

[Dis]solving Genres: Arguing the case for Welsh Crime Fiction

Catherine Phelps
B.A. Hons (University of Glamorgan), M.A. (Cardiff University)

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Summary

Walter Benjamin's suggestion that great literary works not only add to canonical literature but also 'dissolve' genres may not seem apt in an examination of crime fiction, a genre noted for its rigidity and structured form. Though much of this mass-marketed, populist fiction cannot be perceived as great literature, nonetheless, some do work to dissolve genres, to re-shape them to different ends. This is especially true of Welsh crime fiction written in English.

This thesis posits that there is a wealth of undiscovered Welsh crime fiction written in English and that those neglected works are necessary to the study of both crime fiction and Welsh writing in English. Central to this argument is my assertion that Welsh crime fiction (as it will henceforth be referred as) is a separate genre that contains its own specific tropes and paradigms, markers that are indicative of a certain Welsh cultural identity.

As this study also acts as a survey of a previously unexamined area, of necessity, the works under question are the product of a extensive period: from the late-nineteenth century to the present day. While the chapters are arranged thematically, I have also tried to keep a sense of a chronological order with a sense of authors writing against or responding too previous generations of crime writers. In this manner, a tradition can be seen to be forming, one which re-imagines Welsh identity over this protracted period.

As this literature springs from a nation that has frequently been defined as 'other', the Introduction starts with an examination of the so-called Blue Books and how they came to define the Welsh character for those outside Wales. Following this, Chapter I discusses how English crime writers absorbed these discourses and played out their ensuing anxieties in their work. Chapter II then explores an emergent Welsh crime fiction, one which both mimics and subverts anglocentric paradigms. This subversion is also played out in socialist crime fiction, the focus of Chapter III. Interestingly, these re-workings and re-imaginings of anglocentric norms are dealt with in different ways by male and female authors so Chapters IV and V will deal with male and female appropriations of genre respectively.

This thesis concludes by asserting that Welsh identity is influential in forming a new genre, one that takes a rigid and hierarchical structure and adapts it to its own ends.

Introduction

The evidence given me of the immoral character of the people, with a few exceptions, tells the same tale. The Welsh are peculiarly exempt from the guilt of great crimes. There are few districts in Europe where murders, burglaries, personal violence, rapes, forgeries, or any felonies on a large scale are so rare. On the other hand, there are perhaps, few countries where the standard of minor morals is lower. Petty thefts, lying, cozening, every species of chicanery, drunkenness (where the means exist), and idleness, prevail to a great extent among the least educated part of the community, who scarcely regard them in the light of sins.¹

In 1846, concern regarding the education of the labouring classes in Wales led the Welsh-born MP for Coventry, William Williams, to propose a government inquiry. The ensuing report, or to give it its full title, *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (1847), was a damning indictment of the education available for impoverished Welsh children. Yet the report made clear that the commissioners had other concerns. Chartism had made great inroads in Wales in the 1830s and 40s, while the Rebecca Riots of the same period had done much to unsettle authority. The Reports, or as they became known due to the colour of their binding, the Blue Books, also commented on the national moral character, possibly to ascertain the roots of the natives' rebellious nature. Indeed, the commissioners encountered much sympathy from those they questioned for the rioters of recent years. Nonetheless, they concluded that the Welsh seemed to lack the capacity for 'great crimes'. Other crimes such as drunkenness were a common complaint from the commissioners - even schoolmasters were described as frequently intoxicated - so it would seem that the Welsh did indulge in nefarious activities, albeit the petty vices.

Perhaps it is the commonly-held view, perpetuated by the commissioners, that the Welsh were too idle or drunk to commit serious crime, which may account in part for the absence of Welsh-authored crime fiction, or of the use of Wales as a setting for such fiction. Traditionally, Wales has been seen as a bucolic place of safety by English writers, an idea

¹ *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1848), p. 294.

