness of Daudet’, the ‘cool meticulous objectivity of Flaubert’, as well as the ‘styptic naturalism of Maupassant’. These writers, Reid claims, all have a

predilection for rural subjects and simple folk. Mostly it could be left to the novel to delineate those large-scale social patterns which were so amply extended in urban life; the short story seemed especially suitable for the portrayal of regional life, or of individuals who, though situated in a city, lived there as aliens.⁵³

⁵⁰ Bennett, *A History of the German Novelle*, p. 107.

⁵¹ Bennett, *A History of the German Novelle*, p. 106.

⁵² Bennett, *A History of the German Novelle*, p. 111.

⁵³ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 24.

When he moves on to a discussion of Russian literature, he notes the similarities that once again occur – Pushkin’s ‘bareness and precision’, Gogol’s ‘stripping narrative prose of fuzzy embellishment’ as well as focusing on ‘ordinary people, apparent nonentities, with an attentiveness capable of revealing deep currents of emotion beneath petty surfaces.’⁵⁴

Another important writer is of course Chekhov, who was very much the writer of provincial Russian life, often with an emphasis on women’s experience. Katherine Mansfield was influenced by his writing, and in fact, plagiarised him, while within Wales Kate Roberts admired his work greatly and tried to emulate him, as did Rhys Davies.

Women Writing the Short Story

While forms such as the Village Story have a relatively low status in relation to the Novelle, short fiction itself has, of course, traditionally been considered lower in status than the novel.

Within English-language writing, shorter forms are often associated with the acceptably ‘feminine’ pursuit of sketching (both in the artistic and literary senses). As Mary Eagleton notes, ‘if we are talking about new forms and low status then the short story is even newer and lower than the novel.’⁵⁵ Despite this hierarchical relationship, Mary Eagleton

demonstrates that the short story offers exciting possibilities that are specific to the form:

Perhaps for some women writers their interest in this form has arisen, not from their belief that it is known and safe, but from their hope that the flexible, open-ended qualities of the short story may offer a transforming potential, an ability to ask the unspoken question, to raise new subject matter.⁵⁶

She goes on to critique the ‘double bind’ placed on women’s writing:

To say that the woman writer would adopt the short story because of the intimacy of the form, the one to one relationship between author and reader, or because of the short story’s focus on a manageable, single incident is, on the one hand, to recognise women’s social experience in our culture and where that experience may take them in their writing; on the other hand, it is to confine women once again in the personal, the

⁵⁴ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Eagleton, ‘Gender and Genre’, p. 62.

⁵⁶ Eagleton, ‘Gender and Genre’, p. 65.

closely detailed, the miniature. By implication the short story becomes both a lesser form and about all that women can manage.⁵⁷

This thesis attempts to break free from this double bind, arguing that far from being a ‘lesser form, many women writers deliberately chose the short story as a weapon of critique which draws its power from its very position on the margins.

On the Periphery: The Short Story as an ‘Outlaw’ Form

In the introduction to the influential collection of essays entitled *Re-Reading the Short Story*, editor Clare Hanson argues that ‘[f]or a complex of reasons the short story has been largely excluded from the arena of contemporary critical debate.’⁵⁸ Published in 1989, this view may seem, to some extent, outdated given the increasing number of critical texts, introductions and essay collections on the form. Yet Hanson’s further claim, that ‘the short story is or has been notably a form of the margins, a form which is in some sense ex-centric, not part of official or ‘high’ cultural hegemony’ seems significant if we look at fields of literature that have been traditionally overlooked or neglected by the mainstream, Welsh writing in English being no exception.⁵⁹

One critical text which has had a significant impact on short fiction studies, and in many respects, draws on the European models previously discussed, is Frank O’Connor’s *The Lonely Voice* (1963). O’Connor, a short story writer himself, attempts to describe ‘what a short story is and is not.’⁶⁰ One of his frequently quoted arguments focuses on the genre’s difference from the novel and its distinctive focal point:

In discussions of the modern novel we have come to talk of it as the novel without a hero. In fact, the short story has never had a hero. What it has instead is a submerged

⁵⁷ Eagleton, ‘Genre and Genre’, p. 64.

⁵⁸ Clare Hanson, *Re-Reading the Short Story* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 1.

⁵⁹ Hanson, *Re-Reading the Short Story*, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Banks, Russell ‘Introduction’, in Frank O’Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (Hoboken: Melville House, 2004), pp. 5-11 (p. 7).

population group [...] That submerged population changes its character from writer to writer, from generation to generation. It may be Gogol's officials, Turgenev's serfs, Maupassant's prostitutes, Chekhov's doctors and teachers, Sherwood Anderson's provincials, always dreaming of escape.⁶¹

O'Connor centres his ideas around the lack of a 'hero', of 'outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society, superimposed sometimes on symbolic figures whom they caricature and echo – Christ, Socrates, Moses.'⁶² As some critics – especially feminist critics – have commented, O'Connor's perspective on the short story is clearly masculinist, couched in masculine terms and centring, generally, on male protagonists. Furthermore, in terms the short story in Wales, O'Connor's theories address a form that is conceived as a *modern* phenomenon that has little to do with the oral tradition. His ideas, then, are potentially problematic, particularly if we try to trace a tradition back to the mid-nineteenth century or locate Welsh stories in an oral tradition. While these problems with O'Connor's arguments cannot be ignored, some of the recurring thematic concerns that *The Lonely Voice* emphasises are valuable for looking at trends in the short story as a whole. One of his particularly perceptive ideas revolves around the notion that, unlike the novel, the short story is bound up with 'an intense awareness of human loneliness'.⁶³ For O'Connor, the form is primarily concerned with the experience of the outsider, people on the margins of society and the issue of isolation.

O'Connor's ideas have had a lasting impact on later studies of the form. In a recent collection of essays on the trope of 'scribbling women', a phrase coined by Poe, Ellen Burton Harrington observes that the 'image of the "outlaw" story comes out of notions of [short fiction] as a form that is far from central to the literary tradition'.⁶⁴ While noting the way in which O'Connor has 'conceptualize[d] these outlaws in terms of male figures and, it seems, a

⁶¹ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (Hoboken: Melville House, 2004), p. 17.

⁶² O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, p. 18.

⁶³ O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, p. 19.

⁶⁴ Ellen Burton Harrington, 'Introduction', in *Scribbling Women and the Short Story Form*, ed. Ellen Burton Harrington (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 1-14 (p. 7).

masculine Western literary tradition', Harrington takes his basic model of the outlaw figure, and begins to underline how this 'model clearly has implications for women writers as well.'⁶⁵

Feminist revisions of the figure of the outlaw such as that found in *Scribbling Women* are often traced back to the short story theorist Clare Hanson. As we have already seen, Hanson has pointed to the way in which the form deals with the experience of the 'ex-centric', of individuals and groups who are 'not part of official or "high" cultural hegemony'⁶⁶ or, as Welsh critic Tony Brown puts it – 'marginal groups or individuals who are outside the main centres of power.'⁶⁷ Hanson pushes O'Connor's original ideas further, arguing that

The short story is a vehicle for different kinds of knowledge, knowledge which may be in some way at odds with the 'story' of dominant culture. The formal properties of the short story – disjunction, inconclusiveness, obliquity – connect with its ideological marginality and with the fact that the form may be used to express something suppressed/repressed in mainstream literature.'⁶⁸

While this may be a persuasive argument for viewing the short story, it is not without problems. Hanson herself notes that 'These are wide generalisations: not all stories, clearly, work like this.'⁶⁹ Short stories, evidently, are not the only medium through which the experience of the marginalised or the peripheral is explored. Furthermore, as we shall see, the short story in Wales could not be viewed as a 'marginal' medium in its heyday of the 1930s and 40s. While we need to take into account the theoretical frameworks of critics like Hanson and O'Connor, then, we must be wary of the pitfalls of homogenisation and ahistoricism.

⁶⁵ Harrington, *Scribbling Women*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Hanson, *Re-Reading the Short Story*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Tony Brown, 'The Ex-centric Voice: The English-Language Short Story in Wales', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 1.1 (2001), 25-41 (p. 26).

⁶⁸ Hanson, *Re-reading the Short Story*, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Hanson, *Re-reading the Short Story*, p. 6.

The Short Story and Welsh Writing in English

In contrast to the prominence of the novel in England, the English-language novel was ‘slow to get into its stride in Wales.’⁷⁰ According to the entry on the short story in English in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, it is, in fact, the short story that ‘has been more characteristic of the work of Welsh writers in English’.⁷¹ Reasons put forward for this include the idea that it was a ‘natural product, like the poem, of a still-poor society in which the writer was necessarily amateur, writing for brief periods in such time as he had.’⁷²

Furthermore, writers chose this particular form because of the vitality of its linguistic possibilities:

It was a vehicle, [...] like the poem, which could carry the exuberant rhetoric and the sheer delight in language which marked a particular generation which, with the tradition of eloquence in Welsh half-sounding in its ears, plunged into the sea of English with the zest of explorers.⁷³

The author of the entry points to some ‘bolder spirits’ towards the end of the nineteenth century, including Alfred Thomas, David Davies, Bertha Thomas and Zachery Mather, but notes that they ‘[r]arely [...] escape the sentimental or transform the sketch into something structurally more dramatic and assured.’⁷⁴ It is, we are told, ‘customary [...] to date the emergence of the Anglo-Welsh short story from the appearance of *My People* (1915) by Caradoc Evans’, a view that can be ‘justified broadly on three grounds: the overwhelming contrast seen in its attitude to Wales, the market it obtained, and the confidence it eventually created.’⁷⁵ This masculinist approach to the short story in Wales obviously excludes and ignores a wide range of female-authored short fiction that pre-dates Evans, as well as overlooking the popularity of authors such as Allen Raine. Chapter Two looks in more detail

⁷⁰ ‘The Novel in English’, in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, ed Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 535.

⁷¹ ‘The Short Story in English’, in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, p. 675.

⁷² ‘The Short Story in English’, in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, p. 675.

⁷³ ‘The Short Story in English’, in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, pp. 675-6.

⁷⁴ ‘The Short Story in English’, in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, p. 676.

⁷⁵ ‘The Short Story in English’, in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, p. 676.

at the assertion that Evans is the ‘father’ of the modern short story in Wales and suggests much stronger lines of continuity between earlier female writers than has been previously considered.

Prominent exponents of the form are highlighted, such as Glyn Jones, Dylan Thomas, Rhys Davies, Arthur Machen, Geraint Goodwin, Alun Lewis, Gwyn Thomas, and Nigel Heseltine. Amongst these writers from the period up to 1950, only one woman writer is mentioned – Dorothy Edwards. Later writers include Emyr Humphreys, Alun Richards, Leslie Norris and Ron Berry. Interestingly, the entry concludes with a discussion of ‘younger writers seeking to come to terms with an increasingly commercialized, more cosmopolitan, post-industrial Wales’ and cites only female writers – Glenda Beagan and Catherine Merriman – which suggests a reinvigoration emerging from female-authored fiction. As Sally Roberts Jones notes in her critique of this definition of the Welsh short story in English, writers prior to 1915 are ‘dismissed’ while the ‘decline in the commercial market for short fiction by about 1950 is seen almost as marking the end of the Anglo-Welsh short story’.⁷⁶ There are, however, several reasons for the shortcomings in this description of the short story. As Jones points out, revisions to the new edition of the *Companion* were affected by financial constraints and were carried out a year before publication and so could not take into account more recent work. What she also highlights, at the time she was writing, is ‘the lack of good frequent reviewing sources in Wales [which] makes following new authors and new trends in Welsh writing in English very difficult indeed’.⁷⁷ She argues:

And while there is no one centre where the books that make up that literature can be seen en masse, critics and literary historians are likely to have to rely for their overall view of the field on anthologies published by London publishers who are very wary indeed about risking their money and reputation on any but the tried and tested

⁷⁶ Sally Roberts Jones, ‘An Annotated Bibliography of the Anglo-Welsh Short Story: Part II’ (2003) <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/CREW/ResearchProjects/TheAnnotatedBibliography/#d.en.20440> [accessed 7 April 2010]

⁷⁷ Jones, ‘An Annotated Bibliography: Part II’.

names.⁷⁸

Jones's argument perhaps holds less weight now with the growth of Welsh publishers such as Honno, Parthian and Cinnamon, as well particular imprints (including Honno Classics) which provide scholarly and wide-ranging introductions. While publishers within Wales are now gaining confidence and prestige, and are providing an alternative to a London-centric perspective on the Welsh short story, this has clearly not always been the case, especially in the instance of women writers. It has been the task of ground-breaking anthologies such as *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales c. 1850-1950*, edited by Jane Aaron, to challenge and modify the view of the female-authored short story.

Anthologies of Welsh Writing

To gain an overview of how Welsh women's writing was disseminated and what kind of writing was presented to the reading public, we have to turn to the anthologies of Anglophone Welsh writing produced from the 1930s onwards. Sally Roberts Jones points to the 'importance of Gwyn Jones's anthologies, published in London by Penguin Books and by Oxford University Press' which made certain stories available to a wide audience 'as a taster for the literature as a whole.'⁷⁹ Yet, while these anthologies drew attention to texts which would have gone unnoticed by a more general readership, particularly outside Wales, they also hindered the development of a firm tradition in this genre. Jane Aaron has drawn attention to 'the lack of recognition from which [female short story writers] suffer is [...] in part the consequence of the inconsistent manner in which they have been treated by former editors of Welsh short story anthologies.'⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Jones, 'An Annotated Bibliography: Part II'.

⁷⁹ Jones, 'An Annotated Bibliography: Part II'.

⁸⁰ Jane Aaron, 'Introduction', in *A View Across the Valley* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. ix-xx (p. xiv).

What really needs scrutinising, in light of the feminist theory that has so far been discussed, is whether these anthologies which include women writers demonstrate a distinctively different tone as well as themes and, perhaps, imagery. One of the first anthologies to be published, *Welsh Short Stories* (1937), provides an interesting snapshot of the kinds of writing that was included.⁸¹ This collection features a significant amount of writing by women, including two works which could be classed as long short stories – Hilda Vaughan’s ‘A Thing of Nought’ and Margiad Evans’s ‘Country Dance’. Other stories include Sian Evans’s ‘Davis’, Eiluned Lewis’s ‘The Poacher’, Allen Raine’s ‘A Life’s Chase’, Kate Roberts’s ‘A Summer Day’, Dorothy Edwards’s ‘The Conquered’ and Blanche Devereux’s ‘The Bull Giant Head’, a story which is more interesting for its inclusion than its artistic merit. The collection features twenty-six stories in total, eight of which are by women. However, when we examine the actual number of pages of text that are devoted to women writers, the proportion is even more generous than it would initially appear. Of the 483 pages of actual text, 240 are from female-authored stories – almost exactly half.

By the time of *Twenty-Five Welsh Short Stories* (1971), selected by Gwyn Jones and Islwyn Ffowc Elis and published by Oxford University Press, the prominence of women writers had significantly diminished. Of those twenty-five stories, only four were by women and of those four, two were Welsh language stories in translation. The number of actual pages these stories take up is telling – only 34 out of 239. Spanning from the late 1930s to the late 1960s, the stories comprise Kate Roberts’s ‘Cats at an Auction’ (1964), Margiad Evans’s ‘A Party for the Nightingale’ (1948), Sian Evans’s ‘Davis’ (1937) and Eigra Lewis Roberts’s

⁸¹ The Faber anthology includes E. Tegla Davies, ‘The Strange Apeman’; Hywel Davies ‘The Five Eggs’, Rhys Davies, ‘Resurrection’; Caradoc Evans, ‘The Way of the Earth’, Geraint Goodwin, ‘Janet Ifans’s Donkey’, Jack Griffith, ‘Something to be Thankful For’; Richard Hughes, ‘The Stranger’, Glyn Jones, ‘Wil Thomas’; Gwyn Jones, ‘Shacki Thomas’; Arthur Machen, ‘The Shining Pyramid’; Richard Pryce, ‘A Hewer of Stone’, Ifan Pughe, ‘The Wild Horses and Fair Maidens of Llanganoch’; Frank Richards, ‘The Black Rat’, Dylan Thomas, ‘The Orchards’; Herbert M. Vaughan, ‘An Idyll Without an End’; D. J. Williams, ‘A Good Year’; J. Ellis Williams, ‘Big Business’; Richard H. Williams, ‘Siôn William’.

‘Deprivation’. In terms of the way in which the collection is organised, there is a large gap between Kate Roberts, third in the collection, and the next female author, Margiad Evans, whose story is thirteenth. ‘Cats at an Auction’ centres around Elen, who goes to the auction of the recently-deceased Mrs Hughes in the hope of buying a corner cupboard. ‘A Party for a Nightingale’ follows Rhoda Boyce and her friends one evening as they go to the woods to hear the song of a nightingale. ‘Davis’ is written from the perspective of work-shy Fred Davis who is berated by his wife for his laziness and lack of interest in halting the gradual dilapidation of their home. ‘Deprivation’ again deals with the domestic sphere, focusing on Lisi Blodwen whose twenty-year courtship with Huw Llewelyn has come to an abrupt end following Huw’s unexpected marriage to another woman. What is particularly significant about these stories is their shared preoccupation with the theme of loss. In the interview with Saunders Lewis referred to above, Kate Roberts points out that she was first prompted to write by the loss of her younger brother, who was killed in World War One. This thesis, as a whole, attempts to grapple with the question of whether these stories are representative of the recurrent themes in Welsh women’s writing. It is also important to examine to what extent these stories by women contrast with the kinds of stories included by male authors.

In the 1937 Faber collection, the stories by male writers are often marked by dark, even grotesque, humour. ‘The Stranger’, by Richard Hughes, the story which opens the volume, features Mr Williams, rector of Cylfant, and his wife, Minnie, a harmonium player with a wooden leg, who take in a ‘Stranger’, a demon – ‘a grotesque thing, with misshapen ears and a broad, flat nose’ and ‘crumpled wings, as fine as petrol upon water’.⁸² One of the most amusing scenes in the story occurs when the demon transforms Minnie’s wooden leg while she is asleep, so that when she puts it on in the morning, it is ‘the most seductive leg

⁸² Richard Hughes, ‘The Stranger’, in *Welsh Short Stories* (London: Faber, 1937), pp. 9-20 (p. 12). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

that ever troubled a man's eye: and, moreover, there was a silk stocking on it, and a high-heeled Paris shoe' (p. 14). This leg refuses to be hidden, 'thrust[ing] the delicate turn of its ankle right under [the postman's] nose' and 'giving coquettish little kicks into the air' (p. 15) as Minnie tries to run back into the house. Another story with a similar tone is Rhys Davies's 'Resurrection', in which Meg, supposedly dead, rises in her coffin. A woman bent on 'men and whisky', she has caused her sisters, Ellen and Bertha, much embarrassment over the years and continues to do so after she is supposed to have died.⁸³ Meg keeps sitting up in her coffin, asking for refreshment, but she receives nothing. By the end of the story it is clear that her sisters are unwilling to help her and she will 'die' for a second time. Overall, writing by men in these anthologies suggests a preoccupation with dark, satirical humour and an emphasis on working class realities. While female experience and identity are explored with nuance elsewhere, such as in many of Rhys Davies's other stories, there is a sense that some of the stories included in the anthologies by male writers tend to depict women's lives with a degree of negativity and, in some cases, triviality. This is not to suggest that women writers were unable to make use of dark humour and were focused on earnest portrayals of the realities of women's lives. Kate Roberts's sharp wit would offer, of course, a clear corrective to this view. However, looking beyond humour, it is possible to trace a distinct tradition in women's writing which has come from a very different source and attempts to articulate female experience with increasing confidence. The bias toward including male writers in these popular anthologies, which were issued by well-known and respected publishing houses, has made it all the more difficult to identify and evaluate a tradition of women writing the short story – an issue which this thesis aims to address and reevaluate.

⁸³ Rhys Davies, 'Resurrection', in *Welsh Short Stories* (London: Faber, 1937), pp. 39-49 (p. 42). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

A Neglected Tradition

In Chapter One, this thesis attempts to break new ground by tracing an emergent tradition through the tropes found in travel writing and the sketch, from the 1830s until 1912, which spill over into prototypical short fiction. There is a strong focus on the gaze in this chapter, as the texts discussed often feature a participant-observer narrator, a figure taken from the field of anthropology, who scrutinizes and surveys landscapes, domestic interiors, class, culture and language. At the heart of this chapter is an engagement with colonialist modes of representation, especially as many of the authors are outsiders looking in on Welsh culture. Chapter Two expands on the groundwork of Chapter One by looking in further detail at the use and eventual rejection (and sometimes evasion) of the participant-observer narrative perspective, as well arguing that much short fiction of this period has an auto-ethnographic underpinning, by which women writers were able to lay claim to and preserve their own cultural traditions. Chapter Three sets out some key intersections between women writers, feminism, health and wellbeing, and the environment, arguing that these issues are intrinsically linked. This chapter also argues that women writers in these stories are beginning to situate themselves in a national and sometimes global network of ecofeminism, a branch of feminism which underlines the correlation between the oppression of women and damage to the environment. Finally, Chapter Four explores some new trends in Welsh women's short fiction from both new and established voices, concentrating on issues of language, belonging, and autonomy. There is particular attention paid to the ways in which the winners of prestigious Welsh short story competitions and literary awards have shaped the writing of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Overall, this thesis aims to bring forgotten texts back into field of Welsh writing in English and to establish connections with new voices as part of a more fully imagined tradition of Welsh women's short fiction.

Chapter One: Defining a Nation: Wales and the Welsh in Travel Writing, Sketches and Short Fiction

The trajectory of Welsh women's short fiction is interwoven with that of travel writing and the sketch. While these three distinct genres may not, on first impression, seem to be that closely linked, having disparate and diverse publishing histories and intended audiences, there is, nonetheless, a fundamental connection. All three genres have historically been considered 'lightweight', as it were, in comparison with other forms of writing, such as the novel or the essay, but are also traditionally associated with socially acceptable genres for women to write in, being ephemeral and often intended for a narrow audience. Travel writing is caught up, especially during the Victorian period, with the project of colonialism in that the travel writer is constantly reinforcing their own (racial) superiority through classifying and anatomising the exotic 'other'. In such hierarchies, women writers could be perceived as shoring up imperialist discourse rather than undermining patriarchal authority by writing. The sketch, another integral aspect of the project of travel, was also an appropriate medium for women, due to its artlessness and supposed lack of sophistication, to snatch moments of their experience on paper. All three genres, therefore, offer women a space in which to write, a space that ostensibly provides little threat to the dominant patriarchal order. At the same time, their interrelated subject matter, including tropes of travel and domestic detail, define Wales, its national culture and identity from the outside, especially through descriptions of landscape, as well as from the inside, in the extensive exploration of the infinitesimal detail of living conditions, especially in rural areas. This chapter explores a wide variety of texts by women which all, to some extent, illuminate or comment upon what it means to be Welsh from the late 1830s through to the first decade of the twentieth century. There has been, on the whole, a large gap in the literary history of this period, which has been overshadowed in many respects by the intense focus on Caradoc Evans as the alleged 'founding father' of the

short story in Wales. The rationale underpinning this chapter is that we must look further back in time than Caradoc Evans (1878-1945) to find literary foremothers who laid the foundations for generations of successful, imaginative and insightful short fiction writers in the twentieth century. The long-lasting influence of both Elizabeth Gaskell's Welsh-set short fiction and Anne Beale's episodic sketches, which are themselves shaped by the tropes of colonial and 'home tour' travel literature, is charted within the work of later writers, including Allen Raine and Bertha Thomas, who incorporate elements of travel writing and domestic detail into their writing. This counter history of the female-authored Anglophone short story in Wales is a necessarily hybrid history, not least because Welsh was the dominant language until the findings of the *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (1847) which changed the face of education in Wales dramatically by advocating the use of English as a 'civilising' tool.⁸⁴

In her 1986 essay, 'Images of Welsh women', historian Deirdre Beddoe argued that 'Welsh women are culturally invisible'.⁸⁵ This argument could be extended further to women writing *about* Wales, particularly in the contexts of nineteenth-century 'home tour' writing, the sketch and short fiction of the period. In terms of travel writing, scholars are often silent about Wales, concentrating on writing about England, Scotland or Ireland, and focus on more well-known male travel writers such as William Gilpin, or the idiosyncratic George Borrow and his *Wild Wales* (1862). While some women writers, such as Hester Lynch Piozzi and Elizabeth Isabella Spence, are receiving more critical attention, there are still many texts by women writers that have been overlooked and forgotten, often because they fall on the

⁸⁴ For further discussion, see Jane Aaron, 'Introduction: Chartism, Nationalism and Language Politics', in *The Very Salt of Life: Welsh Women's Political Writings from Chartism to Suffrage*, ed Jane Aaron and Ursula Masson (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2007), pp. 3-13.

⁸⁵ Deirdre Beddoe, 'Images of Welsh Women', in *Wales: The Imagined Nation*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Poetry Press Wales, 1986), p. 227.

boundary between travel writing and fiction.⁸⁶ Anne Beale's *The Vale of the Towy*, is a good example. Often, these texts are difficult to place generically, so have been problematic, in the past, to fit into an overarching history of women's literature in Wales.

One of the central arguments of this chapter is that travel writing on Wales not only shapes the way the country's topography is imagined but also informs political discourses concerning national identity, the characteristics of its people, language, customs and traditions. These discourses repeatedly find their way into short fiction of the period, ranging in form from depictions of domestic interiors to panoramic perspectives on the landscape. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, aspects of Welsh life and traditions were under particular scrutiny, not least because of the Chartist rising in Newport in 1839, and the Rebecca riots of the early 1840s, which stemmed from high rises in toll gate taxes. As a result of this period of discontent in Wales, the now infamous *Reports* were compiled, which crystallised many ill-informed and erroneous assumptions regarding cultural and linguistic difference in Wales. While it was commissioned specifically to examine 'the means afforded to the labouring classes of acquiring a knowledge of the English language', it actually recorded far more than this, including opinions concerning moral standards and supposed lack of chastity, particularly amongst women.⁸⁷ Interestingly, it also documents elements of Welsh culture, including local customs, which often feature in travellers' accounts. As the commissioners were themselves unable to speak Welsh, but were examining men and women who were monoglot Welsh speakers, the report was, unsurprisingly, extremely negative, and found that standards in education were 'deplorably low, particularly with regard to the

⁸⁶ Zoë Kinsley writes about both Spence and Piozzi in *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), a text which underpins the analysis in this chapter.

⁸⁷ Hansard, 3rd Series, LXXXIV, 10 March 1846; quoted in Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales: The Observers and the Observed* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p. 20.

teaching of English.’⁸⁸ The *Report*, which became known as ‘The Treason of the Blue Books’, linked, as Jane Aaron has argued, this ‘lack of educational access to English civilisation with what it claimed to be the barbarity and primitive backwardness of the population’.⁸⁹

One particularly eloquent response to the *Blue Books* came, in 1848, from Jane Williams, Ysgafell, who argued that they had ‘done the people of [Wales] a double wrong. They have traduced their national character, and in doing so, they have threatened an infringement upon their manifest social rights, their dearest existing interests, [...] their local customs, and their mother tongue’.⁹⁰ In many ways, the texts which this chapter explores focus on these same aspects of Welsh culture that the *Report* represented so negatively. Authors such as Allen Raine, in novels like *Queen of the Rushes* (1906), attempt to counteract this view of Welsh women by providing depictions of hard-working, honest and chaste female characters, such as Gwenifer, the silent heroine of Raine’s novel. There has been some work done on the recuperation of Welsh women’s literary reputations in this period, especially by Jane Aaron in her *Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales* (2007), but the contribution short fiction made to representations of Welsh women and Welsh culture has not been consistently or comprehensively explored. While the texts under consideration in this chapter cannot necessarily be regarded as a direct response to the *Report*’s findings, especially as some were written before its publication, they do seem to draw recurring attention to some of the fault lines surrounding outsider perspectives of Wales.

⁸⁸ Aaron, ‘Introduction: Chartism, Nationalism and Language Politics’, p. 6.

⁸⁹ Aaron, ‘Introduction: Chartism, Nationalism and Language Politics’, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Jane Williams, Ysgafell, ‘Artegall, or Remarks on the *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*’, in *The Very Salt of Life*, ed Jane Aaron and Ursula Masson (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2007), pp. 18-50 (p. 18).

The effect the *Blue Books* had on perceptions of Welsh women was particularly damaging, as it depicted them as promiscuous and sexually abandoned. For example, in a section entitled ‘Morals in Brecknockshire’, David Griffiths, a ‘working-man at Builth’, notes that ‘[t]he young women are in general unsteady; nothing is thought of having a bastard, and, when in the family-way, they walk as publicly as a married woman’.⁹¹ Another section, entitled ‘Morals in Radnorshire’, includes the opinions of local magistrate, the Reverend R. Lister Venables, who states that ‘[u]nchastity in the women is, I am sorry to say, a great stain upon our people’.⁹² Although men were also rebuked for slovenliness and drunkenness, the charge of moral laxity was particularly damning for women in close-knit communities, especially in rural areas. This report haunts many later Welsh texts, not least those by women deploying the short story form.

While the 1830s were a period of ‘marked political turbulence in Wales’, as Jane Aaron has commented, the texts which this chapter considers, including the work of Catherine Sinclair, Anne Beale, Amy Lane and Elizabeth Gaskell, portray a Wales which is, on the surface, far from unrest and turmoil.⁹³ Indeed, Beale opens *The Vale of the Towey, or, Sketches in South Wales* (1844) by focusing on ‘tranquil vales and mountains’ rather than ‘descriptions of stirring events, and portraiture of a people of determined, if not of a turbulent and rebellious character’.⁹⁴ What becomes apparent, however, when these texts are examined in more detail, is the ways in which textual unease is repeatedly registered regarding cultural difference, issues of feminine propriety and questions concerning the appropriateness of genre. Writing over half a century later in *Picture Tales from Welsh Hills*

⁹¹ *Reports of the Commissioners of inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, Part II: Report on the Counties of Brecknock, Cardigan, Radnor, and Monmouth* (London: HMSO, 1847), pp. 18-60 (p. 58).

⁹² *Report on the Counties of Brecknock, Cardigan, Radnor, and Monmouth*, p. 60.

⁹³ Aaron, ‘Introduction: Chartism, Nationalism and Language Politics’, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Anne Beale, *The Vale of the Towey, or, Sketches in South Wales* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1844), p. vii. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

(1912), a collection of short stories that arguably owes a large literary debt to its travel-writing forebears, Bertha Thomas describes Wales as ‘the stranger within England’s gates’.⁹⁵ The texts discussed in this chapter seem to question Wales’ relationship with Britain, on the one hand legally incorporated and yet still distinctly separate, particularly in terms of national identity. Zoë Kinsley argues in her invaluable study *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* (2008) that ‘notions of foreignness and otherness are central to the way in which supposedly “domestic” tourism functions’, emphasising that the ‘discursive and ideological strategies’ found in imperial and colonial travel narratives can often be found in home tour writing.⁹⁶ In the texts discussed in this chapter, these strategies can be traced through a recurring focus on landscape, detailed examination of domestic interiors, and the construction of a suitably ‘feminine’ voice which allows the writer to discuss intimate details of lower class life.

Theoretical frameworks for examining these hybrid texts, which fall in varying degrees between travel writing and the short story, need to be drawn from both imperial and home tour strategies as well as those found in more ‘literary’ contexts. This chapter aims to draw together various different models of textual strategies found in travel writing, the sketch and short fiction. They include Mary Louise Pratt’s discussion of rhetorical strategies in travel writing, appropriate femininity in the sketch form (including Marilyn Butler’s discussion of the ‘Tales and Sketches’ genre), Kinsley’s definition of home tour textual strategies and, finally, Sandra Zagarell’s concept of ‘narrative of community’.

⁹⁵ Bertha Thomas, ‘The Madness of Winifred Owen’, republished in *Stranger Within the Gates: A Collection of Short Stories*, ed. Kirsti Bohata (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2008), pp. 1-20 (p. 1). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

⁹⁶ Zoë Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 155.

Travel Writing Textual Strategies

In terms of landscape, Mary Louise Pratt's identification of rhetorical strategies that give the traveller's account value are particularly useful, especially as so many stories of the nineteenth century draw on picturesque landscapes in their narratives. Pratt suggests three strategies at work in the rhetoric of travel writing 'which create qualitative and quantitative value for the explorer's achievement.'⁹⁷ She argues that, first of all, 'the landscape is *aestheticized*': 'The sight is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background, foreground, symmetries between foam-flecked water and mist-flecked hills, and so forth.'⁹⁸ The second strategy is achieved through '*density of meaning*', in which she suggests that 'The landscape is represented as extremely rich in material and semantic substance. This density is achieved especially through a huge number of adjectival modifiers'.⁹⁹ The final strategy, Pratt suggests, is

the relation of *mastery* predicated between the seer and the seen. The metaphor of the painting itself is suggestive. If the scene is a painting, then [the travel writer] is both the viewer there to judge and appreciate it, and the verbal painter who produces it for others. From the painting analogy it also follows that what [the travel writer] sees is all there is, and that the landscape was intended to be viewed from where he has emerged upon it. Thus the scene is deictically ordered with reference to his vantage point, and is static.¹⁰⁰

Pratt uses the term 'the monarch-of-all-I-survey' to capture this sense of mastery, appropriation, and ownership (as well as to make fun of this potentially ridiculous subject position). She goes on to say: 'The monarch-of-all-I-survey scene, then, would seem to

⁹⁷ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) p. 204.

⁹⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 204. All italics are Pratt's.

⁹⁹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 204.

¹⁰⁰ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, pp. 204-5.

involve particularly explicit interaction between esthetics and ideology, in what one might call a rhetoric of presence.’¹⁰¹

Other critics, such as Barbara T. Gates, have examined Pratt’s account of strategies in travel writing but have found certain elements of them lacking when considering such writing from a gender-specific position. Gates argues:

Pratt’s category works well in describing male, imperialist travel writers and helps highlight the connections between expansionism and appropriative aestheticism. And in several ways the texts of the Victorian female sublime resemble the works of ‘the-monarch-of-all-I-survey’. [...] But the two oeuvres do differ substantially: the Victorian female sublime emphasized not power *over* nature but the power *of* nature in a given place, and not a rhetoric of presence so much as a rhetoric based in absence, especially absence of the self. The women who engaged in this female sublime featured themselves as witnesses or participants, not monarchs.¹⁰²

In line with this argument, Maria H. Frawley notes the ‘special care that many women travel writers took to evoke the sensory and sensual qualities of the natural environment’.¹⁰³ She also refers to ‘the capacity of some women’s travel writing to co-opt a masculine rhetoric of conquest (more typically associated with imperialist writing) in order to challenge nineteenth-century assumptions about women’s essential nature and bodily fragility.’¹⁰⁴ The kinds of questions that we need to bear in mind when reading women’s writing about Wales is to what extent they follow these same patterns. To what degree do texts about Wales aestheticize the landscape and utilise descriptions which have density of meaning? Is Wales a place of the ‘female sublime’ in travel writing, and, if so, does this translate into the more hybrid texts and the short stories of that period?

The Sketch

¹⁰¹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 205.

¹⁰² Barbara T. Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), pp. 169-70.

¹⁰³ Maria H. Frawley, ‘Borders and Boundaries, Perspectives and Place: Victorian Women’s Travel Writing’, in *Intrepid Women: Victorian Artists Travel*, ed Jordana Pomeroy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 27-38 (p. 31).

¹⁰⁴ Frawley, ‘Borders and Boundaries’, p. 32

It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on the role of the sketch, particularly as it features so frequently in travel literature and regional accounts and reinforces further links to the short story. A literary cousin to the short story, the sketch is defined as being

A short composition, dramatic, narrative, or descriptive. [...] As a kind of prose narrative, a sketch is more modest than a short story, showing less development in plot or characterization. The term is also applied to brief descriptions of people (the ‘character sketch’) or places.¹⁰⁵

The sketch also encompasses the visual. In this sense, a sketch is defined, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as a ‘rough drawing or delineation of something, giving the outlines or prominent features without the detail.’ Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the term altered somewhat to mean ‘a drawing or painting of a slight or unpretentious nature’, a shift which is associated with ‘suitable’ pastimes for women into the nineteenth century. Commenting on the ‘extraordinary range and variety’ in Victorian women’s travel writing, Frawley notes that ‘this range is evident in a record both textual and visual, for many women documented their encounters with sketches, drawings, paintings, and, later in the century, photographs.’¹⁰⁶ What is particularly useful, in terms of linking the short story with travel writing and sketching, is the overlapping qualities of the two types of representation:

far from being mutually exclusive techniques, the textual and the visual are alike crucial to the experience of the Victorian woman who traveled and are interwoven in women’s travel writing from the period. Victorian women travel writers made abundant use of the verbal “sketch” to impart information, as titles of such works [...] indicate.¹⁰⁷

Frawley comments on the artistic elements at work, noting that these “sketches” offered by many travel writers deployed perspective, horizon, distance, color, and shade in ways

¹⁰⁵ ‘Sketch’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e1063> [accessed 13 October 2012].

¹⁰⁶ Frawley, ‘Borders and Boundaries’, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ Frawley, ‘Borders and Boundaries’, p. 34

designed to evoke visual images of their subjects and to control the gaze of their readers.’¹⁰⁸

This once again leads back to Mary Louise Pratt’s discussion of rhetorical devices at play in this kind of writing – the painterly eye that in some way opens up ideas about power in relation to the viewer and that which is viewed. The sketch is also important as a ‘tributary form’, according to Ian Reid, in the history of the short story, alongside the yarn, Märchen, parable and fable.¹⁰⁹ Reid writes:

There is a broad initial distinction between writing about conditions and writing about events. On the one hand primary emphasis falls on what some thing, place or person is like; on the other, it falls on what happens. The former, then, is predominantly descriptive, while the latter follows a line of action. [...] The first of these is a sketch; the second, having an anecdotal core, usually develops into a tale, and more particularly into a yarn.¹¹⁰

Several of the texts under consideration in this chapter focus primarily on what ‘some thing, place or person is like’ without developing any further narrative complexity, remaining cursory and brief but drawing attention to valuable cultural practices.

Narrative Strategies in Home Tour Writing

During the eighteenth century, there was a shift in popular destinations for tourists, including a reassessment of Britain as a suitable place for tourism. Travel to customary European ‘Grand Tour’ destinations became increasingly fraught during the later decades of the century, especially in the wake of the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic wars. Zoë Kinsley’s *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* offers an interesting perspective on the role women played in writing the home tour. While her study extends only as far as 1812, it does offer, like the work of Pratt, an analytical model for discussing the common preoccupations in this kind of writing. She notes ‘three descriptive trends which proliferate’ in women’s home tour writing: ‘the utilization of paradisiacal and Arcadian imagery;

¹⁰⁸ Frawley, ‘Borders and Boundaries’, p. 34.

¹⁰⁹ Ian Reid, *The Short Story* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 30-42.

¹¹⁰ Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 30.

representation of the inhabitants of the sites of travel via motifs of savagery; and [descriptions of] manners and customs [...] which dwell upon the issue of class difference.’¹¹¹ Referring to Mary Louise Pratt’s article ‘Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen’ (1985)¹¹² Kinsley complicates Pratt’s argument somewhat:

However, in the very attempt to put down and present as distinctive the qualities of Welsh, Scottish or English character, what is actually brought to the surface in [...] home tour narratives [...] is the fluidity of national and regional traits across geographical borderlines, so travellers increasingly rely upon a discursive method which emphasizes resemblance to, rather than distinction from, other cultures.¹¹³

What Kinsley’s study also underlines is the problems surrounding gender-based critiques of travel narratives. Previous studies have often made assumptions regarding women’s writing – that they ‘never obtain an objective perspective, are always interested in the domestic and, therefore, appropriately feminine realms of the places they visit, and always identify with the objectified ‘Other’, the native of the foreign land.’¹¹⁴ Kinsley quotes from Mary Russell’s *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travellers and their World* (1994), which argues that ‘women’s travel writing is characterised by detail, and by empathy with the inhabitants of the sites of travel’.¹¹⁵ Russell describes women travel writers thus:

They brought to their part the things that they were good at: an ability to listen, to empathize, to assimilate. They became observers, not of places but of people, and we owe them an eternal debt, for their records of sights and happenings complemented the scientific data remitted by male explorers. Used to the minutiae of the household, they observed the trees within the wood, but because of this their observations were dismissed as being trivial.¹¹⁶

Kinsley draws attention to Russell’s conception of women’s travel writing as ‘a complement to the more serious activities of men’ which ‘undermine[s] their work and limit[s] our

¹¹¹ Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, p. 155.

¹¹² In this article, Pratt talks about the discourse of manners and customs and how this discourse is normalizing by turning individuals into a collective ‘they’. See Pratt, *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1, ‘Race, Writing, and Difference’ (Autumn, 1985), 119-143.

¹¹³ Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, p. 169.

¹¹⁴ Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁵ Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travellers and their World* (London: Collins, 1988), p. 213.

understanding of it' while the 'insistence that all women be "good at" the same things ignores the diversity and complexity of the travel writings they produce.'¹¹⁷ Kinsley also underlines the other issues which impact upon travel narratives, aside from gender, including 'their class, their reason for travelling, their travelling companions, the home environment that they are travelling away from and the cultural and geographical location that they journey into.'¹¹⁸ The texts under consideration in this chapter vary significantly in the ways in which the author identifies with the people and places they describe. Class, for instance, plays a large part in Amy Lane's 'Nancy of the Village Inn' or 'Old Peggy Morris', especially in her discussion of the women, their habits, customs and descriptions of their homes, and often smacks of condescension rather than identification.

As well as noting the ways in which locations are described in terms of paradisiacal imagery and their inhabitants through savagery, Kinsley comments on the recurrence of descriptions of manners and customs 'which dwell upon the issue of class difference' in home tour narratives – an aspect which has significant implications for the texts under discussion in this chapter.¹¹⁹ In addition to these rhetorical strategies, these authors often focus on domestic interiors which are organised, regulated and neat. This preoccupation with order suggests an anxiety about difference that permeates many of these texts, and suggests a desire, which often has a class-related inflection, to contain this difference.

Narrative of Community

The work of Sandra A. Zagarell on 'narrative of community' also seems particularly useful when trying to place these texts within a history of both travel literature and women's writing more generally. Fictions in this genre 'take as their subject the life of a community [...] and

¹¹⁷ Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, p. 8.

¹¹⁸ Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, p. 9.

¹¹⁹ Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, p. 155.

portray the minute and quite ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself as an entirety.¹²⁰ Having roots in texts such as Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), which used the vernacular to represent folk culture, the genre seems to have flourished from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and encompasses more well-known texts such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851-3) and Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896).

Zagarell highlights the genre's important functions, which include presenting and preserving patterns, customs and activities through which 'traditional communities perpetuated themselves'.¹²¹ Perhaps most significantly for the texts considered here, Zagarell refers to 'participant/observer narrators' who seek to lessen the distance between community life and that of the modern world. Throughout this thesis, I refer to 'participant-observer' narrators to underline the pull between the two perspectives, rather than 'participant/observer' which suggests the narrator is one thing or the other, but not necessarily both at the same time. While this may seem like a minor point, it is very important to the analysis as the texts discussed feature these kinds of narrators who are continually negotiating the pull of both participant and observer perspective.¹²² This type of narrator emerges from anthropology, specifically ethnography, the 'study of the culture and social organization of a particular group or community', and refers to 'both the data-gathering of anthropology and the development of analyses of particular peoples, settings, or ways of life.'¹²³ Ethnographic practices are generally divided into two methods – 'one based on survey and travel data gathered by missionaries and other amateur observers' while the other is 'based on direct

¹²⁰ Sandra A. Zagarell, 'Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 13:3 (1988), 498-527 (p. 499).

¹²¹ Zagarell, 'Narrative of Community', p. 500.

¹²² See Chapter Two for further discussion of my rationale.

¹²³ See 'ethnography' in *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed Craig Calhoun, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195123715.001.0001/acref-9780195123715-e-561> [accessed 10 December 2012].

observation by the trained anthropologist', a figure often referred to as a 'participant observer'.¹²⁴ The mode of writing Marilyn Butler identifies as 'Tales and Sketches' in her own work on Edgeworth, also seems to be part of Zagarell's category.¹²⁵ Focusing on 'the life of a particular locality', these 'Tales and Sketches' fall somewhere between regional fiction and travel literature, combining discussion of place with manners, customs, dress, folklore and dialect, and are told from the perspective of the traveller. It is a necessarily hybrid genre, and as such is particularly useful in tracing the emergence of the short story genre in Wales as a whole. There is, I would argue, a strong correlation between Butler's definition of the genre and the German Village Story as described by E.K. Bennett.¹²⁶ If we take 'Tales and Sketches' to be a fairly broad generic subcategory which encompasses aspects of both travel literature and fiction, it would seem to be particularly fruitful for the purposes of this chapter, especially as most of the texts discussed invoke this genre through their titles.

The first text to be explored, by the Scottish travel writer and popular novelist, Catherine Sinclair (1800-1864), is *Hill and Valley, or, Hours in England and Wales* (1838), a lengthy travel narrative written as a series of letters. This text was revised to *Hill and Valley, or, Wales and the Welsh* for its second and third editions (of 1839 and 1840) and reprinted once again in 1860 as *Sketches and Stories of Wales and the Welsh*. Sinclair is interesting as a self-styled 'home tour' writer who travelled around many parts of Britain and beyond, including several tours of her native Scotland. She documented these tours in *Scotland and the Scotch; or, the Western Circuit* (1840) and *Shetland and the Shetlanders; or the Northern Circuit* (1840) – volumes which are crammed with details about the landscape, its people,

¹²⁴ See 'ethnography', in *Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (2002).

¹²⁵ Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction', in Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 2.

¹²⁶ The German Village Story is discussed in more detail in the Introduction to this thesis.

customs and traditions. She seemed to find travelling to the most remote and under-documented areas of the British Isles fascinating, and was able to comment from both an insider and outsider perspective – as British, but decidedly not Welsh. Although extremely popular in her lifetime, Sinclair has been neglected to some extent, with recent attention focused mainly on her children's novel, *Holiday House: A Series of Tales* (1839). The second text discussed is Amy Lane's *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* (1847), a fairly short text which incorporates a range of brief sketches, prototypical short stories and essayistic pieces, as well as some rather unremarkable poetry. Apart from the biographical details which can be gleaned from Lane's sketches, and which indicate her Welsh heritage, as well as detailed knowledge embedded within the text of Welsh customs, nothing is known about Lane's life. The text appears to have only had one modest print run but includes 'Her Most Gracious Majesty Adelaide, the Queen Dowager' and Lady Charlotte Guest as subscribers.

Sharing similar thematic ground is Anne Beale's (1816-1900) hybrid text, *The Vale of the Towy: or, Sketches in South Wales* (1844). Echoing the shift from a focus on place to an overview of the people and their customs in Sinclair's titles, *The Vale of the Towy* was reprinted as *Traits and Stories of the Welsh Peasantry* (1849) and again 'very much changed and heavily edited' as *Seven Years for Rachel, or, Welsh Pictures Sketched from Life* (1886).¹²⁷ While not Welsh by birth, Beale made a home for herself in Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, and wrote favourably about Welsh life in this text and several of her novels. This chapter also considers two short stories with strong parallels to the 'Tales and Sketches' genre by Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), 'The Well of Pen-Morfa' (1850) and 'The Doom of the Griffiths' (1858). Again, Gaskell was not Welsh but had family connections in Wales,

¹²⁷ Jane Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 125. Aaron attributes the changes in subsequent editions as a deliberate attempt on Beale's part to counter the findings of the *Blue Books*. As these editions vary quite substantially, only the first edition is considered in this chapter.

including an uncle who lived near Porthmadog.¹²⁸ She travelled to North Wales several times, including for her honeymoon in 1832, and seems to have been well-acquainted with the country and even its language. A section of her 1853 novel, *Ruth*, which explores the position of the fallen woman in Victorian society, is also set in Wales. The eponymous protagonist Ruth, who is depicted as pure but naïve, is seduced by her upper-class lover, Henry Bellingham, after she has been dismissed from her job as a seamstress. He abandons her in Wales, where they have taken a holiday, and she goes on to give birth to and bring up his illegitimate child.

This chapter considers the correlations and contrasts between these outsider views on Wales with those written from within the heart of Welsh culture, including Sara Maria Saunders's 'Welsh Rural Sketches', published in *Young Wales* (1896-9), and Allen Raine's posthumous collection, *All in a Month, and Other Stories* (1908). These last two texts are very different in some ways, as Saunders' encapsulates much of what constitutes Zagarell's definition of a narrative of community as well as strong women's voices. Raine, on the other hand, makes use of many of the devices associated with travel writing, especially through aestheticization. Another perspective comes from Bertha Thomas's short story collection, *Picture Tales from Welsh Hills* (1912), which rests somewhere between an inside and an outside perspective. Thomas, it has recently been discovered, was not Welsh by birth but had strong connections to Wales and appears to have spent a significant amount of time in the country. The majority of these stories are set in Llandeilo and again seem to incorporate an interesting mix of tropes associated with both travel and 'tales and sketches'. Finally, the work of Pembrokeshire socialites Eve and Lilian Bowen-Rowlands is discussed, alongside wider issues of genre, sub-genre (such as crime fiction) and setting. The Bowen-Rowlands

¹²⁸ Gaskell's uncle, Samuel Holland, owned Plas Penrhyn, where Gaskell spent several holidays. Her Welsh-set fictions are based around this area.

sisters have received very little literary attention, despite their writing being fast paced, witty, and bold. These texts, though obviously very different in terms of means of production, readership and style, when taken together, open up new and undervalued avenues for tracing a tradition of women's short fiction in Wales.

Catherine Sinclair's *Hill and Valley*

In the preface to *Hill and Valley*, Catherine Sinclair refers to the text being a 'very miscellaneous journal', underlining its aim of recording the 'every-day incidents of a pleasant excursion, accompanied by the recollections and remarks which might naturally occur in recalling the scenery of a beautiful and interesting country'.¹²⁹ However, the rest of the text is written as therapeutic epistles, to Sinclair's invalid 'Scotch Cousin', with each chapter forming an individual letter.¹³⁰ What becomes clear from the very outset is that, in terms of familiarity with Wales, Sinclair is writing from a position of knowledge, having visited the country several times and so feels 'competent to hazard an opinion of Wales' (preface). Despite the confident tone and witty descriptions that emerge as the text unfolds, Sinclair is at pains to emphasise the 'feminine' aspects of her writing. Addressing her bedridden cousin, she remarks: 'You once gave up drawing in despair of ever making a straight stroke, and I fear my attempts to paint with pen and ink will prove equally unskilful and defective' (p. 100). Yet she writes on the very same page in a tone that once again affirms her place as a knowledgeable viewer, using the imagery of painting to describe the 'beauties of Bangor': 'Nature has here used her brush in a masterly style, and for boldness of outline and splendour of colouring, the landscape could scarcely be excelled either by Thomson or Turner' (p. 100).

¹²⁹ Catherine Sinclair, *Hill and Valley, or, Hours in England and Wales* (New York: Robert Carter, 1838), preface (unnumbered). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹³⁰ Sinclair uses the device of the cousin in other texts also, such as *Scotland and the Scotch* (Edinburgh: William Whyte & Co, 1840).

What is also interesting about Sinclair's rationale for writing the account is its comparative nature, as she states: 'Being perfectly satisfied that we had *thoroughly done* Scotland, you and I had long entertained so laudable a curiosity to investigate how our neighbours in Wales were accommodated, and what prospects they enjoyed' (p. 5). The text's comparative aspects perhaps explain the depth and particularity of the detail which Sinclair goes into when discussing the inhabitants, customs and traditions of Wales.¹³¹ She notes 'agreeable surprise' (p. 1) when her companion, referred to only as 'A--', 'one morning unexpectedly started the idea of escorting [her] on a grand tour of the picturesque, to the most distant extremity of Glamorganshire' (p. 1). It is clear from this quotation that this will be a fairly conventional home tour in search of picturesque landscapes. As well as the confident and authoritative tone, which has evolved from her previous experiences, what differentiates Sinclair's account from some of her contemporary travel writers is her arch wit, a quality which infuses much of the narrative. This wit is particularly apparent when she goes on to make a joke referring to the transportation of convicts to Australia, adding that the journey is 'not quite so far as a certain charitable friend of ours gave out by mistake, that we were going to New South Wales, where certainly few people volunteer to travel' (p. 1).

For the modern reader, one of the striking aspects of the opening sections is the amount of time it takes to reach Wales itself, as Sinclair narrates the journey from Scotland until nearly a fifth of the way through the narrative. However, when she finally reaches

¹³¹ In the 1841 edition of *Scotland and the Scotch*, Sinclair remarks, with typical tongue-in-cheek humour, that 'strangers about to explore the northern regions, vainly inquire for any recent work, to act as a clue in conducting them through the labyrinth of our Highland hills and glens, affording the general information, and local anecdotes, which add life and animation to that beautiful scenery. While the press abounds with interesting pages, describing the present state of the Pawnees, Zoolus, Red Indians, Thugs, London Pickpockets, New Zealanders, and other barbarians, hardly one stray journal has ventured forth, these many years, respecting the almost unknown tribes of Caledonia.' See Catherine Sinclair, *Scotland and the Scotch* (Edinburgh: William Whyte & Co, 1841), pp. v-vi.

Wales, pausing to visit Powis Castle and then Llangollen, it seems worth the arduous coach journey:

Every one continues partial to the first new country in which he [sic] has performed a tour; but certainly for richness of scenery, natural grandeur, and real antiquity, I have seen no place which can excel Wales, where we had already enjoyed some pleasant excursions, and were now preparing to climb up real undeniable mountains, to see the inhabitants living on Welsh mutton and Welsh rabbits, dressing in Welsh flannel and Welsh wigs, and listening to Welsh harpers, the older the better.

(p. 80)

While the key tropes that Mary Louise Pratt identifies are clearly at work in this description, with its emphasis on the almost overwhelming vibrancy of the landscape she surveys and the authenticity of the history, traditions and customs, the tone is comic and somewhat mocking rather than a 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' that Pratt also identifies as an important textual strategy. The repetition of 'Welsh' certainly suggests that Sinclair is perhaps making fun of this search for 'authentic' culture.

Descriptions which focus on domestic details, such as women's clothes, diet and housing seem to concentrate on the lower classes. Sinclair writes that '[a]ll women among the lower orders in Wales wear men's hats over muslin caps, and a long blue cloth cloak, which gives them, at some distance, the air of ladies a moment before dismount[ing] from horseback' (p. 115). The diet in which the 'common-people indulge very largely', of 'ale, butter toast, and bacon', makes them 'grow enormously fat' (p. 96). During a rain shower, Sinclair takes refuge in a cottage in which she is addressed in Welsh. Although she 'return[s] thanks in English', she makes the point that 'there is a universal language of courtesy which can never be misunderstood when kindness is intended on both sides' (p. 118), suggesting the similarities between Welsh and English-speaking cultures. However, she returns to the position of the knowledgeable, educated viewer as she examines the room, and begins to underline the class differences apparent in the scene she looks upon. Surveying the 'clean and

comfortable room’, replete with ‘dog, cat, poultry, and pigs, exhibiting a great appearance of cheerfulness and plenty’, she ‘observe[s] a broad flat loaf of brown bread, like a tea-tray, suspended from the roof, with a carving-knife dangling beside it, wreaths of onions, and graceful draperies of herrings’ (p. 118). While the earlier scene in Bangor has been compared to the landscape painters Thomson and Turner, this domestic interior is ‘quite a study for Ostade or Teniers’ (p. 118). Both the Dutch painter Adriaen van Ostade (1610-85) and the Flemish painter David Teniers II (1610-90), produced similar types of work, in the mode of peasant genre paintings and emblematic tableaux. Ostade, for example, was well known in his early career for his paintings of peasant life, especially scenes of domestic comfort, while Teniers also painted peasants inside their homes, as well as, in later years, at open-air fairs. There is a sense, however, that once again Sinclair is gently poking fun at these artistic conventions – especially in her references to the ‘graceful draperies of herrings’. Yet if we look at similar artistic forms in nineteenth-century Ireland, these depictions may well carry more weight than it would initially appear. As critics of depictions of Irish peasants have emphasised, both in literature and the visual arts, it is a sense of ‘national character’ that ‘exhibited itself most strongly and visibly in the rural poor.’¹³² If Sinclair’s text is put into this context, it may well contradict some of the negative images of rural poverty found in the *Blue Books* report.

Amy Lane’s *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh*

Amy Lane’s *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* should be considered as much travel writing on Wales as actual sketches, in that it focuses on customs, places, and people in a similar, if more fleeting, manner to Catherine Sinclair. However, as it exhibits many features which are

¹³² Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland 1750-1930* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p. 116.

closely associated with the propriety of women's sketches, it needs to be examined with the theory and framework of sketching in mind. As previously mentioned, Lane's relationship with Wales is difficult to ascertain, aside from internal evidence which suggests she visited Wales many times, both in childhood and as an adult, and that her father was Welsh. As the Preface states the text was written in the Clifton area of Bristol, it might well be the case that the author is the same Amy Lane, born in 1781, who is listed as living in Clifton in the 1851 census. If this is indeed the case, then Lane would have been in her mid-sixties when *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* was published. The occupation of the Amy Lane in the census, of 'Landed Proprietor', suggests that she has come from a privileged background, which would again fit. Amy Lane notes in the preface to *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* that '[t]he following sketches [are] introduced to the notice of the public with unaffected diffidence, having nothing to recommend them, save their truth and simplicity' and, having been 'collected into a small volume', are 'with much respect, presented to the subscribers by their most obliged and grateful' author.¹³³ In the first sketch, entitled 'The Father', Lane underplays her level of education, noting that she 'learnt to read imperceptibly, from hanging about' her father and 'being told the names of the letters as an amusement' (p. 3). She is also self-deprecating, remarking that, compared to learning to read, 'As a sempstress I cannot boast of making equal proficiency' (p. 3).

Despite cultivating an image of deference and propriety, the text often undercuts this image in its enthusiasm for describing the dirt and poverty associated with lower class lives. 'Old Peggy Morris', for example, includes intimate details of her 'old favourite' (p. 42) Peggy, and her 'desolate hovel' (p. 47): '[t]here was her bed, dark and ruinous, a little table with a bit of broken looking glass upon it, a torn Bible, a stool an iron pot, a wooden bowl

¹³³ Amy Lane, *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* (London: Hamilton & Adams, 1847), p. iii. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

and spoon, a cracked basin, [...] and little else, if I except a few delf [*sic*] dishes, arranged on a worm-eaten dresser' (p. 47). The sheer number of references to items being broken or damaged suggests an almost 'unfeminine' fascination with the squalor of lower class living. In Lane's comfortable, middle-class life, the intimate details of her own existence are barely registered because they are not deemed proper to discuss. The reader is given no details, for example, of her own sleeping arrangements or the bedroom in which she sleeps when visiting Wales. Lane, in a sense, can experience this lower-class squalor voyeuristically through the 'appropriate' form of the sketch – by categorising and compartmentalising Peggy's worldly goods, she is, in effect, reducing her to a position which verges on the very edge of humanity. Here Lane's writing shares much with colonial accounts of travel, in which supposedly uncivilised indigenous peoples are given 'order' and meaning by the coloniser.

In the introduction to *Travel Writing, Form and Empire*, Paul Smethurst notes the shifting and potentially subversive position of women travel writers:

Women travel writers are ambivalent figures in the imperial context, both validating and invalidating the interpretative models of gender and empire where the two impinge on each other. [...] In [certain] situations the presence of women travellers might be conceived as counter-hegemonic. (p. 8)

While his analysis looks directly at countries colonized as part of imperial expansion, such as Africa and India, there are several aspects of his analysis which could be appropriate when discussing Wales. Smethurst continues:

[B]y importing and promulgating European forms of domesticity, with their familiarizing and comforting sense of order, [women travel writers] introduced satellite cultures into the colonies. These served empire by imposing imperial order through a colonial style that insinuated the dominant culture's authority through particular structures and spatial codes. The orderly domestic interior, with its (to outsiders) intimidating array of cutlery (a cultural code that signifies class), is, on a smaller scale, comparable to the grid-like urban designs, zoning, and colonial architecture imposed on foreign sites, all of which were designed to impose imperial

authority through imperialist spatial form – the outward manifestation of the structures of meaning and interpretative models underlying imperial order.¹³⁴

Wales is obviously not a colony in the same sense that the countries Smethurst discusses are; however, his reference to order and spatial codes strikes a familiar chord when thinking about the ways in which domestic interiors are represented in the texts under discussion, especially those of Amy Lane and Anne Beale. Instead of the representations of imported colonial order, we find indigenous *disorder*. This preoccupation with order suggests an anxiety about difference that permeates many of these texts, and suggests a desire to contain this difference. As Zoë Kinsley has argued, ‘British travellers touring their own island encounter difference just as travellers “abroad” do, and their difference is commonly given expression through rhetorical gestures that imitate or echo the motifs of travel texts relating foreign journeys.’¹³⁵ If we consider the parallels between this almost excessive emphasis on order and spatial codes within the domestic sphere and Pratt’s argument that density of meaning creates value for the explorer’s achievement, it could be argued that the traveller’s gaze utilises similar strategies within the domestic interior to those describing landscape.

Beyond its desire to speak for Wales, *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* shares some other common ground with Catherine Sinclair’s text. While *Hill and Valley* pays a great deal of attention to both landscape and manners and customs, *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* keeps its focus narrow, on small, domestic details of local manners and customs, such as modes of dress and the interiors of farmhouses. In ‘My Cousin Betsy’, Lane eschews descriptions of grand vistas, and simply refers to ‘arriving at a pretty secluded farm house’ (p.

¹³⁴ Paul Smethurst, ‘Introduction’, in *Travel Writing, Form and Empire*, ed. Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 8-9.

¹³⁵ Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, p. 2.

31) on her first visit to Wales.¹³⁶ In contrast, her cousin, Betsy, whom she meets again for the first time since childhood, is described in great detail: ‘Yet what a change! I scarcely knew her. She had adopted the costume of the country, wore a mob with long ears, loosely pinned, which covered her chin, and over that a beaver hat’ (p. 31). When she sees Betsy again after ‘many years [have] elapsed’ (p. 32), she again describes her clothing and appearance: ‘in addition to her mob, she had superadded a white muslin handkerchief over her head, beneath which her pretty black eyes were archly reconnoitring’ (p. 32). Later in the sketch, Lane returns to Betsy’s appearance: ‘For I have omitted saying, that as years have increased, she has, agreeably to Welsh fashion, increased the warm clothing of her head; and, beside sundry other coverings, you never now see her without the addition of a beaver hat’ (p. 37). Lane, it seems apparent, does not approve of her cousin’s apparel.

The combination of density of detail and a sense of mastery of that detail can be found in the later stages of this sketch, particularly when describing the interior of Betsy’s home:

My Cousin’s dwelling is a good Welsh farm house, standing on the confines of one of her husband’s estates by the road side. It contains a parlour, a hall, a kitchen, and a dining room for the labourers, with bed-rooms. [...] I like to see the neat dresser with the ranges of earthen plates (all the wooden utensils being kept in the dining room), the jugs of all shapes and patterns hanging from the rows of shelves, giving an appearance of neatness and comfort.’ (pp. 36-7)

Again, we seem to be approaching the kind of tableau similar to that described in Sinclair’s text, with its crockery and utensils neatly arranged. What differentiates *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* from *Hill and Valley* is the seriousness with which Lane describes these interiors.

At the same time, the focus on order in the domestic sphere that Smethurst draws attention to in colonial travel writing is again at work. In Lane’s text, there is a clear demarcation between the neatness of Betsy’s house and the dirt and disorder of Peggy Morris. The

¹³⁶ It is interesting to note that Lane, like Sinclair, makes use of the figure of the female cousin, which is emblematic, perhaps, of the familial bonds between England and Wales.

reference to Betsy's house as 'standing on the confines of one of her husband's estates' suggests the size of the land Betsy's husband owns as well as the couple's elevated status as landowners. If we probe more closely, it could be argued that Lane criticises Betsy's markers of Welshness (her headwear being a good example) but praises those that could be transferred into an English household, such as the plates and jugs on display. In another sketch, entitled 'Nancy of the Village Inn', Lane remarks on the hospitality she receives during her stay at the inn. One particular detail stand out is the China plate 'bearing the effigies of her most gracious Majesty and Prince Albert' (p. 61), which Lane praises. Here, in a single image, Lane is inscribing a symbol of aristocracy, English class hierarchies and the British Empire into the very fabric of Welsh life.

Although clearly interested in describing Welsh customs and traditions, these sketches remain somewhat static, lacking the wit and humour of Sinclair's text. While the text contains some fascinating details concerning Welsh life and customs, the narratives as a whole do not have the same vigour or liveliness of writing as Sinclair's. Furthermore, even if Lane does act as a participant-observer who lessens the distance between the community she describes and that of the society she is writing for, she does not manage to avoid a tone of condescension. Indeed, the reader is left with the sense that Lane feels somewhat superior to the people she describes, even when discussing her own family members, such as Betsy.

The sketch 'Remarks', from the later sections of the text, concerning the general manners, habits and customs of the Welsh, represents another interesting cross-section of some of the key issues found in travel writing, including feminine propriety, as well as the subject of class. Lane writes:

Among the popular literature of the present day, that which describes the scenery of Scotland and Ireland, with the manners and customs of the interesting inhabitants, have been so ably written, that I have regretted that a people so peculiar in their habits and opinions as are the Welsh, – having resisted any amalgamation with the English

for so many centuries, viewing them as their conquerors, and affecting to despise their superior civilization, – should have so long lacked a narrator of their remaining peculiarities.

(p. 71)

Interestingly, she underlines a similar concern found in *Hill and Valley*, when Sinclair notes that ‘Travellers may go farther and fare worse than in Wales, so it is surprising that while many libraries boast of possessing “England and the English”, or “Germany and the Germans”, no author has yet favoured the world with “Wales and the Welsh”!’¹³⁷ This suggests that, by the time of Lane’s *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh*, published nearly a decade after the first edition of Sinclair’s text, Wales’ manners and customs were still assumed to be under-documented. Having discussed a substantial amount of detail, ranging from child-rearing to the discipline of servants, Lane continues: ‘It will be understood that these observations regard the country people; the Welsh gentry are, as other gentry, adopting habits of civilization’ (p. 74). Lane distances herself somewhat from the position of competent narrator, remarking that ‘I could wish to draw the attention of some able writer to this subject before these ancient habits are obliterated’ (p. 71). Yet, at the same time, she seems to strive for a kind of narrative mastery over details pertaining to the lower classes. While the use of the word ‘peculiar’ could relate to the sense of being marked out by distinctive social and religious practices, it also suggests the more obvious meaning of being odd and strange. In any case, the use of the term ‘civilization’ suggests that the lower classes are being associated with savagery and a lower form of humanity, as with the figure of Peggy in ‘Old Peggy Morris’.

Anne Beale’s *The Vale of the Towy; or, Sketches in South Wales*

Compared to Amy Lane’s *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh*, *The Vale of the Towy* (1844) is a fairly long text, encompassing over three hundred pages, and only a flavour of its contents

¹³⁷ Sinclair, *Hill and Valley*, p. 2.

can be imparted in this chapter. Somerset-born Anne Beale, a governess who came to Wales in 1841 from an English farming family, was an outsider who attempted to immerse herself in the culture of the area around Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, where she chose to settle. The text explores the topography, customs, traditions and the people living in the area around Llandeilo, and focuses especially on the experiences of Rachel – ‘one of the few delicate-looking Welshwomen’ (p. 23) – as well as her father, Jackey Bach; Rachel’s sweetheart, William and various other colourful village personalities.¹³⁸ This description of the text goes some way towards underlining the extent to which Beale is interested in describing the processes which knit communities together, as in other more well-known narratives of community, especially surrounding key community events such as marriages and funerals. A brief glance at the chapter headings alone gives a sense of the text’s ‘Tales and Sketches’ framework, although the content differs somewhat from the titles suggested. Titles include ‘An Introduction to Wales’, ‘A Welsh Village’, ‘Dynevor Park’, ‘A Country Town’, ‘A Farm House’ and ‘Grongar Hill’, the last of which is also the subject of John Dyer’s (1699–1757) famous topographical poem, published in 1726, of the same name. Chapter titles also indicate Beale’s interest in social traditions and customs, such as ‘All-Hallows’ Eve’, ‘Hollantide Fair’ and ‘The Staffell’, which refers to the ‘*trousseau* of the lower classes in Wales, but [...] embraces a greater number of articles than that fashionable appendage to a lady’s bridal’ (p. 280). Other chapters appear more like short stories, including ‘Mad Moll’s Story’, ‘A Female Pedlar’, and ‘The Ivorite’s Funeral’, the last of which focuses on Welsh funeral rites, and Beale’s obvious disapproval of certain traditions relating to them.

Beale’s text is particularly significant because it pushes generic boundaries much further than Sinclair or Lane, straddling the borderlines between multiple genres, not least the

¹³⁸ Anne Beale, *The Vale of the Towey, or, Sketches in South Wales* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1844), p. vii. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

travelogue, the novel and the romance, as well as the short story and the short story cycle (especially as short story cycles are themselves often considered narratives of community).

Richard C. Sha has emphasised the ways in which women's genre choices were vitally important in maintaining a sense of propriety in the nineteenth century:

Whereas “novel” and “romance” had distinctly improper overtones, especially when written and read by women, “sketch” declared female propriety [...] Female verbal sketchers recognized that they could intensify their propriety by displaying consciousness of their limitations, and by openly showing deference to the more learned, more mature, and more finished productions of men.¹³⁹

While Beale's title suggests that it falls squarely under the 'Tales and Sketches' genre, avoiding any 'improper overtones', its content does not fully follow these generic conventions, thus allowing Beale much more creative scope. Displaying many of the traits Sha's work on women's sketches highlights, Beale states that 'In bringing these [sketches] before the public, [she] neither expect[ed] them to attract great attention, nor to obtain general perusal' (p. viii), suggesting that they were not originally intended for publication. She goes on to say that:

They are no highly-coloured paintings, wrought up to the taste of the time – no tales of breathless interest – no whimsical or burlesque delineations of character; they are simply attempts at portraying persons and things truthfully as they exist, and if my art has not enabled me to bring them out as strongly as I could have wished, I have not, consciously, overcharged or distorted them.

(p. viii)

Beale's choice of language is important here as she utilises tropes of painting, as does Sinclair, concerning colour, outline and perspective to underline that her work is, in fact, limited. A little later, in 'An Introduction to Wales', she refers to her work as 'simple country sketches' which she 'fear[s] will lack interest from the very circumstance of their simplicity' (p. 8). However, when the reader peruses *The Vale of the Towey* beyond the first few pages,

¹³⁹ Richard C. Sha, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch in British Romanticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 113.

this sense of artlessness is proven to be false as Beale depicts the lives of residents of the Towey Vale with vivid, vibrant language and descriptions which are far beyond rough sketches. Her reasons for writing strike a chord with Kinsley's arguments about home tour travels as she describes when she 'came hither, a stranger' and was 'struck by the loveliness of the country, as well as by the characters, manners, and language of its primitive inhabitants' (pp. vii-viii). Encapsulating most of Kinsley's points in a single sentence, including the use of 'primitive' with its connotations of savagery, Beale goes on to emphasise the paradisiacal qualities of Wales as a place where 'Nature as she came fresh from the hand of her Maker' (pp. viii-ix) can be found and its inhabitants are full of 'their original simplicity and purity' (p. ix).

What is particularly striking is the way in which the tone and content shifts after the early chapters, from a descriptive account of Welsh places and customs to plot and character development. In the first 'sketch', or chapter, 'An Introduction to Wales', the initial descriptions are very similar to those found in Sinclair's *Hill and Valley*:

I leave the beautiful Wye [...] and enter at once upon Wales. Certainly it is a lovely country, I thought, as we passed through every diversity of home scenery. In the green vallies, rich in pasturage, the native black cattle and far-famed Welsh sheep were feeding, whilst they dotted the mountain side, also, with black and white. How spring-like and delightful looked the bright green hedges, interspersed with the white flowers of the hawthorn! [...] Smaller trees and underwood covered the hills, from which the white-washed cottage – really white-washed roof and walls – occasionally peeped, and smiled as its dark veil was partially withdrawn.

(pp. 2-3)

However, the richly descriptive language of this picturesque scene, again evoking the tropes of aestheticisation emphasised by Pratt, draws attention away from some of the ideological defects which are inherent in the text. Indeed, it cannot in any way be argued that Beale's representation of Wales is wholeheartedly positive. There is, as with Amy Lane's text, an underlying critique of rural poverty which emphasises a link between the Welsh lower classes

and slovenliness and laziness – a link which Jane Aaron has termed ‘a serious racial flaw.’¹⁴⁰

The narrator repeatedly makes unpleasant remarks about the Welsh national character, but then softens this approach with a discussion of Rachel’s exceptional domestic abilities.

Chapters are structured around overarching generalisations about the Welsh, which then hone in on specific details about Rachel. As the text unfolds, the structure slowly moves away from these generalisations to a portrait of Rachel’s almost idyllic life. In the second chapter, entitled ‘A Welsh Village’, the narrator declares that ‘[t]he insides of the Welsh cottages are generally as wretched as their outsides’ (p. 20). Beale goes on to describe the kind of scene a visitor might expect in some detail:

One small apartment, with an uneven mud floor, contains the family and effects; a miserably small window, half covered with paper panes, admits a scanty portion of light; a bed in one corner, and one or two turn-up beadsteads, looking like chests of drawers by day, prove the room to be both dormitory and refectory. And what a bed it is! –an immense square wooden thing, like a closet, opening with a kind of door at the side, and capable of containing, and does pretty generally contain, six or seven sleepers. The rest of the furniture is comprised in a table, a chair, a stool or bench, a pitcher, bucket, and such like articles. The ornamental part is a little earthenware on a rickety shelf or dresser.

(pp. 20-21)

Again, we are reminded of the type of scene described by Sinclair – the kind of tableau that would not be out of place in a peasant genre painting. The tone of the narrator does not improve until she turns to Jackey Bach’s cottage, ‘where exist comparative comfort and plenty’ (p. 22). The narrator approves of this cottage for no obvious reason, as it has ‘nothing particularly to mark its superiority over the other houses of the village’, although, significantly, it has ‘an air of neatness about the interior that announces the presence of some person who wishes to be as decent as poor means will permit’ (p. 22). Here, we are returned to the familiar gridlines of the coloniser’s perspective, the exception to the working-class rule that proves the savagery of the rest. By the time of the eighth chapter, ‘Grongar Hill’, Beale’s characters are beginning to be mentioned from the very first paragraph, and by the eleventh, ‘The Election’, the narrative surrounding Rachel has become the principal concern. The rest

¹⁴⁰ Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales*, p. 124.

of the chapters continue to make reference to customs and traditions, as well as landscapes, but the focus is primarily on Rachel's romance with William, her impending wedding and life beyond that point. Jane Aaron has written perceptively about the *Vale of the Towey*, commenting on 'well-meaning "white settler" mode, with an English narrator intent on helping the Welsh natives out of their darkness to the light of a superior civilisation.'¹⁴¹ This view of Beale's writing must, of course, be given due consideration, especially as the text may have fed some of the misconceptions of the Blue Books' authors. At the same time, it would be erroneous to discount Beale's text completely as aspects of her writing offer a rich repository of subject matter for later women writers and opens up questions concerning women's modes of writing.

As the text increasingly focuses on the fictional characters Beale has created, the original subject of Welsh life and customs, which should fall neatly under the heading of 'Tales and Sketches', shifts significantly, to the point that the text registers almost a sense of unease at its own generic slippage. Beale notes wryly that

my love for [Rachel] has led me far astray from the rules I laid down for myself when I began these sketches. Instead of druidical remains, old heroes, and old castles, I find myself engaged with the men and women of to-day, and know not how to quit a girl whom I have taken a fancy [...] Though I have not described this lovely valley, with its river, its brooks, its meadows, its glens, its woods, its old romantic towers, its cheerful villages and hamlets, and above all, its inhabitants, as they deserve, I have failed only because I wanted the skill[.]

(p. 321)

These concluding remarks reaffirm Beale's construction of herself as a proper, 'feminine', and supposedly inferior writer. I would argue, however, that this is a deliberate ploy to enable her, under the guise of the 'Tales and Sketches' framework, to reach beyond acceptable, 'feminine' generic boundaries, creating a text which is, in generic terms at least, unusually dynamic. It is the text's self-reflexivity and generic fluidity that makes it a particularly rich source of inspiration and influence for later women writers, coupled with its popularity and

¹⁴¹ Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales*, p. 124.

repeated republications. Beale's textual strategies, including the detached yet paradoxically involved participant-observer narrator, the focus on the propriety of properly ordered (female) domestic space, and the long-sighted gaze of the traveller which the text employs recur again and again in women's short fiction through to the 1930s and beyond, suggesting that her legacy is much more deep rooted than it might traditionally have been thought. As this chapter aims to highlight, Beale's place in a literary history of women's short fiction deserves to be re-evaluated to take account of her particularly important contribution to the genre and its conventions.

Elizabeth Gaskell's Welsh Fictions

In her second novel, *Ruth* (1853), the English writer Elizabeth Gaskell gently mocks the travellers and 'weather-bound tourists' visiting Wales who spend their time during bad weather 'loung[ing] away the days in touching up sketches, dressing flies, and reading over and over again for the twentieth time the few volumes they had brought with them'.¹⁴² For the novel's protagonist, the journey to Wales has a much more profound impact as the landscape imbues her with a 'new sense' of 'vast ideas of beauty and grandeur' (p. 56), while the vista of Snowdonia 'almost overpower[s]' her with 'solemn delight' (p. 56). Although Wales functions in some ways as a backdrop on which to depict the unmarried Ruth's liaison with Mr Bellingham, it is clearly a place Gaskell felt a deep connection with, not least because her infant son, William, died in Porthmadog.

The short stories Gaskell sets in Wales are markedly more detailed than *Ruth*, brimming with information about landscapes, living spaces, and customs and so share many characteristics with the portrayals of Welsh life found in Sinclair, Lane and Beale. 'The Well of Pen-Morfa' (1850), for example, is a melodramatic tale about a coquettish Welsh girl, Nest

¹⁴² Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 54. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

Gwynne, who is made lame by falling while collecting water from the well of the title, having worn her best clothes to impress her lover. Gaskell situates herself as an authoritative participant-observer narrator in this story, commenting that ‘I could tell you of a great deal which is peculiar and wild in these true Welsh people, who are what I suppose we English were a century ago’.¹⁴³ She also makes knowledgeable remarks about a range of issues, such as dress, much like Amy Lane, noting that ‘the pretty, hooded blue-cloth cloak is kept among the Welsh women as a church and market garment, and not commonly used’ (p. 128), which draws attention to the unsuitability of Nest’s garments for the job she was supposed to be completing. Gaskell also makes some comments on the general requirements of rural communities, including diet (and again touching on clothing), which are very reminiscent of Catherine Sinclair’s comments on the Welsh diet, but perhaps lacking the same humour:

Very little is required in those out-of-the-way Welsh villages. The wants of the people are very simple. Shelter, fire, a little oat-cake and buttermilk, and garden produce; perhaps some pork and bacon from the pig in winter; clothing, which is principally of home manufacture, and of the most enduring kind: these take very little money to purchase[.] (p. 125)

Here, Gaskell verges into the kind of ethnographic descriptions which recur throughout many writings on Wales, as if to somehow define the nation by its modest needs. Sinclair, Lane and Beale also take on this kind of commanding tone which suggests they have an overarching, detailed and accurate knowledge of the Welsh, but each of them uses the trope of the humble yet disingenuous narrator to distance themselves from complete mastery of their subject matter. Only once in ‘The Well of Pen-Morfa’ does the narrator’s authoritative stance waver as she refers to herself as ‘uninitiated’ (p. 123) regarding the confusing traditions of surnames in these areas. This largely confident and authoritative voice, however, becomes one which

¹⁴³ Elizabeth Gaskell, ‘The Well of Pen-Morfa’, in *The Moorland Cottage and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 124. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

later women writers would define themselves against, especially in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁴

The techniques identified by Mary Louise Pratt in travellers' accounts again emerge, as Gaskell describes the area around Pen-Morfa:

There are rocks high above Pen-Morfa; they are the same rocks that hang over Trê-Madoc, but near Pen-Morfa they sweep away, and are lost in the plain. Everywhere they are beautiful. The great, sharp ledges, which would otherwise look hard and cold, are adorned with the brightest-coloured moss, and the golden lichen. Close to, you see the scarlet leaves of the crane's-bill, and the tufts of the purple heather, which fill up every cleft and cranny; but, in the distance, you see only the general effect of infinite richness of colour, broken, here and there by great masses of ivy. At the foot of these rocks come a rich, verdant meadow or two; and then you are at Pen-Morfa. (p. 125)

The scene she describes could easily be that of a landscape painting as the reader is drawn, through the use of the present tense and the shift from third person into second person narration, into the description of the rocks above the village in the background and the bright colours of the flowers in the foreground. This is a richly coloured canvas, in shades of gold, scarlet, purple and green, while the use of adjectival modifiers is extensive, from the 'sharp ledges' to the 'rich, verdant meadow'.

The kind of detail Gaskell supplies regarding the interior of cottages is also familiar, reminiscent of the descriptions in the writings of Sinclair and Lane:

There is one large room, round which the beds are built like cupboards, with wooden doors to open and shut, somewhat in the old Scotch fashion, I imagine; and below the bed (at least in one instance I can testify that this was the case, and I was told it was not uncommon) is a great wide wooden drawer, which contained the oat-cake, baked for some months' consumption by the family. (p. 123)

The language is interesting as it is clear that Gaskell is describing not just one particular domestic scene, but the kind of interior that is common in this part of Wales more generally.

¹⁴⁴ Chapter Two explores the figure of the participant-observer narrator in much more depth in the light of increasing interest in anthropology as a university discipline in the first half of the twentieth century in Wales. The current chapter takes the figure of the participant-observer narrator relatively loosely to encompass the colonialist discourses of imperial travel writing which seem to inform so much that is written about the customs and traditions of Wales and the Welsh.

When Gaskell describes a similar scene in ‘The Doom of the Griffiths’, another story featuring a coquettish young girl *again* called Nest, the narrator is keen to highlight the household’s relatively affluent status:

Beneath the window (which commanded a magnificent view) was an oaken dresser, replete with drawers and cupboards, and brightly polished to a rich dark colour. [...] There were two oaken beds, closed up after the manner of the Welsh [...] There was the large wheel used for spinning wool, left standing on the middle of the floor, as if in use only a few minutes before; and around the ample chimney hung flitches of bacon, dried kids’-flesh and fish, that was in process of smoking for winter’s store.¹⁴⁵

As Zoe Kinsley’s arguments would suggest, these details reinforce class hierarchies within the text, underpinning the observer’s higher position. There is a key disjunction between the social position of Owen, Nest’s new husband, and herself – their marriage is referred to as ‘unequal’ (p. 121) – but the narrator is at pains to note the similarities between the classes in this period, which is set back further in time than its publication, noting that ‘at that time of day the Welsh squires differed from the farmers more in the plenty and rough abundance of their manner of living than in the refinement of style of their table’ (p. 119).

One aspect of the description of the interior of Ty Glas, Nest and Owen’s home, that demands further exploration is the reference to the Welsh dresser. Moira Vincentelli has argued that this piece of furniture ‘appears to operate not merely as a piece of furniture for domestic storage and display but as a focus for the establishment of social meanings associated with gender, domestic well-being and national identity.’¹⁴⁶ When we consider the emphasis given to an ‘ornamental’ dresser (p. 21) in an otherwise scantily furnished interior in Anne Beale’s text or the poignantly ‘worm-eaten’ dresser belonging to Amy Lane’s Peggy

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell, ‘The Doom of the Griffiths’, in *Gothic Tales* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 118. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹⁴⁶ Moira Vincentelli, ‘Artefact and Identity: The Welsh Dresser as Domestic Display and Cultural Symbol’, in *Our Sisters’ Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales*, ed Jane Aaron et al (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994) pp. 228-41 (p. 229)

Morris, the dresser appears to be a symbol of decency and respectability. Vincentelli goes on to argue that the popularity of the dresser is part of an increasing ‘need to create depoliticized and unthreatening images of national identity’ in the wake of nineteenth-century colonial expansion.¹⁴⁷ While this may well be the case in both *Sketches of Wales* and *The Vale of the Towey*, in Gaskell’s story, the dresser has complex and negative associations as Owen’s baby son is accidentally killed when he hits his head on it after Owen’s own father throws him to his mother, convinced he is not Owen’s son. What was once an icon for the family’s status and domestic comfort becomes a symbol of a degraded, degenerate line which turns on its own flesh and blood. Given Gaskell’s well-documented sympathies with the working classes and her obvious love of the country, it is ironic that the story provides a somewhat problematic representation of Welsh life, potentially feeding into negative stereotypes of Welsh women as well as emotional and quick-tempered Welsh men.¹⁴⁸ At the same time, however, the legacy of these short stories is as influential as Anne Beale’s *The Vale of the Towey*. Gaskell’s short stories play out the complex interlacing of colonialist concerns about racial difference (and containment) within the participant-observer’s supposedly neutral gaze. While Beale’s text overflows the short story form, Gaskell’s stories are much more tightly bound by the formal requirements to contain a story within a few pages. As the first clearly defined short stories to be discussed in this chapter, Gaskell’s role in shaping the ideological and textual inflections of women’s short fiction from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century should be recognised. Perhaps most importantly, Gaskell’s two stories form a prototypical narrative of community grouping (which anticipates some features of the short

¹⁴⁷ Vincentelli, ‘Artefact and Identity’, p. 231.

¹⁴⁸ Gaskell’s uncle, Samuel Holland, was cited in the *Blue Books* report confirming that the ‘class of farmers are inferior to their labourers in point of intelligence’ (p. 61). This ‘intelligence’ was, however, measured by the fact that one particular farmer could not ‘read, or write, or speak English’ (p. 62). See *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, Part III: North Wales* (London, 1847), pp. 61-2.

story cycle) in repeating place names, names of characters, and descriptions ranging from the insider detail of the domestic interior to the wider survey of the magnificent yet somehow gothic landscape.

Jeannette Marks: an American view

Another outsider who wrote on Welsh customs and traditions was American author, Jeannette Marks (1875-1964). A professor of English at Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts, Marks is an important figure, especially in the way she challenged conservative American attitudes towards lesbianism by openly living with her former tutor, Mary Woolley. The two books she wrote on Wales, *Through Welsh Doorways* (1910) and *Gallant Little Wales: Sketches of its People, Places and Customs* (1912), emerged from several tours she undertook in the first decade of the twentieth century, possibly to escape from gossip-mongering about her relationship with Woolley.¹⁴⁹ While the former text is a collection of short stories, all with Welsh settings or subject matter, the latter is a kind of guide book to Welsh places, architecture and customs, and includes an itinerary in the appendix which makes informative suggestions about where the reader should visit. Although she does not pretend to be an absolute authority as a guidebook on Wales, in the preface to *Gallant Little Wales*, Marks underlines its many useful aspects:

As a guidebook this volume will be found to contain too few unpronounceable Welsh place-names to be adequate, but as an introduction to the North Welsh land, its customs, its village life, its little churches, its holiday possibilities, its folk-lore and romance, its music, its cottages and castles, GALLANT LITTLE WALES should be useful.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ See Anna Mary Wells's *Miss Marks and Miss Woolley* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1978) for further discussion of their relationship.

¹⁵⁰ Jeannette Marks, *Gallant Little Wales: Sketches of its People, Places and Customs* (London: Constable and Co, 1912), p. vii. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text. The phrase 'Gallant Little Wales' may well come from the 1906 song written by Tydan Williams by the same name (subtitled 'a patriotic song with English and Welsh words'). See British Library catalogue entry of Williams's song for further details. *Through Welsh Doorways* is not discussed in any depth in this thesis due to its formulaic and repetitive nature.

The chapter headings point to many of the text's concerns with exploring Welsh architecture, including 'Hilltop Churches', 'Cambrian Cottages' and 'Castles and Abbeys in North Wales'. Others, such as 'The Eisteddfod' and 'Welsh Folk-Lore', look more closely at cultural and folkloric aspects. While some of this information is interesting and informative, the language Marks deploys is often overly ornate and melodramatic, and tends to undermine her depictions of Wales, such as in this example from the opening chapter:

It is a vanished past that haunts the imagination in Wales, so that forever after in thoughts of that country one goes spellbound. It is the beautiful present, the cry of the sheep upon the mountain-sides, the church bells ringing from their little bell-cots and sounding sweetly in the valleys and on highland meadows, the very flowers of the roadsides, – foxglove, bluebell, heather, – that keep one lingering in Wales or draw one back to that land again. (p. 3)

What is particularly striking, from the preface onwards, is her recurrent use of colonial imagery that revolves around plundering, consuming and devouring. She underlines how the departure of the Romans 'left the country open to other invaders who pillaged and plundered', and that, since then, the country has never 'been without an invader'(viii). She emphasises her own role as a kind of invader who has 'gone [her] wonder-ways in Wales, plundering where [she] could', describing her passion as 'a biting hunger for a land which, once loved, can never be forgotten' (viii). In a later section on churches, she describes how 'The eye travels thirstily from stone to stone, or to some peaceful bell-cot pointing the bare ridge of a bleak, sheep-covered hill, or to the far-away hills and gray sky and solemn, dreary places' (p. 36). In many ways Marks's narrative is aligned with Pratt's concept of the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey', portraying herself as a touristic pillager, who can ransack these landscapes with her gaze.

Another important point to note about *Gallant Little Wales* is the way in which it features examples of modern technology and how this affects the traveller's perspective of Wales. In 'A Village in Eryri', for instance, Marks goes into a 'deserted mountain hut to take

pictures of the interior' (p. 24), implying the presence of a camera. This suggests a shift from more time-consuming sketching to a faster, all-encompassing mode of representation through the camera lens. Marks does not again discuss the use of such a device after this point, but this small detail suggests that she is able to capture the scenes around her with much more immediacy than the sketch. Other notable technological changes include modern modes of transport, as the appendix makes references to the 'excellent train service' in North Wales (p. 179) and that Bettws has a 'first-rate garage from which you can get good cars at any time' (p. 179-80). While travellers to Wales are able to access more easily parts of the country that would perhaps have been too arduous on foot or by carriage, the speed at which this travel can take place has increased. In the appendix, Marks underlines her position of knowledge about these matters, claiming that 'Repeated experience of life in North Wales in its most isolated, tiny hamlets, where the tourist has never been before [...] ha[s] given me a perspective which is, perhaps, uncommon' (p. 180). There is a definite tension between this self-identified 'insider' knowledge (and the time it has taken her to accrue this knowledge) and the way in which she effectively packages the main attractions of North Wales into a mere four days of tours. Her rationale for suggesting that the traveller stays in Bettws is its selection of 'good hotels' which are 'well run, sanitary, and [have] excellent food' (p. 179) at a 'reasonable rate' (p. 180) – a far cry from the Wales she describes in detail in the rest of the text. While Marks is by no means the best writer of this kind of material, her contribution, possibly because of her American reputation, had a long lasting impact, along with others of her ilk, on the interrelation between the short story, sketch and travel writing as well as shaping the content of later short fiction to emerge from Wales. Her texts must have had reasonably large print runs as they are still relatively easy to access, whether in libraries, via second hand dealers, or in vanity reprints (often printed as poor quality scans or produced as

digital editions). The inclusion of in *A View Across the Valley* has established Marks as another foremother, as it were, of the modern short story in Wales, and so it is difficult to ignore her writing. The content of some her stories, especially her focus on exploring Welsh folklore and cultural beliefs, such as the inclusion of the Welsh corpse candle in ‘An All-Hallows’ Honeymoon’, helps to legitimise and popularise the interweaving of folklore and tradition in women’s interpretations of the short story form – a tradition which would continue with writers such as Ellen Lloyd-Williams and Eleanor Boniface in the 1920s.

Sara Maria Saunders: ‘Welsh Rural Sketches’

Towards the final decade of the nineteenth century, more assured, confident voices were beginning to emerge from within Welsh culture. When we examine the work of bilingual author Sara Maria Saunders (1864-1939), the shift in both perspective and subject matter compared to the other writers discussed in this chapter is marked. Saunders was born and brought up in Cwrt Mawr, Llangeitho, Cardiganshire, and was the daughter of a magistrate. As a minister’s wife, and therefore of important social and religious standing within her community, Saunders was also deeply committed to the Welsh language. Although her Welsh-language fiction is beyond the scope of this thesis, it was politically astute and also explored the impact renewed religious fervour in the wake of the Welsh Revival of 1904-5. Katie Gramich notes that her ‘writing in Welsh is particularly vibrant, and full of humorous sketches of gender politics in rural west Wales.’¹⁵¹ There is also a sense of rising self-belief in her writing – of an ability to portray Wales and aspects of Welsh life with much more self-assurance. In terms of genre and structure, some of her English-language short stories, entitled ‘Welsh Rural Sketches’, which appeared in *Young Wales* from 1896-9, share an element of common ground with Anne Beale in that they are forming something akin to

¹⁵¹ Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 28.

Zagarell's narrative of community. Jane Aaron notes, for instance, that this text is formed by 'a series of tales linked by the same narrator, locality and community' – communities which are 'without exception [...] dominated by strong and intelligent women'.¹⁵² Aaron emphasises the 'radical' aspect of Saunders' writing, especially 'the strength and influence she attributes to her female characters.'¹⁵³ This radical aspect is something which is somewhat lacking from some of the earlier accounts of Welsh life, but which becomes increasingly apparent in later writers, including Bertha Thomas. Significantly, the focus on surveying domestic interiors for order and cohesion is absent from 'Welsh Rural Sketches', suggesting that Saunders's English-language work has not been influenced or shaped by the colonialist paradigms of her literary foremothers. At the same time, her use of the title, 'Welsh Rural Sketches', still evokes an ethnographic snapshot of a people, place and traditions.

Two examples of Saunders's proto-feminist depictions of articulate and autonomous women can be found in 'The Courtship of Edward and Nancy' (1897) and 'Nancy on the Warpath' (1897), two stories from 'Welsh Rural Sketches' (the latter of which has been anthologised in *A View Across the Valley*). The series as a whole depicts the 'feud of longstanding' between the chapel's deacon, Mr Morris, and a lay preacher, Mr Rogers, in the village of Pentre-Rhedyn.¹⁵⁴ The first of these two stories examines the relationship between Edward, Mr Morris's son, and Nancy, the preacher's daughter, and its impact on their families, while the second explores the intransigent stubbornness of both father and son in the wake of several bouts of illness. In 'The Courtship of Edward and Nancy', Nancy's mother initially exclaims that Nancy 'can't marry the son of the man who has been more insulting to

¹⁵² Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*, p. 187.

¹⁵³ Aaron, *Nineteenth Century Women's Writing*, p. 187.