that I explore more fully in Chapter I where I also consider how later English writers start to use Wales as a setting for crime. Even the Blue Books' commissioners reinforce this notion of Wales as a haven, but, instead of solely believing this to be the result of a rural simplicity, they also insinuate that the Welsh lack the necessary vigour to commit major crimes. These absent crimes: violence, fraud and, to a much lesser degree, murder, were ones that were of interest in the 1840s,² a decade in which Edgar Allan Poe writes his three C. Auguste Dupin stories, which Stephen Knight posits as the first detective fiction.³ This perceived lack of crime in Wales would not suggest it as a site in these emergent crime narratives. Crime fiction at this time was also often city-based, as evinced by the popular City Mysteries, originated by Eugène Sue but soon taken up by other writers.⁴ During this period, Wales lacked a famous urban centre in which to set one of these mysteries. And, as the central protagonists of these mysteries were often aristocratic, the commonly-held but mistaken view that Wales lacked a gentry class or any form of class mobility, also prevented Welsh characters from making much of a mark on these early crime fictions.⁵ This is a notion that also permeates the Blue Books. As one of the commissioners, R. R. W. Lingen, remarks, '[t]hey are never masters [...] the Welsh element is never found at the top of the social scale, nor in its own body does it exhibit much variety of gradation.'⁶ This conviction may explain why, when Wales did appear in English crime fiction, the local people were generally marginalised and silenced, often placed as lowly rural folk for local colour and little else.

² See Heather Worthington's *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 11-13 for an examination of the changing nature of crime in fiction over time.

³ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 25.

⁴ Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* was originally published as a weekly serial in *Le Journal des Débats* in 1842. Such was their popularity that they were published as a novel a year later. The detection-free novel spawned a host of imitations set in a variety of cities. For an in-depth analysis of this particular genre, please refer to Stephen Knight's *The Mysteries of the Cities* (North Carolina: MacFarland, 2011).

⁵ In his essay, 'A Tale of Three Cities: Megalopolitan Mysteries of the 1840s', Stephen Knight points out how Paul Féval's *Les Mystères de Londres* features a Welsh girl as a protagonist whilst drawing attention to the unlikelihood of her being named Diana Stewart. *Crime Fiction in the City: Capital Crimes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 124-137.

⁶ *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, p. 4.

This thesis, however, challenges the concept of Wales as a haven from crime, in fiction at least, and hopes to bring to attention some neglected and forgotten crime fiction by Welsh authors or those set in Wales. It offers not only a survey of crime fiction from Wales, but also argues that such crime fiction is a separate sub-genre with specific paradigms and tropes. But in order to do so, first it is necessary to define what is meant by the term ‘crime fiction’.

Crime and punishment have long appeared in print, from the biblical depiction of the first murder of Abel by Cain or Rhiannon’s penance for the suspected murder of her child in the *Mabinogion*, but it is the shift in emphasis from crime and subsequent punishment to the detective processes used to solve the crime that is considered pivotal to the development of crime fiction as it is currently understood. Crime writers and literary critics have been defining and redefining crime fiction for many decades. W. H. Auden provided an influential definition in his essay, ‘The Guilty Vicarage’ (1948). Simply put, Auden argued that the key events must be: ‘a murder occurs: many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is either arrested or dies’.⁷ However, as Julian Symons points out in his seminal work, *Bloody Murder* (1972), these definitions supplied by Auden and other fellow crime writers, such as R. Austin Freeman and Monsignor Roger Knox, concentrate solely on a certain type of crime genre: Golden Age detective fiction.⁸ For Auden *et al*, their definitions were insistent upon a logical detection and the absence of the supernatural or unexplained. As Symons points out, Golden Age fiction is just one aspect of crime fiction and its many sub-genres. Symons wishes to broaden the definition to include a variety of crime stories. But to do so, he has to trace the genre’s origins and concludes that

⁷ W. H. Auden, ‘The Guilty Vicarage’, in *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 147-158.

⁸ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (1972; London: Pan Books, 1992), pp. 13-4.

‘the detective story, along with the spy story and the thriller, [...] makes up part of the hybrid creature we call sensational literature’.⁹ Although this is not made clear, it seems that he is referring to American sensational fiction, rather than the British Sensation novel.¹⁰ American sensational fiction was popular during the mid-nineteenth century and is seen as the forerunner of pulp fiction, the early-twentieth century magazines and novels named after the cheap paper on which they were printed; like pulp fiction, sensational fiction was mass-marketed while its plots tended to the lurid.¹¹ Symons goes on to explain his use of this term as, whether detective story, spy story or thriller, ‘all deal with violent ends in a sensational way’.¹²

Heather Worthington’s definition is a useful addition to the features identified by Symons, since she suggests that the term crime fiction also refers to ‘all literary material, fiction or fact, that has crime or the appearances of crime, at its centre and as its *raison d’être*’.¹³ Consequently, I will not be restricting this research solely to detective fiction but will incorporate crime fiction that may include an element of mystery, or those sub-genres in which detection is secondary to the plot. Moreover, crime fiction is a genre which has invited re-writing and revision in recent decades and any generic confines are being constantly stretched into new shapes, especially by those wishing to rewrite the roles of those marginalised in crime fiction through gender, sexuality or race. To limit an examination of crime fiction solely to conservative detective fictions, then, would be to ignore these new

⁹ Symons, *Bloody Murder*, p. 16.