¹⁵⁴ Sara Maria Saunders, 'The Courtship of Edward and Nancy', *Young Wales*, 1897, pp. 28-32 (p. 29).

your poor father than any one else: why, it isn't natural' (p. 30). While she does not approve, however, she is quick to defend her daughter once it becomes clear that Edward has won her heart:

If he's made her fancy him, well, he must marry her; and I would like Mr Morris to know that, though he may be a great one with the law in the Monthly Meeting, it's only men that he's got to fight there, and they're a deal easier managed than women; but if he goes against my girl he'll have to fight against a woman that is pretty desperate and won't mind much what she'll do. (p. 31)

The language Mrs Rogers employs is both bold and persuasive, presenting women as having agency, autonomy and power within the community. While the 'Monthly Meeting' is dominated by men, this is not a sphere that Mrs Rogers is afraid of. Naming the 'Monthly Meeting' but not explaining exactly what it is suggests that Saunders expects readers already to understand her shorthand terms.¹⁵⁵ The amount of actual space that Saunders gives her female characters on the page is telling as she enables them to speak up for themselves – a characteristic that Nancy has clearly inherited. The shift from the static depictions of women in Amy Lane's *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh* could not be more clearly articulated than in Saunders's feisty and opinionated female characters.

In contrast to the strong sense of female solidarity and familial bonds between Mrs Rogers and her daughter, the relationship between Mr Morris and his son is described as 'always strained' and that they 'both appeared more comfortable away from one another' (p. 29). During the courtship this strained relationship is pushed further as they stop speaking to each other and pass each other 'as strangers' (p. 31). What is particularly intriguing about their relationship is the way it centres around materiality and the issue of public opinion, rather than love or duty. The narrator, Mr Harris, Pentre-Rhedyn's schoolmaster, discussing the land Edward rents from his father, describes how 'Old Mr Morris treated his only son

¹⁵⁵ The 'Monthly Meeting' seems to have been a specific facet of Calvinist Methodism, and probably only involved the important male figures of the community. As Saunders draws attention to the male-dominated nature of this meeting, it may well be a veiled critique of its patriarchal structures.

with as much severity as he would any other individual, and Edward had to pay rent as regularly as anyone else' (pp. 28-9). Mr Harris asks Edward 'whether he did not expect notice to quit his farm, seeing the bad relations that existed between him and his father' (p. 31) but Edward responds 'You don't know my father yet, Tom [...] No he'll not give me notice for a personal matter like that; if I farmed badly, out I'd have to go; but he'd never be unjust as a landlord, – he couldn't do it (p. 31). Old Mr Morris clearly views his son and those around him in term of use value rather than any kind of emotional bond – a view that Edward sums up as having 'gone through life looking at everybody as if they were insects, and it was his business to finish them' (p. 31). Edward admits that he shares some of his father's characteristics, exclaiming 'I suppose I'm a chip off the old block, for I'm as stubborn as he is – every bit' (pp. 31-2).

Another section of the story, concerning public opinion, which is similarly revealing, revolves around lack of communication. The day for the Pendole fair changes from the first to the third Wednesday of the month, but old Mr Morris forgets this. When his son tries to tell him, he simply says to his servant: 'Tell Mr Edward Morris that if he's got anything to say about the fair, he can tell you; I wish to have no communication with him' (p. 31). As a result, old Mr Morris sends his servant, Peter, to the fair on the wrong day. The narrator notes the public humiliation this must cause him due to the speed at which his 'mistake [is] known throughout the village' (p. 31). Saunders is critiquing old Mr Morris's brand of masculine authority here – something which she does continually throughout 'Welsh Rural Sketches'. There is also a sense that 'Welsh Rural Sketches' is again aligning with Zagarell's narrative of community, in that the stories attempt to represent the *processes* which give the community its coherence. In this example, those processes are the verbal and the unstated

communications which enable large-scale events such as the fair, which is an important aspect of local farmers' livelihoods, to take place.

What should be evident from this discussion of 'The Courtship of Edward and Nancy' is that there are none of the kinds of descriptions of landscape that have been so common in the texts which include the word 'sketch' in the title – it is the business of village life that is the main focus, not the landscape surrounding the community. Also, paradisiacal or Arcadian imagery does not have a place in this kind of story, nor references to the inhabitants as savages. This is fiction which comes from the heart of the community and is written for that community, which may account for the higher proportion of dialogue and direct speech more generally. This is not to argue that Saunders' stories do not share any of the aspects of other writing from this period as they do focus on the depiction of internal spaces as well as manners and customs. In 'Nancy on the Warpath', for instance, there is wealth of detail about the provision for the sick in more middle-class families. When Mrs Morris is sick, Mr Morris refuses to ask Nancy for help, despite knowing that 'an invalid required attention' (p. 34) and that he would have to ask Nancy to come over to nurse her or send his wife to be looked after at Nancy's house. Nancy works on Mr Morris' sense of propriety and moral standing within the community, threatening him thus:

It's one or the other, and if you refuse both, then I'll call the attention of the church to your conduct, and I'll ask them if they consider that a man who has rejected every advance on the part of his son, who allowed his only son to be on the brink of death without stretching out a finger to help him, who leaves his sick wife to the tender mercies of a lot of stupid, ignorant servants. I'll ask them if they think that such a man as that is fit to be a deacon? I'll tell you, Mr Morris, you'll have no chance[.] (p. 35)

Nancy has the power to deploy manipulative and persuasive language to which previous generations, such as her 'downtrodden' (p. 32) mother-in-law, have been denied access. This access to persuasive language is something that recurs in later Welsh women writers' work, including that of Bertha Thomas, especially as awareness of women's issues began to gain

momentum in the early twentieth century. What has also become clear on reading Saunders's work is, like Beale and Gaskell before her, the focus on process in the community, rather than progress, an aspect which, as we have already seen, features strongly in Zagarell's exploration of narrative of community. Process, in this context, is the depiction of the everyday work in which all the village members take part to sustain their community.

Allen Raine's *All in a Month*

Anne Adaliza Puddicombe (1836-1908), known by her more gender neutral pseudonym, Allen Raine, was one of the most popular novelists towards the end of the nineteenth century. Her books, which feature rural settings and revolve around romance, sold in the millions.¹⁵⁶ Raine was born in Newcastle Emlyn and went to school in Carmarthen. A key fact to note about Raine, to which Katie Gramich draws attention in her introduction to *Queen of the Rushes* (1906), is that she was 'separated from her family and from her Welsh roots for a key period during her youth', having been 'bundled off' to finish her education at Cheltenham and London.¹⁵⁷ Having lived in London for over twenty-five years since she married in 1872, Raine did not begin her literary career until she was in her sixties, when she moved to the coastal village of Tresaith, in Cardiganshire. The move was prompted by her husband's increasingly visible signs of mental illness. These experiences of dislocation, I would argue, give her more of an outsider perspective than a writer such as Sara Maria Saunders, for example, and may account for some of the close links between certain aspects of her fictions and the sketches and travel literature that had gone before.

¹⁵⁶ Katie Gramich notes that Allen Raine 'certainly made money from her writing: the sales figures show that she was an enormously successful novelist [...] One index of her popularity is the fact that a number of her novels [...] were made into silent films during the first decades of the new century.' See Katie Gramich, 'Introduction', in *Queen of the Rushes* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1998), p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Katie Gramich, 'Introduction', in Allen Raine, *Queen of the Rushes* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1998), pp. 1-23 (p. 3).

One of Allen Raine's Welsh-set stories, entitled 'In the Rush of the River', retains some of the features of travel writing suggested by Pratt. Unlike the title story, which begins with dialogue, 'In the Rush of the River' opens by tracing the course of the River Erwyn as it 'glide[s] in calm and graceful curves through meadows, woods, and valleys' before being 'obstructed [in] the even tenor of its way' by 'rocks and falls and narrow straits', while it 'fret[s] and foam[s] as it dashe[s] over the boulders'.¹⁵⁸ Towering over this natural panorama is the castle, owned by Lord Meldrin, which 'st[ands] grey and frowning, its ivy-covered turrets still defying the ravages of time and weather' (p. 115). Pratt's idea of aestheticisation is evident not only in these lists of adjectives and specific details but through the painterly depiction of the 'Black Mill' which is 'almost in its shadow' (p. 116) when balanced with the description of the castle.

While being an aesthetically pleasing vista, the landscape mapped is divided by family feuds. This image – of river, castle and mill – sets up the relationship between John Rice, the miller, whose 'ancestors were supposed to have been connected with the Meldrins' (p. 116), his daughter, Gwenda, and the son of the castle's owner.¹⁵⁹ The landscape also reinforces the oral tradition handed down amongst the villagers, 'which told how a younger son of the Rices of days gone by had offended his father and been banished from the castle, and to mortify his friends, had built the old mill almost at their gates' (p. 117). The story, a romance, traces the desires of Gwenda who 'dream[s] her dreams in the old bare rooms looking up at the frowning castle and weaving around it all sorts of foolish girlish fancies' (p. 117) There is a sense in this story that Raine is merging gossip, folktale and aspects of travel literature, which give the writing more depth than it might at first appear to possess.

¹⁵⁸ Allen Raine, *All in a Month and Other Stories* (London: Hutchinson & Co 1908), p. 115. All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

¹⁵⁹ Rice may well be a corruption of the Welsh surname Rhys. One of the main themes of the story is the broken link between the Rice and Meldrin families so a corrupted name would further distance the two parties.

Eventually, by several strokes of good fortune, Gwenda marries the new Lord Meldrin, the grandson of the original Lord Meldrin at the beginning of the story, who has unexpectedly died. There is, of course, a somewhat formulaic aspect to this story. Nevertheless, the ‘old story’ (p. 131) of the Rices’ fall from the family inheritance comes full circle, with Gwenda returned to the ancestral home, suggesting that folklore is still a powerful and pervasive part of village life.

In the title story of the collection, some of techniques found in travel writing are again at work. ‘All in a Month’ depicts the journey of Gwladys to Coed Alyth, a mental institution in North Wales. While the story begins in the middle of a dialogue between Gwladys’ mother and father, Gwladys’ journey features early on in the story, tracing her travels from the old Vicarage at Llanwialen in South Wales to Coed Alyth in the North. Gwladys has been offered a job as a lady’s companion to an inmate of Coed Alyth and is being paid a healthy wage for her services. Here, Raine sets up interesting disjunctions between the necessities of women taking paid work and the details of Gwladys’s journey, which border on the picturesque. Particularly noticeable in this story is Pratt’s concept of density of meaning, especially through the use of adjectival modifiers. Gwladys passes from ‘the peaceful undulating hills of South Wales’ to ‘the grander and more rugged scenery of North Wales’ (p. 7). Once she reaches the North, she notices much about the features of the surrounding landscape: ‘high-hedged roads bordered by primroses and bluebells’ give way to ‘blue mountains and brown heaths [...] continually increasing in grandeur and ruggedness’ (p. 8). Gradually, Gwladys ascends the ‘inaccessible heights’ (p. 8) to find it is a ‘barren region’, which a ‘solemn silence reign[s] over’ (p. 9). When she reaches the final leg of the journey, she begins ‘descending through a wood of splendid old beech-trees, between whose bare white trunks the steep road wound backwards and forwards’ (pp. 9-10). The description continues:

The level beams of the setting sun streamed through the glades, from which the sky above was hidden by the interlacing branches; the ground, thick-carpeted with bluebells and primroses, sloped down almost precipitously to a calm and peaceful valley, of which we caught glimpses through breaks in the beech-trees. (p. 10)

The ability to catch glimpses of the beauty beneath the outer covering through the trees, coupled with a strong sense of Gwladys's wonder, links back to Barbara T. Gates's suggestion that the 'female sublime emphasized not power over nature but the power of nature in a given place'.¹⁶⁰ As with the example of Ivy's glimpses of Carreg Cenen Castle in Bertha Thomas's 'A House that Was' (discussed below), nature wields the power in the relationship between nature and the viewer. What is missing from Raine's stories, however, is Pratt's concept of the 'Monarch-of-all-I-survey', suggesting a shift away from the observer who lays claim to naming (and therefore takes ownership of) the land surveyed.

While these stories do have certain features which link them generically with travel writing and sketches, presenting Wales to an outside audience in similar ways, it is their focus on place through the exploration of loss and dispossession (especially in the sense of a physical home) which is particularly important – a theme which often recurs in auto-ethnographic writing of the early twentieth century in Wales. A survey of the stories in *All in a Month* reveals a recurrent preoccupation with these issues. One of the major plot strands of 'All in a Month', for instance, centres around the loss of an ancestral home – the Culbryth estate – to which Gwladys's father refers at the beginning of the story. Gwladys's charge, Milicent, is convinced that she has found the document that will allow her to inherit this property. The will, however, has been lost and the document she discovers bears no relation to her case. Perhaps the most obvious example of this kind of loss and dispossession is the more well-known story, 'Home, Sweet Home'. Depicting Nancy Vaughan's eviction by her hard-hearted son, John, from her family home at Bronwylan Farm, the story repeatedly

¹⁶⁰ Gates, *Kindred Nature*, p. 170.

focuses on Nancy's nostalgic memories of a better time when she still lived at the farm. Deceived by John into thinking that she is going to live out the remainder of her days with her daughter, Jenny, she is instead sent to Tregarreg Workhouse. The word 'home' is repeated frequently, from the bittersweet title to 'that cheerless home' (p. 198) of the workhouse, and Nancy's final thoughts when she escapes Tregarreg, to 'press on again, for she was going home, thank God! Home! home! home!' (p. 210).

In 'Flow on, Thou Shining River', the second story of the collection, a kind of eviction is also examined, this time bound up in the impact of industrialisation on the environment – of filthy factories and their products of manufacture, as well as coal mining which fuels the local economy (issues which frequently inform narratives of community and is discussed some depth in Chapter Two). The elderly Hughes sisters, Miss Lavinia and Miss Mary Ella, live at No 10, Glenarth Road, Carny-coed, looked after by their servant, Sarah, when the story opens, but it soon transpires that the Carny-coed of their youth had been far different: 'a little sleepy country town, nestling in the trees, and surrounded by sunny meadows, where the soft-flowing river made continual music' (p. 74). Once the 'rich vein of ore that lay under the sylvan glades' (p. 74) is discovered,

quickly the whole scene was changed: furnaces roared, steam-engines puffed, and the throb of machinery filled the air. New streets were built, fortunes were made, and the little rural town that had once been a "thing of beauty" became a smoky blot upon the fair landscape. (p. 74)

The combination of 'the smoke of tall chimneys and the throb of machinery' makes the sisters' existence in their childhood home of 'Lanafon' 'unbearable' (p. 75), after which they 'had drifted to London' (p. 75). They spend many years in the capital but eventually decide on 'returning to Carny-coed to end their days' (p. 75). Significantly, they cannot return 'to the old home, for that [is] now a warehouse' (p. 75) and have to take up residence in No 10,

which is at the other end of town. They are restricted here, however, as they will only walk ‘up and down on the sunny side every fine day for many years, never varying their walk, nor venturing into the surrounding thoroughfares, where cabs and bicycles abounded, and, worse still, where motor-cars rushed snorting on their headlong way’ (p. 74). When an itinerant flute player begins playing outside, it transpires that he is in fact George Winterbourne, Mary Ella’s former love. Mary Ella has been forbidden to marry George by her father on his deathbed. Her father’s decree is again tied up with home, this time the security of having one. George is ‘impatient to make a home and call Mary Ella his own’ and so ‘intimate[s] his intention of abandoning the law and emigrating to Australia, where land was cheap and fortunes were easily made’ (p. 79). Once this desire is made known, Mary Ella’s future happiness is doomed, as her father announces that ‘Never shall a daughter of mine link her fate with that of a man who changes about like a weather-cock!’ (p. 79). Though they are reunited in their last days, both Mary Ella and George die in the spring soon after meeting again, followed by Lavinia in the summer. After their death, Sarah is also freed. Her life has effectively been on hold since having worked for the Hughes sisters (at the beginning, we are told she has worked for them for fifteen years) and she is now

free to return to her home amongst the mountains, and to marry the man whom she had loved, and who had loved her from early girlhood, and the years she had passed at Carny-coed with the “two old Miss Hugheses” became like a dim and tender dream to her busy, happy life. (pp. 92-3)

This story is particularly significant for its tracing of the impact of obligation on women’s lives, whether through the duty ascribed to parental relationships or the duty bound up in employer and employee contracts. The women in this story are caged by a patriarchal society which prevents them from making choices of their own, especially in the case of Mary Ella. However, Raine seems equally sensitive to the restrictions placed upon Sarah as a lower-class serving woman. Being freed from her job with the sisters allows her to return to her own

home in the mountains, suggesting an escape, at least temporarily, from the increasingly industrialised world. Later women writers, especially in the period spanning the 1920s to the 1940s, would explore these kinds of concerns much further in the hope of preserving a way of life that would soon be lost.

Bertha Thomas: a new woman's view

Bertha Thomas (1845-1918) in her short-story collection, *Picture Tales from Welsh Hills* (1912), again shares some of the characteristics of the stories already discussed – of literary roots in the discourse of travel writing and narrators who are outsiders commenting on Welsh culture. Some of this almost ambivalent narrative stance may well be due to Thomas's physical and imaginative distance from a secure sense of national identity. Thomas was originally thought to be the daughter of a Glamorganshire clergyman who became Canon of Canterbury Cathedral, but more recent research by Kirsti Bohata has uncovered the fact that her father was born in Carmarthenshire. As Bohata remarks:

Rather than being the daughter of a Glamorganshire vicar who moved to Canterbury, [...] Bertha Thomas was related on her father's side to relatively minor gentry from the heart of Welsh-speaking Carmarthen. Bertha Thomas herself, however, seems never to have lived in Wales for her father's career and marriage took him to England.
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Thomas's writing career spanned from the late 1870s through to her last publication of 1912-13, but her only work to be set in Wales is *Picture Tales From Welsh Hills*. The text is set around the area near Llandeilo, where one of her family homes was located, and is reimagined as 'Llanfelix' or 'St Teilo'. Recently republished as *Stranger within the Gates* (2008), with some additional proto-feminist material by Thomas, the stories encompass a range of characters and situations, for the most part set in Wales. What is particularly striking about this collection is the way in which it clearly shares the same kind of heritage as the texts that have gone before it, but, like Sara Maria Saunders before her, Thomas's work

¹⁶¹ Kirsti Bohata, 'Introduction', in *Stranger Within the Gates* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2008), i-xxiii (iii-iv).

demonstrates a more confident and probing depiction of Welsh life. A sense of place and the issue of belonging are key to these depictions. Sharing many of the tropes associated with Frank O'Connor's theories in *The Lonely Voice*, the text focuses on the displaced individual, such as the alien, the interloper and the marginalised, as well as those who are geographically displaced from their homelands and cultures. Underpinning the representation of these figures is an unremitting examination of class and how it binds and constrains identity.

Travel is a recurrent theme in the text, often from the perspective of a visitor to Wales, from the bicycling New Woman narrator of 'The Madness of Winifred Owen' to the American tourist, Ivy, of 'A House that Was'. While Thomas frequently focuses on the perspective of women, she also sensitively deals with the effect of cultural and geographical displacement on men, such as the disaffected academic, Elwyn Rosser, in 'The Way He Went'. As this collection is so concerned with travel, it is perhaps no surprise that some of the descriptions contained within it closely resemble the tropes which feature in travel writing.

Thomas's stories seem to encompass elements found in Mary Louise Pratt's theories as well as those discussed by Zoë Kinsley regarding the home tour. Aestheticized landscapes are often explored by the traveller in Thomas's stories as sudden or unexpected glimpses into a world previously unseen. Ivy, in 'A House that Was', is exploring the area around Llanffelix when she sees an unexpected sight: 'A slit in the leafy screen startled her with a sudden passing glimpse of Carreg Cenen Castle, looking, by some trick of the atmosphere, thirty miles off instead of three – dark, rugged, angular, like some mighty monster crouched there and waiting to spring' (p. 133). A similar scene occurs in 'The Madness of Winifred Owen', when the narrator is walking along a 'rough upward track between pastures screened from view by hedgerows so tall as nearly to meet overhead' (p. 2). When a 'sudden break'

appears in the left-hand side of the hedgerow, she unexpectedly spies ‘an old house looking down on [her] as if it were in surprise at the intrusion’ (p. 2). This house turns out to be the setting for one of the story’s most important scenes when the narrator learns more about the history surrounding the house – the home of a self-styled witch-doctor, Dr Dathan, who experiments with potions and alleged dark magic. The house is one of the few physical remnants of Winifred Owen’s own history and a symbol of her escape from a marriage that she did not want to enter into as Dr Dathan provided her with a potion to make her seem mad (and not marriageable). In ‘The Way he Went’, however, the tone of the description more closely resembles that of a guide book as the narrator describes the countryside around

Trearavon:

A fancy spot as to outlook, with the Trothi River at a stone’s throw flowing past between broad buttercup meadows; and away on the opposite bank a noble wooded headland, crowned by a castle famous in song and story. [...] Look up the wide river valley, beyond the little hillside town of Llanffelix, to the far horizon for an enchanting vision of mountain peaks, distinct but involved, remote, as it were sky-high and inaccessible.

(p. 35)

This description is peppered with adjectival modifiers, while the imperative to ‘look’ guides the reader’s eye through the geographical features of the landscape.

Another of Thomas’ stories, ‘The Only Girl’, through industrialisation, registers the same sense of loss found in Allen Raine’s ‘Flow on, Thou Shining River’ – a loss of a landscape as well as a way of life. The story’s narrator states that it her ‘firm belief’ that ‘the original Pixyland was Wales’ (p. 21). This whimsical (and slightly ridiculous) premise underscores an important anxiety about a folklore, tradition and a way of life that is ‘vanishing’, like the pixies, ‘before the spread of County Council schools, steam-rollers, corrugated-iron roofs, and land taxes compelling the felling for sale of timber’ (p. 21). Often, the landscape is depicted through the narrator’s friend Edith’s ‘determined’ attempts to

‘sketch the waterwheel, which, objecting, offered a passive resistance it took time to overcome’ (p. 28):

The site, within a sheltering amphitheatre of ferny, rocky uplands on the lower slopes of a mountain ridge, was one a lord might envy. So also was the ever-varying, far-reaching outlook. First the near field, with a reed-fringed mere glistening in the centre – the sun-god’s mirror, the day long; then away over intersecting lines of wavy, dreamlike hills to the skyline, and, it was said, on certain days – days that never came to pass – to the sea. Such a prospect is the invaluable birthright of many a cottager in South Wales. (p. 28)

This description, which again could be that of a painting, with its focus on foreground and background, once more links back to Gates’s comments about the female sublime. Edith has symbolic control of this landscape in sketching it, but the reference to ‘passive resistance’ may well be a coded comment about a colonialist appropriation of Wales’ landscapes. There is an inherent power in the beauty of this landscape which, as Thomas suggests, is part of every Welsh inhabitant’s inheritance.

While there are aspects of travel writing tropes to be found in *Picture Tales*, it is perhaps those of the home tour that are more notably demonstrated. Kinsley, as we have seen, notes the recurrence of descriptions of inhabitants in home tour writing via the imagery of savagery.¹⁶² ‘The Only Girl’ includes the depiction of the ‘weird figure’ of Catrin Issachar Jones, who is ‘feeble-minded; slightly deficient intellectually’ as well as asthmatic and epileptic (p. 25). Edith refers to her, tellingly, as ‘Caliban’s daughter’ (p. 25), an allusion to her supposed savagery because of her mental deficiencies and physical disabilities.¹⁶³

Caliban is, of course a key figure in postcolonial studies and the inclusion of this small detail

¹⁶² Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour*, p. 155.

¹⁶³ Significantly, one of Emily Pearson Finnemore’s stories, ‘The Woolgatherers’, included in *From a Welsh Hillside* (1923) also features a character referred to as Caliban. Finnemore’s Caliban appears to have dwarfism but is also pitifully misshapen. There are many points of comparison between the fictions of Bertha Thomas and Emily Pearson Finnemore which deserve a more comprehensive exploration in the future. *From a Welsh Hillside* is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

aligns Edith with the coloniser who bestows language upon the indigenous population.

Caliban famously states:

you taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language'¹⁶⁴

As Bill Ashcroft notes, Caliban 'gives voice to an issue that lies at the centre of post-colonial studies: is that language good for nothing but cursing, or can Caliban use that language to change the world?'¹⁶⁵ In Thomas's story, Catrin is effectively speechless in the eyes of the narrator, and her friend, Edith (who has eugenicist tendencies), because she cannot speak English. The narrator also pointedly observes the inequalities inherent in the possibilities for Catrin's care and treatment, depending on her class and rank: if Catrin were 'London-born, she would, no doubt, if rich be with a trained nurse or medical guardian somewhere out of sight; or, if poor, in an Institution for those similarly afflicted' (p. 25). Either way, the story suggests that the disabled or mentally ill should remain under guard and out of public view. What the Issachar Jones family have done is find another way as the 'defenceless and least fortunate member is the last they would wish to banish from the family circle' (p. 25). This may well reflect, and so critique, the Londoncentric views of Edith rather than betray any kind of assumption on the part of Thomas. Indeed, the resolution of the story suggests that Edith's views are intrinsically wrong as the farmstead unravels in a short time after Catrin's death – she is the 'mainstay of the family prosperity', carrying out the bulk of the physical farm work, and it soon becomes apparent that 'the whole fabric of their farm life would come tumbling round their ears' (p. 34).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.2.363-5

¹⁶⁵ Bill Ashcroft, *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ Savagery also appears in the description of the Faust-like figure of Dr Dathan in 'The Madness of Winifred Owen', when the central character, Mrs Trinaman, talks of her travels: 'In the long after-years I have been in lands where they still offer up human sacrifices to their gods. I thought once or twice then of Dr Dathan' (p. 17).

This text tries to straddle the line between the outsider and insider perspectives, through the use of mediated narration or reported stories. The Welsh language is mentioned a great deal, both in terms of characters' ostracisation from and familiarity with it – a sensitivity to that suggests a great deal of time spent immersed in Welsh culture. The admission of the narrator of 'The Madness of Winifred Owen', 'So much I knew of the country I was in – that Wales, the stranger within England's gates, remains a stranger still' (p. 1) cannot be said for Thomas herself.

Eve and Lilian Bowen-Rowlands: views from Pembrokeshire socialites

Pembrokeshire-born Eve and Lilian Bowen-Rowlands's joint collection, *As the Cock Crew and Other Stories* (1895) is a fascinating volume of stories. As it differs considerably from some of the work of the other women writers featured, I have chosen to explore it at the end of the chapter so as to not skew the impression of the general themes and techniques which run through the majority of the stories discussed. This collection deserves further, sustained research, especially as it is unclear from the text itself which of the two sisters wrote which stories, or whether they were all collaborative. One of Lilian's other stories, 'The Lattermath', is analysed in Chapter Two, but has a strange publishing history as it originally appeared in a very different format in the *London Kelt* in January 1895. Both Lilian and Eve featured frequently in the society gossip columns of the 1890s and early 1900s, both in Pembrokeshire social circles, where they were born and brought up, and further afield in London. A snippet about Eve, for example, appears in the *London Kelt* in June 1896, in the 'London Welsh Gossip' column (one of many means of communication for the ever-increasing group of 'expatriate' Welsh who had moved to London in the nineteenth century):

Eve Bowen Rowlands who has taken to the stage as a profession is spoken very highly of by some theatrical critics. One writer states that she is physically eminently

suiting for the stage and if she pleases London as she is at present pleasing the provinces a brilliant career is doubtless before her.¹⁶⁷

In fact, there seems to be considerable interest in the sisters from a London Welsh perspective, probably because Lilian was herself a contributor to the *London Kelt*.¹⁶⁸ Delving into the newly available digital archives of *Welsh Newspapers Online* provides numerous examples of both sisters' attendance at a wide range of Pembrokeshire social gatherings, especially weddings and parties, as well as more sombre events such as funerals.¹⁶⁹ There is, I would argue, much still to be learnt about the sisters, not least their literary aspirations and influences, which, judging by *As the Cock Crew*, seem wide and varied.

As the Cock Crew has several stories which focus on crime, including 'As the Cock Crew', 'The Sin of Elizabeth' and 'Delilah', which involve assault, theft and assassination respectively. 'As the Cock Crew' is especially important in terms of its representation of Jewish identity. On the one hand, the depiction of one of the main characters, a pawn shop owner called Ezekiel, who is badly beaten by his estranged wife's former lover, is somewhat negative. Yet sympathy is evoked for his wife, Miriam, also Jewish, who returns to her husband to tell him the truth about why she left him for another man:

I went [...] because I was young and mad. He pictured love to me as you had never pictured it. He told me such men as you could never love [...] Ezekiel, I left him the next morning. [...] Since then I have been true to you [...] I have been cold and hungry often [...] only I loved you. I thought of the hour when I might dare and tell you this.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ 'London Welsh Gossip', *London Kelt*, 27 June, 1896.

¹⁶⁸ In a column entitled 'London Notes', there is reference to the sisters having 'published a collection of tales' and a separate note highlighting that Lilian is a contributor to the paper. See *London Kelt*, 9 February, 1895, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ Lilian is documented, for example, as attending a supposedly 'quiet wedding' of a female relative to a London barrister, in Maldon, Essex. The details of the wedding take up considerable column space despite its humble nature. 'Marriage of Miss Rowlands and Mr Rose-Innes', *Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 2 May 1890, p. 2. Available at <http://welshnewspapers.llgc.org.uk/en/page/view/3062297/ART6/lilian%20bowen%20rowlands> [accessed 22 February 2014]. Nearly two decades later, the *Herald* mentions a wreath Lilian sends to a family friend's funeral. See 'Untitled', *Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 1 January 1909, p. 2. Available at <http://welshnewspapers.llgc.org.uk/en/page/view/3064807/ART5> [accessed 22 February 2014].

¹⁷⁰ 'As the Cock Crew', in Eve and Lilian Bowen-Rowlands, *As the Cock Crew and Other Stories* (London: Remington and Co, 1895), pp. 1-7(p. 6).

To open a collection with a relatively frank discussion of desire, marriage and love seems especially brave for the time of publication. 'The Sin of Elizabeth' again looks at the position of women, and tells the story of Jane, who has scrimped every penny she can spare in the hope of giving her daughter, Elizabeth, a nest egg if she ever returns to her, after running away many years before. The story actually ends with Jane suffering a heart attack as she discovers Elizabeth pilfering her entire life's savings. There is a strong sense the narrator is critical of Jane's apathetic attitude towards her lot in life and her daughter's cruelty towards her. In fact, the story seems to be arguing that Jane gets her just desserts at its conclusion. One aspect of the story, however, which links this collection back to the other writers who feature in this chapter, is the descriptions of Welsh landscape:

Jane's home was in the old market town of Criccieth, and stood on the cliffs looking out upon the blue waters of Cardigan Bay, and the golden beach where the children and waves laughed together, and the boats in the quiet flush of eventide came home once more. She had passed all her days in the sleepy Carnarvonshire borough; had seen little besides the ruins of its castle, and the distant peep of Barmouth, across the vast stretch of waters, beyond whose margin rises Harlech's historic towers, with the grand, bold background of the Merionethshire hills. To Jane it was all so familiar, and so full of her life's history, that the very name of any other place sounded almost sacrilegious to her ears.¹⁷¹

This particular example seems to align itself with the technique of aestheticizing the landscape surveyed by the viewer, as found in so many of the stories of the nineteenth century, as the narrative voice moves from the detail of the castle ruins, out towards Barmouth and beyond to Harlech. At the same time, the way in which place acts as kind of repository for memory anticipates some of the major concerns in later women's writing of the period spanning from the 1920s to the early 1950s.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ 'The Sin of Elizabeth', in *As the Cock Crew*, p. 34.

¹⁷² See Chapter Two, especially my discussion of stories being 'storehouses of the past'.

My analysis of the sisters' stories has barely penetrated the surface of their richness and complexities. While melodramatic at times, they seem to offer a particularly cosmopolitan and cultured view of the world which must be, to some extent, rooted in their social positions. In addition, their stories deserve to be considered specifically in the context of crime fiction to gauge the extent to which their writing, in this particular genre, was pushing at the boundaries of acceptable genres for women writers, particularly given their social status. While this particular aspect is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis, it is something which requires further scholarly attention.

Conclusions

As a whole, texts written from an outsider perspective, especially those by Catherine Sinclair, Anne Beale and Elizabeth Gaskell, provide a rich resource for understanding perceptions of Wales and its culture – offering, on the whole, a welcome alternative to the negative and damaging depictions found in the *Blue Books*. While they remain outsider perspectives, they are nuanced and informed in many ways, especially in the case of Anne Beale, who has been effectively adopted by the Welsh and anthologised alongside other authors of what used to be referred to as 'Anglo-Welsh' fiction, but is now termed Welsh writing in English. At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the desire to categorise and, therefore, contain elements of Welsh culture which are other or alien to the middle-class female traveller from elsewhere recurs as a motif across all of these texts. These texts are, in many ways, implicated in a wider project of cultural imperialism to which Wales has been subjected for centuries. What complicates matters somewhat, when we look back over these texts, is the obvious difficulties each woman writer faced in finding a suitable mode of expression for her fictions or experiences. The travelogue and the sketch provided a

framework within which to write, yet each author, with the exception perhaps of Gaskell, goes to great lengths to emphasise the poverty of their writing styles. As ‘narratives of community’ or ‘Tales and Sketches’, they represent a body of work which has the potential to preserve and perhaps even uncover patterns and customs from Welsh life which might otherwise be lost. If nothing else, this aspect of cultural recuperation certainly seems to be a worthwhile motivation for reading and studying some texts (especially the writings of Amy Lane and Jeannette Marks) that might, on the surface, seem unworthy of sustained examination.

The overarching aim of my analysis is to suggest a longer-standing tradition of female-authored short fiction, in all its various hybrid and prototypical forms, than has previously been envisaged. This tradition, I contend, can be traced through the recurring motifs of travel and a particularly detailed emphasis on domestic interiors which became, when taken together, a twofold model of survey, and perhaps even surveillance, which formed the basis for an emergent model of the short story form. These panoramic yet paradoxically close-up shots of Welsh life, culture and identity, coupled with the presence of the participant-observer narrator, anchor these fictions in a colonial past. Yet, at the same time, we must remember that these models, flawed as they are, did offer a certain amount of literary freedom to women writers, as well as documenting important aspects of Welsh women’s experiences which might be lost, forgotten or simply swept aside as unimportant or trivial. It would be the work of twentieth-century women writers to break free from the constraints of these models and find alternative modes of expression, voice and style.

Chapter Two: 'Store-Houses of the Past': Auto-ethnography and Welsh Women's Short Fiction, 1920-1950

In an essay entitled 'Wales and her People' (1926), the anthropologist H. J. Fleure describes, in language perhaps more akin to poetry than anthropology, the 'Celtic fringe' as being 'in a sense the ultimate refuge in the far west, wherein persist, among valleys that look towards the sunset, old thoughts and visions that else had been lost to the world.'¹⁷³ He goes on to say:

Those who fervently believe in "Progress" will perhaps wonder why they should be preserved, but it is a moot point whether what we are now calling progress is not always in danger of becoming specialisation that develops some aspects of personality and allows others, such as those expressed for many generations in craftsmanship and in folk-song, to wither.¹⁷⁴

For Fleure, these aspects of culture are especially important and need to be preserved. In a description which is echoed strongly by Eiluned Lewis several decades later, he refers to Wales, as one of the 'ultimate refuges', as being one of a few remaining 'treasure houses which may give of their bounty the germs that may revive half-forgotten dreams and activities for the enrichment of social life.'¹⁷⁵

One of the pressing questions of the 1920s seemed to be how best to preserve traditions that were beginning to be lost or die out through increased industrialisation. Fleure argues that 'it is the interesting features of local cultures that are specially worth keeping.'¹⁷⁶

However, the best means of doing so seem to be more problematic:

The saving and development of local cultural traditions seem at first sight to demand the creation of organisation for their defence, but it is highly questionable whether this is the best policy. It carries with it the danger of shutting oneself in and thence follow inevitably a lowering of standards, a limitation of cross fertilisation of thought, and a growth of prejudice.¹⁷⁷

One of the ways in which these cultural traditions were preserved was, of course, through institutions such as the National Museum of Wales and the National Library of Wales, which

¹⁷³ H. J. Fleure, *Wales and Her People* (Wrexham: Hughes and Son, 1926), p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ Fleure, *Wales and Her People*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Fleure, *Wales and Her People*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁶ Fleure, *Wales and Her People*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁷ Fleure, *Wales and Her People*, pp. 18-19.

were both granted royal charters in 1907. Writing in 1937, Eiluned Lewis eloquently underlines the valuable role of such institutions in the survival of Welsh culture:

We may picture the Welsh of the present and past generations as labouring to build a chain of fortresses to defend their ancient heritage of culture from the forces of opposition and decay. Their most modern and impregnable bulwarks are the combined watchtowers and store-houses, the twin creations of Museum and Library. [...] [T]hese arsenals give immense satisfaction to those who regard as somewhat insufficient the achievements of earlier engineers.¹⁷⁸

Lewis's prose, with its imagery of defence, is passionately argued. At the same time, it could be argued that her own fictions, including her short stories, are part of a wider network of literary 'treasure houses' of cultural heritage that revitalises and recovers elements of culture that would otherwise be lost, even with the advent of institutional practices of preservation. This chapter argues that, in the period spanning from the 1920s to around 1950, the Welsh female-authored short story was especially well situated to act as a repository for a wealth of cultural knowledge, while at the same time being bound up with explorations of female space and identity.

It could be argued that the forms inherited from the sketch and travel writers of the nineteenth century, of a detached and superior narrator commenting on community life, seemed dated and old fashioned by the 1920s and 1930s. However, this narrative perspective does, in fact, run through some of the transitional writings of Emily Pearson Finemore (b. 1864) and Lilian Bowen-Rowlands (b. 1870) who both published short fiction in the 1920s. Other writers, such as Ellen Lloyd-Williams, take up some of the strands of earlier writing on Wales, particularly an interest in the country's tradition of folklore, and use the short story to preserve that tradition. Preservation of this kind can be viewed as being part of a wider ethnographic project to collect together that which is special about a culture. Later in the period discussed, short fiction takes a much more auto-ethnographic turn, which is explored

¹⁷⁸ Eiluned and Peter Lewis, *The Land of Wales* (London: Batsford, 1937), p. 110.

in the semi-autobiographical work of Oriel Malet (b. 1923) in the late 1940s. Auto-ethnography, which is explored in more depth as the chapter unfolds, is in essence a branch of anthropology which ‘describe[s] and systematically analyse[s] personal experience in order to understand cultural experience’.¹⁷⁹ Other writers of the 1920s, such as Kathleen Freeman (1897-1959) and Dorothy Edwards (1903-34), seem to subvert the models passed down from the sketch and travel literature, utilising a technique of male ventriloquism instead of taking up a female subject position. Later writers, such as Kate Roberts (1891-1985), Lynette Roberts (1909-1995), Margiad Evans (1909-1958) and Eiluned Lewis (1900-1979), retain some of the features of earlier writing, especially the subject matter of the domestic interior and the dynamics of community life (often in rural settings), but break away from the participant-observer narrative device. When they do use this device, it is often from a knowing or satirical position.

What does remain from the writing discussed in Chapter One is what sociologists would describe as ‘thick description’, which can be defined as dense descriptions of social life from observation, through which broader cultural interpretations can be made. Clifford Geertz has drawn attention to the constructed nature of ‘thick description’ in ethnography. He argues that ‘what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to.’¹⁸⁰ He goes on to argue that

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of ‘construct a meaning of’) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sounds but in transient examples of shaped behaviour.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner, ‘Auto-Ethnography: An Overview’, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12:1 (2011). Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095> [accessed 2 May 2013].

¹⁸⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 8.

¹⁸¹ Geertz, *The Interpretations of Culture*, p. 9.

The use of thick description, which characterises the writing of Catherine Sinclair, Anne Beale, Elizabeth Gaskell and many others, is also a recurring feature of short fiction of the period spanning the 1920s to the early 1950s, suggesting that this ethnographic endeavour still underpins many later fictions.

Ethnography and Auto-Ethnography

While this thesis is concerned primarily with literary representations of Wales and Welsh identity, the amount of ethnographic detail contained in Welsh women's short stories of the 1920s to 1950s concerning traditions and culture suggests that crossing over into the field of anthropology could be particularly illuminating. Modern ethnography can be defined as a discipline which 'takes the position that human behaviour and the ways in which people construct and make meaning of their worlds and their lives are highly variable and locally specific.'¹⁸² By the early twentieth century, the 'amateur' ethnographic approach that had structured women's travel literature and sketches on Wales, had shifted away from the desire to examine, categorise and contain difference. Instead, in the short fiction of the first half of twentieth century there are strong parallels to be found with the dynamic concept of auto-ethnography. Deborah Reed-Danahay explains that

The concept of autoethnography reflects a changing conception of both the self and society in the late twentieth century [...] It synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question.¹⁸³

¹⁸² J. J. Schensul and M. D. Lecompte, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research* (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira, 1999), p. 1.

¹⁸³ Deborah Reed-Danahay, 'Introduction', in *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), pp.1-17 (p. 2). Reed-Danahay does not hyphenate the term auto-ethnography in her writing. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I have used the hyphen in my own use of the word. As with the term 'participant-observer narrator', it suggests an inherent tension and the possibility of instability.

In literary studies, there are obvious parallels to be found in Irish texts, including James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), which have also been described as 'auto-ethnographic' in their 'accounts of economic, ideological, and personal struggles in British occupied Ireland.'¹⁸⁴ This is not to argue, of course, that the texts discussed in this chapter are simply ethnographic accounts of Wales underpinned by autobiographical detail. Instead, this chapter will explore the short fiction of this period through the lens of Mary Louise Pratt's far more politically-charged definition of auto-ethnography:

I use these terms ['autoethnography' and 'autoethnographic expression'] to refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways which *engage with* the colonizer's own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations.¹⁸⁵

Reed-Danahay helpfully highlights a key distinction in the way auto-ethnography is explored in theoretical material, specifically 'whether or not the accent is on autobiography or ethnography.'¹⁸⁶ Pratt, in Reed-Danahay's opinion, is one of a group of theorists who are interested in 'native ethnography' (the study of one's own group), in which 'issues of authenticity of voice and of counter narrative come into play when the autoethnographer is not a professional anthropologist.'¹⁸⁷ The theoretical nuances of some of these arguments are beyond the scope of a literary-based thesis such as this. Nevertheless, authenticity of voice and the construction of a counter narrative are both key aspects of the stories discussed in this chapter. Moreover, there is one final comment that Reed-Danahay makes that bears a striking resemblance to important theories concerning the short story, especially the emphasis on the

¹⁸⁴ Robin Patric Clair, 'The Changing Story of Ethnography', in *Expressions of Ethnography: Novel Approaches to Qualitative Methods*, ed Robin Patric Clair (New York: SUNY, 2003), pp. 3-26 (p. 9).

¹⁸⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.

¹⁸⁶ Reed-Danahay, *Auto/ethnography*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁷ Reed-Danahay, *Auto/ethnography*, p. 8. Reed-Danahay argues that the other main branch of theorists find that the life story has ethnographic interest.

figure of the outsider and ex-centric experience in the work of Frank O'Connor and Clare Hanson (discussed in the introduction). Reed-Danahay notes:

The most cogent aspect to the study of autoethnography is that of the cultural displacement or situation of exile characteristic of the themes expressed by autoethnographers. This phenomenon of displacement breaks down dualisms of identity and insider/outsider status. Whether the autoethnographer is the anthropologist studying his or her life story, or the native anthropologist, this figure is not completely "at home". The ability to transcend everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life is related to the ability to write or do autoethnography. This is a postmodern condition. It involves rewriting the self and the social.¹⁸⁸

Reed-Danahay's description of the auto-ethnographer as exiled, displaced or not completely at home would fit many Anglophone Welsh writers, whether male or female. The role of non-Welsh writer who elects to have a Welsh identity or immerses themselves within Welsh culture is also significant, as these kinds of writers are situated in a liminal space between cultures, possessing a sharp eye for cultural detail but at the same time exploring outsiders and misfits in their writing.¹⁸⁹

There also seems to be a particularly close fit between the short story form and autoethnography as a genre; in fact, auto-ethnographers are increasingly utilising the form to take their research in new directions. Kamala Visweswaran, for example, concludes *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (1994) with a short story she wrote to explore her dual identity as an American and as an Indian.¹⁹⁰ As Reed-Danahay notes, 'the autoethnographer is a boundary

¹⁸⁸ Reed-Danahay, *Auto/ethnography*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ An example of a writer with an elective Welsh identity would be Margiad Evans, who changed her name from Peggy Whistler to Margiad Evans in order to reflect the fact that she aligned herself with Welsh culture. Lynette Roberts is another example of a writer who immersed herself in the culture, but still remained on the periphery. She married a Welshman, learnt and researched much about Welsh culture and the language, but remained an outsider in her home of Llanybri.

¹⁹⁰ Visweswaran is a particularly useful critic to compare with Welsh critics who explore the complexities of having two distinct cultural identities. When talking about being 'Indian-American', she underlines the significance of the hyphen that separates the two cultural groups: 'The hyphen enacts a violent shuttling between two or more worlds'. See Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 119. In the context of Wales, Diane Davies has explored the politics of the hyphen of the term 'Anglo-Welsh' in 'Anglo-Welshness: The Semantics of hyphenation', in *The Nation: Myth or Reality*, ed Keith Cameron (Oxford: Intellect, 1994), pp. 23-9.

crosser', so the anthropologist's foray into a literary genre is perhaps to be expected.¹⁹¹ Here we can perhaps see the potential of auto-ethnography so cross disciplinary boundaries and to colonise literature. There is a danger, however, in linking the short story form with auto-ethnography without careful qualification. While I argued earlier in this chapter that the stories explored here could be viewed as 'treasure houses' or 'store-house[s] of the past', it must be remembered that these stories are not straightforward artefacts which are necessarily representative of a whole culture. Visweswaran notes the issue of 'collapsing' genres in ethnography, where 'life history narratives were collected from the (often last-) living members of particular tribes or cultural groups to stand as testimonies for lost ways of life. Thus the life history of an individual came to stand for the life history of a vanishing culture.'¹⁹² This chapter aims to underline the similarities between the subject matter and narrative strategies in short stories written by women from Wales, yet will also foreground the geographic and cultural specificity of these stories. What this chapter seeks to achieve is to synthesise elements of narrative of community, particularly its focus on process rather than progress, with the potentially dynamic aspects of auto-ethnography to form a theoretical framework which will illuminate the structure and content of short stories written from the 1920s onwards.

The Short Story in Wales: The Significance of Caradoc Evans

The period spanning the 1920s to the 1940s is often referred to as the 'heyday' of the short story in Wales. Male writers of this era who have employed the form to a significant degree, such as Rhys Davies, Dylan Thomas, Glyn Jones, Gwyn Jones, and Alun Lewis, have elicited much critical attention and are still, for the most part, in print or are at least accessible in the

¹⁹¹ Reed-Danahay, *Auto/ethnography*, p. 3.

¹⁹² Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, p. 6.

form of anthologies of Welsh writing, as discussed in the introduction. As previously mentioned, the entry on ‘The Short Story in English’ in the *New Companion to the Literature of Wales* (1998) emphasises the form’s prominence in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in comparison to the novel, arguing that it was ‘the natural product, like the poem, of a still-poor society in which the writer was necessarily amateur, writing for brief periods in such time as he had.’¹⁹³ It also makes the connection between the work of earlier writers in the sketch form, such as Anne Beale, and short stories from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Bertha Thomas. The entry laments, however, most writers’ failure to ‘transform the sketch into something more structurally dynamic and assured’, an issue which this thesis contests in chapter one.¹⁹⁴ Male writers who found success with the short story were, for the most part, from working-class mining areas in South Wales. Rhys Davies, the son of a grocer, was from Blaenclydach, in the Rhondda Valley, while Gwyn Jones was from Blackwood, Glyn Jones from Merthyr Tydfil, and Alun Lewis from Cwmaman, near Aberdare. It is perhaps unsurprising that the sketching of rural communities found in earlier (more middle-class) writers’ work should be re-shaped to fit the experiences of intense industrial labour and impact these new forms of work had on the family, work and education, much as Raymond Williams argues in his work on the Welsh industrial novel.¹⁹⁵ In contrast to earlier writers’ alleged failure to ‘escape the sentimental’, these later male writers are, on the whole, darkly realist.¹⁹⁶

The *New Companion* entry champions Caradoc Evans as the founding father of the Anglo-Welsh short story. While this contention is arguable, and has been challenged by the publication of *A View Across the Valley*, which suggests a literary history that pre-dates

¹⁹³ ‘The Short Story in English’, in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, ed Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998) p. 675-6.

¹⁹⁴ ‘The Short Story in English’, in *The New Companion*, p. 676.

¹⁹⁵ See Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1979).

¹⁹⁶ ‘The Short Story in English’, in *The New Companion*, p. 676.

Evans's fictions, the impact of his satiric and highly controversial collection, *My People* (1915), cannot be overlooked, especially the way in which it turned a spotlight on Wales and Anglophone Welsh writing more generally. Significantly, the connections with earlier material in the short story form are underlined by the dust jacket of the first edition, which simply featured seventy words of introduction instead of an author or title:

These stories of the Welsh peasantry, by one of themselves, are not meat for babes. The justification for the author's realistic pictures of peasant life, as he knows it, is the obvious sincerity of his aim, which is to portray that he may make ashamed. A well-known man of letters and critic has expressed the opinion that "My People" is the "best literature that has, so far, come out of Wales."¹⁹⁷

The focus on 'realistic pictures of peasant life' suggests continuities with the kinds of writing produced by Elizabeth Gaskell and Anne Beale, especially in its fascination with the squalor of the poverty-stricken lower classes. In Wales, as John Harris notes in his introduction to the Seren republication of *My People*, the reaction was 'unremittingly, incandescently, hostile. No book before or since has remotely provoked such hatred.'¹⁹⁸ A contemporary review by Ivor John M.A., writing in the *Welsh Outlook*, demonstrates some of the problems posed by the collection for Welsh readers:

Had Mr. Evans been content to call his stories "Studies" of Welsh life, this implying that he had merely selected certain episodes that appealed to his genius and taste (no matter how perverted), criticism would be confined within certain narrow limits. But everything points to Mr Evans's belief that he is a realist painting Welsh village life as it is[.]¹⁹⁹

The way in which the collection signals itself as a realist depiction – of language, customs, and community interactions – is undeniably problematic, not least because of its authoritative Old Testament style and archaic (and erroneous) rendering of speech patterns. The fact that it centres on one particular location, the fictional Manteg which stands in for Evans's home

¹⁹⁷ In his introduction to the republication of *My People*, John Harris includes a reproduction of the original dust-jacket from the first edition published by Andrew Melrose. See John Harris, 'Introduction: "The Banned Burned Book of War"', in Caradoc Evans, *My People* (Bridgend: Seren, 2003), pp. 9-47 (p. 34.)

¹⁹⁸ Harris, 'Introduction', p. 38.

¹⁹⁹ Ivor John M.A., "'My People'", *Welsh Outlook*, 3.3 (March, 1916), 83-84 (83).

village of Rhydlewys, with recognisable topography and geographical detail, makes it all the more convincing as a realist portrayal. In the now infamous ‘Be This Her Memorial’, the description of the central character’s home is reminiscent of both Anne Beale’s and Amy Lane’s negative remarks concerning the state of peasant cottages or Catherine Sinclair’s accounts of travelling through poor Welsh villages. Impoverished Nanni, who is eventually forced to survive on roasted rats,

lived in the mud-walled, straw-thatched cottage on the steep road which goes up from the Garden of Eden, and ends at the tramping way that takes you in to Cardigan town; if you happen to be travelling that way you may still see the roofless walls which were silent witnesses to Nanni’s great sacrifice[.]²⁰⁰

John Harris comments on the way in which the ‘highly concentrated life histories [...] are all variously interrelated’, noting that the ‘strength of the collection derive[es] from a tight geographical framework and further linking devices of character, action and theme’ which form a ‘coherent social statement.’²⁰¹ In fact, it is possible to see some direct links with Sandra A. Zagarell’s definition of the genre known as ‘narrative of community’, previously discussed in Chapter One. This genre, Zagarell contends, is

concerned [...] with continuity, seeks to represent what gives the community its identity, what enables it to remain itself. The approach is imbued with a concern for process. Writers understood communities to take form through negotiation among diverse, often recalcitrant components – people living at distances from each other; sometimes reluctant individuals; scarce resources; values, practices, and lore that are threatened by time and change; a harsh physical environment – and they foregrounded the specific dynamics through which these elements are continuously reintegrated.²⁰²

Notable examples of this genre include Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), V.S. Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* (1959), Alice Munro’s many short story collections set in small-town Ontario, including *The Love of a Good Woman* (1999), and Annie Proulx’s *Close Range: Wyoming Stories* (1999). This is not to argue that *My People* fits straightforwardly into the

²⁰⁰ Caradoc Evans, ‘Be this her Memorial’, in *My People* (Bridgend: Seren, 2003), pp. 108-112 (p. 108).

²⁰¹ Harris, ‘Introduction’, *My People*, p. 18.

²⁰² Sandra A. Zagarell, ‘Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre’, *Signs*, 13.3 (Spring, 1988), 498-527 (520).

genre of narrative of community. In fact, the stories read more like a narrative of anti-community, of a world that is out of touch with modernity and crippled by outmoded religious and cultural practices. Indeed, one of the key aspects of Zagarell's argument is the positive, community-affirming nature of the texts she classifies under this genre, texts which create a 'store-house of the past', to borrow a phrase from Eiluned Lewis's *In Country Places* (1951), soon to be lost in the advent of increasingly industrialised modernity. This motif of industrialisation, which featured so frequently in the texts discussed in Chapter One, is further developed and explored by writers of the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰³

Participant-Observer Narrators

Another key feature of these stories, which has been previously discussed to some extent in relation to the narrators of sketches and travel writing in Chapter One, is the role of the participant-observer narrator who directly 'represent[s] the contrast between community life and the modern world'.²⁰⁴ This type of narrator, as we have seen, is a recurring feature in colonialist literature, and has its roots in the discipline of anthropology, Ethnographic practices are generally divided into two methods – 'one based on survey and travel data gathered by missionaries and other amateur observers' while the other is 'based on direct observation by the trained anthropologist', a figure often referred to as a 'participant observer'.²⁰⁵

It is worth pausing for a moment to examine the tone of the participant-observer narrator in a little more depth. H. J. Fleure's essay, discussed at the beginning of the chapter, is overflowing with descriptions of the Welsh, and derives from Fleure's own anthropological study of remains found in Wales. He describes an aspect of one ethnic grouping within Wales in this memorable way:

²⁰³ Eiluned Lewis, *In Country Places*, p. 53.

²⁰⁴ Zagarell, 'Narrative of Community', p. 503.

²⁰⁵ See 'ethnography' in *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*.

a large element in the Welsh population, especially in the south, is that of the so-called “Little Dark People,” usually rather long-headed, without a high median ridge on the skull, with smooth facial contours and moderate features, and lacking [...] strong brows [...] Hair and eyes are generally dark, the build is slim and stature small.²⁰⁶

What is particularly interesting is the way Fleure then shifts, almost imperceptibly, from archaeological fact to sweeping generalisations concerning the *current* health, diet, character, social interactions and cultural predilections of this ethnographic group:

The Little Dark People are found nowadays in the rural population as a rather acquiescent element, likely, therefore, to suffer from poor food under conditions of rural poverty and so be victims of phthisis [tuberculosis]. In towns they continue for a while to suffer from phthisis but, if they survive long enough to settle in thoroughly, they seem to acquire considerable physical resistance, related in all probability to altered feeding. They form a very large part of the Welsh population in the coalfields. This type is often in a large majority in a religious or bardic gathering in Wales. The big broad-headed dark men seem to favour organizing activities in commerce and finance, but they also have their rural foundation, often, naturally enough, with maritime associations.²⁰⁷

These kinds of detached, ideologically laden, ethnographic descriptions seem to seep into the psyche of many Welsh writers and slip into their own representations of Welsh identity. In Rhys Davies’ *The Story of Wales* (1943), for example, strong echoes of Fleure’s descriptions can still be detected several decades later:

Two thousand years before Christ a seafaring tribe of short, dark-headed people, non-Aryan and pre-Celtic, settled in this land, and to-day their descendants can be seen, still short of limb, long-skulled, dark-eyed and volatile of temperament, culling a black mineral in Rhondda mines.²⁰⁸

This chapter argues that there is a fundamental link between ethnography and short fiction in the period leading up to the early 1950s, shaped by the legacy of the travellers, tourists and outsiders discussed in Chapter One. As this thesis has already demonstrated in the previous chapter, texts which examine landscape, customs and people often fall into the category of

²⁰⁶ Fleure, *Wales and her People*, p. 8

²⁰⁷ Fleure, *Wales and her People*, p. 9.

²⁰⁸ Rhys Davies, *The Story of Wales* (London: William Collins, 1943), p. 8.

amateur survey, especially in travel writing and brief sketches (such as Catherine Sinclair's accounts), while others often develop compelling parallels with the participant-observer perspective when the narrator has some deeper knowledge of Welsh culture (including texts by Anne Beale and Elizabeth Gaskell). In *My People*, 'Be This her Memorial' is the only story in the collection in which the narrative voice slips into a first-person, participant-observer perspective. The story begins: '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 story I have to tell you contradicts that theory' (p. 108). In other stories, the narrative voice is more removed but still claims an authoritative, insider perspective, such as in 'The Woman who Sowed Iniquity', which begins: 'This is the chronicle of Betti Lancoch, who was the daughter of Essec, the Essec of whom is written on his gravestone that he was possessed of two farms named Lancoch and Llanwen, that he had a name among the religious men of the Big Seat in Capel Sion' (p. 94). Evans's first-person intrusion into the narrative of 'Be This her Memorial', coupled with the authoritative and knowing voice of the whole collection also suggests the presence of the participant-observer narrator.

The key shift between the texts discussed in chapter one and those from the 1920s onwards is the frequent *absence* or subversion of this participant-observer narrator, suggesting that there is a growing confidence among women writers who no longer need these models, which are imaginatively limited, ideologically and colonially tainted, and, arguably, inadequate, on which to base their fictions. What this chapter proposes instead is to forge links with auto-ethnography, a term which has been gathering interest in the social sciences, as 'an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically

analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience'.²⁰⁹ Auto-ethnography combines elements of autobiography and traditional ethnography, thereby 'challeng[ing] canonical ways of doing research and representing others' through a synthesis of creative writing and social science.²¹⁰

The Short Story in the 1920s

In the years after *My People*, stories which related closely to the 'tales and sketches' genre, with a clear ethnographic underpinning, were still being published. One particularly significant title is *From a Welsh Hillside* (1923) by John Finnemore (1864- 1915) and his wife, Emily Pearson Finnemore (b. 1864).²¹¹ Born in East Anglia, Finnemore lived for many years in Wales, having taken the headmaster's position at Tanygarreg School, on Mynydd Bach, Cardiganshire, in 1891 where his wife was employed as a sewing mistress.²¹² Emily was born in Northamptonshire, but spent a considerable proportion of her life in Wales after she married John. The collection of twelve stories is broken up on the contents page into stories written by John (the first four) and those written by Emily. As the collection was published eight years after John's death, it is difficult to ascertain how much control he had

²⁰⁹ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner, 'Auto-Ethnography: An Overview', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12:1 (2011). Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095> [accessed 2 May 2013].

²¹⁰ Ellis et al, 'Autoethnography'.

²¹¹ The relative ease of obtaining this text today at a fairly low price – between £8-15 second hand – suggests that the book must have had a reasonably sized print run. Emily's dates are unknown, but she appears to have outlived her husband.

²¹² Emily's life is frustratingly omitted from all the usual biographical sources, as far as I can tell, with the exception of a patchy entry in the *Oxford Companion to Edwardian Fiction*, which only gives an approximate year of birth (1863) and refers to her extensive output. See 'Finnemore, E. P.', in *The Oxford Companion to Edwardian Fiction*, ed Sandra Kemp, Charlotte Mitchell, and David Trotter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198117605.001.0001/acref-9780198117605-e-393> [accessed 25 June 2013]. Census records list her as being born in 1864 and include her occupation in 1901 as 'author', followed by the more feminine 'authoress' in 1911. In the 1901 census, John is listed as 'Schoolmaster and Author'. By the time of the 1911 census, the size of the couple's household, which comprised 15 rooms and several servants, suggested that they were relatively wealthy and making a healthy income from writing. Census data available at <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> [accessed 12 July 2013]. John died in 1915, from possible heart failure, but Emily survived for some time after this. A newspaper article from 1921, which notes that she had discovered one of her late husband's unpublished stories, proves that she is still living by this point, while all the reviews of *From a Welsh Hillside* point to her surviving John up to the mid-1920s. See *Dundee Courier & Aberdeen Journal*, 8 December, 1921, p. 3.

over the collection or even if Emily used his (now well-known) name to enable her own work in this mainstream genre to be published. The collection, ostensibly a book of short stories, oscillates between the telling of Welsh tales and ethnographic descriptions, especially concerning social customs. The fact that these descriptions related to an earlier period in Welsh social history did not escape the attention of contemporaneous reviews. In a 1924 edition of the *Welsh Outlook*, the reviewer notes that

perhaps the best of [the stories], and the most “true to nature”, are those in which are admirably described the old picturesque wedding and funeral customs, which have been largely modified, if indeed they have not wholly passed away, during the last generation.²¹³

Although the narrator of one of Emily’s stories explains that ‘[t]here are many old-time customs among the Welsh pertaining to the great crises of human life – birth, marrying, and dying – and some of them are carried out in pristine simplicity at the present day’,²¹⁴ the review notes that there is ‘ample internal evidence that some of them were written several years ago’.²¹⁵ John Finnemore’s fascination with his adoptive land can be traced through the publication of his numerous books concerning Wales, including *The Custom of the Country: An Idyll of the Welsh Mountains* (1898), *The Red Men of the Dusk* (1898), *The Story of England and Wales* (1913), and, finally, *Social Life in Wales* (1922), which was published under the *Black’s School History* imprint. He also produced a volume for children entitled *Fairy Stories from the Mountain* (1899). While Finnemore’s life is fairly well documented, his wife’s seems to have garnered far less attention, despite the fact that she published in the region of eighteen volumes of fiction in her own right, many of them through the Christian Knowledge society.

²¹³ L. J. R., ‘From the Welsh Hills’, *Welsh Outlook*, 11: 2 (1924), p. 56.

²¹⁴ John Finnemore and Emily Pearson Finnemore, *From a Welsh Hillside* (London: A. & C. Black, 1923), p. 113. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

²¹⁵ L. J. R., ‘From the Welsh Hills’, p. 56.

In ‘Marie’s Bridal’, one of Emily Pearson Finnemore’s stories, it is the position of the outsider in the rural community – a figure which will recur throughout the stories discussed in this chapter – that is particularly significant. The story, although tending towards the melodramatic, focuses on the plight of the eponymous Marie, who has had a son with Dick o’ the Bryngwyn but remains unmarried. Dick himself is the son of a notorious confidence trickster and petty criminal. As a result, despite being no worse than a flirt and a ‘loafer’²¹⁶ (p. 101), he is looked down on by the local community:

It is proverbial that to give a dog a bad name is quite as good as hanging him, and the truth of it is strikingly borne out in close-set communities with no outlook on the world, but a very intense inlook upon themselves. Families of ill-repute are banned off-hand in public esteem from one generation to another – verily the sins of the father are visited upon the children. (p. 100)

Marie herself is despised by Dick’s mother and sister because she lives in a lowly cottage (‘bwthyn’), rather than a working farm as does Dick’s family. In fact, from Marie’s perspective, it is quite a feat to have won his affection, ‘ranking among the poorest, living in a rush-thatched bwythyn [*sic*], with nothing but a superb physique, black diamond eyes, and hazel-brown skin as her dowry’ (p. 102). The story ends with Marie and Dick’s marriage, but Dick dies moments after the ceremony is complete. In its final line, ‘Le roi est mort. Vive le roi!’ (p. 110) the story leaves the plight of Dick’s young son, who is also called Dick, ambiguous. Although he has been legitimised by the marriage, the community’s scorn for his mother is likely to live on.

Another of Emily’s stories, ‘Y Mab Afradlon’, which means ‘The Prodigal Son’, reworks the well-known Biblical tale of the son who squanders his parents’ money and affection but is welcomed back into the fold once he has redeemed himself.²¹⁷ Emily’s

²¹⁶ Emily Pearson Finnemore, ‘Marie’s Bridal’, in John Finnemore and Emily Pearson Finnemore, *From a Welsh Hillside* (London: A&C Black, 1923), pp. 95-110 (p. 101). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

²¹⁷ The translation is given as a subtitle in parenthesis.

version, however, attempts to revise the traditional narrative by creating a strong female character, another Marie, to counterbalance the actions of Siani's idle son, Evan. Marie, a distant relative, has come to stay with Siani at Glan-yr-Afon because her own mother has died and their farm, Penbryn, has had to be sold. Unusually for the women in this particular collection, she has her own money (from the sale) and so a certain degree of independence. While the story draws on some ridiculous Welsh stereotypes, the depiction of Marie off-sets some of this over-enthusiasm for all things Celtic.²¹⁸ Part of the reason Marie comes to Glan-yr-Afon is because she has heard rumours of Evan's misdoings. She says: 'See I know it all: the news comes many miles, and we hear right away in Penbryn, twenty miles off, that Evan Glan-yr-Afon is Mab Afradlon'.²¹⁹

When Evan first meets Marie, he is so intoxicated that he only registers her as 'the figure of a stranger seated on the settle', an 'unfamiliar occupant of his own corner' of the kitchen (p. 173). The following day he still has no idea who she is and tells her so. Her response is very clear: 'But I know you well enough – by hearsay. Y Mab Afradlon o' Glan-yr-Afon! Tut, tut! All the countryside knows *you!*' (p. 178). Here we can begin to see a trope which recurs frequently throughout *From a Welsh Hillside* – of an outsider coming into a close-knit community and making it more comprehensible to an audience that is not part of that world. In this story, Marie plays the role of the participant-observer narrator, witnessing and reporting on the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Glan-yr-Afon.

After witnessing Evan's drunken antics, which culminate in a night in the cowshed, Marie packs up his things and tells him to find work and not come back to farm for a year:

²¹⁸ For example, Evan's 'dark eyes had the Celtic light in them, the soft sparkle that runs quickly to fervours on slightest provocation to excitement' (p. 171).

²¹⁹ Emily Pearson Finnemore, 'Y Mab Afradlon', in John Finnemore and Emily Pearson Finnemore, *From a Welsh Hillside* (London: A&C Black, 1923), pp. 171-185 (p. 175). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

And do you think I can't do as well as half a man like you? I'm all a woman! I can do a man's work if need be! When I came yesterday and looked at the fields, my fingers itched. [...] I'll make the place pay twice as well; and when I go to market and sell a cow or the pigs, I shan't leave half the money in the houses before I come home. (p. 179)

After Evan has gone, there are many examples given of Marie's industriousness that are perhaps 'unfeminine'. At one point, the narrator comments that 'the unusual phenomenon was seen on the fields of Glan-yr-Afon of a woman with the customary sower's cloth tied around her neck, and she paced up and down casting the seed broadcast' (p. 179). Only hiring a man for the heavy work of the ploughing, the rest she does herself. The jobs seem to vary from the intricate to hard manual labour:

Marie was to be seen at every kind of work early and late. The dilapidated fencing was replaced with neat, trim poles and wire; sunken broken banks were built up again; sodden fields where crops could never reach any fruition, save the poorest, were drained; the lean, starved cattle were sold, and their place taken by better-class animals, which later brought about the astonishing result that Glan-yr-Afon butter was the best in the neighbourhood. Then she quietly wrung the necks of the meagre, leggy chickens, dressed them, and took them to market, and with the proceeds of the sale purchased the beginnings of a sounder and better laying stock. (p. 180)

Apart from detailing the kinds of work women who worked in agricultural environments would have to do, this extract suggests that Marie is unusually self-sufficient. In fact, I would argue that her ability to take on a man's role makes her a potentially dangerous figure. The scene in which Marie packs up Evan's possessions suggests a symbolic role reversal as she empties her own case, which has a label on it 'bearing her own name' (p. 176), and places all his things inside. Yet by the end, when Evan comes home a year later, he returns the case and offers to marry her now that he is reformed, sober and the farm is a success. This somewhat disappointingly conservative ending suggests that the text cannot sustain an independent, autonomous woman for very long without containing her within the structure of marriage.

By delving into the Finnmores' stories, it is possible to draw out some wider preoccupations within the text as a whole, such as class, gender, place, community, and

language. This collection can be seen as an attempt to mediate between Welsh customs and English audiences, especially as it translates the Welsh it includes. Marie, for example calls out ‘Bachgen! Bachgen bach!’ (p. 101) when she sees her son upset, which is immediately followed by ‘Boy! Boy dear’ in parentheses. The ease with which the stories slip between ethnographic description and storytelling suggests that, for the Finnemores at least, stories about Welsh life were interwoven with cultural and social history.

Another important example of the kinds of short stories being published in the 1920s can be found in Pembrokeshire writer Lillian Bowen-Rowlands’s (b. 1869) ‘The Lattermath’, published in *Welsh Outlook* in 1925. The story is a somewhat melodramatic romance that has some parallels with the subject matter of Hilda Vaughan’s 1934 novella ‘A Thing of Nought’, in that Judith Pryce, the story’s main character, is forced to spend years apart from her lover, Dick Morris.²²⁰ In Vaughan’s story, Megan Lloyd is unable to marry her lover, Penry, when he unexpectedly returns from Australia, because she has married another man, assuming Penry to be dead. In Bowen-Rowlands’s story, Dick takes part in a robbery and must remain ‘hiding in foreign parts’ to avoid arrest.²²¹

Judith is another outsider, described at the beginning of the story by the inhabitants of the Pembrokeshire villages of both Upper and Lower Solva as ‘a good daughter but a lonesome neighbour’ (p. 192). She seems uninterested in the villagers’ opinion of her, ‘pa[y]ing] no attention to their praise or blame’ (p. 192). Instead, she has ‘the tolerance of indifference, and in her slow, silent fashion, moved amongst them, a creature apart from the little world in which they had their being’ (p. 192). Again, this story has a participant-

²²⁰ This story was first published in *The London Kelt* in 1896 but is substantially different from the *Welsh Outlook* version. There is no editorial comment on why this story has been included in an altered form (or that it had been previously published). The language of the 1926 version is much more pared back, while the participant-observer narrator’s intrusion into the text is altered considerably.

²²¹ Lillian Bowen-Rowlands, ‘The Lattermath’, *Welsh Outlook*, 12.7 (1925), pp. 192-3 (p. 192). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

observer narrator, whose perspective slips into the narrative within the first few paragraphs: ‘I felt sure that Judith had a history, and imagined that it concerned a man. Judith interested me. Her personality was more marked than the majority of those who dwelt along that surge-tossed coast’ (p. 192). As with Emily Pearson Finnemore’s ‘Marie’s Bridal’, Welsh words which the reader may find difficult are glossed in parentheses throughout the story. However, the first instance of this glossing comes within a report of an interaction the narrator has with some of the local people: “‘Did Judith have a lover?’” I asked one of the *labbigans*, or gossips, of the place one day’ (p. 192). Alan R. Thomas notes the existence of words found in Wales which are ‘clearly not of Welsh derivation [but] are not evidenced in England, either’.²²² He remarks that in Pembroke only, we find [...] *labbigan* ‘a female gossip’.²²³ When local people use local words, they are glossed in parenthesis, marking them out as different or strange. Generally, when the narrator uses dialect, these parentheses are missing, suggesting that, as a participant-observer, the narrator has command of the language.²²⁴ It is when the narrator visits Judith at home that the kinds of descriptions which feature in the works of earlier accounts, particularly Amy Lane’s depiction of a poor woman’s cottage (to which Bowen-Rowlands’s bears an uncanny resemblance²²⁵), recur:

The cottage, wherein the mother and daughter lived was almost destitute of furniture. A net was hung here and there as if to keep out the draught. The “ball” fire was almost black in the grate; upon a wooden table a cracked teapot and a broken suet dumpling, or, as they call it in Pembrokeshire, a trolly, showed the remains of the last meal. Judith looked up from chalking the hearthstone. (p. 193)

²²² Alan R. Thomas, ‘English in Wales’, in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Volume V: English in Britain and Overseas: Origins and Development (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 94-147 (p. 144). Another example which Thomas gives is ‘lattergrass “aftermath”, [which] occurs in both The Gower and Pembroke’ (p. 144), which suggests a derivative of or close relation to Bowen-Rowland’s title.

²²³ Thomas, ‘English in Wales’, p. 144.

²²⁴ There is one contrary example where the narrator refers to seaweed being ‘heaped in a “cowell” (basket)’ (p. 193), but the addition of quotation marks around ‘cowell’ make it stand out as being an unusual word.

²²⁵ We are reminded of Lane’s description of the ‘desolate hovel’ in ‘Old Peggy Morris’: ‘There was her bed, dark and ruinous, a little table with a bit of broken looking glass upon it, a torn Bible, a stool an iron pot, a wooden bowl and spoon, a cracked basin, [...] and little else, if I except a few delf [*sic*] dishes, arranged on a worm-eaten dresser’. See Amy Lane, *Sketches of Wales and the Welsh*, p. 47.

There is much to say about this extract, not least the obvious poverty in which the two women live, having sold off furniture, it would seem, to survive. Just after this moment in the text, Judith angrily retorts that ‘Poor folk [...] must have those as choose to come and pry’ (193), suggesting that the narrator is invading their private space. The uneven power relations between the two women and the narrator are emphasised further when the narrator gives money to Judith’s mother, who has grown ‘faint-hearted’, according to Judith, as ‘She’d have taken no charity a year or so agone’ (p. 193). The image of the old woman scrabbling on the floor for a dropped shilling, which immediately follows the description of the ruined cottage, is especially poignant. The gaze of the observer focuses on the broken and the fractured details of the interior, which seems to suggest that the lives of Judith and her mother are similarly fractured – by poverty, especially, and additionally heartbreak for Judith. The detail of chalking the hearthstone is an important addition, as it refers to the practice of decorating the hearth with a kind of ‘whiting’, as discussed by Iorwerth C. Peate in *The Welsh House* (1940).²²⁶ Peate specifically mentions Solva and includes two different geometric designs which were found there in 1908.²²⁷ This is one of the kinds of domestic creativity, or folk art, that women undertake in the home, only to wash it away again the following day. Lynette Roberts, in her short stories of the 1940s, explores the practice at more length, but it is, by then, a tradition of the past, rather than the present day (discussed below). In this story, as well as Roberts’s, the act of chalking ephemeral designs suggests a pitiful cycle of inscription and erasure.

Towards the end of the story we discover, in a conversation that only the narrator overhears, that Dick has made a secret return to the village to fetch Judith. She, however, is unable to leave her mother with whom she ‘must bide [...] till th’ end’ (p. 193). The narrator,

²²⁶ Iorwerth C. Peate, *The Welsh House: A Study in Folk Culture* (Burnham on Sea, Somerset: Llanerch Press, 2004), p. 171.

²²⁷ See Peate, *The Welsh House*, p. 172, fig 58.

whose gender is never revealed, reinforces their control of the facts of the story at the very end, when the significance of the title of the story is brought to the fore:

Judith lives with her mother still, and works as hard as ever: and nobody divines, *save me*, that she is waiting for the Lattermath, her Lattermath. The meadows know more than one summer. The human heart has more than one spring. (p. 193) [emphasis added]

Interestingly, ‘Lattermath’ is not glossed. This could mean that the narrator assumes the reader will already know what this term means – that there is some kind of shared understanding of the term – or, conversely, that this word is deliberately left unexplained, thereby aligning the narrator with the community of Solva, rather than the reader. The Lattermath can refer to a second reaping (which is itself known as the ‘aftermath’), but the quality of the crop is usually of a lower standard. If Judith were to get this second chance with Dick, it would clearly be after her youth has passed. The end of the story suggests that Judith will, in fact, be waiting until the next life for Dick, as a ship is wrecked just outside Lower Solva, en route to France, just after some of the villagers think they see Dick in the vicinity. The story’s focus on the plight of unmarried or widowed women in small communities (there is no mention of Judith’s father, which suggests that he is already dead) is particularly moving and has parallels with others published in this period when many young men had been killed in the First World War. Yet the way in which the participant-observer narrator’s viewpoint keeps slipping through the text’s narrative implies that the models found in older sketches and travel accounts of Wales have not quite been abandoned. The intimacy the narrator achieves with both Judith and other female members of the local community suggests that the narrator is probably female and so would link to the female participant-observer narrators discussed in Chapter One, but the text itself resists disclosing this information. At the same time, the story’s repeated inclusion of dialect (often specific to this

small area of Pembrokeshire) suggests a level of confidence in the worthiness of this area as subject matter for a short story.

The short story's especial suitability as a vehicle for Welsh expression, as a supposedly marginal form for a marginalised people, was also explored in criticism in the early twentieth century. One particularly illuminating article, by T. Huw Davies, entitled 'Some Recent Welsh Literature and the Limitations of Realism', was published in *Y Cymmrodor* in 1917. While this article obviously predates the publication of *From a Welsh Hillside* (and the revised version of 'The Lattermath'), the authors themselves are mentioned in this article (with the exception of Emily Pearson Finnemore, who again is left out):

It is true that some attempts have been made to reproduce the life of the country in English fiction – *Rhys Lewis* was translated, Theodore Watts Dunton wrote *Aylwin*, Ernest Rhys, Owen Rhoscomyl, Miss Gwendolen Pryce, Miss Bowen Rowlands, John Thomas Alfred Thomas, Miss Dillwyn, John Finnemore, and others varying greatly among themselves in power and achievement wrote English novels and stories dealing with Wales, Welsh history and Welsh life, but not one of them produced any work of first rate power and achievement.²²⁸

Davies clearly finds these authors lacking, an assessment which for some, at least, has begun to be readdressed. Much work has been done on Amy Dillwyn, for example, in recent years and her contribution to Welsh writing in English, especially in novels such as *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880) and *A Burglary* (1883), republished by Honno, has been discussed far more favourably. Nevertheless, Davies makes some interesting comments when he considers the future of writing in Wales, anticipating what will become the trademarks of modernist literature:

It may be, of course, that present events [i.e. the First World War] will create a great revulsion against the realistic [...] but it is just as likely that an intimate acquaintance of a generation with the ghastly realities and possibilities of life will make it all the more impatient with the accepted forms, methods, and traditions of the past.²²⁹

²²⁸ T. Huw Davies, 'Some Recent Welsh Literature and the Limitations of Realism', *Y Cymmrodor* (1917), 186-205 (195-6).

²²⁹ Davies, 'Some Recent Welsh Literature', p. 205.

Davies foretells a future for the short story in Wales in which the constraints of form and traditions of the past would be shrugged off. While Davies's desire for innovation in does not come about until the decades after the First World War, changes can already be traced in women's writing. Writers of the 1920s onwards, such as Dorothy Edwards, would push and warp the boundaries of realism so that many of the traditions of the past would be significantly altered.

Ellen Lloyd-Williams

Ellen Lloyd-Williams's 'The Call of the River' (1924), one of three of her stories published in *Welsh Outlook*, has some of the ethnographic hallmarks of the Finnemores' stories, but puts more emphasis on the supernatural. The story focuses on the character of John Evans, Tŷ Bach, 'a man of no fixed trade', who seems to have intimate knowledge of folklore and the supernatural, a 'queer soul, with eyes that saw more than those of other folk'.²³⁰ Like a Pied Piper of Hamelin figure, he transfixes the local children with his 'tales of the days when the Fair Folk came to buy in Carmarthen market, or when the miner [...] would pause a moment, to hear the tap-tap-tap of goblin hammers' (p. 90). Another interesting folkloric detail is the reference to 'Pwca's lantern', which John often points to, 'hovering at night above the deep waters of the bog' (p. 90). The United States consul for Wales, Wirt Sikes, in *British Goblins: Welsh Folk-Lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions* (1880) explains the significance of the lantern:

The most familiar form of the Pwca story is one which I have encountered in several localities, varying so little in its details that each account would be interchangeable with another by the alteration of local names. This form presents a peasant who is returning home from his work, or from a fair, when he sees a light travelling before him. Looking closer he perceives that it is carried by a dusky little figure, holding a lantern or candle at arm's length over its head. He follows it for several miles, and

²³⁰ Ellen Lloyd-Williams, 'The Call of the River', *Welsh Outlook*, 11.8 (1924), pp. 218-219. Republished in *A View Across the Valley*, ed Jane Aaron (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. 90-94 (p. 90). All further references are to this more recent edition and are given in the body of the text.

suddenly finds himself on the brink of a frightful precipice. From far down below there rises to his ears the sound of a foaming torrent. At the same moment the little goblin with the lantern springs across the chasm, alighting on the opposite side; raises the light again high over its head, utters a loud and malicious laugh, blows out its candle and disappears up the opposite hill, leaving the awestruck peasant to get home as best he can.²³¹

The link between the sound of the ‘foaming torrent’ that Sykes describes and the figure of the Pwca forms the basis of Ellen Lloyd-Williams’s story, in that John has fallen in love with the woman who lives in the river. The main action of the narrative surrounds John’s reluctant engagement to the daughter of Blaenpant, whose father is ‘reckoned to have put by in his time’ (p. 91). As with so many stories from this period, money (and financial security) underpins the proposed marriage. John himself admits he does not love the girl, but his grandmother goads him by saying: ‘Are you a man or are you not, John Evans? Will you waste all your time roaming the fields? You will make no fortunes yourself, and here comes a fortune tossed in your lap! I have no patience with you’ (p. 92). The story deftly captures the tensions between a capitalist ideology and the old world order, including the supernatural, and underlines the many incompatibilities between them. Nevertheless, this story could be seen as a ‘store-house’ of folklore, recording and exploring the way in which the natural world is imprinted with the vestiges of stories from a long-distant past. Like Hilda Vaughan and less well known writers such as Oriel Malet (Malet is discussed towards the end of the chapter), Lloyd-Williams demonstrates the potential for the short story to act as a repository for vanishing folklore, not just cultural traditions and ways of life.²³² Lucy Thomas, in her PhD thesis on Vaughan, draws attention to this quotation from Vaughan on folk culture: ‘I

²³¹Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins: Welsh Folk-Lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions* (1880), pp. 23-4. Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34704/34704-h/34704-h.htm> [accessed 11 September 2013]. This form of the Pwca story may well have influenced John Finnemore’s story ‘Dan Bach’, in which Oxford graduate Dan saves his future wife from falling down a precipice which is masked by fog.

²³² See Lucy Thomas’s discussion of Hilda Vaughan’s use of folklore in her unpublished PhD thesis, *The fiction of Hilda Vaughan (1892-1985): negotiating the boundaries of Welsh identity* (Cardiff University: 2008), especially Chapter 6, “‘Strange memories, not of her own but of her nation’s past began to stir in her’: Welsh Folklore and Folk Custom in the Novels of Hilda Vaughan”, pp. 193-231.

know this life [i.e. the Welsh] more intimately than any other, and I am anxious to record the old ways and types which are fast vanishing before the levelling influences of universal education, easy transportation, and wireless'.²³³ Thomas adds: 'Vaughan, it seems, perceived her own role in relation to folk culture as one of responsibility. The comment positions her writing as an act of conservation, a social and cultural duty to rescue the Welsh past from obscurity'.²³⁴ If we think of Ellen Lloyd-Williams in similar terms, we could view 'The Call of the River' as an act of folkloric conservation. In turn, this suggests a particularly strong relationship between the short story form and the recovery of Welsh culture, not least because the short story has such a deep-rooted relationship with the oral tradition.

Male Ventriloquism: Kathleen Freeman and Dorothy Edwards

Kathleen Freeman (1897-1959) has a substantial *oeuvre* of work, ranging from translations of classical Greek texts to detective fiction. Born in Birmingham, Freeman undertook undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at the University of Wales, Cardiff, and then lectured there, in Classical Greek, for nearly thirty years, Freeman stands out amongst the other female short story writers of her generation in that she was able to make a living from teaching and researching at university level (rather than secondary school) in a subject she was passionate about. Dorothy Edwards (1903-34) had a similarly good standard of education, including reading Greek and Philosophy at the University of Wales, Cardiff. As Clare Flay notes, 'like many other university-educated women of her generation, Edwards was expected to become a teacher'.²³⁵ While Freeman pursued an academic career, and

²³³ Hilda Vaughan, quoted in *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*, eds. Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York: W. H. Wilson, 1942), pp. 1450-1451 (p. 1451).

²³⁴ Thomas, *The fiction of Hilda Vaughan*, p. 204.

²³⁵ Clare Flay, *Dorothy Edwards* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 13.

taught Edwards while she was an undergraduate, Edwards was set on becoming a full-time writer.

Compared to stories by authors such as Emily Pearson Finnemore, Lilian Bowen-Rowlands and Ellen Lloyd-Williams, Kathleen Freeman's 'The Coward', first published in her collection *The Intruder and Other Stories* (1926), and later republished in *A View Across the Valley* (1999), is noticeably different. By contrast to most of the stories collected in *A View Across the Valley*, it features a male narrator and bravely explores sexual passion and intimacy outside of marriage. In Emily Pearson Finnemore's story of the same decade, 'Marie's Bridal', the sexual intimacy that obviously occurs between the as yet unmarried Marie and Dick happens off stage, two years before the story's main action. In Freeman's story, one of the main characters, Nancy, comforts Joe, the narrator of the main section of the story, while his mother lies dying. Joe describes the scene with startling honesty:

She drew my head down to her, and wound my arms about her. She kissed my breast and stroked my throat with twining fingers. She pressed against me, till I went mad, and picking her up, carried her to the room where I slept, under my mother's, for there I could best hear her knock in the night-time. And there like a wild beast I made her mine.²³⁶

The exuberance and power of the couple's passion is vividly portrayed, despite the somewhat disturbing details about the mother's proximity. Later in the story, when Joe's mother is dead, Nancy refuses to marry him:

Marry you! [...] Not I! No, I'll not have you for a husband. Marry you to save you from your mother's curse! Marry you, so that when you kiss me, you needn't look back over your shoulders, lest you see her standing there, pointing at you!' (p. 106)

In life, his mother disapproved of him even speaking to Nancy and, when she lies dead in her room, Joe sees that 'her lips were drawn back and the teeth gleamed' in 'wrath' (p. 103). Jane Aaron, in her notes to the story in *A View Across the Valley*, suggests that Freeman was an

²³⁶ Kathleen Freeman, 'The Coward', in *A View Across the Valley* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. 95-106 (p. 102). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

‘early student of Freud’ as Joe ‘seems to have been held captive throughout his life by a pronounced Oedipus complex.’²³⁷ Joe is the coward of the title, unable to move beyond the constraints of his relationship with his mother, and unable to live beyond the conventions of his time. Nancy, on the other hand, seems to be able to inhabit a more fluid identity – she has employment, even changing jobs in the story (from an ‘eating-house’ to a ‘public-house’, p. 99) because it gives her ‘more free time’ (p. 99), and she can move freely between town and countryside. In the hilly countryside she feels ‘at home’, ‘perhaps because her grandmother had been a gypsy’ (p. 99). Her gypsy lineage marks her out as being different from both the town people and the country people, another outsider. She seems unscathed by pre-marital sex, although, interestingly, she says early on in their relationship that ‘I never thought I could like a man until I met you’ (p. 99), which could be interpreted as her being uninterested, until this point, in a heterosexual relationship. It could be argued, in fact, that there is an undercurrent of coded lesbian desire in this story.²³⁸ While taking on a male persona gives Freeman the freedom to explore sexual experience without being deemed ‘improper’, it does open up many questions about the nature of desire in the story. There is something palpably sexual in the almost voyeuristic descriptions of women in the story while the framing of Joe’s narrative by another (unnamed) male narrator suggests a kind of containment – as if the sexual identities explored within the story must be kept at arm’s length.

Dorothy Edwards’s collection, *Rhapsody* (1927) is one of the most complex and tightly constructed collections to have come out of the 1920s in Wales. Like Freeman,

²³⁷ Jane Aaron, *A View Across the Valley*, p. 274.

²³⁸ Catherine Phelps suggests that ‘while it would be presumptuous to make inferences about Freeman’s sexuality [...] there is certainly a marked difference to Freeman’s lifestyle, a spinster-academic who shared her domestic life with another woman, to what was generally expected of the women at the time’. See Catherine Phelps *[Dis]solving Genres: Arguing the case for Welsh Crime Fiction*, unpublished PhD thesis (Cardiff University, 2013), p. 160. Another story, ‘The Fraying of the Thread’, which is set in Pembrokeshire, suggests a lesbian romance. My thanks to Catherine Phelps for drawing my attention to this story. See Kathleen Freeman, *The Intruder and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1926).

Edwards seems to build barriers of containment around both her characters and settings. Christopher Meredith, in his foreword to *Rhapsody*, notes the predominance of ‘extremely controlled studies of constrained desire, loneliness and incomplete relationships’ in her stories.²³⁹ Again, we are reminded of the loneliness which, as Frank O’Connor argues, defines many modern short stories. Indeed, Clare Flay writes eloquently of Edwards’s position within Welsh culture and her relationship with form: ‘[d]oubly marginalized as a woman and as a Welsh writer, debarred from the patriarchal leisured society that she chose to depict and the male-dominated work-class society from which she came, the short story became Edwards’s chosen vehicle.’²⁴⁰

One of her most famous stories, ‘The Conquered’, explores gendered power relations with much nuance and is also the only story to have a distinctly Welsh setting. The story, which revolves around an English narrator, Frederick Trenier, who visits his aunt ‘on the borders of Wales’, interweaves physical remnants of conquest and colonisation, in the form a Roman road which runs close to his aunt’s property, with psychological conquest.²⁴¹ He flirts with a Welsh neighbour, Gwyneth, throughout the story but the relationship does not develop, partly due to Frederick’s pedantry. At the beginning of the story, Frederick sets the tone for his over-blown sense of self-importance, commenting that he has brought ‘plenty of books down so that it should not be a waste of time.’ He views the women round him, including his cousins, Jessica and Ruth, as having little importance and does not attribute any value to the ‘fun [they] used to have’ (p. 46) when he stayed with them in previous years. In a particularly telling moment, Frederick notes that Ruth remembered ‘far more about what we used to do than I did; but I suppose that is only natural, since she had been there all the time in between,

²³⁹ Christopher Meredith, ‘Foreword’, in *Rhapsody* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007), pp. ix-xiv (p. ix).

²⁴⁰ Flay, *Dorothy Edwards*, p. 25.

²⁴¹ Dorothy Edwards, ‘The Conquered’, in *Rhapsody* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007), pp. 45-59 (p. 45). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

and I do not suppose anything very exciting had happened to her, whereas I had been nearly everywhere' (p. 46). As Katie Gramich notes, Frederick is 'urbane, cultured and egocentric', to the point that his male ego threatens to trample the more humble desires of his less worldly cousins. In terms of connections with coded sexual desire in Freeman's 'The Coward', the depiction of Ruth might well have wider implications. Once 'very lively and something of a tomboy' (p. 45) and described as more 'like her father' (p. 51), Ruth has now 'become very quiet' (p. 45) and conforms to the expectations of her gender. This depiction might now be recognised as a portrayal of a now submerged lesbian identity.²⁴² At the same time, as all of these descriptions are being mediated by Frederick, it could be the case that he is deliberately labelling her in order to marginalise and silence her. Ruth, like so many of Edwards's female characters, has been contained and perhaps even conquered by a patriarchal hierarchy.

In deploying a male narrator, Edwards is, in fact, drawing attention to the constructed and arbitrary nature of gender imbalances. Elizabeth D. Harvey notes that when male writers use this technique, 'ventriloquism is an appropriation of the feminine voice, [which] reflects and contributes to a larger cultural silencing of women'.²⁴³ As Edwards turns this technique around, it could be argued that she is wresting power from the dominant, male language – especially of imperialism, as the title of 'The Conquered' suggests. In other stories, such as 'A Country House' and 'Sweet Grapes', Edwards again uses this technique of ventriloquism to draw attention to the imbalances in gender equality. In 'A Country House', the male narrator is a jealous husband who dislikes his wife having any contact with the outside world. As they live so far away from any town, they have no electricity so he decides to bring in an electrician, called Richardson, to see if anything can be done. As Clare Flay notes, the husband 'continually attempts to control and oppress his wife, fearing that if she is left to her

²⁴² There are comparisons to be made here with Imogen Rees in Amy Dillwyn's *A Burglary* (1883), who leaves behind her more boyish traits by the end of the novel.

²⁴³ Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 12.

own devices she will become completely wild and uninhibited'.²⁴⁴ The arrival of Richardson into their home makes the husband even more certain that his wife will cheat on him even though his wife is simply desperate for conversation and company. In 'Sweet Grapes', we find another male narrator, who acts as a frame to the story of Hugo Ferris, who goes to the Peak district for a holiday. He rents part of a building which is 'rather like a castle, but quite obviously built in Victoria's time'²⁴⁵ but is immediately disappointed as it seems 'vulgar and ostentatious' (p. 112). In the main part of the building lives a young woman named Elizabeth, with whom Ferris strikes up a casual relationship. The way the narrator refers to her as 'hanging on the lowest bough waiting to be plucked' (p. 123) illuminates the story's title and suggests that she will be cast aside when Ferris has finished 'consuming' her, as it were. The story ends with Ferris oblivious to the fact that Elizabeth has developed any kind of attachment to him, and returns home having laughed about the fact that he will not be sorry that that relationship has ended. Here Edwards lays bare the unequal and unjust treatment of women in a society which regards them as products to be consumed. Her layering of two male perspectives underlines how powerless lower-class women like Elizabeth are in a society dominated by men. This analysis has barely scraped the surface of Edwards's unremitting deconstruction of gender relations, yet it hopes to demonstrate that although her writing seems very different from her contemporaries, she was in fact committed to uncovering the ways in which women could be silenced.

Kate Roberts

There are many ways in which the Welsh-language author Kate Roberts could be viewed as an auto-ethnographic writer. In a translation of a radio interview with Saunders Lewis, which was broadcast in 1947, Kate Roberts discusses the way she writes about experiences drawn

²⁴⁴ Flay, *Dorothy Edwards*, p. 23.

²⁴⁵ Dorothy Edwards, 'Sweet Grapes', in *Rhapsody* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007), pp. 111-124 (p. 111). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

from her local community. When Lewis notes that Roberts ‘look[s] at other people’s lives’ in her stories, rather than her own’,²⁴⁶ Roberts explores this further, underlining the importance of ‘looking through [her] imagination at the experience of the people [she] was raised with’ and ‘describing the things that led to that experience’.²⁴⁷ It is this process of looking at the causes of these experiences which leads her to say that ‘that’s probably why there’s so much looking back in the stories’.²⁴⁸ While Roberts uses this reflective technique to explore ‘an impoverished community at an impoverished time in its history’, and to highlight her community’s ‘fight against poverty’, she also captures the life of that community in vivid detail, perhaps even more so than her contemporaries writing in English.²⁴⁹ Although a prolific writer in Welsh, Roberts’s work was made available to English-speaking audiences with the publication of *A Summer Day and Other Stories* (1946), a translation of some of her short stories, with a foreword by Storm Jameson. More recently Joseph P. Clancy has translated a significant proportion of her fictions in *The World of Kate Roberts* (1991), which has made her work even more accessible to the non-Welsh speaker.