¹⁰ In *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Chris Baldick defines Sensation Literature as ‘A kind of novel that flourished in Britain in the 1860s, exploiting the element of suspense in stories of crime and mystery. The most successful examples are Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1860), Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), and J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Uncle Silas* (1864). The sensation novel has been seen as an early kind of thriller in that it exposes dark secrets and conspiracies, but is distinguished from the classic detective story by its lack of a central detective figure.’ So, like American sensational fiction, it too can be seen as a precursor of crime fiction recognised as such today. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-1038?rskey=BzYLFO&result=996&q=> [accessed 12 March 2013].

¹¹ See: ‘Ballou, Maturin Murray’, in *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* ed. James D. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 55.

¹² Symons, *Bloody Murder*, p. 16.

¹³ Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. xi.

developments in crime fiction, especially those wishing to re-centre the Welsh and their specific cultural identity.

Yet it is during detective fiction's most prolific period, the inter-war Golden Age, that Welsh-authored crime fiction first appears. Prior to the mid-1920s, there appears to be little or no Welsh crime fiction.¹⁴ As was suggested earlier, detective fiction at this time was a genre bound by strict rules - rules that were often laid down by crime writers themselves. Whilst many such instructions are tongue-in-cheek, they can reveal an anglocentric focus in the conceptualisation of crime fiction. Especially pertinent to the invisibility of Welsh crime is Auden's aforementioned essay, in which he expands upon previous definitions and delineations. In a discussion of settings in crime novels, Auden insists that they should fall into the following categories:

a) The group of blood relatives (the Christmas dinner in the country house); b) the closely knit geographical group (the old world village); c) the occupational group (the theatrical company); d) the group isolated by the neutral place (the Pullman car).¹⁵

I would argue that Wales, with the exception of the Pullman car, contained all of these elements. Wales still had plenty of 'old world village[s]' at the time when Auden was writing the essay, for instance, but these often failed to be presented in crime fiction. Instead, fiction favoured the neat, Home Counties, middle-class village settings featured in much of Agatha Christie's work which had little relation to Welsh rural life.¹⁶ While Auden's essay mocks the

¹⁴ As the first detective stories were often in short story form and sometimes serialised in periodicals, Conan Doyle's tales of Sherlock Holmes being a prime example, there is a possibility that there are forgotten crime stories awaiting rediscovery in one or more of the many Welsh newspapers and periodicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. More and more Welsh authors are being brought back into publication, with a special interest in the short story, so one cannot definitively state that there was no Welsh crime fiction prior to the 1920s, only that there may be a possibility that it languishes awaiting rediscovery.

¹⁵ W. H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 147-158 (p. 149-50).

¹⁶ Colin Watson named such villages 'Mayhem Parva' and it is an image that persists today in the television series *Midsomer Murders* (1997-), set in a series of small villages complete with gentry, spinster sisters and a village green. A more contemporary example, one pertinent to my argument that Welsh villages do not conform to anglocentric ideals, would be the recent use of Llandaff Cathedral Green for a BBC Wales *Dr Who* episode, 'The Eleventh Hour' (2009). The Cathedral Green is not noticeably 'Welsh' in any sense yet the BBC production team added various set pieces, such as a village pond, parish notice board and a pub signpost, to mark it as a middle-class 'English' country village.

reductive nature of genre writing, he also stresses his difficulty in reading those fictions which were ‘not set in rural England’.¹⁷ These accepted anglocentric boundaries and guidelines regarding this genre mean that Wales will be automatically set as ‘other’ and cannot be viewed as a site in its own right.

This perhaps explains why many of the first Welsh crime writers, who are examined in Chapter II, chose to set their early work outside Wales, either in England or in fictional villages that stood in for England. Previously, I provided several definitions of crime fiction but, as discussion turns to the first Welsh crime writers, it now behoves me to define what I mean by Welsh crime fiction. Naturally, it has to adhere to crime fiction’s parameters as outlined above, but for crime fiction to be considered ‘Welsh’ it must also engage with features that are unique to or indicative of Welsh culture and heritage, be these linguistic, stylistic, historical or geographical. This may appear prescriptive but it does allow for the inclusion of non-Welsh authors who employ Welsh cultural tropes. Conversely, writers who set crime in Wales or use the Welsh as central figures will not automatically merit inclusion. For example, Glyn Daniel’s *Welcome Death* (1954) is set in Llanddewi, Glamorgan and the crime is investigated by a visiting Cambridge don of Welsh extraction. Nonetheless, rather than view this as the beginnings of Welsh crime fiction, Stephen Knight accuses Daniel of an internalised colonialism and argues that, ‘in an Anglicised south Wales rural village people behaved just like Agatha Christie’s English – and the crimes are detected by a patronising Cambridge don, a notable symbol of enlistment for the author, himself a Cambridge don but of Welsh origin’.¹⁸ In this instance, Daniel’s revisioning of Wales as a site for crime fiction has failed in the sense that the Welsh village simply mimics its English counterpart. Rather than reclaiming the genre for a Welsh audience, his novels perform an act of anglocentric