One of Kate Roberts’s best known stories is ‘The Quilt’, taken from her 1937 collection, *Winter Fair*. The quilt of the title is one of the few things Ffebi Williams can keep when her husband goes bankrupt, losing the business, their house and most of their possessions. Ffebi is desperate to hold on to this luxurious quilt, an item she bought despite the couple’s finances already being strained:

There Ffebi had the greatest temptation of her time of economizing, and she wrestled with it as if she were fighting a battle with her enemy. There were beautiful flannels and quilts there, and in the midst of them one quilt that was making everyone’s mouth water. Every woman would take it and finger it going by and cast a yearning look at it in leaving. It was a quilt of thick white wool, with stripes across it, stripes of every

²⁴⁶ ‘Kate Roberts in Interview with Saunders Lewis’, trans Rob Mimirriss. Available at http://www.robmimirriss.com/Kate_Roberts2.html [accessed 24 August 2013].

²⁴⁷ ‘Kate Roberts in Interview with Saunders Lewis’.

²⁴⁸ ‘Kate Roberts in Interview with Saunders Lewis’.

²⁴⁹ ‘Kate Roberts in Interview with Saunders Lewis’.

colour, blue and green, yellow and red, not stiff and straight, but undulating. Its fringes were thick and a proof of the thickness and the close weaving of the wool. Ffebi was overcome with a longing to buy it, and the more she considered her poverty, the more intense the longing grew.²⁵⁰

The item is a symbol not just of luxury but of beauty and seems to be the one thing in Ffebi's life which transcends the increasing poverty of her day to day existence. This is a quilt which all the women want, as it represents warmth, colour and vibrancy – things that are missing from their lives. The quilt is also handcrafted and so represents the traditional crafts and skills of individual women. This directly contrasts with the mass production of products sold by the 'big companies' (p. 77) that have put her husband out of business. This shift away from locally produced goods to mass manufacture and retail (symbolised in the story by the tinned food) by large companies marks the end of the way of life Ffebi and her husband have known, an issue which is a key element of Zagarell's discussion of narratives of community. At the end of the story, Ffebi is desperately clutching the quilt as the house is cleared of all its furniture, herself also a symbol of an era now passed.

'A Summer Day', one of the first stories to be translated into English for a mass audience, encapsulates some of the recurring features found in Roberts's short stories – vivid descriptions of landscape and topography, precise detail of characters' attire and attitude, and sharp, witty dialogue. What is particularly interesting about this story is the way in which Roberts seems to play with the model of the ethnographic survey of Welsh cultural attributes, replacing the participant-observer narrator with a trio of young girls who travel to a different village on a day's holiday and are welcomed into a local woman's parlour for tea. En route, they stop to drink milk at a farmhouse which is described, in terms reminiscent of Anne Beale and Amy Lane, with a focus on order and neatness: the farmhouse is 'newly white-

²⁵⁰ Kate Roberts, 'The Quilt', in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 79. All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text. Rhys Davies's story, 'The Nightgown', about female desire being represented by clothing and fabric, has some similarities with Roberts's story.

washed' with a 'neatness in the straight furrows and in the level beds of onions' in the garden.²⁵¹ The rest of the story is made up of their hostess bemoaning her son's marriage to Miss Jones, a barmaid from the same village as the narrator. The son, who remains asleep for the rest of the story, has 'got the girl into trouble' (p. 67). There is a sharp distinction made between the freedom and openness of the natural environment that the girls travel through to reach the village of their hostess and the cluttered, claustrophobic, socially constructed space they reach. At one point, there is almost a paganistic quality to the girls' revelry in the hot sunshine as they 'gave [their] bodies, which had been shrinking in knitted coats throughout the winter, to that god' (p. 65). The confinement of these garments can be read as a metaphor for the social structures that constrict characters, especially women, but could perhaps be opened up further to include the constraints laid upon genre by the forms that shape and contain twentieth-century short fiction.

The issue of freedom from constriction recurs as a theme throughout the story, manifesting itself through the décor of the hostess' home. Here, again, Roberts seems to be playing with the trope of the participant-observer narrator, as the same kinds of details that would normally be found in travellers' accounts, or in the stories of a writer such as Elizabeth Gaskell, are pointedly referred to. Inside the house, the furniture is almost claustrophobically 'full of china, inside and out' to the point that 'there was hardly a square inch that had not some piece of china or other' (p. 66). The narrator is surprised that there is 'no dust' and that 'everything [is] shining' (p. 66). What seems like a marker of cleanliness and good housekeeping, however, becomes a symbol of superficiality and the constraints of respectable appearances. Even the hostess's body seems to be over-spilling clothes she wears, including a

²⁵¹ Kate Roberts, 'A Summer Day' in *A Summer Day and Other Stories*, ed Storm Jameson (Cardiff: Penmark Press, 1946), pp. 63-69 (p. 63). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

blouse that is ‘too small for her in every direction’ (p. 65). Here, I would argue Roberts is playing with the ‘thick description’ found in many earlier travel texts, which commented on wider cultural issues through a high level of detail. By the end of the story, the narrator notes a shift from it being a ‘bright house full of china’ to a ‘heavy house’ (p. 69). I suggest that these details are key to the metaphorical richness of the story, as they point to a culture which puts far too much emphasis on appearances and social respectability. Despite the mother’s attempts to maintain her own and her husband’s position as ‘respectable people’ (p. 68) within the community (the husband, we discover, is an elder in the chapel), the son’s actions have made a mockery of that respectability. The marriage is a sham as the son ‘hasn’t been near [his new wife] since [the marriage], and she hasn’t been near him either’ (p. 67). Roberts seems to suggest that the institution of marriage has dulled (even ruined) the son as he no longer washes, puts a collar on or joins in with village activities, such as a ‘ploughing match with the boys’, as he did in previous years (p. 68). The specific detail in this story, with its careful depiction of female-centred domestic space, is imbued with symbolic meaning, but at the same time seems to be drawing attention to the suffocation caused by social custom and tradition, as well as by the family structure itself.

Lynette Roberts

Lynette Roberts encapsulates much of Mary Louise Pratt’s perspective on auto-ethnography – of auto-ethnographic writing being concerned with authenticity of voice and the construction of a counter-narrative. Yet Roberts cannot be claimed as an auto-ethnographic writer without some considerable qualification, not least in regards to her national identity. As Patrick McGuinness notes, ‘Roberts was born in Argentina, educated at art school in London, and had been in Wales, married to a Welshman, less than two years’ when she wrote ‘Poem from

Llanybri', in which she situates herself as being part of Welsh culture.²⁵² He goes on to say that

Though her parents' families, Australian for generations, had originally come from Wales, she was Welsh by a combination of choice and imaginative will. 'Poem from Llanybri' is a cosmopolitan's claim to a rooted culture that is also a culture of rootedness.²⁵³

The question that needs addressing here is whether Roberts's short fiction is also looking for that same kind of inclusivity and rootedness as her poetry. At the same time, what does it mean for a writer who has a genealogy embedded in colonised countries to adopt another contested space and call it home? Roberts, with her ethnographic eye, but deep personal attachment to and interest in Welsh culture, should be the model of the detached yet fascinated participant-observer narrator. Yet because she pares back her stories so much, this authoritative stance does not manifest itself.

In comparison to Kate Roberts, Lynette Roberts's stories are far briefer and are more like snapshots of rural life. Her seven short stories form a preface to the essay *An Introduction to Village Dialect* (1944), in which she 'endeavour[ed] to prove that [contemporary Welsh dialect] has both a tradition and a root' and traces a variety of sayings and folkloric traditions through texts from various periods of Welsh history.²⁵⁴ As Patrick McGuinness notes, the essay is 'passionate and piecemeal, and is unlikely to satisfy the scholar'²⁵⁵ as it looks to demonstrate 'the essence of all languages of the soil' (p. 119). Despite this dubiously essentialist position, Roberts's concluding remarks to the essay are especially interesting as they suggest a desire to 'write back', as many colonised subjects

²⁵² Patrick McGuinness, 'Introduction', in *Lynette Roberts: Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), pp. i-xxxix (p. xii).

²⁵³ McGuinness, 'Introduction', p. xii.

²⁵⁴ Lynette Roberts, 'Introduction to Village Dialect', in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. 107-124 (p. 107). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

²⁵⁵ Patrick McGuinness, 'Introduction', in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. vii-xvii (p. xiv).

attempt to do, to stereotypes of Welsh dialect she has encountered in the media, as she hoped to ‘dispel the false misrepresentations used by both radio and amateur writers to represent the Welsh-speaking peoples’ (p. 124). In a letter to the poet Robert Graves, she reiterates these same words, ‘false misrepresentations’ (p. 167), adding that these representations need ‘correct[ing]’, especially those found in ‘short stories written by foolish pimps such as Henry Treece’ (p. 167), of the New Apocalypse school.

A brief look at one of the stories Treece wrote entitled ‘Two at the table’ (1940-41) provides ample evidence for Roberts’s claims. Originally published in the New Apocalypse journal, *Kingdom Come*, the opening alone gives a flavour of the kind of picture Treece paints of Welsh life: ‘The day before yesterday Blodwen grinned along the alpine edge of the knife and sliced the rye-bread carelessly, thick as the tombstones outside the Wesleyan Chapel.’²⁵⁶ The story focuses on Blodwen’s affair with her lodger, Twm, the ‘broad-shouldered caveman’ from Swansea with ‘gold hair that swung in the mountain air like a piper’s sporran, and hands as big as a dinner-plate’ (p. 111). Much of the story’s clumsy comic effect lies in the other characters’ knowledge of the affair, which results in much sniggering behind the back of Blodwen’s unwitting husband, Evan. Racial stereotypes abound, from Blodwen and Evan’s ‘dark’ hair and features (p. 114), to sexual incontinence (including most of the widowed population of the village), lying, thieving and general stupidity. Characters’ speech (and song) is rendered in a particularly irritating fashion, from Evan’s claim that Twm has said he sings ‘like a toad with a belly full of rusty nails – that was too much, look you’ (p. 118) to Twm’s ‘Celtic frenzy’ as he spots some dandelions and breaks into song: ‘Piddle-the-bed [...] Piddle-the-bed that she lies on’ (p. 113). Even in a moment of free indirect discourse, when the text presents Blodwen’s fears at her parents discovering her to be

²⁵⁶ Henry Treece, ‘Two at the Table’, in *I Cannot Go Hunting Tomorrow* (London: Grey Walls Press, 1946), p. 111. All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

pregnant by Twm, the language is stereotypically transcribed as ‘Welsh’: ‘Such straight-laced folk, look you, with their American organ and the eldest son a preacher’ (p. 112). Considering these gross misrepresentations, it is no wonder that Lynette Roberts felt the need to write something more authentic and true to the Welsh.

An important context for Roberts’s writing is the work of St Fagans National History Museum, situated at St Fagans Castle, near Cardiff, which first opened in 1948. Roberts was obviously aware of Dr Iorwerth C. Peate, first curator of the museum, as she refers specifically to his work in setting up the project in her essays as well as his book, *The Welsh House* (1940). The museum’s purpose was to ‘record and study the culture of Wales, including its crafts, architecture, costume, agriculture, folklore and dialects’.²⁵⁷ In her essays, Roberts is particularly interested in not just recording but preserving Welsh architecture, especially that of rural communities, arguing that it is ‘far more urgent’ to have the ‘support of valuable persons like Dr Peate to help preserve and repair the numerous farms and cottages’ than it is to put examples ‘in a museum behind glass’ (p. 128). While Roberts’s stories may have analogies with the project at St Fagans in their ‘authentic’ representation of Welsh dialect, they are far more than simple reproductions of culture or picturesque tableaux for consumption by tourists. The stories themselves are threaded through with details about domestic interiors which capture both the beauty and the drudgery of aspects of female cultural practices.

‘Tiles’, the second story in *Seven Stories*, begins in the middle of a conversation between the narrator, who is unwell, and her neighbour, Rosie. Rosie lights a fire, using traditional materials (called ‘pele’) and then attempts to scrub the floor, prompting the

²⁵⁷ See ‘The Museum of Welsh Life’ in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 519.

narrator to complain about having floorboards instead of tiles, as ‘almost every cottage has them but mine’.²⁵⁸ This leads Rosie to tell of her experiences when younger:

I’m telling you right, there was an old lady living just below our farm in Plasnewydd and mother used to send me down with a piece of bacon or some milk. She was very old and doubled up, and you could see the pleats and bows on her back as she bent over her stick. She wore a cap with frills and loops, and a flannel apron. [...] Once a week she would do her floor over with a burdock – no dock-leaf, I mean – with the point. She’d go like this.’ And Rosie stood to make the circle and placed a dot in the centre. ‘She’d do like this, until when you came to look at it from the door, it looked like linoleum. Sometimes she did other designs such as triangles, or small circles like trefoil, or squares. Round the hearth she would do stoning in another design. Under the grate was also white. She’s dead now, I know; and I remember these things when I was 14, now I’m 46. It must be on cement and it comes off a dark green.’ (pp. 96-7)

The details contained in this extract could pass as ethnographic descriptions of rural Welsh traditions – from the style of female dress to the way homes were decorated by women. As noted above, Peate includes some interesting examples of these floor patterns, a practice which seems to belong to a different era by the time that *The Welsh House* is published. In contrast to Lilian Bowen-Rowlands’s representation of chalking, Roberts includes far more detail. The use of dialogue, coupled with very little context regarding character or setting in the story’s opening, breaks away from the participant-observer narration that Zagarell notes in earlier narratives of community or, indeed, ethnographic descriptions of Welsh life. The patterns the old woman decorates her floor with may have parallels with a tradition in Indian culture, which is known by various different names, including rangoli, alpana, muggulu or kolam, which refers to the practice of making stylised or geometric designs on the floor, either for celebrations or to encourage good fortune, and is often done by women.²⁵⁹ In both cultures, the home is at the centre of women’s lives, especially of the lower classes. In India, it has been traditionally viewed as an essential part of being able to demonstrate feminine

²⁵⁸ Lynette Roberts, ‘Tiles’, in *Lynette Roberts: Diaries, Letters and Recollections*, ed Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. 96-97 (p. 96). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

²⁵⁹ See Neelam Verma, *Traditions: a complete book of Indian arts and crafts motifs* (Mumbai: English Edition Publishers and Distributors, 2005) for further details of rangoli.

grace. In ancient India, ‘womenfolk specialised in line drawing, being trained in drawing patterns [...] and exquisite, unswerving line work was associated with the dexterity of the female hand.’²⁶⁰ The use of art within the home is a creative outlet for women in a way that other occupations did not offer, such looking after children or agricultural labour. This folk tradition, in both Indian and Welsh culture, could also be read as a symbol of contestation. Given India’s own troubled history of colonisation, the opportunity to re-inscribe culture, however ephemeral, is a marker of a distinct and enduring national and cultural identity. For Roberts’s story, the knowledge and skill needed to execute these similarly complex designs is fast disappearing in an increasingly Anglicised Wales – the story captures the existence of the designs, and some idea of their shape, but not how they are executed. Roberts is also drawing attention to the fragility of the oral tradition of handing down lore from mother to daughter. ‘Tiles’ tries to mimic that female-to-female link, from the old woman to Rosie, and from Rosie to the narrator. However, there is a generational time lag between Rosie’s original experience and her telling of that experience, as well as gaps in the description of the process of completing the floor designs themselves. Perhaps most importantly, the designs themselves are ambivalent – they could be an expression of artistic autonomy or a symbol for the repetitive, unending labour of women in the domestic sphere. As Lynette Roberts herself was an ambivalent figure in *Llanybri*, a literal outsider on the periphery of language, culture and community, it may well be that this perspective fundamentally informed and shaped her fascination with the ‘otherness’ of Welsh culture. The lack of the participant-observer narrator ensures that Roberts is not simply re-enacting the cultural imperialism of travel writers and sketchers of the past, and turning the ‘exotic’ and unusual practices of the Welsh into a consumable product. Is it possible, we must ask, for a writer to be classed as auto-ethnographic when the culture they are writing about is not their own? Roberts, as an outsider

²⁶⁰ C. Sivaramamurhi, *The Painter in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1978), p. 8.

looking in, is perhaps *performing* auto-ethnography, rather than *doing* auto-ethnography. Yet her writing contains all the hallmarks of auto-ethnography, from Pratt's emphasis on the authenticity of voice and counter-narrative, to Reed-Danahay's stress on cultural displacement. Having been born in a country which was itself colonised, and having several generations before her who were settlers in Australia, it is perhaps unsurprising that Roberts, with no firm roots of her own, is most comfortable in the position of the exiled auto-ethnographer. This is, after all, a subject position which is defined as boundary crossing. If this is the case, then Roberts has the capacity to locate herself as an auto-ethnographic writer without being Welsh by birth. Perhaps auto-ethnographic, as a label for writers, could be defined as a means of conveying a complex meta-understanding of culture, not just the particular culture they happen to be situated in at the time of composition. As such, it may have the power to transform epistemologies and break out of binary oppositions, such as insider and outsider, home and exile.

Margiad Evans

Margiad Evans is, of course, another important outsider in the history of women's writing in Wales. Having spent time on the Welsh Border, in Herefordshire as a child, Evans fell in love with the country, its landscapes and traditions. While she may technically be an outsider, the adoption of the name 'Margiad Evans' over her real name of Peggy Eileen Whistler, gives some indication of her desire to immerse herself in the culture and belong. The impact on women's lives from the 'harsh physical environment' that Zagarell refers to in some communities is particularly noticeable in 'People of His Pasture', from her collection *The Old and the Young* (1948). Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan has emphasised that both Margiad Evans and Kate Roberts have a common narrative thread, as their

short stories depict a domestic world in a rural or semi-rural community where the women's lives are full of hardship and struggle. Although there is bleakness at times, there is above all bravery and dignity in these women.²⁶¹

Lloyd-Morgan notes that the American short story writer, Eudora Welty, was a particular favourite of Evans, especially her 'stories about working people in disadvantaged rural communities in the southern states of America, told in a superb literary style.'²⁶² There are many similarities between the subject matter of their writing, as well as the style they both adopt which elevates their simple subject matter above the mundane and trivial.

The descriptions of landscape surrounding the farm house at the centre of 'People of His Pasture' especially striking in their bleakness, giving the impression that the landscape is almost a character itself in the story:

On the hills around this solitary house shone the astringent green of the March pasturage, dotted with ewes like silver-grey puff-balls. [...] The sky was smaller than the land, and the land was one great pasture, one loneliness so large, so lost as to stir a kind of abstract pity. [...] The house, half mill, half farm, with its wretched, bald garden was positively alone, by the path of the water. Nor did any other homestead, barn or shelter show itself within view.²⁶³

While the panoramic gaze of the participant-observer narrator can perhaps still be detected in this description, as well as the aestheticisation of the sheep as 'puff balls' on a wider canvas, there is a significant shift in the tone of the writing compared to earlier accounts. The picture painted here in words is a canvas of desolate nature rather than overflowing with density of meaning. In the midst of this rural landscape is a 'figure of a man trudging with hurdles', the 'only example of humanity' who works 'as if he were the only saviour of the land, its symbol and its sacrifice.' In fact it is his wife, the mother of their three young children who is the sacrifice, weighed down by work, poverty and successive pregnancies. It is here that Evans

²⁶¹ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, *Margiad Evans* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), p. 106. Lloyd-Morgan also points to stylistic affinities between Evans's 'The Ruin' and Kate Roberts's 'Y Gollod' ('The Loss'). See *The Old and the Young*, p. 209.

²⁶² Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Introduction', *The Old and the Young* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), p. 7-17, p. 15.

²⁶³ Margiad Evans, 'People of his Pasture', *The Old and the Young* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998) pp. 51-60 (p. 52). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

demonstrates some of her most perceptively auto-ethnographic writing, in that she provides a counter narrative which recognises and values the wife's work on the farm, in the home and with the children – work which is universal to women yet also particular to the area Evans sets the story. The unnamed woman finds a teenager, named Daniel, knocking at the door to warn her about the suffering of one of the diseased ewes. There is a moment of failed communication between the two characters when the woman refuses to help, saying 'we've had two die already. It can't be helped' (p. 55). Daniel cannot understand why nothing is going to be done, even if the only course of action is to have the ewe destroyed. She tells Daniel: 'You see, she might recover. And then it would be a waste, wouldn't it?' (p. 57) Daniel, an architect's son, is appalled by this attitude but he seems unable to see the family's point of view, reliant as they are on the income from their farm and animals:

He absolutely recoiled from her without disguise. Why was he afraid of her? Why didn't he shout at her and her brute of a husband? Worst of all, he hated her cunning gentleness, her touch. So this was what country people were like! Well, they were hateful[...] He thought of that phrase, "a holiday in the country", with its attractive associations for town-bred persons. Flowers in the garden, lambs in the field.

(p. 57)

His city-dweller status makes him unable to square his vision of the Welsh Border with the idealised picture he has in his mind. His father's job also suggests carefully designed order, something which seems out of place in the incomprehensible world of the 'country people'.

After Daniel recoils, there is another instance when he has a brief moment of connection with the woman as she shows him a shortcut off her land:

They were close to the bridge. He was pressed against it. He thought he had some warning, but it was too brief for him to think. In a gasp his body seemed to become two bodies and one being. An uncontrollable one. [...] The woman was kissing him!

(p. 59)

This extraordinary and overwhelming image of connection metaphorically joins the urban and the rural for a brief second, but it also creates a fleeting sense of community. As the

woman poignantly says immediately after the kiss, '[t]here are days when I could scream and scream and scream [...] days when I could go mad' (p. 59). This kiss enables her to reach out and have some form of communication with another living being who has no other demands on her, unlike her husband or children. The story is also significant as it resists a single narrative perspective, instead shifting its focus from the woman's daughter, playing in the garden, to Daniel, to the woman, and back again to Daniel. The difference between this text and its nineteenth-century ethnographic predecessors is that the participant-observer narrator has been diffused into multiple perspectives. Instead of criticising rural practices, the story elevates the realities of agricultural life for women to the level of tragedy

The environment as character is an even more prominent feature of Margiad Evans's 'The Old Woman and the Wind'. Mrs Ashstone lives in a 'tiny cottage, slapped with limewash' which is 'built under a single flake of rock. Some bloomless gorse bushes and pale broken patches, that was all. There was no living feeling, but only a heedless and violent solitude'.²⁶⁴ Here Evans's description evokes a kind of minimalist pointillism, with broken brush work suggesting the landscape's rugged sparseness. The landscape's 'violent solitude' is embodied by the wind: 'Wind, always blowing, roaring, pushing at her and her cottage, shoving her out of place, pouncing on her hair. Cursed wind, too big for the world' (p. 35). Mrs Ashstone lives in a barren landscape, broken up only by her meagre crocuses, a 'clump of ochre yellow sheathes' which have been 'smashed' by the wind, as it has 'smashed everything else' (p. 35). Instead of some sort of pastoral idyll, the cottage is surrounded not by sheep, but rocks, which lie 'like sheep' on grass which is likened to 'quivering wire'. The environment, as a character in its own right, oppresses the women of whom Evans writes.

²⁶⁴ Margiad Evans, 'The Old Woman and the Wind', in *The Old and the Young* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998) pp. 35-43 (p. 36). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

Women writers of the 1960s and 1970s would take this complex relationship between women, nature and oppression to another level (discussed in Chapter Three) but Evans might be regarded, along with Kate Roberts, as an early proponent of ecofeminism.

There is no doubt that, for Mrs Ashstone, this location has had a strongly formative influence. There is a definite sense that her surroundings have warped and soured her both mentally (she has ‘forgotten that she was called Annie’, p. 35) as well as physically:

She had a little screw of hair on top of her skull, a screw of nose curled upwards like a dead leaf, and small, clutching yellow hands that were always chasing the flying and broken things floating in the wind’s wake. Somebody said she looked as if she were forever catching feathers in the air, and it was true that she did. (p. 36)

This description is intriguing on several different levels, as it aligns her with a kind of supernatural witch figure, a label which is explicitly applied to her later in the story, but at the same time locates her as a skeletal extension of the landscape, with her screw-like hair and nose echoing the wire-like grass – hard and bare. Yet, at the same time, her clutching yellow hands evoke the yellow flowers that the wind destroys, while the curling, leaf-like nose softens her appearance, suggesting an almost organic relationship with the landscape around her. It is the final image, of catching feathers in the air, which undermines her harsh exterior, suggesting not just futility, but fragility. The loneliness of this misfit protagonist clearly has many parallels with Frank O’Connor’s theories about the marginalised, outlaw figure of the short story in *The Lonely Voice*. The way in which nature (especially its harsh reality as opposed to picturesque beauty) is depicted maps out the difficulties that the women in Evans’s stories have to overcome in order to survive. As with other narratives of community, the processes which sustain small communities (rather than the idea of progress) are closely linked to the natural features of the local environment itself.

Eiluned Lewis

While she was born in Newtown, Montgomeryshire, and had a mother who was a fluent Welsh speaker, Eiluned Lewis also spent a great deal of her life in England. Educated at Westfield College, University of London, Lewis worked as a personal assistant to a newspaper editor and later as a drama critic, experiences which inform one of her stories ‘The Elastic-Sided Boots and the Angel’. Published in the *Welsh Outlook* in 1929, this story juxtaposes country life in Wales with city life in London. Of all Lewis’s short stories, this particular one seems to encapsulate Reed-Danahay’s description of the auto-ethnographer as an exile, who is never quite ‘at home’ anywhere. The ‘elastic-sided boots’ of the title refer to the boots the unnamed female narrator has to wear in order to take part in the hunt, having travelled to Wales from London for a short holiday. Known as ‘Jemimas’, these boots are usually used for dressing up and date back over thirty years to her father’s time at Cambridge. The boots could be viewed as representative of the narrator herself as being somewhat out of place in the environment in which they are placed. Although the narrator cuts a somewhat ridiculous figure in this attire, as she prepares to join the hunt, and ends up ‘hot, tired’ and with her hat stuck in an ‘overhanging hawthorn tree’, there is overall something restorative and wholesome about the experience of returning home to Wales.²⁶⁵ The view is described as tranquil and extraordinarily beautiful as the narrator travels through the valley in the ‘delicate dusk of early spring towards a primrose coloured sunset’ (p. 176). It is this vista that makes her realise she has ‘come home’ (p. 176). While she admits she envies ‘Londoners who take their short holidays in Sussex, or spend a week-end “somewhere up the river”’ (p. 176), the sight of the Welsh hills makes her thank ‘bountiful Heaven for every good mile that separated [her] from Fleet Street’ (p. 176).

²⁶⁵ Eiluned Lewis, ‘The Elastic-sided Boots and the Angel’, *Welsh Outlook*, 16.6 (1929), 176-178 (177). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

When back in London, towards the end of the story, the narrator nearly injures herself when she tries to jump off the tube, having realised she has missed her stop while reading. There are clear similarities between the scene where she lost her hat to the hawthorn tree as she nearly gets stuck in the doors, with her hat ‘knocked sideways’ (p. 177). The language used to describe this environment contrasts sharply with that used to describe Wales, however, as it is alienating, strange and perhaps even malevolent. The trains are described as ‘an alien breed’, while the doors that nearly crush the narrator close ‘slowly and relentlessly as the doors of hell on a lost soul’ (p. 177). The narrator is also described as being as ‘[s]tartled as Balaam’s ass’ (p. 177). This biblical reference, to the ass belonging to the prophet Balaam, alludes to a moment when the ass, but not Balaam, notices an angel standing in the road. The angel in Lewis’s story is simply the name of the tube station that signals the narrator’s journey has gone off course. The narrator has to play the part of an ingénue, taking instructions from various male passengers who bark directions at her. Her ‘frightfully crooked’ hat (p. 177) has given her the appearance of having ‘never been in London before’ and she even considers whether she ‘should play the role assigned to her by “muffing” the last step’ of her journey (p. 177). Yet at the end of the story, there is something about her that makes the male passenger comment on the morning being fine for hunting. She muses: ‘Confound the fellow! Were there straws in my hair? Or was I bandy-legged as well as stiff?’ (p. 178). There are no obvious markers to show that she knows about this kind of country lifestyle, yet somehow the male passenger seems to sense that she will understand his reference. The narrator is ‘unwilling to miss [her] cue in any conversation’ (p. 178) which suggests that she has to play along with this performance. A tiny detail earlier in the story about the elastic-sided boots’ use (that they are only ever used for occasional games of charades) suggests that there is something fundamentally inauthentic about the narrator’s

position in either English or Welsh culture – that she is acting in whichever location she finds herself in. Again, Reed-Danahay’s description of the auto-ethnographer comes to mind, as Lewis seems to be commenting on the problems of being caught between two identities.

A later work by Lewis, entitled *In Country Places* (1951) is proposed as a diary which features a ‘host of small domestic happenings and occasions’.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it does have moments when it creeps into storytelling mode and the entries read more like poetic sketches or the beginnings of short stories, rather than journal entries. The way she writes ‘not of one April but of several Aprils’ suggests several years compressed together, making the work seem less like a chronological account of country life and more like a semi-fictional representation. Perhaps most significant for the purposes of this thesis is the way Lewis explores the relationship between the land and its history. In Wales there seems to be a particularly strong connection between the land and its history, which is evident in the physical remnants of that history in the landscape. This close relationship perhaps explains why Welsh writers often chose a Welsh context for their fictions, a connection which Lewis articulates well. In ‘The Unforgetting Land’, set on the Pembrokeshire coast, Lewis notes that ‘Here indeed it is difficult to forget the past’ (p. 71). The landscape Lewis describes is littered with the relics of past times, from the ‘famous cromlech, with delicately poised capstone and lichened uprights’ to the ‘grey Norman cathedral’, treasures for the ‘historian and antiquarian’ to explore (p. 71). Some of the relics from past times have now disappeared, including the bell ‘which summoned the men from the fields’ but ‘has been carried off long since to the National Museum of Wales’ (p. 72). There is an air of sadness and poignancy about this particular loss, as the bell tower now ‘stands empty’ (p. 72), a monument to a way

²⁶⁶ Eiluned Lewis, *In Country Places* (London: Macmillan, 1951), p. 7. All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

of life that has now passed. In fact, the sketch repeatedly points to things which have fallen out of use, such as the ‘ancient stone quern’ (p. 72) used for grinding corn, or the ways in which farming practices have changed with time. The butter in another house is now ‘churned by electricity’ (p. 72) rather than manually and the area where the horse stood is covered over, the ‘grass grown now’ (p. 72). In an old manor house, Lewis notes details which would not be out of place in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Welsh-set short stories or the work of other travellers to Wales (as discussed in Chapter One), focusing on ‘a cupboard-bed for the maid servants’ and ‘two great stone vats for the salting down of bullocks at winter-time and still used for the curing of bacon’ (p. 73).

In another sketch entitled ‘The Gentle Countryman’ Lewis recalls the

excellent Welsh shawls of [her] childhood, in which Welsh women of old carried their babies wrapped in such a way that the mother had free use of her hands. It is difficult to find such a shawl now, but the mills that made them are still making flannel of an obstinate nature that refuses to wear out (p. 90)

While having some clear comparisons with the kind of content found in travel writing and sketches (as discussed in Chapter One), the rich detail of this sketch is not for the traveller to Wales to gaze upon. Instead, it demonstrates a Welsh writer storing up and therefore salvaging these soon-to-be-forgotten cultural markers for a Welsh audience. There is also a strong sense of continuity being proposed, especially by the image of a baby in a pram outside one of the historic buildings at the very beginning of the piece. As a metaphor for permanence and regeneration, the baby links the histories of the generations who have lived in this place. The final paragraph is particularly significant as it provides an alternative perspective to some views concerning the area:

I have heard people speak lightly of this remote corner as being ‘off the map’, but it should be regarded rather as a store-house of the past, a fastness in which are preserved traditions faded, or fading from our way of life. Invaders of its quietness there have been in plenty [...]: men [...] have left their traces behind to be held and preserved by this unforgetting land. (p. 73)

It could be argued, therefore, that Lewis is herself aware of her own role in creating a ‘store-house of the past’, imbuing her work with a strong auto-ethnographic quality.

Oriel Malet and Auto-Ethnographic Short Fiction

As Eiluned Lewis’s work would suggest, the line between the short story, autobiography and ethnographic account is blurred in various literary pieces published in the 1930s and 1940s, including Hilda Vaughan’s ‘A Country Childhood’ (1934) and ‘Far Away’ (1935), and Lewis’s own *Dew on The Grass* (1934).²⁶⁷ Oriel Malet’s ‘A Welsh Childhood’, published in *Wales* in the Autumn of 1946, stands on the cusp of memoir and the short story. While this generic instability makes it a particularly fascinating text, the fact that Malet herself has been virtually excluded from a history of Welsh women’s writing makes the analysis in this chapter all the more vital. Oriel Malet was a pseudonym for Lady Auriel Rosemary Malet Vaughan, daughter of Ernest Edmund Henry Malet Vaughan, the seventh Earl of Lisburne, and Spanish aristocrat Maria Isabel Regina Aspasia de Bittencourt. Yet, judging by the description supplied by her literary agents, Messrs. A. P. Watt & Son, for the contributor section of *Wales*, it would be difficult to guess these grand connections:

As to the note about the author of *A Welsh Childhood*, I am afraid that all the information she wishes printed is that she is Welsh and was born and brought up in Wales. She has had the following books published — *Trust in the Springtime* (novel), *My Bird Sings* (novel), *Margery Fleming*, all by Faber.²⁶⁸

In 1946, the same year as ‘A Welsh Childhood’ was published, Malet won the prestigious John Llewellyn Rhys Prize for her second novel, *My Bird Sings* (1945), yet she seems to have

²⁶⁷ While *Dew on the Grass* is a novel, the individual chapters’ episodic and, to a certain extent, self-contained structure suggests links with earlier texts, such as Anne Beale’s *The Vale of the Towey*. The editorial note accompanying the two pieces by Hilda Vaughan, republished in the Radnorshire Society Transactions (1982), points to the fact that *Dew on the Grass* inspired Vaughan to write these recollections. See ‘Editorial Note’, *The Radnorshire Society Transactions* (52), 1982, p. 8.

²⁶⁸ ‘Notes on Contributors’, *Wales*, 6.3 (Autumn 1946), p. 7.

dropped out of literary accounts of the 1940s and 1950s almost entirely, despite having published over ten novels during these two decades.²⁶⁹

‘A Welsh Childhood’ recalls the author’s youth in west Wales from earliest memories to teenage years, and, as such, could be taken as a straightforward autobiographical account. However, the style of ‘A Welsh Childhood’ aligns it much more closely with the short story form. The opening begins with a startling image of a child licking the nursery floor: ‘Her earliest memory, I think, was of lying face downwards on the hard, shiny linoleum of the nursery, and licking a pink flower painted on it.’²⁷⁰ The third-person narration distances the text from the ‘I’ that would normally accompany autobiography and creates a sense of dislocation between the subject of the text and the author herself. The child refers to herself as ‘Rosemary’ (p. 78), one of Malet’s middle names, which further distances the reader from Auriel the child, and even further from Oriol the writer.

As ‘A Welsh Childhood’ continues, the way in which Wales becomes important in the developing child’s consciousness is brought to the fore:

The next discovery she made was about the place she lived in. This, apparently, was called Wales. Afterwards, it seemed quite simple; she couldn’t imagine having lived four years without finding it out. At the time, it was tremendous, an awe-inspiring piece of information. (p. 78)

It takes some time for Rosemary to understand that ‘Wales’ is not just her immediate surroundings. Her siblings inform her that Wales is ‘[n]ot this room, silly. Not this house. *Everywhere* – the whole country. It’s called Wales’ (p. 78). The first description of the landscape surrounding her home of Trawscoed recalls some of the representations of Welsh topography found in earlier accounts, such as Catherine Sinclair’s or Elizabeth Gaskell’s, as

²⁶⁹ This award was founded in 1942 in honour of the writer John Llewellyn Rhys, who was killed in action in World War II, and is open to British and Commonwealth writers of fiction, non-fiction and poetry, aged 35 or under, at the time of publication. Alun Lewis was also an early recipient in 1944 for *The Last Inspection*.

²⁷⁰ Oriol Malet, ‘A Welsh Childhood’, *Wales*, 6.3 (Autumn 1946), 78-82 (p. 78). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

well as contemporaneous writers such as Margiad Evans (especially in ‘The People of His Pasture’) where the landscape looms so large that it almost takes on the role of a character itself:

You couldn’t see far, really, because of the great hills rising like hoops to the sky. The hills were green, with white dots of sheep grazing on them, the lower slopes ruled into neat fields. Higher up there were yellow gorse bushes and great patches of bronze autumn bracken, higher than the children’s heads. [...] They [the hills] were like people; there was a plain pointed one with a group of fir trees near the summit, called Talfan, and a curious one with a pimple on the top called Tyncwm. Hidden away in Tyncwm was a waterfall, and, in winter, the children picked off the icicles, beautifully twisted and pointed like giant pencils. (p. 79)

Malet’s careful use of imagery associated with childhood to describe the natural world, such as the pimple and the pencil, makes the landscape accessible and knowable, rather than the imposing yet aestheticized vistas of earlier writers, such as Gaskell. Moreover, what comes across more than anything else in this passage is Rosemary’s overwhelming attachment to the land. The hills, she recalls, she ‘learned to love [...] beyond everything else’ (p. 79).

Besides deftly exploring the world around her, Malet is particularly skilful at drawing attention to the interplay between her higher class lifestyle and the wider community she lives in, especially the way in which it is steeped in superstition and folklore. She notes, again with a detached tone:

It was a joke in the family that the older children had all fallen sick with measles on the same day, because their father had been cursed by a witch, whose son he had run in for poaching. The child had shivered when she heard these tales. (p. 79)

When Rosemary is on her way back from a Christmas party with her siblings, she is mistaken for a supernatural being by a woman in a cottage when they stop to ask for directions. The cottage is described as being a ‘tiny, two-roomed cottage with a sloping slate roof and white-washed walls’ (p. 79), so is a far cry from the privileged existence Rosemary leads in Trawscoed. In Rosemary’s world, where ‘houses were few and far between, [...] it was nothing to go forty miles’ to attend a party. When the cottager sees Rosemary, decked out in

her ‘best coat of real white fur, and gloves to match’ (p. 79), she ‘shriek[s] and slam[s]’ (p. 80) the door shut again, convinced that Rosemary is ‘a fairy or a ghost’ (p. 80). Her siblings tell her: ‘She thought you were a fairy, dear [...] Really, the ignorance...you’d scarcely believe it possible in these days’ (p. 80). Despite this practical and rational outlook, however, superstition still seems to be embedded even in the very fabric of Rosemary’s childhood home, as ‘[a]ll the rooms in the house had coloured witchballs hanging in the windows’ (p. 79). Witch balls were extremely popular from the nineteenth century onwards and were supposed to neutralise the evil eye of a passing witch.²⁷¹ Unlike earlier outsider commentators on Welsh culture, Malet is particularly skilful at drawing attention to the way in which class and education impact on cultural beliefs and seems to be gently poking fun at the idiosyncrasies of her own class.

Another aspect of ‘A Welsh Childhood’ that strikes a chord with other short stories describing Welsh life is the depiction of the Post Office:

People came for miles around to buy cake and bread groceries and patent medicines and sweets, but mostly to hear the latest gossip. Displayed on the counter there were bright pink posters written in Welsh and announcing cattle sales, shows, sheep dipping and Hedging Competitions. It was very interesting; everyone knew you, and you knew everyone. (p. 81)

Reminiscent of Kate Roberts’s description of Emwnt’s Shop in ‘The Last Payment’ as the hub of the community, the Post Office is a wealth of information as well as products. Here the boundary between Rosemary’s privileged lifestyle and the agricultural community seems to break down and suggests that Rosemary does in fact belong to this community, despite her higher class status. Local people speak to her as if she is one of their own, commenting ‘Well

²⁷¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore* notes two different types of witch ball – large glass balls which were painted with a reflective or bright paint (popular in the nineteenth century) and smaller ones (from the late eighteenth century) with multi-coloured patterns. See ‘witch balls’, in *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, ed Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198607663.001.0001/acref-9780198607663-e-1137> [accessed 26 April 2013].

indeed, bach, you've grown," (p. 81) or advising her on the next delivery of 'good' chocolate, in the form of Cadbury's (p. 81). She notes that "[i]f your restive pony chewed lumps out of the hedge belonging to the cottage next door, while you were inside [the Post Office] sampling [its] delights, nobody seemed to care' (p. 81). Yet this inclusion gives her a false sense of security, as she goes on to say that '[i]t was comforting, but it didn't fit you for the time when you would have to leave the hills and go amongst strangers who didn't care if you grew or not, and who *did* mind if your pony ate their hedge' (p. 81). Rosemary's realisation that the world outside her village does not follow the same rules as she is accustomed to again picks up on Reed-Danahay's concept of the auto-ethnographer as being displaced or exiled. The knowledge and experience afforded by adulthood enables Rosemary to scrutinise the way in which her childhood community was constructed, as well as the rules by which it abided. Just as the unnamed narrator in 'The Elastic-Sided Boots and the Angel' is caught between two cultures, so too is Rosemary, at once belonging yet fundamentally exiled from home.

Conclusions

Considering the diversity of the Welsh women writers who were writing about Wales during the period spanning 1920 to the early 1950s, in terms of geographical location, education, class and birthplace, the interrelation between their fictions could be considered unusual. However, the recurring fascination with landscape, travel, cultural tradition, folklore and the domestic sphere do suggest a shared desire to probe the literary conventions of the past, especially the colonial shadow of the travelogue, and to revitalise Wales' distinct cultural heritage. There is a sense that, for most of these writers, turning a spotlight on folklore or cultural traditions is part of a wider auto-ethnographic project to document, preserve and protect. The participant-observer narrator still has an important role to play in these fictions, whether in the form of complicating our understanding of this figure, or being rejected entirely. Tracing this figure in Welsh women's short fiction enables us to make closer

connections between a distinctly Welsh tradition and its sister narratives of community, as well as opening up generic comparisons with other post-colonial nations.

The link between Frank O'Connor's notion of the outsider in short fiction seems to reverberate throughout the stories of the late 1930s and 1940s. There may well be a link between this outsider status and the position of women during and after the Second World War – women who were awkwardly situated between the home and the workplace. In the stories explored in this chapter, there is relatively little detail about the effect of war on the very fabric of women's lives – lives which are, in all other respects, described in so much detail. This is partly due to my own selections, which have skewed this perspective a little. Margiad Evans, Lynette Roberts and Kate Roberts are all, of course, deeply concerned in their fictions with warfare in its various different forms. Yet the focus on the past is itself a means of protecting a way of life and a culture that would be altered almost beyond recognition by the time of the writers of the 1970s, only two decades later. The recurring focus on landscape is transformed in these later texts from aesthetic admiration into a passion for reclaiming the environment. Domestic interiors and the realm of women's household work also translate into the pressures placed upon women in an increasingly globalised world, where the old traditions are literally being built over by the construction of roads and sprawling urban developments. While there are still recognisable links between the writing of the first half of the twentieth century with that of the 1960s and 1970s, it is with very different voices that women of the latter period embrace the challenges of a new age of industrialism, individualism and capitalism.

It is important to recognise that less well-known writers, such as Emily Pearson Finnemore and Lilian Bowen-Rowlands, have played an important role in the development of the short story in Wales and deserve further, more sustained study. With an author like Oriel

Malet, there is surely a great deal of further scholarly groundwork to be done to reinstate her as a much more central figure in women's literary history in Wales. Combined with the more widely recognised writers, including Margiad Evans and Kate Roberts, a new literary history of short fiction of this period begins to emerge, one which focuses on the importance of roots, permanence (especially in the case of women writers who made Wales their home), and continuity.

Viewing these writers as literary auto-ethnographers opens up the potentially restrictive category of short fiction by women from Wales. Many of these women writers were not Welsh by birth, but took on the mantle of Welsh identity in order to explore and examine the landscapes and peoples of their adopted country. The preoccupation with authenticity of voice that Mary Louise Pratt emphasises is threaded through all the texts discussed. At the same time, these stories also provide counter narratives, another feature of auto-ethnography, to the dominant view of Wales that has been established by anthologies which emphasise male, working-class writers. The sense of displacement that Reed-Danahay notes is also a recurring feature of these texts – the auto-ethnographic writer, in exploring culture, has to distance him or herself from that culture, to some degree, in order to reimagine it in fiction. Through their commitment to and love of their respective communities, these writers have captured and vividly described aspects of life which would otherwise be lost. This is not to argue that these stories should be viewed as static or simplistic representations of a bygone era. Rather, they provide snapshots of rural life in all its rich complexity.

Chapter Three: Women, the Self, and the Environment: Transforming Wales in 1960s and 1970s Short Fiction

The 1960s and 1970s were a particularly vibrant time in the history of the short story in Wales. In terms of female contributions to the genre, these decades produced an unusually varied yet politically powerful range of voices. There are many different strands of writing which emerge from this period, but this chapter will pay particular attention to short fiction which has an inherently transformative dynamism, underpinned by a commitment to feminist principles. The transformative power of literature during this period lay in texts' abilities to articulate, and potentially change, the day-to-day realities of women's lives. One example from America would be Marilyn French's bestselling novel, *The Women's Room* (1977), which was famously described, by Fay Weldon, as being 'the kind of book that changes lives', when it was first published.²⁷² French herself, in the thirtieth anniversary edition of the novel, writes that:

When I was asked, in 1977, what I would wish for *The Women's Room*, I said I wished for a world in which no one would comprehend it because women and men had found a way to live together in felicity. Unfortunately, despite many easements on female life in the west, the world's ethos has moved in the opposite direction'.²⁷³

The desire for a different world view that transcends gender imbalances is something that Welsh women writers shared with their more well-known feminist cousins in both England and America. In terms of theoretical frameworks for this desire to force a change in the fundamental ideology that underpinned western viewpoints, we need to turn to a particular feminist form: transformative feminism which has a very wide-ranging remit:

At its core, transformative feminism, a catchall term that encompasses the principles of transnational, women of color, and other liberatory-orientated feminisms, is committed to dismantling systems that inequitably distribute power because of racism, class bias, capitalism, imperialism, patriarchalism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression as they are manifest in local and global contexts.

²⁷² See front cover of the thirtieth anniversary edition of Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (London: Virago, 2007), which reprints this famous quotation.

²⁷³ French, *The Women's Room*, pp. xv-xvi (p. xvi).

Ultimately, transformative feminists seek to disassemble oppressive socioeconomic and political structures and replace them with just institutions.²⁷⁴

Marginalised as they have been by both patriarchy and imperialist attitudes, Welsh women have never claimed the same kind of position as Anglo-American feminists and it is this deep understanding of their marginalisation that imbues their feminist critiques with a much more inclusive attitude. The charges that were laid against Anglo-American feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, for being centred on white, middle-class experience, do not hold when Welsh women's short fiction is explored in any depth. This chapter will pay special attention to the branch of transformative feminism known as transformative ecofeminism, which has its origins in the writings of the French feminist, Françoise d'Eaubonne. This type of feminism seeks to deconstruct and reimagine the relationship between women's oppression and the destruction of the environment, without trying to homogenise women's experiences or lose sight of the local.

Before exploring ecofeminism, we must pause for a moment to consider ecocriticism, a branch of literary criticism which shares many values with transformative ecofeminism. Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism very simply as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment'.²⁷⁵ She goes on to compare ecocriticism with other critical perspectives:

Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Collette Morrow and Terri Ann Fredrick, 'Introduction: Women and Public Work', in *Getting In is Not Enough: Women and the Global Workplace*, ed Collette Morrow and Terri Ann Fredrick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 1-24 (p. 7).

²⁷⁵ Cheryll Glotfelty, 'What is Ecocriticism?', *Association for the Study of Literature and Environment* (1994). Available at <http://www.asle.org/site/resources/ecocritical-library/intro/defining/glotfelty/> [Accessed 15 September 2013]

²⁷⁶ Glotfelty, 'What is Ecocriticism?'.