¹⁷ Auden, ‘The Guilty Vicarage’, (p. 147).

¹⁸ Stephen Knight, ‘Crimes Domestic and Crimes Colonial: The Role of Crime Fiction in Developing Postcolonial Consciousness’, in *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective*, eds. Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen (New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 17-34, (p. 30).

ventriloquism. With Knight's words in mind, this examination of Welsh crime fiction does not wish to include mere imitators of English forms; the texts that are included have to write against prevailing anglocentric norms, even while seeming to mimic those paradigms. For instance, some of the crime fiction in Chapter II may appear to lack the tropes necessary for inclusion as Welsh crime fiction as they show no visible connection to Welsh cultural identity and appear to follow the patterns and structures of English crime fiction. However, rather than merely mimicking English crime fictions, a closer reading of such texts reveals a subversive act of mimicry explained by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), as one which unsettles a colonial power.¹⁹

Nonetheless, the supposed lack of Welsh crime fiction may be due in part to other reasons. As aforementioned, the conventions laid down by Auden *et al* positioned Wales as an 'other' place, one which is unsuitable for crime fiction. There are also similar ideologies at work when considering the possibilities of a Welsh detective figure. This becomes clearer when considering the detectives of early crime fiction. As mentioned previously, Stephen Knight suggests Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'²⁰ (1841) as the first detective story, a story which, moreover, links the process of detection to what Poe referred to as 'ratiocination',²¹ that is, logical deduction by exact reasoning. Poe's C. Auguste Dupin and, later, Conan Doyle's renowned Sherlock Holmes, detected through the power of reason alone, aided by a superior intellect. The figure of the emotionally detached detective contrasts with contemporaneous images of the passionate Celt and thus precludes the possibility of a Welsh detective. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901), Dr Watson, drawing on Cesare

¹⁹ Bhabha's theory will be explained and explored further, particularly in Chapters II and III.

²⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume IV* (1841; New York: AMS Press, 1965), pp. 146-192.

²¹ *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe Vol. 2*, ed. John Ward Ostrom (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 265.

Lombroso's theories of physiognomy,²² remarks that Sir Henry Baskerville has 'the rounded head of the Celt' which reveals his descent from 'that long line of high-blooded, fiery, and masterful men'.²³ Baskerville is a worthy ally, but one whose hot-headedness makes him unsuitable as a detective. Unfortunately, the case of the missing Welsh detective continued for some time. The television adaptation of Colin Dexter's *Morse* series (1987-2000) saw his sidekick Lewis transformed from a middle-aged Welshman to a younger Geordie and so the Welsh detective is effectively made invisible and silenced, at least on our television screens. There has been one notable exception: *Yr Heliwr* [The Hunter]/*Mind to Kill* (1994-2004), which starred Philip Madoc, was made by the Welsh production company Llundain Lliw/4L Productions. Episodes were filmed first in Welsh, then English and shown on Welsh and English television channels respectively. But currently, Madoc's television detective remains anomalous.²⁴

Luckily, the detective figure has seen much reinvention of late. A key feature of these more recent, revisionist texts is the introduction of new detective figures like Tony Hillerman's Navajo crime fighters²⁵ and Ian Rankin's Edinburgh-based Inspector Rebus.²⁶ The detective, once the preserve of white upper-middle-class English males, is now found in marginalised communities. The emergence of a Welsh detective working within Wales itself is part of this revisionist trend. But the Welsh detective did not appear fully-formed in his native land. Often, the first Welsh detectives originated from Scotland Yard. A frequent plot

²² In his 1876 work, *The Criminal Man*, Cesare Lombroso theorised that criminality revealed itself through physical characteristics. Hence, criminality was not the result of an 'evil' nature, rather, it was embodied in the individual, either from birth or through environmental factors.