As the previous two chapters have already suggested, there is a recurring connection between women writing about the land that they survey or inhabit, from insider and outsider perspectives, to women writers cataloguing and preserving what is special and unique about Welsh homes, customs and culture. While ecocriticism explores the relationship between literature and the environment, ecofeminism is a ‘philosophical and political position which posits that there is a connection between the social mentality underpinning the domination of women in patriarchal society and the domination and degradation of nature by industrial capitalism’.²⁷⁷ Coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne, in *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (*Feminism or Death*), ecofeminism ‘challenges the meaning of “productivity”, arguing that industrial, value-adding productivity is very far from the only form of productivity there is and that the hegemonic form is environmentally unsustainable’.²⁷⁸ In other words, d’Eaubonne’s *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* exposes the fact that in a capitalist, individualist world, industrial work has made some other forms of productivity valueless, despite the increasingly damaging effect on the world as a whole. What this also means, I would argue, is that control of productivity has been wrested away from women and smaller communities, towards urban and industrial centres – the very issue that texts which fall under Sandra A. Zagarell’s concept of narrative of community mourn or fear. Moreover, in this age of global capitalism, women may have as little control over their own bodies as they do over the destruction of the environment. D’Eaubonne’s argument is based around the context of the Catholic Church’s stance against abortion and contraception, which effectively took any choice regarding the avoidance of pregnancy, apart from abstinence, away from Catholic women. She says herself that ‘We are speaking here about French women. The picture would

²⁷⁷ Ian Buchanan, ‘Ecofeminism’, in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199532919.001.0001/acref-9780199532919-e-208>. [Accessed 15 September 2013]

²⁷⁸ D’Eaubonne’s text imagines a future underpinned by feminism, to the extent that the planet is saved from seemingly unavoidable destruction from pollution.

change for other countries. American and English women are much more determined in their demands for total sexual freedom'.²⁷⁹ Whether or not this is a sweeping generalisation and does not necessarily hold true for Wales, it does beg the question of whether Welsh women were able to demand the same sexual freedom assumed to be held by their English and American counterparts.

In his introduction to *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women and Literature*, Douglas A. Vakoch outlines the links between women and cultural ecofeminism, another branch of ecofeminism:

According to cultural ecofeminism, there is an innate connection between women and nature. By positing an inherent tendency of women to be attuned to nature to care for it, to recognize their interrelationship with it – cultural ecofeminists recognize the value of actions and characteristics typically devalued by the dominant (patriarchal) culture.²⁸⁰

There are, of course, problems with this argument, as Vakoch himself admits. He goes on to say that

by identifying these traits as innate, however ecologically positive they may be, the social and historical factors that have led to women's oppression are obscured. Moreover, this essentialist assumption implies that men have inherent limitations in their ability to connect to the natural world by virtue of their sex.²⁸¹

Eric Otto, another important ecocritical theorist, examines women's environmentally engaged literary texts and bases his arguments on texts which 'define themselves in ways encouraged by [...] ecofeminism: against the dominant logic of patriarchy and through their own personal and local experiences, through collective histories, and/or through Earth-based spiritual

²⁷⁹ Françoise d'Eaubonne, 'Feminism or Death', in *New French Feminisms*, ed Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), pp. 64-7 (p. 65)

²⁸⁰ Douglas A. Vakoch, 'Introduction: A Different Story' in *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women and Literature*, ed Douglas A. Vakoch (Plymouth: Lexington, 2012), pp. 1-12 (p. 4).

²⁸¹ Vakoch, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5

traditions'.²⁸² While Otto is referring specifically to science fiction writers, there are still valid comparisons to be made, especially in the case of a writer such as Shirley Toulson, in 'Playground of England', imagines a future for Wales in which the country has effectively been annexed as part theme park, part heritage museum (discussed below).

The language Otto uses – of personal and local experiences and collective histories specifically – again resonates with Zagarell's concept of narratives of community. Otto draws specifically on the branch of ecological studies known as 'transformative environmentalism' which poses a 'challenge [to] the oppressions of women and nonhuman nature effectively, [...] while maintaining the best theoretical and practical work of ecofeminism's many iterations'.²⁸³ This particular branch of ecological studies comprises a number of movements which have 'emerged since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* initiated modern environmentalism in 1962'.²⁸⁴ This chapter will argue that transformative environmentalism and ecofeminism, underpinned as they are by identity politics, stems from narratives of community in their widest sense – that the environment is itself an extension of local communities depicted in stories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is not to argue that all women writers of this period were interested solely in ecological issues; however, the recurring focus on these issues suggests that this was a pressing concern, particularly in stories published in journals and magazines. What transformative environmentalism and ecofeminism can offer are 'theories about the ideological origins of and solutions to environmental degradation'.²⁸⁵ What these critiques of patriarchy's contribution to the state of the environment do is turn attention to the way in which

²⁸² Eric C. Otto, 'Ecofeminist Theories of Liberation in the Science Fiction of Sally Miller Gearheart, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Joan Slonczewski', in *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women and Literature*, ed Douglas A. Vakoch (Plymouth: Lexington, 2012), pp. 13-38 (p. 14).

²⁸³ Otto, 'Ecofeminist Theories of Liberation', p. 15.

²⁸⁴ Otto, *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 1.

²⁸⁵ Otto, *Green Speculations*, p. 1.

prioritising the needs of the individual can be damaging to the wider community and its environment. While Eric Otto is particularly interested in science fiction written by women, it could be argued that this is a marginal genre, and as such shares much common ground with the short story.

This chapter contends that many of the short stories published in the 1960s and 1970s are deeply concerned with environmental issues and women's positions in relation to those issues. While the stories of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s explored the impact of modernity on local communities, by the end of the 1970s, short story writers were beginning to look beyond the local to the national and international. There is, without doubt, a growing political awareness and critique of the way the environment has been treated, not least by the decisions of local councils and the government. I use the word 'environment' in its widest sense – from ecological issues to the impact of large-scale construction, industrialisation and of work itself. The concretizing over of many areas of South Wales, for example, can be traced back to the construction of the first Severn Bridge in 1966, which began to open up South Wales to visitors from the south-west of England. The M4, which was completed during the 1970s, drove a line of concrete through many towns and villages, breaking up communities while proposing to link them together. The shape of areas such as Port Talbot, rent in two by large swathes of road, changed beyond recognition. This is just one example, of course, of Wales being altered and ultimately damaged by governmental policy driven by industrial and mercantile greed.

While stories ranging from the 1920s to the cusp of the 1950s were looking to shore up culture and traditions, stories of the 1960s and 1970s are concerned with the place of women in the landscape and their political status within it. There is a marked difference, for example, between the fictions of the early 1950s, such as the short stories of Eirlys Trefor,

and the ecofeminist fictions of Elizabeth Baines in the late 1970s. At the same time, writers were beginning to explore the female body in much more depth, including formerly taboo subjects such as sex and mental illness. For example, in one of Kate Roberts's short fictions, *Dark Tonight*, shifts and changes in modern society and mental health are inextricably linked. While stories in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s looked at the roles, obligations and pressures placed on women in the community or institutions such as marriage or the chapel, later writers focused far more on individual subjectivity. However, this exploration of subjectivity tends to be tempered by the needs of particular communities, including the family as a small-scale example, rather than the model of the capitalist individual. This chapter traces some of the variety of writing found in journals from the 1950s to the 1960s, before looking in more detail at ecofeminist texts of the 1970s. Most of the texts discussed in the lead up to those I term ecofeminist have some kind of dialogue with women's bodies, their relationship with nature, or some process of recognition or realisation of the self in a wider (feminist) world, and so the texts track an emergent feminist consciousness.

Questioning the old world order

During the 1970s in particular, Welsh women contributed to wider debates concerning women's history. Writing in 1972, in her controversial yet influential book, *The Descent of Woman*, Pontypridd-born author Elaine Morgan underlines one of the key preoccupations in writings of the period – a growing awareness of the disparities and injustices inherent in perceptions and performances of gender roles. While this text is not concerned with ecology as such, it does have a strong focus on women's position within the environment as imagined and described by anthropology. Morgan argues:

Throughout most of the literature dealing with the differences between the sexes there runs a subtle underlying assumption that woman is a man gone wonky; that woman is a distorted version of the original blueprint; that they are the norm, and we are the

deviation. It might have been expected that when Darwin came along and wrote an entirely different account of *The Descent of Man*, this assumption would have been eradicated, for Darwin didn't believe she was an afterthought: he believed her origin was at least contemporaneous with man's. It should have led to some kind of breakthrough in the relationship between the sexes. But it didn't.²⁸⁶

Morgan's book sought to question some of the long-held assumptions about evolutionary theory, arguing for a history of the species which included a period of aquatic apes:

The legend of the jungle heritage and the evolution of man as a hunting carnivore has taken root in man's mind as firmly as Genesis ever did. He may even genuinely believe that equal pay will do something terrible to his gonads. He has built a beautiful theoretical construction, with himself on the top of it, buttressed with a formidable array of scientifically authenticated facts. We cannot dispute the facts. We should not attempt to ignore the facts. What I think we can do is to suggest that the currently accepted interpretation of the facts is not the only possible one.²⁸⁷

It could be argued that Morgan's position in this text has many parallels with transformative environmentalism in that it attempts to challenge, redefine and transform our understanding of evolution. While Morgan's arguments have been widely disputed and, in some respects, discredited, the point of her book remains valid – to question assumptions, to make us 'reread', as it were, the histories that we have assumed to be correct.

This desire to question, to probe, to critique and also re-evaluate women's position in a patriarchal society runs through many of the short stories of the period. In Morgan's case, her book re-evaluated the position of women within the particularly patriarchal world of science and anthropology. Having won a writing competition in the *Observer* in the late 1950s, she began writing short stories – stories which are clearly bound by conventions and of genre and gender. She notes that publishers

all assumed that if we could write well enough to satisfy the *Observer*, we might have undiscovered first novels stashed away modestly in a drawer. I replied to one [potential publisher] saying sorry, no novel, but turning professional sounded very interesting and how does one go about it? The answer was unequivocal, especially in

²⁸⁶ Elaine Morgan, *The Descent of Woman* (Souvenir Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, p. 7.

²⁸⁷ Morgan, *The Descent of Woman*, p. 8

the case of a female writer. The insatiable market in those was for romantic short stories for women's magazines.²⁸⁸

For other writers, however, the form proved to be much more supple and capable of exploring the restrictions placed on women, including in the workplace, marriage, sexuality, and motherhood. The history of the short story can never be studied in isolation from history itself, but at this period there was much ground-breaking critical thinking in so many different areas of women's lives, including massive shifts in political, academic, and personal views, which impacted on the fundamental belief systems of many women. Maroula Joannou talks of the shift that 'underpinned the intellectual formation of the generation who were politicised in 1968', including

the commitment to peace and justice on a global scale, the perpetual questioning of received wisdom, the restless intellectual curiosity; the passionate alignment with the oppressed, the deep-rooted desire to democratise familiar institutions, the suspicion of anyone who appeared to be motivated largely by personal ambition, the rejection of elitism and the determination to break down hierarchy, the belief in the power of collective action to change whatever needed changing.²⁸⁹

This was, indeed, a period of huge shifts in ideologies and intellectual practices, as well as an opportunity to 're-vision' the way that society was fundamentally grounded in patriarchy.

The short story writer Elizabeth Baines contributed to Mary Eagleton's acclaimed *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (1986), emphasising 'the whole point of making fictions' is to 'counter social "reality", to expose it as a construct, at best another fiction, at worst a downright lie'.²⁹⁰ Baines's view of social reality is bound up in her own fictions with ecofeminism and its critique of social order, but other women writers would express similar concerns in a myriad of different ways.

²⁸⁸ Elaine Morgan, *Knock 'Em Cold, Kid* (Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire: Matador, 2012), Kindle Edition, p. 82.

²⁸⁹ Maroula Joannou, *Contemporary women's writing: from the Golden notebook to the Color purple* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 4.

²⁹⁰ Elizabeth Baines, 'Naming the Fictions', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 109-111 (p. 109).

In terms of Welsh history, Deirdre Beddoe opens her chapter on ‘Jobs, Gadgets and the Pill, 1945-1970’, in her important book, *Out of the Shadows* (2000), by commenting that ‘The years between 1945 and 1970 form one of the most neglected, complex and fascinating period in twentieth-century Welsh women’s history’.²⁹¹ The complexity associated with this period, in Beddoe’s opinion, comes from the ‘powerful contradictory forces [that] were at work in shaping women’s lives, pulling them in opposite directions at the same time’.²⁹² As Beddoe’s book carefully elucidates, there were enormous shifts in ‘women’s paid work, home life, health, education and [...] politics’.²⁹³ These shifts, this chapter contends, are imagined, scrutinized and deconstructed in the short stories that were written during this period.

In terms of women writers and their outlets for imagining these shifts, Wales was fortunate to have several publications which gave women space to imagine the potential of this new world order. Gillian Clarke, who both co-edited (1974-76) and edited the *Anglo-Welsh Review* (1976-84), notes in the editorial of the 1979 edition, which focused especially on women writers, that ‘[t]here has always seemed a high proportion of women poets in the Anglo-Welsh magazines in comparison with other British journals’.²⁹⁴ While this may well be the case, there are actually far fewer short stories by women published during Clarke’s editorship. In the 1960s in particular, under the editorship of Roland Mathias, most (if not quite all) editions of the journal would include a short story or other substantial piece by a woman writer (such as a memoir or a political essay). While this reduction under Clarke’s reign may well have been influenced by her own tastes (combined with the bulk of the

²⁹¹ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 135.

²⁹² Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 135.

²⁹³ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 135.

²⁹⁴ Gillian Clarke, ‘Editorial’, *Anglo-Welsh Review*, 65 (1979), 1-2 (p. 1). Clarke uses this editorial to discuss wider concerns about women’s writing. Although this is not a ‘special issue’ as such, a large proportion of the *Review* is taken up by women writers.

magazine shifting focus to reviewing rather than showcasing fiction towards the late 1970s), it does not mean that there was a lack of women's short fiction by this point in the decade, merely that there were other outlets, especially magazines such as *Planet*, which prioritised short fiction publishing. Clarke's 1979 editorial is especially important as it crystallises some of the issues facing women writers more generally. She writes that the

first thoughts roused by many writings that appear in this issue are of negatives: of the subjects women don't write about, of the recognition they don't receive. Women writers often disappear into obscurity after the heyday of their creative period is done. They have, traditionally, striven less for fame, even sought privacy and so avoided fame. It is clear that writers famous in their own life-times, whether male or female, are usually those who, deliberately or otherwise, have claimed attention by more than talent alone. So, many talented women have been relatively unnoticed. Then there are the likeliest subjects of female writing, the domestic and familiar, and the way of looking at relationships, places, objects, and society that is inclined to be minutely perceptive and detailed.²⁹⁵

Drawing on the example of Jean Rhys, who 'disappeared for twenty years and was discovered living like a recluse', her name now 'virtually unknown', Clarke looks with anticipation towards the work of the *Companion to Welsh Literature* which, she hoped at the time, would 'prevent the like disappearance or neglect of the writers of Wales in future'.²⁹⁶ Ironically, many of the authors who appear in the pages of *AWR* in the 1960s and 1970s do not feature in the revised 1998 edition of the *Companion*, notably Dora Polk, Shirley Toulson and Elizabeth Baines. This chapter aims to redress the balance and turn critical attention to the vibrant and politically active short fiction of the period.

The 1944 Education Act, which provided secondary education for all girls and boys, meant that all girls had access to a certain standard of education, at least until the age of fifteen, and this had an increasingly positive impact on the number of women who pursued their studies at college, entered teacher training or undertook undergraduate degrees from the

²⁹⁵ Clarke, 'Editorial', p. 1.

²⁹⁶ Clarke, 'Editorial', p. 2.

1950s onwards. What is striking about the women writing in Welsh periodicals of the time is the number who had graduated from Welsh universities and colleges (including a few who went on to teach at Welsh higher education institutions), including writers such as Hilda Schiff, Margaret Aeron-Thomas, Fay Bailey, Ruth Holliday and Ivonne Piper.

Shifts in the 1950s: Women Writers in *Dock Leaves*

The proliferation of short stories written and published by women during this period is in many ways bound up with an increase in outlets for publication by the middle of the twentieth century. Important periodicals and magazines include *The Anglo-Welsh Review* and *Planet*. A quick glance over *Dock Leaves* (1949-57), which became *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, gives a good indication of trends, as well as gaps, in the history of Welsh women's short stories in the years leading up to the 1960s. There are very few short stories by women to be found during *Dock Leaves*' decade of publication, though there is some poetry and a few travel-focused and political articles. Marcia Nichols Holden, editor of New York based *The Poetry Magazine*, features in 1954 with a piece entitled 'Once Stranger on the Roads of May in Wales'.²⁹⁷ The style of this piece harks back to the style of American Jeannette Marks' Welsh-set travel writing, and includes such gems as 'Wales is a farmer who grows poetry along with his leeks'²⁹⁸ and 'It's a fact, of course, that the Welsh live in caves' (p. 15).

The overblown tone of the piece is captured best in this particular example:

I want to harp on the difference. Castles of ruins sing along the primrose path of their greatness for the land of castles and bards is a wild one [...] the imagination strikes true and my heart knocks and comes home. (p. 14)

Fortunately, Holden's wild, castle-strewn landscapes are not representative of the language found in the majority of short stories published in the 1950s. Most of the stories published in

²⁹⁷ This title may be a misprint for 'Once a Stranger' or 'One Stranger' as it seems a little awkward.

²⁹⁸ Marcia Nichols Holden, 'Once Stranger on the Roads of May in Wales', *Dock Leaves*, 5.14 (1954), pp. 13-5 (p. 14). All further references are to this edition and are given in parenthesis in the body of the text.

Dock Leaves are very well written and have much more significant implications than it might appear on an initial reading, especially as they point towards the kind of issues that were beginning to affect women in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The first story by a female author to be published in *Dock Leaves* is Olwen Rees's 'The Chair' (1950), which indicates a clear line of connection with the stories previously discussed in Chapter Two, as it features a participant-observer narrator. The story is arguably an example of an awakening ecocritical consciousness, in that it draws attention to the way industrialised areas (de)form characters. The text's narrator is not named and the gender remains unclear (although the tone and the narrator's circumstances suggest a male voice). This narrator, a university student who has come home after examinations, seems to have a great deal of autonomy: 'I was free to roam the hills we called Mynydd Bettws, the boundary between Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, and I did this from morning to night, taking food in one pocket and a loved book in the other'.²⁹⁹ The narrator continues:

Sometimes I would stop at one of the little farms which dotted these hill-sides, and I would often be asked into the kitchen and offered tea or milk. In those days the small farms were much more isolated than they are now, and the busy folk would be glad of an excuse to stop work and chatter about the village or about me and my work. It flattered my self importance I suppose, the fuss they made of me because I was at college. It seems pathetic to me now, the deference these workers paid to me and my book learning. (p. 20)

The story is actually about Ifan, who can talk the narrator 'into silent admiration, and put my college learning into its proper place' (p. 21). There are interesting connections to be made here with John Finnemore's 'Dan Bach' in which the eponymous Dan is a 'Welshman [who has] worked [his] way up' to get to university³⁰⁰ and Bertha Thomas's disaffected academic, Elwyn Rosser, in 'The Way he Went'. In Rees's story, Ifan is a gifted poet, whose skills with

²⁹⁹ Olwen Rees, 'The Chair', *Dock Leaves*, 1.2 (1950), pp. 22-23 (p. 20). All further references are to this edition and are given in parenthesis in the body of the text.

³⁰⁰ See John Finnemore, 'Dan Bach', in John and Emily Pearson Finnemore, *From a Welsh Hillside* (London: A&C Black, 1923), pp. 45-66 (p. 46).

words are the ‘nearest thing’ the narrator declares, ‘to music that I shall hear on earth’ (p. 21), and who is determined to win a chair at the Eisteddfod. Ifan’s tragedy is centred around the loss of his wife and child; however, he has not lost them through death, as might be expected, but through his sheer inability to communicate effectively. This inability is, in fact, the driving force behind the story, crystallised in the relationship between Ifan and his unnamed English wife, a servant girl who has been working in Swansea. There is something unbridgeable about their relationship, partly caused by the language barrier. However, place is also a large factor in their problems, especially the way place forms and deforms identity, shaping desires and needs. The narrator comments, ‘How hungry she must have been for the crowds, the talk, the noise of the streets. But always Ifan shared his day with the earth and the cattle, his evenings with the poetry and sleep’ (p. 22). In the early days of their marriage, she is ‘[b]ored with the long quiet days, [and] she would be hungry for companionship. But Ifan heard nothing she said’ (p. 21). In a telling comment, the crux of their problems is revealed: ‘They spoke a different language, each making sense to self, but never to the other’ (p. 21).

In Rees’s story, there is underlying imagery concerning restriction and isolation—imagery which, significantly, recurs in many stories of the 60s and 70s and often takes the form of cages (and, in later stories, dead birds or birds with broken wings). Ellen Moers writes in one of the foundational texts in Anglo-American feminist literary criticism, *Literary Women* (1976), that ‘[o]f all creatures, birds alone can fly all the way to heaven – yet they are caged. Birds alone can sing more beautifully than human voices – yet they are unheeded, or silenced.’³⁰¹ While Ifan’s wife is not explicitly described with bird imagery, she is undoubtedly caged and silenced:

³⁰¹ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: W. H. Allen, 1977), p. 250.

But she, when the child was asleep in the loft, and the night was quiet or moonlit, would take a shawl and leave her cage for a while to wander as far as where she could see the distant light of the sea-port. She would return hearing nothing that the wind said to her, nor feeling the springing grass under her feet. But the moonlight had got into her eyes, and was stretching cold fingers into her heart. (p. 22)

Ifan's wife begs him not to go to the Eisteddfod because their child is ill, reminding him that the only help that she can call on is a neighbour, who lives over a mile away down the mountain. He refuses, somewhat callously, fixated on winning the chair. However, when he returns, the house is empty as his wife has carried the child back to the port. The moonlight that the narrator previously describes as being in her eyes is now 'in her heart also' (p. 22). The wife never returns and 'and the son who was to be a poet grew up a stranger in the crowded streets' (p. 22).

As the story of Ifan's loss comes to an end, the narrator pauses and reflects for a moment:

We walked up the steep lane and through the mountain gate. I looked back at the sweep of valley below and the Mynydd du beyond, and felt a thrill at the beauty of the scene. But of course I belonged here; this was my home. I thought of the shabby streets of the sea-port, and wondered again at the strength of the forging of the chains of childhood. (p. 23)

Here we can identify recognisable traces of the legacy of the participant-observer narrator who looks across the landscape at the beauty they survey. At the same time, this narrator is laying claim to this landscape, like many of the auto-ethnographic writers discussed in Chapter Two. The beauty surveyed is also tempered by the knowledge of the sprawl of the sea-port. The story aligns Ifan's unnamed wife with nature (and the 'feminine' moon) but makes her belong in an environment which is built up, over-industrialised and ugly. Here Rees may well be questioning, from a developing ecofeminist perspective, where women belong in a society that builds over the beauties of nature and centres itself in capitalist trade. Hélène Cixous famously draws attention to binary oppositions of the hierarchical

construction of gender, including activity/passivity and sun/moon, and argues that ‘woman is always on the side of passivity’.³⁰² Cixous’s binary oppositions find their parallel in the value dualisms of ecological feminist critiques. As Victoria Davion notes:

A value dualism is a disjunctive pair in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional and exclusive, and which places a higher value on one disjunct than the other. Many ecological feminists argue that a reason/nature dualism underlines the conceptual framework of western patriarchal cultures.³⁰³

In ‘The Chair’, Rees is complicating the value dualisms of reason/nature (as well as sun/moon) by exposing the ways in which the unnamed wife is forced into her role by marriage. When she leaves her husband, she has an unexpected level of agency which turns the sun/moon opposition upside down.

Another story from *Dock Leaves* again suggests new concerns in Welsh women’s short stories. Mountain Ash-born author Roberta Bowen’s ‘A Summer Afternoon’ focuses in intense detail on the experiences of Lisa Jane, a girl who is on the threshold of womanhood. Again, the story has elements of a developing ecofeminist consciousness, evoked through intense imagery focused on the power of both women and nature, but its violent conclusion shifts the emphasis away from a co-operation between women and nature. The initial description of her appearance would not be out of place in earlier stories, especially those from the nineteenth century, but there is also a sense of impending danger, deftly described through colour:

Her slim, growing body in the tightly bodiced red flannel dress, held itself taut and upright on the three-legged wooden stool beneath the frowning window, and the queer saffron light over the lowering beacon mirrored itself in her eyes like the moonlight in two deep pools. The high-backed chairs in the darkness of her mother’s kitchen

³⁰² Hélène Cixous, ‘Sorties’, trans. Ann Liddle, in *New French Feminisms*, ed Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), pp. 90-98 (p. 91).

³⁰³ Victoria Davion, ‘Ecofeminism’, in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed Dale Jamieson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). Available at http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405106597_chunk_g978140510659718 [accessed 30 August 2013].

echoed the sense of her waiting and the ghost of a fire in the grate, burning despite the heat of the day, beckoned with an orange grin.³⁰⁴

Again we have access to a central female character associated with the feminine imagery of moonlight. Fearing the elderly ‘witch’ who will be coming to buy eggs from the farmhouse in her mother’s absence, Lisa Jane’s emotions are played out in intense pathetic fallacy through thunder and lightning. The story takes a violent turn when Lisa Jane takes one of her knitting needles and stabs the woman in the arm, ‘jabb[ing] the pointed steel in the jaundiced arm and plung[ing] it home’ (32). This act confirms Lisa Jane’s suspicions as ‘the evil face contort[s] and a witch-scream shrill[s] above the thunder as the green blood spurt[s] out’ (32). At this point Lisa Jane has crossed the threshold into womanhood (and knowledge) as she ‘passe[s] a blood-stained hand across her virgin forehead and smile[s] a secret smile at the safe rain blessing the trees – for she was no longer a child’ (p. 32). This fevered Gothicism, which has parallels with some of Dylan Thomas’s early stories, has a somewhat discomfiting undertone – of violence against women by women, and of the alienation and expulsion of difference. Older women, as we have seen from Allen Raine’s ‘Home Sweet Home’ to Margiad Evans’s ‘The Old Woman and the Wind,’ are often pushed to the very margins of society, no longer having any use value in an increasingly capitalist society. The expulsion of the witch as an emblem of nature is also troubling, as it suggests that the new generation of women may turn its back on the lore of its foremothers.

From the Little Folk to the World of Work: Short Fiction in *The Anglo-Welsh Review*

When *Dock Leaves* changed its name to *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, its first edition under the new name featured a woman writer, Eirlys Trefor, with her story ‘Mountain of Bronwen’

³⁰⁴ Roberta Bowen, ‘A Summer Afternoon’, *Dock Leaves*, 3.8 (1952)29-32 (29). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

(1958). Just as with Trefor's other story from the late 1950s, 'The Promise', published in *Wales* in 1959, 'Mountain of Bronwen' seems somewhat different in tone and style to Rees's and Bowen's stories. While many stories published in the 1930s and 1940s focus on a past that is just within the realms of living memory, Trefor's story suggests a past that is much more nebulous. The awe-inspiring power of nature is again embedded in the imagery of the story, focused especially on the mountain of the title, suggesting ecocritical leanings. However, that power is not fully explored or harnessed for feminist purposes, despite the tragic plight of the nature-orientated Bronwen (discussed below). Early in the story we are informed that

There are no living persons in the village to-day, who have looked upon the face of Bronwen. But there is one who is the lover of mountains who has verily looked upon the face of Bronwen, and been drawn nigh to Heaven, and holds in the heart her story.³⁰⁵

Through the syntax and archaic diction, Trefor suggests an allegorical or fairy tale version of Wales. Bronwen herself is a perplexing and complex character, who is described from the very beginning as being pulled in two very different directions, '[g]lorying one moment in a circle of admiration', then 'suddenly feel[ing] near suffocation and sickness' (p. 69). A recurring image in the story is that of 'the void within her, the void that had to be eased with filling' (p. 69). This void varies from a psychological and emotional lack to a physical emptiness that seems to stand for the womb. Unwilling to be 'wooed [...] or wed', Bronwen 'must be free, and mistress and master' (p. 70). Considering the time in which this story was written, when marriage was still seen to be the ultimate aim for most young women, a female character who wishes to be both master and mistress could be seen as particularly subversive. Trefor does not quite allow this reading to take flight, however, as she introduces a traveller

³⁰⁵ Eirlys Trefor, 'Mountain of Bronwen', *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 9.23 (1958), 68-77 (69). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text. This journal will be abbreviated to *AWR* from this point onwards in footnotes.

who comes to the village, a ‘man of letters’ (p. 71), who fills Bronwen with ‘yearning’ and ‘longing’ (p. 71) This traveller eventually jilts Bronwen at the altar and she becomes cold and emotionally distant. After a period of focusing on duty, she marries a ‘plain man of the village’, which is ‘in accordance with custom’ (p. 74), and has a child which she believes will ‘fill the void’ (p. 75). The child does, for a time, but is ‘early wed’ (p. 75) which again leaves Bronwen with a void that is ‘aching to be eased with filling’ (p. 75) It is only when the ‘little folk c[o]me dancing’ around her on the mountainside that she realises that the void is, in fact, her soul which is now filled with joy.

The style of both ‘Mountain of Bronwen and ‘The Promise’ differs considerably from *Light Cakes for Tea*, Trefor’s novel from 1958, which tells its story from the perspective of an old man in a Welsh community. While a reviewer in *Wales* referred to the novel being the ‘prose equivalent of R. S. Thomas’, there is little evidence of an equivalent skill with language in either of the two stories from the same period.³⁰⁶ The prose verges on melodrama and is, on the whole, unsatisfying. Yet there does seem to be an underlying feminist critique to some extent. Bronwen is unable, for instance, to break free from the chains of physical attraction. There is a scene, for example, before the traveller jilts her, which alludes to some kind of intimacy, where she is ‘conscious only of giving and taking, in a passion of love, and the void was lost in the fire’ (p. 73), but is stopped short by a convenient bout of thunder, lightning and torrential rain. The difference between the experience of each gender is highlighted after this scene as Bronwen ‘lie[s] in the dark, silently cursing the mountain for taking away her hope of fulfilment’ (p. 73), while the traveller also curses, but ‘comfort[s] himself with a change of clothing and a tankard of ale before retiring’ (p. 73). The issue of

³⁰⁶ ‘Review’, *Wales*, No 40, (May, 1959) p. 65. In AWR, a note is appended to the end of the story which notes that ‘A first novel by the author of this story is announced for publication by the Hutchinson Group in the autumn’ (77) which means ‘Bronwen’ was published first.

female sexual desire and fulfilment becomes far more prominent in later stories, and the sexual frankness of earlier writers, such as Kathleen Freeman, becomes much more common.

After this substantial story, there is a significant gap in Welsh-focused or Welsh-based stories by women writers in the pages of *The Anglo-Welsh Review*. There are several interesting political pieces which explore Jewish identity from a Welsh perspective by Palestinian-born author Judith Maro, and various travel pieces, including Margaret Aeron-Thomas's 'A Member of the Wedding' (1963), which offers very precise ethnographic details of a wedding on a Greek island. There are also several New England-based stories by Emily Katharine Harris, which it would be interesting to compare in terms of style and content with contemporaries in Wales, especially as Harris focuses on the intricacies of community interactions. Similarly, Ellen Tiff's story 'The Night of the Overnight' (1962) explores the relationships between neighbours in a suburb of New York. These stories suggest a more internationalist approach to publishing during the period as well as showcasing very different voices.

In 1969, two stories from *The Anglo-Welsh Review* stand out because of the nuanced voice their authors give to central male characters and their complex relationship with man-made and natural environments: Dora Polk's 'Success Story' and Phyllis M. Jones's 'The Road Through the Mountain'. Polk's 'return of the native' story focuses on George Morgan, a man who has made his fortune in a machinery-leasing business, having left Wales for Canada over thirty years previously. As he returns for his mother's funeral, George's wealth is obvious, from his 'forty-dollar shoes' to his talk of installing central heating in his sister's house before he leaves.³⁰⁷ While George is one of the 'success' stories of the title, his return highlights for him the 'backward streak' that runs through his community, the 'inability to

³⁰⁷ Dora Polk, 'Success Story', *AWR*, 18.41 (1969), 91-6 (91). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

climb out of their rut, to change their tinpot ways' (p. 92). When George originally decided to leave Wales, his reasons were bound up with his view of the country's supposed lack of progress. He tells his then-girlfriend, Olwen, that 'Wales is done for [...] Dying of the blight. The slump is eating us away, sucking our blood' (p. 92).

There is a strong sense that, despite George's financial successes, his personal relationships have not flourished to the same extent. By the time of his mother's death, he 'lacks somebody to share the good life he had won' (p. 93). In a particularly revealing aside, George thinks about his first wife, Mary-Lou, who clearly suffered from mental health difficulties. Mary-Lou, George notes, was a 'victim of lifelong depressions – aggravated, he was reluctant to admit, by the pressures of his upward climb' (p. 93). This frankness about women's mental health and the impact of gender roles on these issues is refreshing, and points to the possibility of a more nuanced understanding of the kinds of problems women face which exacerbate depression. There is also an intense sense of isolation, despite the fullness of their lives, which has been made possible by money. Mary-Lou 'had always been away, if not on rest vacations, then withdrawn into the shades and mazes of her mind' (p. 93). Her 'fiery death in a one-car crash' (93) is left ambiguous – perhaps an accident, but potentially suicide. While Mary-Lou's life (and death) is tragic, it points towards wider preoccupations concerning fulfilment in the modern domestic sphere. George's quest to make his fortune damages his wife irreparably, while he himself seems dislocated and alienated from his previous identity as part of a Welsh community.

Running parallel with George's story is that of Ceridwen Reese, Olwen's daughter by the man she married in place of George. Ceridwen is making a similar return journey to her homeland as she has not 'been home since her Mam died' (p. 95) a few years previously. Having returned to sing at the Centenary Concert at the chapel, she is coincidentally home at

the same time as George. Ceridwen is dislocated from her original community by education and talent. As George's sister explains, Ceridwen 'went straight from the county school to London when she won that scholarship to have her voice trained' (pp. 94-5). Having sung at Covent Garden (which the locals hear about through the local paper, the *Argus*), Ceridwen is herself a 'success story' and her return is something of a triumph, for the local community at least. Significantly, Ceridwen does not speak in the story, suggesting that in some fundamental way she lacks an autonomous voice. There is also a telling scene at the end of the story, where she is holding the flowers that George has sent her. While George wanted to 'spill the daffodils in a cascade down her black velvet gown', she instead leaves the flowers 'swathed in the paper they had come in, the point lapped over the blossoms like a three-cornered sherbert bag' (95). George feels this is part of '[t]he same old life-curdling caution that ruined everything. A grudging meanness with the simple riches of the earth' (p. 95). When George had last seen Olwen, just before he left for Canada all those years ago, he asked her if he could touch her body '[b]esides the parts of you that show. To speed me on my way, my lovely bud' (p. 94). The parallels between the flowers that Ceridwen now holds and the concept of her mother imagined as a kind of bud that must be unfurled, suggest a preoccupation with breaking down social constrictions on the body. At the same time, there is a slightly uncomfortable undercurrent, as George ponders whether 'it might have all been different if he had taken her' (p. 94). The text leaves the interpretation of this line ambiguous, suggesting both rape and literally taking Olwen to Canada. Equally disturbing is the moment when he looks at Ceridwen holding the flowers, and he sees her 'silver body and golden head of Olwen's' as 'less than maggots in a sheep's eye now' (p. 96). The 'long-self-promised trip back home to Wales' has underlined 'how much ha[s] remained the same' (p. 91) – for George, it is a stagnant, rotting place. Yet the return to the natural, if grotesque, imagery is

significant as it again reinforces the alleged link between women and nature. At the same time, it suggests that George's thought processes are in some way still bound by the natural world he has tried too hard to leave behind in his successful career in Canada.

Phyllis M. Jones's 'The Road Through the Mountain' also focuses to a certain extent on mental (as well as physical) health, but it is also a story about the environment, albeit an underground, constructed one rather than a 'natural' place as such. Reiterating the dangers of mining practices for workers' wellbeing, which are explored in earlier texts by B. L. Coombes's *These Poor Hands: The Autobiography of a Miner Working in South Wales* (1939) and Menna Gallie's *The Small Mine* (1962), 'The Road Through the Mountain' captures the shift from older styles of mining to more machinery-led work. The story laments the passing of the old ways, which are concomitant with a loss of community and loss of individual identity in the face of automation. The main character, Mat Griffiths, is 'the only one in his generation who had tackled this new place', but his health is hardly up to the lengthy shifts or the long bus ride home, as the pit is much further away.³⁰⁸ Right from the opening paragraph, we can see the way in which Jones carefully examines the changes that have taken place and how they have ruptured Mat's bonds with his friends and his working environment:

When [the coughing spasm] was finished, he looked around for his old butty, Dai, as he had done so many times before. But there was no one. Again he remembered: this was not the old Wern. This was the new big mine they called The Graig, where he had been sent to work out the last years of his life. And Dai was not here. Dai had been left behind, broken by progress, unable to face the long hours of travelling. 47

Even the deceptively simple names have deep symbolism, as the Welsh word 'wern' can mean 'alder', a type of tree, while 'grraig' means 'rock'. The contrast between a network of long-established roots and a hard, sheer material is a particularly apt metaphor for Mat's

³⁰⁸ Phyllis M. Jones, 'The Road Through the Mountain', *AWR*, 18.42 (1969), 47-52 (50). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

experiences in his new place of work. The loss of personal and emotional investment in the new mine is evident in the differences between the way the men react at work:

the men who had mined had been together, taking a personal, real interest in production. They were all part of the place. Here the soul had gone. There was nothing...and yet...production was all anyone spoke of...at the top. (p. 47)

This shift towards individual wealth and capitalist expansion does not fit with the old style working practices. Even the style of management is different (and disconcerting) as Mat notes the changing educational levels of the men in charge and the gulf this creates between them and the men they supervise:

Managers these days were more with the men and at the same time more remote. Maybe it was this education that divided. The old managers would match language for language in a blast-off...but still remember the names of your children and how the wife had just come out of hospital. (p. 47)

The lack of personal relationships between manager and worker have tragic results, as no-one notices that Mat has been missing underground for many, many hours and the new system for checking the right number of workers has returned is not, in fact, 'foolproof' (p. 48).

From the beginning, Mat takes a wrong turning which could be read as a critique of the mining industry itself. A tiny detail early on in the story, in which 'the mechanical supports, the walking chocks' are renamed as 'the Daleks' (p. 47), supports this critique. The Daleks were mechanised alien life forms, from the popular science fiction TV drama, *Doctor Who*, who destroy all other living things in their path in order to secure mastery of the universe. With their unrelenting desire to destroy humanity, the Daleks represent an image of Armageddon which could be read to symbolise a growing (perhaps ecocritical) anxiety about the future of the planet in a world which was becoming increasingly mechanised.

Significantly, Daleks are supposedly gender neutral, having evolved beyond the categories of male and female, but they are aligned with masculine warmongering, not least because of

their distinctly male, electronic voices. Traditionally, the ‘chocks’ in Jones’s text would have been made from thick planks of wood, remaining in one particular place to support the shaft. In their new incarnation as mechanised, almost animate objects, the chocks can move along the mineshaft due to their hydraulics. Such mechanisation threatens the future of men like Mat in a way which is parallel to the menace of the fictional Daleks. Again, there is a strong suggestion that the heart and soul of the coal mining industry, symbolised by the wood that has been replaced by the new chocks, has been ripped out with the advent of these larger-scale pits.

Interestingly, the story contains flashbacks to when Mat’s own father had died, presumably in a mining-related accident, and Mat had been forced to take on the responsibility for looking after his family. The woman who comes to break the news of his father’s death says ‘Mat will take over now and look after your mother, won’t you boy?’ (p. 49), handing him, effectively, a life sentence of duty. As he remarks himself, he ‘wasn’t afraid of death [...] it was life... “Mat will take over” and there would be no escape’ (p. 49). The duty of care, which is bound up in family and community, is no longer a part of the workplace as Mat wanders through the mine, now ‘[f]or the first time in forty years [...] a stranger underground’ (p. 49). At the end of the story, Mat has lost all ties with reality, having been underground alone for so long that he breaks, mentally, despite having been ‘the strongest’ of his generation (p. 50). At this point, his childhood memories of losing his father and feeling the ‘black desolation of loneliness [...] as a small boy screaming [...] in the quiet shadow of the kitchen’ (p. 51) come to the forefront of his mind. The mine, at least when he had been working at the Wern, was a kind of masculine space which has, until then, felt safe. At this point, the ‘boy’s sobbing merg[es] with the man’s cry of fear’ (p. 51). His wife, Mary, is given a voice in the story’s final lines: ‘He’ll never go back, not over my dead body. I’ll

spend the rest of my life trying to get that look off his face...that look...as if nothing was real any more' (p. 52). What 'The Road Through the Mountain' underscores is that the consequences for the women left to care for their husbands and their shattered health be given equal weight with that of the devastation experienced by the men themselves.

Kate Roberts: Welsh Language Short Fiction in the 1960s

Running alongside these authors were major Welsh-language short story writers such as Kate Roberts, Jane Edwards and Eigr Lewis Roberts. A full exploration of Welsh language women writers of the short story form would no doubt provide enough material for a thesis in itself, so the scope of this particular study is limited to selected works in translation, including Roberts's novella *Tywyll Heno* (1962), translated as *Dark Tonight*. Many readers are already familiar with Roberts's interconnected collection of short stories, *Te yn y Grug* (1959), or *Tea in the Heather*. Following the experiences of a young girl, Begw, Roberts skilfully depicts the child's world view, and often a humorous tone, which as Katie Gramich underlines, presents a 'distinct change from Roberts's characteristic note of sadness.'³⁰⁹ *Tea in the Heather* has many parallels and connections with the earlier narratives of community discussed in Chapter Two, including Roberts's own earlier stories. In one particular example, Begw has been asked to carry out an errand at the village shop for the local stonebreaker. Her visit, which has echoes of Ffanni's trip to pay off her life-long debt at the shop, in 'The Last Payment', is just as detailed, but this time much less serious: 'The shop was, as always, full of smells on top of each other, just like the goods. [...] And Oh! there were sweets of every colour there, the same shape as a saucer turned upside down, with all sorts of things written

³⁰⁹ Katie Gramich, *Kate Roberts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 56.

on them in other colours.’³¹⁰ In *Dark Tonight*, however, the tone is much more sombre and searching.

Dark Tonight traces the retrospective journey of the central character and narrator, Bet Jones, into mental breakdown. Citing her loss of faith for her descent into a debilitating depression, Bet seems to lose faith in life itself, rather than in a strictly religious sense, although her husband is a minister. Katie Gramich notes that ‘Roberts almost never writes about religious experience and her interest in the chapel here, as elsewhere in her oeuvre, is as a social institution’.³¹¹ In light of the other fictions discussed in this chapter, the way in which a rising political consciousness is indexed in this text is particularly interesting. Looking specifically at the cultural tradition of the eisteddfod, one of Bet’s family friends explains what he hopes to see from such gatherings of people at the heart of Welsh culture:

A little trace of vision. Here we are, living in the most turbulent age the world’s ever seen, and these poets don’t see anything in it but a chance to describe, describe the horrors of war, describe the effect of the new age on the Welsh way of life, the world changing, nostalgia for the old things and continually lamenting over the loss. There isn’t one of them has the guts to open his own soul and see what’s there.³¹²

After this, one of the others who is listening comments: ‘A man needs to battle before he can write’ (p. 243). I would argue that throughout this story, which is focused so closely on female experience, especially of mental illness, Roberts is exposing the kinds of battles women must go through in order to be able to express themselves fully. Bet herself is caught between two generations, as her friend Melinda explains: ‘The trouble with you is that you come between two periods: you’re not old enough to belong to the narrow old crowd who were deacons when we were children, and you’re too narrow to relate to young people today’

³¹⁰ Kate Roberts, *Tea in the Heather*, in *The World of Kate Roberts*, trans. Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 167-226 (p. 178).

³¹¹ Katie Gramich, *Kate Roberts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 93.

³¹² Kate Roberts, *Dark Tonight*, in *The World of Kate Roberts*, trans. Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 229-282 (p. 243). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

(p. 258). Melinda herself travels all over Europe, having money of her own to spend, and is not forced to live by the same rigid rules as Bet. However, Melinda is the focus of much local gossip and is presumed to be sexually active during her periods on the continent. The world that Bet and Melinda live in is, undoubtedly, narrow. Bet herself articulates this a little later in the text when she says ‘I belonged to two worlds, the shackled world of my youth, and the new world that I saw, that I heard and read about in books, where no fault was found in sin’ (p. 265). This new world that Bet glimpses is both frightening and fascinating, but it is the weight of the old world and its expectations of her as a woman which cause her breakdown. What is especially fascinating about the text, besides its frankness about mental health and sexual mores, is the imagery used to describe Bet’s depression. Bet describes it as ‘the mask coming over my eyes [...] and the blackness into my heart’ (p. 248). Here we can see a direct parallel between the imagery Roberts uses and that of Olwen Rees in ‘The Chair’. The difference with Roberts’s portrayal is, of course, that Bet, unlike the unnamed wife in Rees’s story, has a name, an identity and a distinct voice of her own.

Kate Roberts obviously was not the only Welsh language writer in the 1960s to be discussing the female body and female subjectivity. Other writers, such as Eigr Lewis Roberts in ‘An Overdose of the Sun’, which explores an older woman’s experiences of marginalisation after being diagnosed with cancer, also look, with the same kind of scrutinizing eye, at Welsh culture and its patriarchal structures.³¹³ Another writer who continually returns to the female body is Jane Edwards and her fierce examination of sex and relationships. Her story, ‘Blind Date’, which was anthologized alongside ‘An Overdose of the

³¹³ There is an underlying suggestion that there may be a link with the unnamed central female character’s cancer and sun exposure. Roberts describes her sun worshipping in this way: ‘Once she had welcomed it, greedily. She would inject it into her flesh, like a drug. If only she could again suck its warmth into her veins and feel it surge through her body. But she had lost her nerve and was afraid of its power.’ See Eigr Lewis Roberts, ‘An Overdose of the Sun’, in *The Penguin Book of Welsh Short Stories*, ed. Alun Richards (London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 205-208 (p. 205).

Sun', looks at the way young women are torn between the world of chapel and home and that of modern life, with its emphasis on the body as a kind of capital in the exchange between men and women. There is clearly far more to be said about Welsh women writers who write in the Welsh language, not to mention the politics of having that work translated. Eigr Lewis Roberts translated 'An Overdose of the Sun', so this in itself calls into question the types of meaning that are brought to the fore or, conversely, buried by different styles of translation. What does it mean to translate women's writing into the language which has attempted to marginalise and control a nation for centuries? There is neither, unfortunately, the scope nor the space to answer this question here, but it is one that I hope will be explored in much more depth in relation to short fiction in the years to come.

Ecofeminist Voices: Shirley Toulson and Elizabeth Baines

Two voices stand out from English-language short fiction writers in the 1970s for being especially perceptive and critical of patriarchal and politically motivated actions which restrict and damage women's lives. Shirley Toulson uses biting satire to engage with the problem of second home ownership, and the objectification of Wales as a tourist destination more generally in 'Playground of England' (1973). Deploying a detached, quasi-sociological, geographical and anthropological discourse to describe her vision of Wales of the future, she focuses in more depth on the impact this has on Megan, a retired teacher, who acts as a kind of 'case study' in the story. Elizabeth Baines's 'Boiling the Potatoes' (1978) also focuses on women's lives, but employs an experimental, fragmented style to explore female identity. In many ways, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), with its complex metaphorical associations and fractured collage of images and snatches of speech hovers, on the borders of the narrative style and structure of Baines's story. Both Toulson's and Baines's stories are inherently intertextual, borrowing from many different types of discourse, reminiscent of Julia

Kristeva's explanation that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another'.³¹⁴ While Toulson borrows from anthropology, Baines looks back to modernist writers and their reshaping of language to fit modern experience.³¹⁵

The opening sentences of Toulson's 'Playground of England' read as being somewhere between a geographical study of Welsh migration habits and a history textbook about a country's invasion and the subjection of its people. Studying this story in 2013, the reader is apt to gloss over the dates Toulson forecasts for her version of a future Wales (which is set in 1997), yet they suggest a vision which holds some unsettling truths for some parts of the country, notably rural and coastal areas where local people struggle to find affordable housing:

By 1997 the Welsh had totally withdrawn. From Snowdonia to the Black Mountains, the land was a spacious suburbia, providing second week-end homes for the executives of the London/Birmingham/Manchester conurbation. After a brief attempt in the '70s to swallow their pride and cater for the tourist industry, the hill farmers had found it more profitable to sell outright.³¹⁶

This opening clearly picks up on range of issues concerning English colonial practices, with Wales as the 'playground of England' that the title suggests, administered by the 'Public Playgrounds Commission' (p. 114). There is also a strong case to be made for this story to be read as a mimicry of colonialist invasion and travel literature, a space that has been cleared of inhabitants in an ironic contrast to the supposedly empty spaces of colonial expansion.

³¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', *The Kristeva Reader*, ed Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 37.

³¹⁵ Another author I have recently discovered is Ivonne Piper, especially her story 'Song of Solomon's Great-Great-Great-Great and Etcetera-Grand-daughter', *Planet*, 16 (February/March, 1973), pp. 24-32. This story is complex and extremely rich for a short story. Using jarring defamiliarizations, Piper questions the rules of language, the canon and intertextuality. As Llandrindod Wells-born Piper has published several short stories which have Welsh settings (the story from *Planet* is set in Swansea), as well as other work under different pen names, she deserves some further critical attention.

³¹⁶ Shirley Toulson, 'Playground of England', *Planet*, 18/19 (Summer, 1973), 113-117 (p. 113). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

Toulson both repeats back, yet mocks, the language of invasion and ownership. The authoritative narrative voice of a writer such as Amy Lane, with her throwaway comments about large swathes of the population are refracted back into a rewriting of the power relationships between coloniser and colonised.

Wales of the imagined late-1990s is an expansive tourist attraction, tended to not by farmers but the 'Ecology Section of the Department of the Environment', whose responsibility it is to 'maintain the forests, and to see to it that a reasonable strain of sheep in reasonable numbers cropped the grass' (p. 113). Overseas visitors are 'packed in their air-conditioned/muzaked coaches with reclining seats', while 'gasp[ing] at the scenery through the glare-proof/mist-repelling windows' (p. 114). Recalling the language of George Orwell's *1984* and the reliance on technology to mediate the environment in futuristic short stories such as E. M. Forster's 'The Machine Stops' (1909), Toulson's Wales of the future is empty and artificial. As with the links to T. S. Eliot, Toulson seems to draw on the techniques and approaches of Modernism, which sought to break free from the stifling traditions of the past and to shape a new way of thinking through language. Megan, one of the few remaining authentic residents, refuses the large financial incentives to sell her cottage and insists on 'liv[ing] here until [she] die[s]' (p. 117), managing to survive by careful negotiation with the small corner shops, which are 'masquerading under various Welsh names' (p. 116) and are closed when the holiday season ends. When one of the companies which specialises in obtaining Welsh property hears of Megan's house, they decide to set the 'Cardiff Welfare people' onto Megan (p. 116), to take the decision to sell out of her hands. The story ends with the 'medical officer of health, the director of social services and their two chief assistants' (p. 116), who have been brought in by helicopter, attempting to take Megan away by force, if necessary. She resists their attempts to take her away by holding her breath, 'decid[ing] to

hold it for ever' (p. 117) in the hope that such action will, at her age, 'prove fatal' (117). This passive-aggressive act, with its refusal to resort to violence, mirrors the tone of the story itself, which makes its protest clear through witty critique and satire – a technique which is, in effect, a form of non-violent disobedience.³¹⁷ Toulson is clearly tapping into a general dissatisfaction with Welsh property becoming second homes for affluent English incomers – an issue which culminated in the campaigns of arson carried out by Meibion Glyndŵr in the 1980s. The Wales that she imagines is frightening in that it is recognisable, much in the same way that Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's speculative (and dystopian) trilogy, beginning with *Oryx and Crake* (2003), imagines a world only a step or two beyond that which we experience at the moment. Toulson's critique of English policy towards Wales, I would argue, is part of a wider project to transform understandings of what it means to be a Welsh woman under an imperialist government. Toulson's story cries out for greater autonomy and freedom for Wales – something which actually happened with the devolution referendum, which, fittingly enough, took place in the same year Toulson set her story.

Elizabeth Baines also has a far-reaching political agenda, but achieves her vision through subtle manipulation of language, playing with linearity and narrative progression by leaping from one topic or setting to another through connecting words or phrases. Baines is also concerned with female autonomy (especially regarding the body, memory and health) and the ability to forge connections – between people, places and the environment. The famous lines from Eliot's poem 'On Margate Sands. / I can connect/ Nothing with nothing'³¹⁸ echo throughout the story, as Baines's unnamed female protagonist refigures them as

³¹⁷ Megan 'has no time for violence', having 'left Plaid Cymru after some of its members burn down an estate agents in London' (p. 115). This detail about Plaid is erroneous as it was not involved in this kind of action, unlike Meibion Glyndŵr.

³¹⁸ T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber, 1990), pp. 21-50 (p. 34, ll. 300-302).

‘[n]oting the connections’³¹⁹ or ‘[n]oting the connections, and the lack of connections, I stand on Sunday afternoons upon the lawn’ (p. 32). The story’s title, ‘Boiling the Potatoes’, which focuses on the quotidian, is actually drawing attention to the histories inscribed in everyday practices. The narrator tells us: ‘I boil my potatoes on the open fire. The flames flicker, and the pot gets black, crusted with charcoal like the bark of a tree’ (p. 31). While this image may be commonplace, it connects the narrator with the traditions of previous generations of Welsh women. The narrator notes that ‘When they rehoused us, built us new homes, the council provided hobs and open fires, to preserve our legends’ (p. 31). Presumably referring to the large losses of homes during the bombing in the Second World War, and the large scale building programmes of council housing from the 1950s onwards, this house connects the narrator to previous generations, yet, as a council house, is also an emblem of modernity. However, the retained features are the most convenient, and suggest a cost-cutting measure in place of time-saving modern domestic appliances. There is also a distinct sense of dislocation, displacement and exile underpinning the imagery connected with home and belonging – themes which are explored in the very fabric of story – in disconnected events, inconsistent chronologies and imagery of loss, figured through the recurring depictions of diseased tree. Kirsti Bohata, who writes of Wales as a postcolonial nation, argues that ‘a fracture in the relationship between people and place may occur for the colonized in their homelands.’³²⁰

The tree bark referred to in this early section of the story recurs, as many images and individual words do in the story, and has a distinctly political edge. At the end of the story, the narrator’s family are ‘pointing and calling [to her] in distress’:

³¹⁹ Elizabeth Baines, ‘Boiling the Potatoes’, *Planet*, 42 (February, 1978), 31-2 (31). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

³²⁰ Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 94.

Look at all the elms, there's something wrong! They've a modern malaise, for some reason they're dying! See – their leaves are like torn paper, and their bark's about to crumble – already some are ugly cracks against the sky!' (p. 32)

Here, Baines is drawing attention to the damage inflicted upon elm trees in Wales by Dutch elm disease, which was caused by beetles carrying fungus. Peter Jones, writing two years later in *Cambria*, notes that the 'disease spread rapidly into Wales during the late 1960s and early 1970s', and highlights the devastating consequences for the large population of elm trees within Britain as a whole: 'Leaves on diseased elms first turn yellow, then brown, the foliage drops off, twigs and branches die back and the entire tree can be killed off within a summer.'³²¹ In Wales, the disease caused 'bleak and exposed' flatlands around Caldicot, losses in the civic centre of Cardiff, and the destruction of whole hedgerows in north Wales.³²² As Jones emphasises, 'there are no instant cures for the landscape ravages caused by the disease'.³²³ Indeed, this disease literally changed the physical appearance of Wales, devastating large areas of outstanding natural beauty. Jones also underlines the fact that, in many ways, 'the battle to save the elm population in Wales was lost in England'.³²⁴ It is this aspect which gives Baines's story a particularly political edge, as policies decided within Westminster and by the Forestry Commission effectively ensured that the spread of the disease went unchecked in Wales. Jones refers to a sample study, commissioned by the Forestry Commission in 1971, which ignored Glamorgan despite the high incidence of Dutch elm disease in the neighbouring counties of Gloucester, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.³²⁵ Additionally, the first Dutch Elm Disease Order (Statutory Instrument 1708) of October 1971, which gave statutory powers to local authorities to carry out felling themselves or force landowners into felling diseased trees, did not cover Wales. In a peculiar parallel to the

³²¹ Peter Jones, 'Dutch Elm Disease in Wales', *Cambria: A Welsh Geographic Review*, 7.2 (1980), 1-10 (p. 2).

³²² Jones, 'Dutch Elm Disease in Wales', p. 8.

³²³ Jones, 'Dutch Elm Disease in Wales', p. 8.

³²⁴ Jones, 'Dutch Elm Disease in Wales', p. 8.

³²⁵ Jones, 'Dutch Elm Disease in Wales', p. 4.

aggressive afforestation performed by the Forestry Commission, as discussed by Kirsti Bohata in *Postcolonialism Revisited* (2004), we find a laissez-faire policy that was similarly destructive.³²⁶

Baines's story could be read as a lament for the elm, as the narrator repeatedly returns to the word, as an emblem of times now past. The narrator, for instance, remembers 'rubbing hands' with her husband, Brewer, 'beneath the barky elms' (p. 31) and 'the swing in the orchard fastened to an elm-branch' (p. 31) which she remembers from childhood. The world that the narrator is faced with now, in old age, is that of 'little metal cars' and a landscape changed beyond recognition. Instead of 'green sweeps' (p. 31) there is 'the power-house, and beyond it the cement works' (p. 31), where 'chimneys puff dust' and the hedges are 'drifting [in dust], white and grainy, even the blackberries pale with dry snow' (p. 31). Baines locates this area specifically as Aberthaw, in the Vale of Glamorgan, where the River Thaw was diverted through the power plant to help cool the reactors. The word 'grainy' reverberates as much as 'bark' as it recurs in the description of the 'grainy bulge' which appears beneath Gwyneth's (the narrator's sister) breasts, suggestive of cancerous breast tumours. The narrator 'sponge[s] those alien tissues, issuing in drifts upon her paper bones' (p. 32), which repeats the imagery of dust associated with the power plant and links with the 'torn paper' of the diseased elms. I would argue that, in this story, Elizabeth Baines eloquently yokes together the diseased elms with the diseased female body – both resulting from inadequate political intervention. G. Melvyn Howe, in an article entitled 'Spatial Inequalities in Mortality Experience in Wales' (1986) draws attention to the disparities in death rates in different areas of Wales. He refers to several towns on the border between Mid and South Glamorgan, including Bridgend (Baines's home town), which were 'high risk areas' for

³²⁶ See Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).

breast cancer in particular, and had death rates by the early 1980s which were ‘25 per cent or more above the U.K. average.’³²⁷ Howe also ‘wonders what particular combinations of environmental carcinogens, socio-economic characteristics, or lifestyle factors predispose or place at risk to breast cancer women folk living in the[se areas].’³²⁸ He also underlines that ‘it is necessary to ask to what extent [...] the irregularities or inequalities in mortality [are] explained in terms of human response to environmental hazards’³²⁹ This recurring focus on environmental factors can be traced in Baines’s story as the description of the ‘grainy’ tumour is echoed in Gwyneth’s final journey, when her coffin ‘slip[s] away under the elms and between the grainy hedges’ (p. 32). There is a strong suggestion that Gwyneth’s illness has been caused by the carcinogenic dust that coats the land surrounding the power plant. Considering the high-profile campaigns of Greenpeace, which was founded in 1971 (a UK branch was founded in 1977, a year before the publication of Baines’s story), concerning environmental issues, such as the widespread dumping of nuclear waste into oceans, pollution of the planet was a particularly pressing issue. Women in Wales were beginning to take active roles in these kinds of campaigns from the 1970s onwards. As Jane Aaron comments, “‘Greenness’”, in a broad sense, has constituted a significant aspect of Welsh women’s contribution not only to Welsh but to global life.’³³⁰ She goes on to say that ‘It was, of course, women from Wales who initially established the Greenham Common protest camp.’³³¹ While ‘Boiling the Potatoes’ obviously predates Greenham Common, it does suggest a deep-rooted critique of policies which have a long lasting, negative impact – not just on Wales and its lands, but on women’s lives in a wider sense. If we look at another of

³²⁷ G. Melvyn Howe, ‘Spatial Inequalities in Mortality Experience in Wales’, *Cambria: A Welsh Geographical Review*, 13.1 (1986), 131-149 (143).

³²⁸ Howe, ‘Spatial Inequalities’, p. 143.

³²⁹ Howe, ‘Spatial Inequalities’, p. 146.

³³⁰ Jane Aaron, ‘A Review of the Contribution of Women to Welsh Life and Prospects for the Future’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, n.s., vol 8 (2008), 188-204 (201).

³³¹ Aaron, ‘A Review’, p. 201

Baines's stories, 'Cautionary Tale' (1976), originally published in The Arts Council's *New Stories I*, ecocritical issues are already visible. In fact, the same power plant mentioned in 'Boiling the Potatoes' has already been flagged in this earlier story, which is set in Gilestone (a small village in the Vale of Glamorgan, very close to Aberthaw). The story also mentions 'war-time pill-boxes' which 'snarled above the beach the sea didn't reach'³³² which are remnants of the military coastal defences of the previous world wars. Instead of Eiluned Lewis's 'storehouse of the past', we find a landscape littered with traces of a past that is quickly becoming meaningless and obsolete.

Baines's 'Boiling the Potatoes' has yet another layer of meaning which is particularly powerful and yet poignant. There is a brief reference to the narrator's 'senility' (p. 32), suggested by her daughter as the reason for 'stick[ing her] face' (p. 32) into a mass of spiders' webs and eggs on the back of a picture on the wall when her daughter chastises the narrator for her lack of cleanliness around the home. The reader, on first glance, could take this quite light heartedly, but there are various small details and the repetition of phrases in the story which suggest the narrator is in the early stages of dementia. Details from the past repeat themselves, such as the memory of Gwyneth scaring the evening paper boy by dressing up in her nightie as a ghost, as a 'practical joke, based on a local legend' (p. 32). Afterwards, he 'jibber[s] and stare[s] with hollow eyes' and the girls have to 'calm him down with brandy' (p. 32). As Gwyneth lies by the fire, dying, she also 'jibber[s] all the time, and stare[s] with hollow eyes' and her sister 'calm[s] her down with brandy' (p. 32). Ages of characters are also confusingly similar, as the narrator's daughter is referred to as being fifty while Gwyneth is 'going on fifty' (p. 31), 'past fifty' (p. 32), then 'going on fifty-one' (p. 32). The narrator is clearly shifting between the time (now passed) when Gwyneth was fifty,

³³² Elizabeth Baines, 'Cautionary Tale', *New Stories I*, ed Margaret Drabble and Charles Osborne (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976), pp. 19-22 (19).

and the present, when her own daughter has reached Gwyneth's age. By interlocking the past with the present, the narrator simultaneously holds on to the past yet merges it with the present, creating a subtle sense of disorientation that mimics that of the narrator's own unravelling mind. There is a political dimension to the imagery of dementia, which parallels Eigr Lewis Roberts's exploration of the link between skin cancer and environmental damage in 'An Overdose of the Sun'. Women's minds, in Baines's story, as well their bodies, are diseased because of contamination – through actual pollution which is caused by the British government's desire for energy, no matter what the cost, as well as the metaphorical contamination of the psyche caused by a casually dismissive colonialist attitude to the needs and desires of Welsh female subjectivity .

The story also seems to be making a distinction between different kinds of knowledge – the difference between facts and stories, or 'legends' as she frequently refers to them. As the story opens with the narrator's imperative to 'Watch – those spider-webs of legends!' (p. 31), and seems unwilling to clean the copious amounts of spiders, their webs and their eggs from her house, she seems particularly keen to preserve the legends of her youth. The memories of 'Songs of the slipper-days, the swinging in the orchard, and the green fields wheeling down to the sea...' form part of these legends, while small details like Gwyneth hitching up her petticoat 'for the fashion of the day' (p. 31) but making herself look 'old' with a 'bulge beneath [her] dress' (p. 31) are described differently: 'This is history, this is fact, this is not legend' (p. 31). For the most part, these 'legends', or memories of her girlhood with her sister in an unspoilt landscape, are in parenthesis, and so are in some ways fragments of this lost era which remain in the main body of the narrative.³³³ The imagery of

³³³ There is one section of reminiscence where the opening parenthesis is missing. This is a misprint, according to the author herself, but the version that we have in print further erodes the line between memory and the present.

the spider's web, which recurs throughout the story, could be read as a metaphor for language and the process of keeping hold of memories – that words themselves are like the spider's threads, connected yet inherently fragile. When her daughter pulls the picture off the wall to complain of her mother's failing hygiene standards, the webs are described as 'a shredding of spiders' webs' (p. 32), which again suggests the disconnections and broken synapses of dementia. The retelling of legends is vital in the story to capture the characters' personal histories, to reinforce the threads that connect memories. As the narrator states: 'Saying it often, saying it always, we made a legend of our own' (p. 32) This phrase seems to be playing on the title of Elaine Showalter's well-known feminist text, *A Literature of their Own*, which was first published, to much acclaim, in 1977. The story, in this way, connects itself with a wider feminist network.

Conclusions

While the changes in narrative styles represented by the shift from the work of Eirlys Trefor to Elizabeth Baines could not, in some respects, be more marked, there are many continuities in texts to be found across the period discussed in this chapter, as well as further back in a literary history of short fiction. What is particularly striking about Baines's work is its multi-layered complexity, yet it is also rooted in notions of place, domesticity and memory – all of which are present in much earlier writers' work, especially Anne Beale's. While the writing in earlier sketches and prototypical short stories was less mature, the correspondences which recur suggest the continuation of a developing tradition. The passion that Beale felt for Wales is equally evident in the writers of the 1960s and 1970s, albeit expressed in different ways.

While sketches and other short fictions of the nineteenth century had the ability to define and sometimes skew perceptions of national identity, the stories discussed in this chapter had (and still have) the power to transform our understanding of the environment,

including the legacy of the damage done by governmental policy directed from Westminster. This chapter is only the beginning of what I hope to be much more sustained work on ecofeminism and short fiction, and I have only been able to briefly skim the richness and diversity of women's writing on nature and the politics this involves. What does stand out from the stories discussed is the clear shift to an open and frank dialogue concerning the (female) self and its position in a world which is becoming increasingly ecologically aware. The interconnection between women's bodies and the world we live in has become an even more pressing concern from the viewpoint of 2013, not least the ways in which our lives are saturated by chemicals and unnatural foodstuffs. Writers of the late 1960s who focused on men's perspectives, such as Dora Polk and Phyllis M. Jones, opened up feminist perspectives to include the harm done to both the male psyche and the male body by the increasing demands of capitalism and industry. Later writers, such as Shirley Toulson and Elizabeth Baines, should be read as ground breakers in both ideological and ecological critiques.

Short fiction has traditionally been classed as a marginalised genre, in academia as well as in wider publishing circles. Yet it is able, despite this labelling, to expose and explore elements of vital importance in Welsh life, culture and the environment. This chapter has only uncovered a fraction of the wealth of material that still lies hidden in journals and magazines from this period. When more work is done in this field, there will be even more reason to question the marginal status of a genre that can ask the kinds of questions that can transform not just women's lives, but Welsh culture and attitudes as a whole.

Chapter Four: Place, Language and Belonging: Contemporary Short Fiction by Women from Wales

Over the last two decades, there has been considerable attention directed towards the accomplishments of female short fiction writers in Wales. A brief glance at the recent successes of women's texts in prestigious Welsh literary prizes would suggest that there has been a marked shift in the way women's writing is perceived and recognised – to the point that it could be seen as a mainstream rather than marginal genre. Some notable short story collections include Deborah Kay Davies' *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* (2008), Gee Williams's *Blood etc* (2008), winner and runner up respectively of the 2009 Wales Book of the Year, as well as Rachel Trezise's *Fresh Apples* (2005) which won the £60,000 EDS Dylan Thomas prize in 2006. Women writers have also been successful in the biennial Rhys Davies Short Story Competition. Recent winners include Siân Preece (2009) and Penny Simpson (2007), as well as Deborah Kay Davies (runner up in 2007 and 2001), which suggests a rising confidence and resurgence in women's short story writing in Wales. While anthologies of the past regularly excluded women or diminished their achievements, the same could not be said for publishing within Wales itself, particularly over the last two decades.

Across contemporary women's short fiction in Wales, there is a profound engagement with the question of identity – especially in the wider context of gender and nation. Since devolution in 1997, it could be argued that a sense of what constitutes 'Welshness' has become increasingly pressing, an issue which has seeped into the writing of many Welsh authors, across a range of genres. Katie Gramich notes the shift in textual preoccupations concerning Welsh identity, remarking that

Whereas many female voices in literary works from earlier in the twentieth century (in both languages) lamented the loss of a more or less unified Welsh culture of a

golden age before Anglicization, migration and urbanization, recent voices are more likely to speak of a hybrid conception of Welshness.³³⁴

This chapter will focus on some of the different ways identity is explored in women's short fiction, including through hybridity, encompassing a range of different perspectives and experiences. This chapter does not attempt in any way to be a comprehensive survey of contemporary short fiction. Rather, it looks to some key voices which demonstrate the diversity of current narrative techniques. Some established authors have been sacrificed to give space to emergent writers in the first steps of their literary careers, in the hope of offering an inclusive impression of both on-going and developing preoccupations in women's short fiction.³³⁵ This chapter focuses on several writers of the 1990s, including Leonora Brito, Catherine Merriman, and Glenda Beagan, as well as authors published since 2000, including Rachel Trezise, Jo Mazelis and Deborah Kay Davies. Finally, the chapter examines some recent trends in stories which have been successful in prestigious literary competitions in Wales. This cross-section of women writers, from a range of backgrounds, aims to draw attention to the diversity of voices in the genre of short fiction as well as recurring themes of exile, displacement, salvage, loss, flight, and escape, underpinned by an auto-ethnographic examination of Welsh identity in a predominantly post-devolution era. The way in which Deborah Reed-Danahay defines the characteristics of auto-ethnographic writing, discussed earlier in Chapter Two, seems to have particular resonance for the women writers of the 1990s and beyond. I repeat the quotation from Reed-Danahay as it encapsulates much that is striking about writing from contemporary Wales. She remarks:

³³⁴ Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 183.

³³⁵ The work of Siân James and Clare Morgan has not been discussed in this chapter, for example, while writers with considerable literary outputs, such as Catherine Merriman, do not receive as much attention as they deserve. Nevertheless, the rationale of this chapter is to point towards trends and underline a range of concerns in current short fiction. There is, undoubtedly, huge potential for expansion and further refinement in the arguments explored in this chapter as the field is constantly growing and evolving.

The most cogent aspect to the study of autoethnography is that of the cultural displacement or situation of exile characteristic of the themes expressed by auto-ethnographers. This phenomenon of displacement breaks down dualisms of identity and insider/outsider status. Whether the autoethnographer is the anthropologist studying his or her life story, or the native anthropologist, this figure is not completely “at home”. The ability to transcend everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life is related to the ability to write or do autoethnography. This is a postmodern condition. It involves rewriting the self and the social.³³⁶

This is not to argue that women writers are necessarily doing the work of auto-ethnographers; rather that some of the main features of this discipline recur in contemporary short fiction.

This chapter argues that these features – of exile, displacement, and the desire to rewrite the self – are bound up in a new understanding of national identity, including defining what that identity comprises. What also emerges from this discussion of Welsh women writers is the somewhat disturbing way in which they appear to be disconnected or cut off from a past tradition, evoked in the image of the stranded oxbow lake in one of Glenda Beagan’s stories, ‘Birth of an Oxbow’. The features of an older generation of women writers, influenced by the tradition of the sketch and travel accounts of Wales is implicit in the writing of contemporary women, but the writers themselves seem to have lost sight of their own roots. This chapter seeks to underline the ways in which contemporary women’s writing can be read and understood as part of a wider tradition of Welsh women’s short fiction.

Leonora Brito

One of the most fascinating writers to emerge from the 1990s in terms of hybrid conceptions of Welsh identity is Leonora Brito, a black author born and brought up in Cardiff. What is perhaps most significant about Brito is the way she gave a voice to the histories and experiences of the Caribbean-Welsh population of Cardiff, which has often been a marginalised and overlooked community. Her collection of short stories, *dat’s love* (1995), brings together her various prize-winning stories, including the Rhys Davies competition and

³³⁶ Deborah Reed-Danahay, ‘Introduction’, in *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), pp.1-17 (p. 4).

the Stand International Story Competition. As they are set in and around the Cardiff docklands of Tiger Bay, they represent a history that has now been lost, as much of the area Brito would have been familiar with was bulldozed in 1999 in preparation for the building of the new Cardiff Bay development, now home to the Welsh Assembly Government. Linden Peach describes Brito as

having more in common with Nobel Prize-winning African-American novelist Toni Morrison than many Welsh short story writers, sharing her concern with how ethnic minority communities and mixed-race peoples can reclaim themselves as subjects of their own histories and biographies rather than being objects in other people's narratives.³³⁷

Katie Gramich also notes 'the way in which a British identity is emphasized [in Brito's stories], rather than a Welsh one.'³³⁸ One particularly engaging story is 'Digging for Victory', which explores the aftermath of a warship crashing into the city's canal gates. The story opens from the perspective of a black, female narrator who remains unnamed throughout: 'When Mr Churchill's war-ship sailed into Cardiff Docks in the spring of 1955, I was seventeen years old and working at my first job, as a clerk in the Ministry of Labour, right on the corner of Custom House Street and Canal Parade'.³³⁹ The first page carefully traces her journey into work, naming several of the roads which she walks along, many of which are still recognisable today, despite the city's major remodelling. The narrator is marked out from the other girls in the story as she has a good job, while her younger sister, Teeny, 'work[s] with all the other coloured girls down Oram's, making lavatory brushes in the winter and artificial Christmas trees in the summer' (p. 67). The narrator, on the other hand, is 'proud to have a job up town. Stepping over Canal Parade Bridge into town made me different. Teeny said it made me stuck up' (p. 67). While Teeny calls her sister 'Miss Piss-pot' and observes,

³³⁷ Linden Peach, 'Unspoken Histories: Ground breaking Short Fiction', in *Contemporary Irish and Welsh Women's Fiction* (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2007), pp. 18-43 (p. 20).

³³⁸ Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 194.

³³⁹ Leonora Brito, 'Digging for Victory', in *dat's love* (Bridgend: Seren, 1995), pp. 67-74 (p. 67). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

in a strongly-marked, Caribbean accent, ‘who you thinks you are I’m sure I doan know’, the narrator is keen to highlight her own difference and desire for upward social mobility through speech. The narrator never displays any trace of an accent, suggesting that she is trying to adopt a more ‘English’ or, perhaps, ‘British’ mode of speech. What is also particularly striking about the story’s narrative technique is the way in which the colloquial, strongly accented speech of the other girls is juxtaposed with the narrator’s memories, which are often very evocative and carefully crafted. This is especially apparent in her description of the wrecked canal, after the warship has crashed:

The water had gone, emptied violently into the sea, and the violence of its going had transformed the area into an enormous excavation site, leaving a mangle of objects half exposed to the light. I remember water wheels and iron wheels and cast iron plate. And heavy, rusted chains endlessly uncurling out of the mud, like snakes being stirred from hibernation. [...] It was an exhumation of the industrial past. Layer by layer. (p. 72)

One way of reading this imagery of excavation in ‘Digging for Victory’ is as a metaphor for uncovering the hybrid, multi-layered and plural identities of Cardiff’s inhabitants, which have been produced and shaped by the city’s industrial past. Trezza Azzopardi’s *The Hiding Place* (2000) also features a similar scene of excavation where a dead body is discovered in the mud in Cardiff’s docklands. This type of quasi-archaeological imagery seems to be a recurring feature of women’s writing more generally, including Siân Preece’s ‘Getting Up’. Unlike the plastic toilet brushes and artificial Christmas trees that Teeny makes, the items thrown up by the water are all metal, perhaps underlining the changing face of industry in the city. As with Preece’s story (discussed below), Brito’s text is attempting to uncover a past that has, up until now, been inaccessible. What is also striking about this story is the fact that it embeds itself in an industrial past rather than a rural shared history as earlier women writers do. This suggests that the way women’s lives have been shaped by industry is an integral part of

current day experience, especially in densely packed urban areas such as Cardiff. The irony is, of course, that the histories Brito sought to preserve and explore in her fictions are now reburied under another layer of concrete. Nevertheless, her fictions offer readers a far more nuanced understanding of this especially submerged community than could previously be imagined.

Catherine Merriman

Gwent-based author Catherine Merriman writes from a somewhat different perspective from Brito, and often explores the role of the middle class housewife or mother. As with Leonora Brito's writing, place remains a recurring issue in Merriman's work. Born in London and educated at the University of Kent, Merriman has experienced English culture from its very metropolitan centre. Although she has now lived in Wales for over thirty years, Merriman's upbringing in southern England and it is, perhaps, because of these English roots that questions regarding the outsider's relationship to Welshness surface in 'The Beginning of Something', from her 1997 collection, *Of Sons and Stars*. The story focuses on Kay, and her son, Alex, who is about to leave Wales for university in Colchester. The story explores the issue of loss, especially Kay's now superfluous role as mother, as well as Alex's reclamation of a Welsh identity. The story's opening, though very different from Brito's, demonstrates a similarly strong sense of place, as Kay and her son are 'looking out over the broad plain of the Usk Valley while walking along the side of the Bloreng Mountain.'³⁴⁰ Some of the story's most probing questions concerning the relationship between place and identity are posed directly through the dialogue between mother and son, which could be interpreted as a kind of oral tradition in the story. Standing on the mountainside, Alex asks: 'You won't ever

³⁴⁰ Catherine Merriman, 'The Beginning of Something', in *Of Sons and Stars* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1997), pp. 35-40 (p. 95). All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

move, will you?’ (p. 96). When Kay replies that the house will be ‘rather big’ without him, Alex makes it clear that he means something much larger than the family home:

‘I mean from here. From this.’ He nodded outwards. Kay looked across the pastoral fields of the Usk floodplain, towards the Black Mountain horizon. [...]

‘You want to keep a stake in this, do you?’

Alex nodded. ‘I can’t imagine living where there aren’t mountains. Be weird.’

‘That’s because you were born here,’ Kay said. ‘Mountains are like the sea. They imprint on the soul.’

(p. 96)

There is a definite sense that this landscape has played an integral part in shaping Alex’s identity, that it anchors his sense of who he is. In the midst of their discussion, Alex

comments that he ‘feel[s] Welsh’, but asks his mother: ‘What was it like for you and Dad then? When you came here first? Being English. Didn’t you feel kind of alien?’ (p. 98).

Kay’s response is revealing as it draws attention to a postcolonial critique of the construction of the (usually white, male) self: ‘It didn’t cross our minds. [...] The English don’t think about being English. Like men don’t think about maleness, or white people about whiteness.

It was just an adventure’ (p. 98). Kay’s language evokes the trope of the white colonizer who does not think about his or her own race because it is seen as almost ‘naturally’ dominant.

Through this dialogue, Merriman explores both the experience of the English settler as well as that of the next generation, which binds itself to a Welsh identity, claiming the landscape as home. Alex is now able to claim a Welsh identity for himself, despite being the first generation of his family to be born there. He is now replicating the journey his parents took, but in reverse, as he heads off to England and to university.

Glenda Beagan

Glenda Beagan’s fictions are similarly concerned with place and identity – themes which she continually examines in her three collections of short stories, *The Medlar Tree* (1992),

Changes and Dreams (1996), and *The Great Master of Ecstasy* (2009). As with Merriman, it

is difficult to do Beagan's literary output justice in a chapter which is essentially a snapshot of contemporary women's writing in this form. However, it is possible to highlight some key recurring tropes in her writing. One of the most striking aspects of *The Medlar Tree* is its unremitting exploration of identities, often female, either in flux or experiencing some kind of displacement. As is often the case in Beagan's writing, the image of the medlar tree itself brings together multiple and complex interpretations that connect with these experiences. Previously native to south-east Europe and western Asia, the tree has been transported and cultivated further north, beyond its original environment. Its fruit is symbolic of certain aspects of femininity as it has historically connoted female genitals due to its shape, while the word 'medlar' has come to mean a prostitute or a disreputable woman. Inedible in colder countries, such as Britain, until it is partially rotten, the fruit can be eaten as soon as it is ripe in warmer climates. As the medlar tree has been uprooted from its natural habitat, so too have many of Beagan's characters. For them, the natural order is somehow disturbed or disrupted which leads to discontent and often rage. This discontent manifests itself in several different ways, most notably in the form of mental illness or in relationships that are strained and unravelling, 'rotten' in some fundamental way. The emotional shifts that characters experience are often bound up with wider concerns regarding loss and dispossession – themes which, as Katie Gramich has shown in *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales* (2007), often recur in contemporary Welsh women's fiction as a whole.³⁴¹ In Wales, where there seems to be a renaissance in women writing the short story, it could be argued that the form itself is feminine – in the sense that it can capture and explore women's experiences (of marginalisation, especially) in a way that other forms cannot quite achieve. Beagan's

³⁴¹ See Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007) for further details.

‘Scream, Scream’, a story which recounts the childless Mrs Jenkins’ three-yearly visits to a psychiatric ward (during which time she screams unremittingly for many hours) is bound up in dispossession. Her scream encapsulates her sense of loss at being the last descendant of Sgubor Fawr, a Welsh farmhouse which has been in the family for countless generations – her scream is ‘the scream of the last of the Jenkinses of Sgubor Fawr’.³⁴² As Katie Gramich explains:

Mrs Jenkins is a childless woman who is the last of her family to live in the remote farmhouse of Sgubor Fawr; her scream is the expression of a specifically Welsh sense of dispossession, but at the same time it is also [...] an expression of a specifically female anguish and despair.³⁴³

When on the ward, the scream seems to encompass all the other female patients – ‘It’s as if the scream slowly inhabits them all, slowly expresses them all’, a ‘blend of dark voices [...] ungovernable, timeless voices without meaning or order’ (p. 31). There is something chaotic and primal in this scream which articulates, without language, a profound loss.

The intersection of language and identity seem to be especially important in Beagan’s writing, possibly due to her own experiences as an English speaker living in North Wales. In an article entitled ‘To Find a Speech, A Tongue: Language and Identity – A Personal View’, Beagan discusses a moment of self-discovery that occurred while attending a conference on Raymond Williams, as she listened to the critic Anthony Easthope attacking Williams’ work: ‘I found out just how Welsh I really was. And yet I wrote in English. It wasn’t the first time I’d felt alienated from the only language I could use fluently, but this time it all seemed to crystallize, and *mean*.’³⁴⁴ Beagan explores this sense of alienation further, commenting:

‘Perhaps, paradoxically, I write in the first place because I’m uncomfortable with the language I have to employ, that I’m trying, somehow, to define my personal territory through

³⁴² Glenda Beagan, ‘Scream, Scream’, in *The Medlar Tree* (Bridgend: Seren, 1992), pp. 26-33 (p. 32).

³⁴³ Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales*, p. 161.

³⁴⁴ Glenda Beagan, ‘To Find a Speech, a Tongue: Language and Identity – a Personal View’, *Planet*, 94 (1992) 27-32 (p. 28).

it'.³⁴⁵ Words, she argues, 'are often used to fix boundaries, to keep at arm's length, to deny admission, even on one's own doorstep.'³⁴⁶ The almost cartographic imagery Beagan uses, of personal space as 'territory', of words as boundary markers, underlines a recurring concern with the ways in which identity is mapped and shaped by language. Interestingly, the language Beagan uses has striking similarities to cultural geographer Doreen Massey's exploration of notions of place and identity. Massey argues that certain policies and movements, including nationalist movements, that establish a relationship between place and a sense of belonging, do so through a somewhat nostalgic idea of the past and national character which 'attempt[s] to fix the meaning of places, to enclose and defend them: they construct singular, fixed and static identities for places, and they interpret places as bounded enclosed spaces defined through counter position against the Other who is outside.'³⁴⁷ Beagan's work, it could be argued, strives to break down these unrealistic or nostalgic representations of places and instead inculcates a sense of belonging through linguistic memory, including place names remembered in Welsh, as well as the importance of personal rather than political history.

The sense of unease which Beagan highlights has clear parallels with the sentiments expressed by one of her characters in 'Pink Summer Blues', Hafwen, a teenager from a Welsh-speaking family who live in a more Anglicized area of Wales. Drawing on the context of the activities of Meibion Glyndŵr, a group which committed arson on the second homes of absentee English owners during the 1980s, the text refers to Hafwen's sister, Leri, who has been arrested following an attack on the local estate agents – another of the group's targets. One of the story's underlying tensions surrounds the issue of what constitutes 'proper' Welshness – something which Leri is trying to defend through her direct action against the

³⁴⁵ Beagan, 'To Find a Speech', p. 30.

³⁴⁶ Beagan, 'To Find a Speech', p. 29.

³⁴⁷ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 168.

estate agents. Daz, one of the local boys Hafwen used to know in primary school, is not ‘proper Welsh’, like Hafwen’s family, ‘but you couldn’t say he was English’ either.³⁴⁸ Daz taunts Hafwen following Leri’s arrest, but also emphasises the way in which the ‘educated’ Leri will be treated differently. He says to his friend, Gaz: ‘If it was you and me did this, something like this, we’d get it wouldn’t we? We’d go down. The works. We’d cop the lot. Breaking and entering. Criminal damage. She won’t, you know. [...] It’s political. Different, isn’t it?’ (p. 63). Daz’s words underline the gulf between classes – those that have dropped out, effectively, from mainstream education in particular. He sees Hafwen as ‘stuck up’, as someone who ‘think[s] she’s too good for [them] now’ (p. 62). Her ability to speak Welsh seems to mark her out, in Daz’s eyes, as socially superior and therefore snobbish. The taunting, in fact, could be seen as emphasising his jealousy of Hafwen’s ability to speak Welsh as Daz is himself culturally dispossessed, unable to access a language that is part of his birthright.

Leri has become involved in language activism ostensibly for political reasons, yet Hafwen ‘can’t help feeling it’s a kind of game for Leri. She’d like to be a film star [...] and this is second best’ (pp. 66-7). At the same time, Hafwen realises that ‘The language is important. [...] And it’s not just a question of different words for the same things. A language makes you think and feel in a special way. It makes you what you are’ (p. 66). The story suggests that any understanding of Welsh identity is necessarily a complex balance between the formative aspects of place and language as well as the issue of performativity that all the characters face in some way. As Hafwen muses, ‘It’s all an act isn’t it? Life, I mean?’ (p. 67) In contrast to Leri taking on Welsh identity as a role, for the girls’ mother the Welsh language is clearly bound up in her own sense of herself. She names Leri after the river that ran behind

³⁴⁸ Glenda Beagan, ‘Pink Summer Blues’, in *The Medlar Tree* (Bridgend: Seren, 1992), pp. 62-68 (p. 64). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

her home in Tre Taliesin, in Ceredigion, suggesting that she has symbolically incorporated the area she considers home into her new life with her husband and children. Encountering the same kind of unease that Beagan herself experienced when she began to think critically about her heritage, the girls' mother 'never really [feels] comfortable when she's speaking English' (p. 66). Again, this sense of discomfort arises, suggesting that there is something fundamentally unsettling about being caught between two national identities.

By the time of her 2009 collection, *The Great Master of Ecstasy*, Beagan's perspective seems to be a little more positive, even when discussing the politically charged topic of alienation from a mother tongue, especially in 'Birth of an Oxbow', as well as 'A Bad Case of September', which follows on from it. In these two stories, language loss is tied up with finding an adequate means of self-expression and representation. Both feature an ageing female protagonist, Judith, who has recently lost her husband, Bob. 'Birth of an Oxbow' opens with her going through some old box files of papers from her teacher training course, including an exercise which required the trainees 'to revisit their childhood, think themselves back to how a child feels and thinks and perceives, re-enter places they'd known as children, relive those experiences. Capture them again'.³⁴⁹ Judith's piece of creative writing is called 'The Birth of an Oxbow', and is included, in fragments, throughout the text of the story. The text becomes a kind of collage, interweaving segments of Judith's past with her present situation. Her creative writing explores a moment from her childhood when fields of ice disrupt the flow of the river, creating an oxbow, a bend in the river that has been cut off. The only indication of the river's path is the 'row of willow pollards' that are like 'stumped spiky fists' (p. 97), suggesting a partially traced trail. When the thaw comes suddenly, the banks break, 'leaving the willow pollards stranded. And that old river bend is

³⁴⁹ Glenda Beagan, 'Birth of an Oxbow', in *The Great Master of Ecstasy* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 95-106 (p. 99). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

history, a cut-off crescent. A remnant lake they call an oxbow' (p. 97). It is only as the story unfolds that the relevance of this imagery, of this body of water cut off from its original source, becomes clear. Judith is herself a kind of 'oxbow', virtually cut off from her family thanks to her husband's dislike of their son's Welsh-speaking wife, Shani. Perhaps even more importantly, she is cut off from her own Welsh identity as she is unable to speak Welsh herself.

In 'A Bad Case of September', we learn more about Judith's relationship with her 'mother' tongue. Unable to speak Welsh fluently as a child, Judith notices, through the Urdd group in her primary school, that:

The people around them were all fizzing and frothing with the splendid richness of their Welsh. They inhabited another world. Was it here that Judith had first learned to be a watcher rather than a joiner? If you couldn't belong you had to find something else to do, didn't you? Detachment could be quite entertaining.³⁵⁰

(pp. 135-6)

This reminiscence of childhood has many parallels with Beagan's own views on the subject of language loss, as she argues that this experience 'is all the more painful when something of the language remains in the form of residual memories that taunt and tantalise.'³⁵¹ If we look back to 'Pink Summer Blues', it could be argued that Hafwen is symbolic of these residual memories for Daz – she stands for a culture of which he cannot be part.

As we later learn, in 'A Bad Case of September', Judith sells the family home, takes a creative writing course, learns Welsh again and begins to think about her identity, especially her Welsh identity, in a way which is much more self-aware. It is not until she reaches middle age that she begins to recognise that she can access this cultural heritage as well as construct

³⁵⁰ Glenda Beagan, 'A Bad Case of September', in *The Great Master of Ecstasy* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 115-140 (pp. 135-6). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text

³⁵¹ Glenda Beagan, 'A Different Nourishment: Exploring the Effects of Language Loss', *Poetry Wales*, 29: 2 (1993), 46-51 (p. 50).

a sense of self that is separate from her roles as wife and mother. It is then that she begins to recognise the ‘internal voice that must have been her own’ – a voice that is not weighed down by her husband’s opinions or concerns about her family, a voice that is autonomous. It is this search for autonomy which, I would argue, characterises contemporary women’s short stories, especially the power to salvage (both literally and metaphorically) and restore a sense of Welsh identity which fits modern times.

Rachel Trezise

Rachel Trezise’s fictions have much more in common with some of the notable industrial male writers of the twentieth century, such as fellow Rhondda writer, Gwyn Thomas. Her fictions envisage the poverty, despair and dispossession of a bleak, post-industrial landscape. One story in particular, ‘But Not Really’, from her 2005 collection, *Fresh Apples*, offers a decidedly bleaker exploration of place and modern Welsh identity than does those of Beagan. The story’s perspective shifts back and forth, as if in a film, between Jacky, Graeme – her ex-husband – and Gemma, Graeme’s current (and underage) girlfriend. In one particularly significant scene, Jacky is eating in a restaurant with her father, following her divorce from Graeme. Her father, guzzling his food ‘like a pig from a trough’, asks: ‘Do they have to speak Welsh here? [...] What a fucking God-awful language’.³⁵² The story continues: ‘But he didn’t check, and didn’t care who it was using the mother tongue he never knew, never learned’ (p. 16). Jacky’s father clearly recognises Welsh but is unable to understand it, suggesting that he has been cut off from his linguistic heritage. At the same time, his foul-mouthed description of it suggests a residual resentment and hostility and he is perhaps taunted and tantalised in much the same way as Beagan’s Daz. Jacky also seems

³⁵² Rachel Trezise, ‘But Not Really’, *Fresh Apples* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2005), pp. 13-24 (p. 16). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

disconnected from Welsh as for her they are ‘choky words’ which sound ‘like a song that drifted with the food smells around the room’ (p. 16).

While the issue of language only features briefly, it registers a profound and recurring sense of loss in the text. The somewhat odd juxtaposition of the Welsh language and the smell of food in the restaurant scene ties in with a wider preoccupation regarding a lack of nourishment – emotional, spiritual, cultural – which stunts the characters within the story, especially their capacity for personal growth. Jacky is unable to eat the ‘cottage cheese salad [which is] curdling on her plate’ (p. 17), more worried that her father will spot the ‘abysmal hole cocaine abuse had burned through the septum of her pretty nose’ (p. 14). Much like ‘Samantha Kemp’s ‘If Those Who Have Plenty Take...’ (discussed below), this is a fractured, damaged and bleak post-industrial society in which casual sex, drug use and domestic violence are the norm. Graeme, who wants possession of marital home following the divorce, is blackmailing Jacky over the sex tapes he has made of her and forces Gemma to continually phone her, repeating the words ‘I’ve seen the film’. As the story switches focus between Jacky and Gemma, whom Graeme beats, there is a sense that this cycle of abuse will continue unchecked. What seems to stand out from Trezise’s writing is a sense that people are formed, indeed malformed, by the places in which they live. Trezise herself has said in a recent interview: ‘the characters [in *Fresh Apples*] are amalgamations of the people I grew up with and the everyday struggles they faced -- unemployment, drugs, poverty, the social issues of the day. [...] I think people and place are tantamount to one another, and my concern is to tell a truth.’³⁵³ Trezise’s comments echo those of Raymond Williams, in *The Welsh*

³⁵³ ‘Interview with Rachel Trezise’ (December, 2008). Available at: <http://conversationswithwriters.blogspot.com/2008/12/interview-rachel-trezise-author-of.html> [accessed 3 January 2012]

Industrial Novel, when he discusses the ways in which people are formed by their social situations:

The lives of individuals [...] are not just influenced but in certain crucial ways formed by general social relations. This industrial work, and its characteristic places and communities, are not just [...] a new 'setting' for a story. In the true industrial novel, they are seen as formative.³⁵⁴

For Trezise, these notions of community are bankrupt, myths that must be dispelled. The post-industrial Rhondda Valley is a broken and corrupt place that spawns generations of damaged individuals. There is also a sense that the 'scripts' these characters are following, encapsulated in Gemma's repetition of 'I have seen the film', are empty and meaningless.

Jo Mazelis

In Swansea-born author Jo Mazelis' debut collection, *Diving Girls* (2002), place plays a significant role, from the Welsh hillsides of 'Running Away with the Hairdresser' to the art galleries of London in 'Siriol'. In many of the stories, characters are either literally running away, from their homelands (often figured as Wales) or from failed relationships, or are in transition, travelling through physical spaces or emotional states. Stories vary from the light-hearted to dark and morally questionable. In 'Flock', Mary Williams, a twenty-nine year old virgin is travelling from the west on a train, via Cardiff and Newport, and is searching for romance, especially the kind found in the pages of the complete Jane Austen she reads on the journey. Although the story has a comic ending, Mary does not ultimately find the suitor she desires. In 'Running Away with the Hairdresser', the train again features, this time as a symbol for escape as the male narrator, who has become involved with a married woman with a six-year -old son, watches it 'hurtling eastward towards England'.³⁵⁵ Yet it is a false

³⁵⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1979), p. 11.

³⁵⁵ Jo Mazelis, 'Running Away with the Hairdresser', in *Diving Girls* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2002), pp. 28-32 (p. 28).

escape, as when the narrator leaves Wales, haunted by his hesitation at saving his lover's son from drowning, he never stops running.

In 'Settling', the relationship between place, home and self-knowledge is explored in much more detail. The main character, Richard, decides to leave Swansea and move to London, believing that 'the best way to live life and to cure his problems was to move to another place'.³⁵⁶ The story's opening tracks his various moves from 'shared flats in the Uplands', 'bedsits in Mount Pleasant', 'lodging with families in Cockett and Killay', then 'places nearer the sea, in the Mumbles', 'wilder places on the North of Gower', and finally, 'the grey marshlands of Penclawdd and Crofty' (p. 80). Each of these abodes represents a slightly different mantle of identity for Richard, from socialising in shared accommodation to self-reflection in quieter, more rural areas. While the story opens with Richard's mantra that 'In the city you could be free' (p. 80), his restless movement away from the city limits suggests otherwise.

When these places do not offer the kind of freedom he desires, he 'tr[ies] London' instead (p. 80). The choice of verb is interesting, especially as he has already 'tried lodging' and has 'tried out places nearer the sea', suggesting that each new place offers some kind of new identity that he can take on at will. In fact, when he sits on the tube 'ignoring everyone, in the same way that everyone else ignored him' (p. 81), the narrative specifically refers to this trip being 'part of his reinvention of himself' (p. 81). The need for self-discovery, of finding a place to belong, seems to underpin the story. In Swansea, when Richard worked there, he would finish each evening 'aching from the long day, and aching with discontent' (p. 83), but there is nothing to suggest that life in London will be any different. The 'settling'

³⁵⁶ Jo Mazelis, 'Settling', in *Diving Girls* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2002), pp. 80-85 (p. 80). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

of the title is a double image, of Richard finding a suitable place to call home and the settling of the snow that falls as he arrives at his new home in London. What Richard comes to gradually understand, as he watches the snow fall, is that it is not any particular place that causes his discontent, but his own perceptions. What he actually wants are some moments of stillness and quiet. As the snow continues to fall, he cannot remember how long it has been since he had ‘seen it settle with such sureness’ which gives him the feeling that ‘the world was all for the taking’ (p. 85). The story ends on this pivotal moment, with Richard encouraged to stay just to see what the world will look like in the morning. This story picks up on some central concerns in contemporary Welsh women’s writing – that settling is itself a difficult process which is not necessarily achievable. Fractured identities, such as Richard’s, suggest that peace can only be found through integration and recognition of the disparate parts of the self.

Mazelis’s artistic background in both design and photography seeps into several of the stories, especially in relation to the figure of the artist or art appreciation more generally. ‘The Blackberry Season’ focuses on an art gallery curator, ‘The Game’ depicts a father and son’s shared love of art which brings them together despite a strained relationship, while in ‘Siriol’, the ‘lady wrestler’ of the title finds a painting of herself in a London gallery complete with a tattoo she pledged to have done many years ago. Another important story is ‘Tongue’, which revolves around Paul, an artist who makes sculptures from scrap metal. Paul’s relationship with his new girlfriend, Karen, who does not see the value of his work, deeming it ‘nice’ and a ‘marvellous hobby’, calls his status as an artist into question.³⁵⁷ This story is intriguing to think of in terms of metaphors for traditions of the short story in Wales, as the imagery Mazelis uses centres around scrap metal, reshaped and reformed into

³⁵⁷ Jo Mazelis, ‘Tongue’, in *Diving Girls* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2002), pp. 40-50 (p. 43).

something new and strange. Here she takes an image of metal, which would usually be associated with a (male) industrial occupation, and turns it into something potentially beautiful. There are, of course, links to be made here between Paul's scrap metal artwork and the metal in the drained dock in Brito's story as a physical remnant of an industrial past. In another of Mazelis's stories, 'The Ghosts of the Old Year' (a Rhys Davies prizewinning story), the central female character paints and repaints multiple canvases. These paintings are based on the photograph of the woman her partner has run off with. While this cycle of painting and repainting a static image may seem unfulfilling, it becomes a meaningful mode of representation. Having recently had a baby (and now abandoned by the baby's father), her sense of identity is uncertain and in flux. This act of painting gives the narrator a sense of catharsis over the affair, but also, perhaps more importantly, a sense of ownership. At the end of the story, she sits surrounded by the canvasses: 'I close my eyes. Open them again. This is my garden; these my paints, my colours, my light. I am not a stone, impassive, without art. I am a gardener, a god, and tomorrow is a new morning'.³⁵⁸ There has been a thread running through the story of religious imagery, with the erstwhile partner imagined as a Judas figure. The narrator paints her way out of the passive victim position to become autonomous as an artist and as a woman.

Deborah Kay Davies

Deborah Kay Davies's *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* (2008) has an outwardly straightforward structure, following the lives of sisters Grace and Tamar in a chronological sequence of stories. There are nineteen tales in total, all of which can be read independently of the others. While the collection does follow a chronology, it could arguably be read as a short story cycle rather than a sequence, especially as imagery surrounding connection,

³⁵⁸ Jo Mazelis, 'The Ghosts of the Old Year', in *Circle Games* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2005), pp. 191-198 (p. 197).

communication and belonging recurs throughout the text. These questions of genre are more important than they might initially seem, as they allow for a far more open interpretation of Davies's writing and the characters conceived within it, as well as linking her writing with that of earlier writers, such as Kate Roberts's short story cycle, *Tea in the Heather*. As Rachel Lister notes, the short story cycle is 'a versatile, provisional form [which] privileges plurality and openness. It contests boundaries and enacts the possibility of multiple beginnings and renewable identities.'³⁵⁹ While place has an important bearing on the collection – the location is identified as Gwent and there are frequent references to the geography of the surrounding area – belonging is explored explicitly through the sisters' relationship with each other. Again, that sense of not quite belonging, of a lack of connection, pervades the individual stories, including the frank depiction of the aftermath of childbirth in 'Stirrups', in which the title points to the medical intervention of hospital stirrups. This first story, which explores their mother's experiences directly after the birth of Tamar, includes harrowing birth scenes which go some way to explain the lack of bonding between mother and child. In another story, 'Cradling Breezeblocks', the fledging friendship between Tamar and a neighbour's mentally disabled daughter, the only child in the neighbourhood with whom Tamar will play is explored. Again, due to the nature of the child's disability, the only way they can play together is by holding breezeblocks in the same way a mother would hold a new-born baby. Many of the stories depict the sisters' cruel and often unjustifiable aggression, and even violence, towards each other as they struggle to make sense of themselves and their relationship, which they come to recognise is inextricably interwoven by the final story, 'Cords'.

³⁵⁹ Rachel Lister, 'Female Expansion and Masculine Immobilization in the Short Story Cycle', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 48 (2007). Available at <http://jsse.revues.org/index682.html> [Accessed 07 July 2010]

Davies is especially interested in imagery concerning the body, which in itself also links her to an earlier tradition of Welsh women writers, as discussed in Chapter Three. In her 2006 poetry collection, *Things You Think I Don't Know*, imagery relating to the body, especially internal organs, recurs repeatedly. In 'Consuming Passion', for example, the desire to become one with a lover moves beyond spiritual or emotional connections to a kind of physical incorporation:

It's not enough for me
to kiss my lover's mouth
long and hard.
I want to eat his tongue and lips.³⁶⁰

Not content with 'strok[ing] my darling's weary head', the narrator wants to pick out his thoughts, imagined as 'pomegranate seeds', with a pin, which again suggests consumption, piece by piece. In the poem's final stanza, the narrator cannot feel 'complete' by simply embracing her lover but wants to 'watch my rib-cage open out/ and smoothly draw/ my love inside the steam and glow' (ll. 15-17), with their 'entrails entwining' and 'heart beside jumping heart' (ll. 18-19). In many ways *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* is threaded through with similar kinds of imagery and metaphors, particularly in relation to themes of disconnection and alienation. Depictions of physical connection, even in the form of violence, or imagery of consumption, stand in for emotional bonds that are missing or broken. The collection repeatedly underlines the impossibility of wholeness and personal fulfilment, and that relationships, whether familial or sexual, are never quite enough.

The first story in the collection, 'Stirrups', is worth examining in more detail as it sets the tone for the rest of the text. The story repeatedly makes contrasts between Grace, Tamar's

³⁶⁰ Deborah Kay Davies, 'Consuming Passion', in *Things You Think I Don't Know* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006), ll. 1-4. All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

older sister, and the much more positive experiences their mother associates with Grace's birth than with that of Tamar. As she lies in hospital, she seems strangely distant from her new baby, 'long[ing]' instead for 'her first-born's solid, warm body' and to 'kiss her pliant lips'.³⁶¹ The reality following Grace's birth was a 'glowing, marshmallowy dream-country where nothing hurt' (p. 2) but everything about this new, post-Tamar reality is different. Before 'there were no sharp noises, no grief' (p. 2), but now she cries incessantly and inconsolably while the world is full of harsh sounds – the birds are 'screaming' outside, while Tamar's cries are a 'high screeching' (p. 5). The pain she feels from the birth is similarly discomfiting, as the stitches she was given make her feel 'permanently spanned with barbed wire' and her breasts feel 'full of small pebbles' (p. 2). The image of the stirrups could be read as a metaphor for her relationship with Tamar – this unexpectedly unfulfilling and painful aspect of motherhood 'hobbl[es]' (p. 4) her in much the same way as the stirrups do.

The crux of the story, and perhaps the text as a whole, is that there appears to be something different about Tamar, that she is alien and unknowable. As she lies in her cot, her mother looks at her face 'with its tightly shut eyes' that 'seems to hold some knowledge that she can never hope to understand' (p. 2). At the same time, the images of hunger and consumption found in 'Consuming Passion' reoccur. It is almost as if Tamar's inscrutability weakens her mother somehow and this is imagined as her mother's heart's walls 'thinning by the minute, about to tear and leak out her watery life's-blood' (p. 4). Directly after this image of a defective heart, she notices some 'enormous' daffodils (p. 4) with 'mouths stretched wide to tempt early bees' (p. 4). There is something inherently disturbing in this image, redolent of consumption and incorporation, which suggests that however much she tries to love Tamar, it will never be enough. As a whole, Deborah Kay Davies's collection is

³⁶¹ Deborah Kay Davies, 'Stirrups', in *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008), pp. 1-5 (p. 1). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

unsettling both for the reader and in terms of a wider sense of Welsh women's identity. While a writer like Mazelis suggests refashioning old forms to make new shapes to fit modern women's experience, Deborah Kay Davies's writing seems to revel in the disorder, chaos and ugliness of the fractured psyche.

Susie Wild

As the title of Swansea-based Susie Wild's 2010 collection, *The Art of Contraception*, suggests, many of the stories revolve around pregnancy, abortion, miscarriage or issues surrounding parenthood. These issues are ultimately about creating and sustaining a sense of belonging in contemporary Wales. Female identity is again a central aspect of the text, especially women's lives that have remained unfulfilled, including failed actress, Maggie, in 'Arrivals', the novella-length piece that rounds off the collection, or the unnamed woman in 'Stung', who remains virtually housebound after she miscarries her twins when she slips in the snow. As in Jo Mazelis's work, a substantial proportion of the stories also focus on masculine identity but these male characters are usually flawed and damaged, or misfits and outsiders. In 'Aquatic Life', Rob, an overweight fantasist, develops an unhealthy desire for GCSE student Sylvie, daughter of his employer, and makes a scrapbook of photographs of her. When these are discovered at work, Sylvie's father, a local councillor, uses Rob as a 'scape-whale'³⁶² to deflect attention from Sylvie's pregnancy during Sylvie's father's campaign for re-election, making Rob out to be a 'paedo' (p. 7). In other stories, the issue of fatherhood is a constant preoccupation, including in 'Diving Lessons', which contrasts the loss experienced by John, and his girlfriend Lottie, after they decide to abort their baby, with that of Archie, who wants children (although he has paid for several private abortions for previous partners) but is with a woman who does not want children yet. In 'Big on Japan',

³⁶² Susie Wild, 'Aquatic Life', in *The Art of Contraception* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 1-8 (p. 6). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

Fred has been brought up to believe his father works in Japan, a country and culture with which he has become obsessed, but his father has in fact abandoned him for another family on a nearby estate. Fred meets a girl at a tattoo parlour, and later makes a pass at her at a club, only to find that she is in fact his half-sister. By the end, unsurprisingly, he is not ‘so big on Japan any more’.³⁶³ All these stories point to a preoccupation with emptiness and lack, as well as broken and fractured families. Wild’s depiction of contemporary Wales is unsettling as it suggests that the traditional structures of Welsh society, of home and work, are beginning to break down.

Echoing the disturbing imagery of consumption found in Deborah Kay Davies’ work, Wild’s story ‘Pica’ explores the somewhat bizarre eating habits exhibited by the pregnant receptionist, Tanja, and her increasingly desperate attempts to conceal her unsavoury meal choices from her work colleagues. The story is cleverly named, as ‘pica’ is a term for the phenomenon of eating non-nutritional material, such as clay, earth or plaster, which is often seen in small children, people with certain mental illnesses, and pregnant women. The term comes from the Latin for ‘magpie’, a bird reputed to eat almost anything, as well as stealing brightly coloured objects. The plot revolves around the temp, Debbie, who steals her co-workers’ packed lunches from the office fridge. Tanja takes great pains to ensure this does not happen to her lunch of ‘detergent and blueberry mousse’ and ‘couscous salad glinting with crumbs of coal and shards of stone’³⁶⁴ by using a ‘kid’s cartoon lunchbox’ which is ‘neon bright and unmistakable’ (p. 35). Debbie, magpie that she is, steals the lunch and is soon in hospital, mistakenly thought to have attempted to take her own life. ‘Pica’ has a sad back story, however, as Tanja’s mother has recently died of a cancer associated with the

³⁶³ Susie Wild, ‘Big on Japan’, *The Art of Contraception* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 51-56 (p. 55). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

³⁶⁴ Susie Wild, ‘Pica’, in *The Art of Contraception* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 33-42 (p. 41). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

female reproductive organs, despite having had a hysterectomy to prevent its growth. For Tanja, who has been traumatised by her mother's death, there seems to be something paradoxically wholesome about her cravings, which satisfy her on some fundamental level. Once she has progressed through 'mild earthy substances [...] like the grubby potato peelings when making chips' (p. 37) to 'crumbled bricks, twigs' and 'whole handfuls of soil' (p. 37), the landscape itself becomes a meal which makes her mouth 'water' (p. 37). Significantly there is also something inherently sexual (not to mention feminine) about the landscape, as it fills her with 'desire and filthy thoughts' as 'busty mountain ranges' tempt her more than a dessert trolley (p. 38). Here Debbie seems to be looking for a sense of national identity which will bestow her with a sense of belonging. The way the landscape is figured as female suggests that Debbie is trying to locate herself within some kind of meaningful female tradition. However, when Debbie looks for meaning, she finds, as with many of Wild's stories, an emptiness which threatens to destabilise her whole identity.

Wild's collection, as a whole, demonstrates the shifts and changes in modern lifestyles, in Wales and beyond. The impact of the credit crunch and the recent economic downturn more generally is registered in 'Big on Japan' when Fred's sister bemoans his desire for sushi over the 'credit crunch chic indulgence of value ready-meals: microwave lasagne or shepherd's pie eaten ironically at dinner parties' (p. 52). In 'Pica' the credit crunch is again directly referred to and cited as one of the reasons for the workers 'snub[bing] the sandwich lady' (p. 34) and bringing in their own lunches. Convenience food, something which is frequently mentioned in the text, seems to form the basis of Tanja and Dean's attempts at cooking for each other. Termed as 'yellow food', their diet consists of 'chips, waffles, cheese toasties [and] pizza' (p. 38). Named brands seem to feature frequently – sandwiches are 'wrapped in Tesco bags' (p. 34), while 'Weight Watchers' hummus is stolen

from the fridge. Even Tanja's stepfather is depicted in relation to branded products – his car 'reek[s] of Special Brew, Polo mints, farts and Superkings [and is] littered with *Daily Mails*' (p. 35). In 'Pocillovy', a strange story about a woman named Alice who pins her relationship's survival on the finding of an egg cup, there are references to the flat being strewn with an odd assortment of cacti from 'IKEA',³⁶⁵ 'lidless biros', 'Strepsils and half-drunk Lemsips' (p. 20). In 'Stung', even a miscarriage is described in terms of brand names as the 'snow-coloured street [...] turn[s] the colour of cherry Slushpuppie'.³⁶⁶ Wild's focus on these branded products suggests a growing concern that Welsh identity is being undermined by a globalised market. The fears of Ffebi Williams in Kate Roberts's story, 'The Quilt', concerning the damage caused by mass produced goods have here been taken to their utmost extreme.

In 'Aquatic Life', modern technological advances, particularly the internet, also feature. Here we can begin to make more connections with the auto-ethnographic writers of the first half of the twentieth century. In detailing the problems and issues that contemporary Welsh people have to face, Wild is herself creating a 'store-house' of modern phenomena. Rob can fantasise about a life of exotic holidays and make those day dreams seem more of a reality when he researches the 'relevant travel pages' and tries to 'learn names and facts' (p. 1). The photographs that he has of Sylvie are all taken from a particular day when she wanted a new profile for a social networking site. Rob appears to be a little out of touch, as he misnames popular sites such as Facebook and Bebo as 'Facehack and BimBo' (p. 5). While these instances of misnaming could also be ironic, the fact that he has to resort to traditional

³⁶⁵ Susie Wild, 'Pocillovy', in *The Art of Contraception* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 17-24 (p. 18). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

³⁶⁶ Susie Wild, 'Stung', in *The Art of Contraception* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 85-94 (p. 91). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

techniques of scrapbooking to make his ‘collage’ (p. 4) of pictures rather than using digital manipulation software suggest otherwise.

While Wild’s background in journalism, online magazine editing and blogging may well explain the inclusion of details relating to internet technology, the sheer volume of these kinds of details suggests a shift in culture, in Wales and beyond, towards globalised communication that threatens to undermine a sense of the local. While place is important in the text, especially Swansea, it could be argued that this is fairly superficial. Welsh identity is not scrutinized in the text as much as in *Diving Girls*, for example, perhaps because ‘Welsh’ is simply one label in a host of many different identities available to this generation of women writers. Flora, in ‘Sauce’, can reinvent herself, creating an ‘altered identity in the form of a haircut or wardrobe staple’, and so ‘shape-shift’ until whatever difficulty she needs to run from has gone away.³⁶⁷ Wild’s text, as a whole, suggests similar possibilities for superficial change, which borders on being meaningless and empty. While earlier Welsh women writers had to fight to be heard, and struggled with the notion of what it meant to be Welsh, Wild’s unstable and constantly shifting characters suggest a modern Wales which is fundamentally adrift from a grounded sense of roots and identity.

Matrices of Connection: the Imagery of Diving

One significant similarity which links both *Diving Girls* and *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* with *The Art of Contraception* is the imagery of diving and swimming. I would argue that this imagery directly relates to that found in Adrienne Rich’s 1973 poem, ‘Diving into the Wreck’, where Rich imagines diving as a metaphor for recovering a history of women’s writing, culture and history – to ‘see the damage that was done/ and the treasures

³⁶⁷ Susie Wild, ‘Sauce’, in *The Art of Contraception* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 43-50 (p. 48). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

that prevail'.³⁶⁸ Linking to some of the stories in this chapter which feature salvage, Rich's vision of this recovery work is both difficult and painful. The imagery of diving which threads through so many of the collections is also fraught with conflict, anger and pain. For *Diving Girls*, Mazelis designed and carried out the photography for the cover art of her collection, which features two girls, apparently mid-conversation, as one stands on a wooden post, preparing to dive. On closer inspection it becomes clear that this is inherently dangerous and foolhardy as her companion, who stands nearby in the water, is only ankle-deep. In the story to which this image relates, 'The Diving Girls' [emphasis added], diving is a marker of unity for Annie and her unnamed stepsister, the narrator of the story: 'This is happiness. It is joy and purity and innocence. It is easy. It is Annie and me'.³⁶⁹ Yet by the end of the story, this relationship has been irrevocably changed. When Annie cuts her foot at the beach, her stepsister runs home to get help. Annie's mother demands: 'Where is Annie? What's happened? Where's my baby?' (p. 110). After this, the narrator comes to a realisation: 'Me and Annie. Annie and me, we are no longer one and the same. We are not equal. I am whole and she is broken and this is her mother, not mine' (p. 110). Again, Mazelis seems to be commenting on wider issues of sisterhood, and perhaps even a female literary tradition in which the relationship with literary foremothers is far from smooth.

The front cover of the 2009 edition of *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* features a girl, wearing a wetsuit, who is about to dive off a wooden platform with arms and legs outstretched. One story featuring diving is 'Kissing Nina', a story which is especially significant as it is one of the very few that registers and recognises lesbian desire in any of the collections discussed in this chapter. Grace and her childhood friend Nina practice kissing

³⁶⁸ Adrienne Rich, 'Diving into the Wreck', in *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* (New York: Norton, 1973), ll. 56-7.

³⁶⁹ Jo Mazelis, 'The Diving Girls', in *Diving Girls* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2002), pp. 105-112 (p. 107). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

each other in readiness for future boyfriends, but it is evident that there is a strong sexual attraction between them. When Grace meets a boy called Kit at the local swimming pool, she finds him ‘irresistible’ as she watches his ‘elegant diving’.³⁷⁰ As Nina has always ‘hated the water and never went anywhere near it’ (p. 36), Grace’s flirtation with Kit seems to be a strong rejection of her feelings for Nina. The diving, and later, swimming, forms part of a courting ritual that ends with Kit walking Grace home and kissing her in her bedroom. However, the memory of kissing Nina in that very same room is so strong that she ‘clenche[s] her empty fists and firmly pushe[s] the boy away’ (p. 38). In the end, Grace cannot reject her feelings for Nina completely, but this suggestion of homosexuality is never referred to again in the text – one of its many ellipses.

Diving again features in ‘Thong’, in which Tamar and her boyfriend John go on a double date to the beach with Grace and another boy, who stands in for Grace’s fiancé, who is at work. Grace reputedly hates the beach because of nearly drowning as a child, due to her ‘father’s idea of teaching [them] to swim’ by swinging them by ‘a wrist and ankle’ and then letting them go.³⁷¹ Grace is particularly provocative and overtly sexual in this story, attracting both of the men’s attention, swimming topless and exposing herself deliberately while drying off. Deciding she needs teaching a lesson, Tamar ‘yank[s] her off the platform’ where she has been diving and holds her underwater. Tamar watches as Grace’s ‘arms move in decreasing circles’ (p. 90), suggesting that she is almost drowning, and the ‘bands of [Grace’s] hair radiat[e] out from her skull like undulating eels’ (p. 90), an image which falls somewhere between the monstrosity of the gorgon and the suicidal Ophelia. Consequently, Tamar watches as Grace ‘sob[s] and retche[s]’, only ‘div[ing] off’; and returning to shore once

³⁷⁰ Deborah Kay Davies, ‘Kissing Nina’, in *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008), pp. 33-38 (p. 36). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

³⁷¹ Deborah Kay Davies, ‘Thong’, in *Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008), pp. 81-91 (p. 85). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

Grace is ‘quiet and breathing normally’ (p. 90). Again, the tension between the two sisters could be read as a metaphor for the problems inherent in finding and being part of a female literary tradition of the short story. The sisters’ conflict could be read as the current generation of women writers’ need to symbolically ‘kill’ (or drown) some aspects of the female tradition to which they are related, in order to forge an identity which allows them to adequately express themselves.

While the front cover of *The Art of Contraception* depicts swimming sperm about to fertilise an egg, diving and swimming in water again appears, especially in ‘Diving Lessons’. Lottie, still mourning for the pregnancy she has terminated, is drunk, and is ‘dangerously close to falling into the dirty harbourside water’ (p. 9) outside a waterfront bar in Swansea.³⁷² Lottie appears to be ‘rais[ing] her arms as if to dive’ (p. 9) while her boyfriend, John, prays she does not as he cannot swim. For Lottie, the water offers ‘dark and silence’, far away from all the ‘Friday night noise that explodes in the streets and in her head – the chatter and clatter; smashing times, smashing glasses and smashed lives’ (p. 10). The water signifies fear for John, having ‘grown up in a concrete city’ (p. 13), but for Lottie it is very different as ‘she needed to be near the sea [...] to feel sane, to feel whole’ (p. 13). On a metaphorical level, the story could represent the difficulties in integrating modern Welsh women’s writing, focused as much of it is on cities and towns, into a predominantly rural tradition. Lottie tells John to ‘Dive in!’ (p. 14) when they first become involved, but the risks attached seem to be great. In the same way, contemporary Welsh women writers have to discover, and perhaps develop, their own sense of wholeness by diving, headfirst, into the waters their foremothers left behind. Tracing these stories back to a tradition of auto-ethnographic writing, suggested by the recurring focus on Wales itself, leads us back to Deborah Reed-Danahay’s discussion of

³⁷² Susie Wild, ‘Diving Lessons’, in *The Art of Contraception* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 9-16 (p. 9). All further references are to this edition and are given in the body of the text.

the place of the auto-ethnographer, displaced and awkwardly straddling both insider and outsider perspectives.

Rhys Davies Short Story Competition Winners

For the final section of this chapter, I will turn to some recent short fiction and, especially, emergent voices, in order to point towards the kinds of issues that may well dominate women's short fiction post 2013. Taken as a whole, the most recently anthologised Rhys Davies winning stories, published in *Getting Up* (2010), represent a colourful cross-section of contemporary concerns.³⁷³ What is particularly striking about the anthology is the significant proportion of stories by women that feature some kind of conflict, including violence and cultural conflict. One of the most disturbing stories in the collection is Samantha Kemp's 'If Those Who Have Plenty Take...' which also focuses on conflict, especially between classes. Stylistically slippery, the story employs both a second and third person narrative voice which is unusual but oddly effective. Focusing on a small block of flats, the story's opening is a catalogue of arson, casual break-ins, and police intervention, which immediately highlights the chaos and violence of the world the narrator inhabits:

Nine flats, the first to go is Maurice, he burns his flat down. Later you see him lying on his back in various gardens as you walk to the shops. The man opposite you is next. The police come because he has been seen waving a gun. You are sorry he is leaving; he doesn't frighten you at all. He tells you to take whatever you want from his flat. When he is gone you slip your hand through the letter box like you saw a neighbour do when he broke into the flat, before he appeared before you in your hallway. The flat is empty but in a cupboard you find a floor cleaner; you take it. (527)

The location, as well as the female narrator, remains nameless throughout, yet there is a sense that the story's probing of class and dispossession has far reaching implications, especially

³⁷³ *Getting Up*, sel. Stevie Davies and Niall Griffiths (Abercynon: Leaf Books, 2010), Kindle edition. All further references to this edition are given as location numbers in the body of the text as there are no page numbers provided.

considering Kemp's roots in the economically depressed South Wales valleys.

Characterisation is fairly minimal, with each character only receiving a brief introduction, after which they tend to die, are beaten or raped, or disappear. As they remain for the most part nameless, they fall somewhere between class-related stereotypes and emblematic figures of a postmodern, fractured world. They include a homophobic young man, a gay couple, a fourteen-year-old prostitute, an elderly prostitute, a pregnant woman with a violent boyfriend, another young woman with a violent boyfriend, a man with an unexplained facial injury and increasingly obvious mental illness, and a woman on the ground floor who periodically screams 'Scum!' (558) into the hallway. The only characters to be named are Maurice, the arsonist, Mike, the gunman, and Lorna, the elderly prostitute, who is 'seventy but from the back looks twenty-five' (548), and later, Leanne, the young prostitute, after she has gone missing, presumed murdered. When they are described in this way, as a list of anonymous characters with varying levels of dysfunctional behaviour, the story would almost appear to be ironic or even absurd. While there are moments in the story when this does almost seem to be the case, such as a scene where gangster-style men in trilbies descend on the block, overall the tone is bleak and hopeless. It could be argued that Kemp's vision is the logical extension of Rachel Trezise's portrayals of deprived, post-industrial areas of Wales, where a sense of community has almost completely broken down.

In the anthology's introduction, Niall Griffiths and Stevie Davies comment on 'the capacity of brief narrative to realise in its very structure a sense of cramped and contested space, as have-nots near to total dereliction struggle for power' (51). This struggle seems to be articulated by the woman in 'Those Who Have Plenty Take...', who screams 'Scum', directing her venom at the narrator, despite being the only person in the block who has a job. As a symbol of a capitalist economy, the narrator epitomises the way of life from which the

rest of the residents have been excluded – the capacity to earn as well as the possibility for social mobility. The narrator has other places to inhabit, such as the workplace, and can afford to travel either by car or public transport, whereas the rest of the residents are stuck in this perpetual hell. The story's title appears to be a reworking of the adage 'those who have plenty, give' yet nowhere in the story do people outside of the block make any attempt to alleviate their situation – even the police are powerless. The title's ellipsis leaves a guilt-burdened gap for the reader, positioned as the narrative 'you', to fill. The divide between those with plenty and those without is reinforced in the narrator's workplace, as she hears her colleagues 'dismissing certain types of people as scum' (566). As if echoing the woman who screams 'Scum!' the narrator admits: 'Your heart screams' (566). Both women seem to be attempting to articulate the anguish these 'have-nots' experience in their impoverished lives, yet these screams could also be read as encompassing all of the voices of the various women in the story who are abused and violated – a theme which recalls Glenda Beagan's 'Scream, Scream'.

Despite all the violence, bloodshed and aggression there are still, almost unbelievably, vestiges of a community spirit. Mike, the gunman, for instance, joins the narrator in chasing the man with the pregnant girlfriend after he beats her half to death, while the narrator's boyfriend offers the crack addict across the hall his asthma inhaler when he hears his laboured breathing during the night. Even the elderly Lorna, one of the most vulnerable women in the block, particularly after she contracts bowel cancer, offers the narrator sanctuary, telling her 'if you get scared in the night and are able to wake her you can come in. She tells you some of the boys already do' (580). By the end of the story this fragile sense of community, which has been held together for the most part by the narrator and her boyfriend, has completely broken down. The story concludes with the man with the facial injury

standing outside the couple's flat covered in blood and threatening rape and murder. Overwhelmed by the repetitive and senseless violence surrounding them, the couple retreat by 'climb[ing] into the attic' (615). It is unclear whether this is a literal or symbolic movement but suggests that they have crossed over a boundary into some other space, unable to leave. The underlying suggestion is that women writers must imagine, and therefore confront, aspects of contemporary Welsh life and culture which threaten to destabilise the continuities with an older tradition, such as globalisation, the breakdown of traditional communities and changing patterns of work in a post-industrial world. Women writers must not retreat, metaphorically, to the attic but should face the difficulties of writing about modern Welsh life head on.

In sharp contrast to Kemp's story is Siân Preece's 'Getting Up', the overall winner of the 2009 competition. The story's title refers to the term used by graffiti artists to describe their success in making their mark, originally referring to graffiti on the New York subway system. One of the main themes of the story revolves around this idea of making a mark, of having artistic ability recognised – something which the delinquent characters in 'Those Who Have Plenty Take...' are denied. In 'Getting Up', a teenage boy who names himself 'Spydr' has been sent on an outward bound course, having been caught daubing both his school buildings and the janitor's house in graffiti. In the midst of abseiling, with plans to tag the cliff face, he falls into a cave where he discovers another boy's art work from thousands of years ago. Aware, after a trip to St Fagans, that there are supposedly no cave paintings in Wales, he begins to realise the enormity of the discovery.

The story begins abruptly, *in medias res*, with the phrase 'A dog's skeleton' (98). The narrative continues: 'That was what he had touched in the dark. He made it out with his eyes and hands together, seeing it better for touching it.' As readers we are similarly 'in the dark',

trying to make sense of Spydr's discovery. This technique of defamiliarisation is part of a wider strategy within the story to underline the ways in which art, as a mode of representation and self-expression, can transform the ways in which we perceive the world around us. The skeleton, along with the cave art, represents an unearthed Welsh history that could be disinterred and, perhaps, re-imagined, again connecting with the recurring imagery of archaeology found so frequently in Welsh women's writing. The figure of Spydr himself is clearly part of this project of transformed perception. As the story unfolds, the reader becomes gradually aware that he is neither vandal nor miscreant – he is an artist, if somewhat misunderstood, and is keen to prove his self-worth through his art work: 'A part of him believed that if the piece was good enough, then they would see past their anger, see the quality, the art of it. Acknowledge it. Acknowledge *him*' (131). As he waits to be rescued, he attempts to use the dog's skeleton as a stencil; however, this technique does not work and leaves only a 'blurred' (172) shape on the cave wall. He soon realises that if he wants to make his own mark on this artwork, he will need to use his own designs, fashion his own templates. As he works, he is 'careful not to paint over the caveboy's work, conscientiously 'fitting his own into the spaces between' (178). As the story draws to a close, Spydr admires his work as a 'huge, beautiful mural' (182), observing 'the dialogue from one end of time to the other, images entwined. Just two boys chatting, showing off, sharing' (183). One way of interpreting the story is as a dialogue between contemporary and historical forms of representation, especially art and writing, which seeks to find some kind of symbiosis. This could be taken further to include women's writing and the tradition that exists behind it – both the accepted version of history, in the form of the canon of (male) writers that has gone before, and the neglected tradition of earlier Welsh women writers. In Preece's story, Spydr does not have the courage to exhibit his brave, dialogic artwork, worried that it will be

misinterpreted as vandalism, so the story ends with him on the verge of painting over the entire piece. Preece, and other emergent authors of her generation, will hopefully avoid the same fate.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to give a flavour of the different kinds of writing to emerge from female short fiction writers over the last two decades, as well as to draw attention to the recurring preoccupations in these texts with shifting identities and changing places. That two so markedly different stories as ‘Getting Up’ and ‘If Those Who Have Plenty Take...’ could come from the same competition speaks volumes about the ways in which women writers are imagining Wales. Equally, texts from the 1990s, such as Brito’s and Merriman’s, suggest that the issue of coming to terms with identity, whether Welsh-Caribbean or English settler, is bound up in the intersections between place and identity. The issue of language continues to be a pressing concern for many writers in Wales, due in part to a rise in Welsh language acquisition and a growing awareness of its cultural significance. The divergent viewpoints of Beagan and Trezise point towards a more fluid conception of what it means to be Welsh, but also suggest a growing concern with national identity. The successful vote for devolution in 1997 brought ‘Welshness’ to a new level of conspicuousness and led to a burgeoning consciousness of the differences between women’s experiences of culture and tradition in Wales compared to England. This success, narrow though the vote was, is itself a marker of confidence in Wales’s autonomy and independence – an aspect of Welsh identity which recurs throughout contemporary writing.

What does become noticeable, however, is that writers of the 1990s through to the present day repeatedly demonstrate their anxiety about a lack of a clear connection to a

shared tradition of women's short fiction. The imagery of diving suggests that these writers are, as in Adrienne Rich's 'Diving into the Wreck', looking for a tradition in which to root themselves. Obviously, more work needs to be done on the period between the end of the 1970s and the early 1990s to try to clarify where those disjunctions begin to occur.

Examining in more depth writers whose literary careers span this period, such as Catherine Merriman, may well offer some answers to this problem. The short fiction writer as auto-ethnographer, a concept to which this thesis keeps returning, seems to be another way meaningfully to ground these authors within a tradition that spans over a hundred and fifty years. These contemporary women writers are still asking the same kinds of questions that their literary foremothers asked in order to gain understanding of what it means to be Welsh. Now that there are many more types of 'Welshness' which make up the country's population, those questions can only become richer and more nuanced.

Conclusion

Looking back over the wealth of material published by women writers since the 1840s, there are several ways in which our understanding of short fiction by women in Wales needs to be redefined and reshaped. While the contention that Caradoc Evans is the ‘founding father’ of the short story had already been called into question by the publication of short fiction which predates *My People in A View Across the Valley*, I would argue that we should now look with more certainty to the literary foremother figures of Anne Beale and Elizabeth Gaskell as a starting point for the emergence of a literary tradition of Welsh women’s short fiction.

Though neither Gaskell nor Beale was Welsh, there is a quality in their writing about Wales and Welsh customs which demonstrates a genuine love of the people, its customs and its landscapes. As Beale’s text in particular is so far removed from the humiliating and derogatory depictions of the *Blue Books*, written by men for a patriarchal and imperialist government, it is perhaps unsurprising that the model she provides should have such lasting influence. Similarly, the writing of Catherine Sinclair, with its humorous yet candid descriptions, offers a relatively more appealing model of Welsh life than the *Reports*. The way the *Reports* shaped the relationship between short fiction and anthropological writing on Wales cannot be swept aside. The episodic nature of those extremely negative and unfair accounts of Welsh life, I would argue, feeds into short fiction of the nineteenth century (and into the twentieth) and gives a form to writing on Wales, especially the focus on ‘thick description’ which characterises the prototypical short fiction from Elizabeth Gaskell and Anne Beale onwards.

The figure of the participant-observer narrator creates a thread which links short fiction, the sketch, and travel literature from the mid nineteenth century through to the mid twentieth century. While this mode of representation, with its colonial implications, became

gradually outdated as the twentieth century progressed, this narrative trope is transformed into the auto-ethnographic style of writing found in many texts from the 1940s onwards. Sandra A. Zagarell's concept of narrative of community, where I first came across the participant-observer figure, can be taken as a meaningful way of reading Welsh women's fiction, especially the focus on process, rather than progress, in fictions up to the era of writers such as Lynette Roberts. The processes upon which communities were founded, up until the social disruptions caused by the Second World War, have been preserved in astonishing detail, and these texts will remain a source of especial interest for social historians, let alone literary critics, for many years to come.

This use of an auto-ethnographic technique, to document and preserve cultural traditions, is double edged, as it calls into question the meaning of Welsh culture, particularly by the time of contemporary women writers, in an increasingly globalised world. The kinds of questions that Rachel Trezise, Jo Mazelis and Susie Wild ask about language and identity, for example, suggest that women's short fiction has become focused on pressing concerns about belonging in a bilingual and multicultural society. What place, these texts ask, does Welsh culture, often held together by local traditions and long-standing bonds between families, have in this world of the internet, social media and rootlessness? The 1970s, I would argue, were a particularly dynamic time in the history of the Welsh women's short fiction. The transformative power of ecofeminist writings, such as that of Elizabeth Baines or Shirley Toulson, have yet to be fully explored and examined. However, there does seem to be a disjunction between those potent voices of the 1970s and the type of writing to be found work by contemporary Welsh women. More work needs to be done on the gap between the confidence that is placed *in* women's writing in the current publishing market and the lack of assured self-knowledge about the tradition from which these women writers have emerged, as

documented in their own work. The recurrent motif of diving suggests that the tradition has not fully been realised by the very women who are integral to that tradition. This thesis, I hope, will go some way to address this balance.

Another question which haunts this thesis remains to be answered. Is writing which emerges from a nation which is classed in many ways as postcolonial more likely to enable the ethnographic model to take root? Is the shape of the short story fundamentally drawn up by colonialist views of the world? Perhaps one way to answer this would be to compare Welsh women's writing with that of other postcolonial nations. If we briefly consider more well-known examples of postcolonial short fiction writers, such as Pauline Melville and Jean Rhys, for example, it would seem that there may be some weight in this argument. Melville is constantly writing back to Walter Raleigh in her short story collection, *Shape-Shifter* (1990), much as Welsh women writers were effectively writing back to the *Blue Books*. Melville also details a large amount of the culture of Guyana in this text, including the folkloric figure of Anansi. Another example would be Jean Rhys, who set her now well-known novella, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in her native Caribbean, and crams into both this text and her other Caribbean-set short fictions folklore and traditions. This is only a very cursory attempt at any kind of comparison between Welsh women writers and other postcolonial writers of short fiction, but it suggests that there may well be a host of fruitful comparisons to be made.

One area which will undoubtedly provide an even richer understanding of Welsh women's fiction is the recently digitised archive in the form of *Welsh Newspapers Online*. This resource, which includes fully searchable scans of a wide range of daily and weekly papers from across the country, includes many columns and comments on Welsh life, its customs

and traditions. These columns need to be carefully compared and contrasted with the writing found in women's texts of the period in order to give some indication as to whether these two types of texts converge. One issue which may well necessitate some rethinking in the wake of this resource is the question of influence. I discussed Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' and Gilbert and Gubar's revision of his ideas; however, there was, when I began this research, no means of comparing or gauging what kind of stories were influencing women writers, particularly during the formative years when the genre itself was in its infancy, without spending what might take years in library archives. One of the first things I noticed, when searching through *Welsh Newspapers Online*, was the sheer number of results which came from searching the key words 'short story'. When I looked through the results more closely, I was surprised to see so many short stories by women featuring in the newspapers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, on closer inspection, it became apparent that there was a pattern emerging in the stories being published within Welsh newspapers – many had already been previously published in a London-based newspaper and that these stories had originally been published anything up to fifteen years previously. This discovery has several possible repercussions for Welsh women writers, including that they had models to base their own fictions on which were up to fifteen years out of date and that they were, on the whole, particularly Anglo-centric.

Academic and Publishing Platforms: New Directions for Welsh Women's Short Fiction

In a recent article exploring increased interest in the short story form in the lead up to the inaugural Rhys Davies Short Story Conference, sponsored by Literature Wales, Swansea University and the Rhys Davies Trust, in order to bring the form into more prominence, various writers, including Tessa Hadley, Rachel Trezise and Meic Stephens, were asked to discuss their thoughts on the short story form. Hadley eloquently remarks that '[h]uman

beings think in short story shapes. The short story comes naturally to us. A joke, or a scrap of news, or a bit of gossip – all these are short stories in embryo.³⁷⁴ There is a strong sense that Hadley is pointing to the oral tradition and that this still has a large part to play in the formation of contemporary stories, as well as the kind of community interactions explored by many women writers from the nineteenth century to the present day. Trezise, in contrast, emphasises the importance of Frank O'Connor's influential theories, underlining the links between his ideas about submerged population groups and the outsider perspectives found in her own short fiction:

The characters in my first collection are certainly [submerged population groups]; young people in the South Wales Valleys confused about their [A]nglicised identity. The characters in my second collection too; migrants, immigrants and travellers, displaced and disconnected.³⁷⁵

Meic Stephens, on the other hand, draws inadvertent attention to the gender bias which has traditionally been inherent in celebrating the achievements of short story writers in Wales. He comments that Rhys Davies 'was among the first Welsh writers to excel in the short story form, taking his place with Caradoc Evans, Glyn Jones, Dylan Thomas, Alun Lewis, Gwyn Thomas, Gwyn Jones, Leslie Norris and Alun Richards'.³⁷⁶ Although referring implicitly to the Welsh short story in English, Stephens's quick tally of the canonical writers might well leave the general reader with the impression that Rhys Davies had no strong female contemporaries, including Dorothy Edwards or Margiad Evans, let alone the large selection of Kate Roberts's work which has been available in English translation from the 1940s onwards. There still is much work to be done to change these perceptions regarding the 'major' writers of short fiction in Wales, let alone the gender of these writers.

³⁷⁴Kirsty McCrum, 'Rachel Trezise and Will Self join other writers in praise of the short story', *Wales Online*, 24 August 2013. Available at : http://www.walesonline.co.uk/whats-on/rachel-trezise-self-join-writers-5778752?fb_action_ids=10153185140875593&fb_action_types=og.likes&fb_source=aggregation&fb_aggregation_id=288381481237582 [accessed 25 August 2015]

³⁷⁵ Kirsty McCrum, 'Rachel Trezise and Will Self'.

³⁷⁶ Kirsty McCrum, 'Rachel Trezise and Will Self'.

The Rhys Davies Conference, which aims to be an event of international standing, is in itself a clear indication of the renewed interest in the short story form. As discussed in Chapter Four, the Rhys Davies Short Story competition has become recognised as an important and prestigious outlet for new talent in Wales. To have a conference attached to this ‘brand’ with well-known proponents of the form, such as Rachel Trezise and Will Self, giving talks and workshops, suggests a particularly strong sense of confidence in the appeal and merit of the form. While there have been conferences dedicated to short fiction in recent years, the amount of Welsh short fiction discussed has been scarce.³⁷⁷ Having a conference dedicated to exploring and debating trends in both current and older writing will, no doubt, draw more attention to the high quality of writing by male and female authors both within and outside Wales.

Another new development which may well take the short story in new directions is the advent of the hybrid short story publication, *Rarebit*, which will be published in late 2013.³⁷⁸ Published by Parthian, this collection will be available in a collectable hardback edition, with original artwork by Welsh artists featuring on the cover, as well as in an enhanced e-edition. Taking advantage of the expansion in e-reader platforms on devices such as Apple’s i-Pad and Amazon’s Kindle, *Rarebit* will offer, it hopes, ‘a kaleidoscope of identities, perspectives and settings which encapsulate much that is vibrant and exciting about

³⁷⁷ See, for example, ‘The Singer not the Song: Narration and the Short Story,’ a conference organised by Sheffield Hallam University in 2011, which had one paper on Welsh short fiction. Oxford Brookes’s conference entitled ‘Mapping the Self: Place, Identity, Nationality’ (December 2012) featured two papers which focused, to some extent, on short fiction by women. Within Welsh universities, short fiction does attract more attention, especially the work of Dorothy Edwards, Margiad Evans, Kate Roberts and Rachel Trezise, including papers, for example, at the AWWE’s annual conference ‘Literary Topographies: Mapping Welsh Writing in English’ (March 2013) and a postgraduate symposium at Cardiff University, ‘Constructing Identities and Changing Spaces in Wales’ (June, 2013).

³⁷⁸ Parthian is leading the way with collections of new fiction from Wales, including *Nu: Fiction and Stuff* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2009) and *Nu 2: Memorable Firsts* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2011), both edited by Tomos Owen, which also include some poetry.

modern Welsh short fiction'.³⁷⁹ Many of the stories feature cultural conflict, centring on the fault lines in multicultural families and often alluding to post 9/11 anxieties, especially in Susmita Bhattacharya's poignant yet unsettling epistolary story, 'Letters Home', which scrutinizes the divided loyalties of a Bangladeshi migrant worker in Wales. What is particularly refreshing about the collection is the balance not only of writers from many different cultural and educational backgrounds, but the sheer number of good quality stories by women. The rationale behind the venture is to mix well-known voices with the new, divided into 'showcase' stories by established writers (such as Rachel Trezise and Deborah Kay Davies), 'sampler' stories from recently published collections by Parthian, and 'emerging talent' from writers who have fewer publications. Some of the writing from the 'emerging talent' is very promising, including stories by Rhian Edwards and Georgia Carys Williams. Clearly, if this venture is successful in the long term, it will provide women writers with a potentially prestigious literary platform which will reach, particularly in terms of the e-book version, a much wider range of readers. It is hoped that the twenty-first century will be as exciting and innovative a period for Welsh women's short fiction as the last 150 years have already proven to be.

³⁷⁹ Text taken from Reader's Report on the project, written by M Deininger. See <http://www.parthianbooks.com/content/rarebit> [accessed 31 August 2013] for further details.

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