²³ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901; Napoli: Loffredo Editore Napoli, 2002), p. 64.

²⁴ However, filming started in 2012 on a similar bilingual series, *Hinterland*, set in Wales and which will be aired on S4C and BBC4. Nonetheless, its screening on BBC4, a channel that shows continental European crime drama, suggests that Welsh crime fiction is still seen as foreign and 'other'.

²⁵ Hillerman's Leaphorn and Chee series featured two detectives who worked for the Navajo Tribal Police and were published from 1970 to 2006.

²⁶ Ian Rankin's first Rebus novel, *Knots and Crosses*, appeared in 1987. He was then retired in 2007 in *Exit Music* having reached sixty, the official retirement age for the Scottish police but was brought back into service in 2012 in *Standing in Another Man's Grave*. Like his creator, Rankin, Rebus is originally from Cardenden, but has become synonymous with Edinburgh.

device had the Welsh detective on holiday to visit family, conveniently located at the scene of a crime. Once the crime was solved and order restored, the detective would then return to the metropolitan power centre. David Williams's Mark Treasure series (1976-1993) rarely saw Treasure, a London-based merchant banker, return to his native Wales, for instance.²⁷ However, Williams later embarked on a series set in South Wales which featured DCI Merlin Parry (1995-2003).²⁸ Williams's DCI Parry is symptomatic of the Welsh crime writers' need to elevate the Welsh in crime fiction from colourful native to a high-status figure of authority. Moreover, such fiction reclaims the detective from London and situates him firmly in the heart of his homeland and culture to restore peace and order.

So far, I have referred to the detective as 'he'. In the past the detective has been a masculine presence and Marty Roth goes as far as to state that 'in detective fiction gender is genre and genre is male; Jane Marple and Modesty Blaise are feminine notations that perform a masculine function'.²⁹ This is a view that is countered by later depictions of female detective figures, most notable being the creation from the 1970s of central figures who are feminist, lesbian or are women from marginalised cultures,³⁰ a trend that is also apparent in Welsh-set crime fiction by women. A key feature of many of these new female detectives is their dual heritage. For instance, both Lindsay Ashford and C. J. Emerson, in *Frozen* (2003) and *Objects of Desire* (2006) respectively, have written characters that are of Welsh-Indian descent. Rather than diluting their Welsh identity, this signals a departure from an anglicised

²⁷ As a merchant banker, Mark Treasure was based in London. The series, which began with *Unholy Writ* (1976) and ended with *Banking on Murder* (1993), saw Treasure travel widely through southern England, the Caribbean and even Russia but rarely to his native Wales.

²⁸ *Last Seen Breathing* (1995) saw the creation of two characters, DCI Merlin Parry and DS Gomer Lloyd, who worked for the South Wales Constabulary. *Practise to Deceive* (2003) marked the last in this particular series.

²⁹ Marty Roth, *Foul and Fair Play: Reading Genre in Classic Detective Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p.xiv.

³⁰ Notable examples are M. F. Beal's *Angel Dance* (1977), which featured the lesbian Chicana investigator, Kat Guerrero, and Barbara Neely's Blanche White series (1992-2000) whose eponymous character is a black domestic and amateur sleuth.

identity as it looks to other colonised cultures – cultures which engage in a reworking of a common *lingua franca*.³¹

Despite this creation of the native detective, some Welsh crime fiction goes further by diminishing the importance of that same figure. Detection and capture, in Auden's strictly defined parameters, almost always leads to arrest or death in modern crime writing, so punishment still has a place, albeit in a minor role. This choice of ending is one that is state-sanctioned; should a potential victim kill the murderer, this is self-defence and does not transgress state laws. Whichever ending is chosen by the author, the result is a return to order and harmony. This is also true of Welsh crime fiction. Still, in some cases this harmony and order is not restored by an adherence to state authority and law but is rather brought about by a return to the community's code, based on its own ethics and values. Although not a crime novel as such (unless one takes into account the criminal destruction of Welsh rural life by the industrialisation of its valley towns), Richard Llewellyn's *How Green was My Valley* (1939) gives an interesting account of Welsh justice. As in other texts mentioned above, the police are figureheads of English law and as such are a threat to the community's autonomy for, as the narrator's father states, 'you will have a policeman to stay. A magistrate next. Then perhaps even a jail'.³² State law is here seen not as an agent of harmony but as a tool of oppression. When a child is murdered it is the community, specifically the child's father and brothers, who enact revenge and punishment on the criminal.³³ Communal law takes its lead from the Old Testament and follows the principle of 'an eye for an eye' or, in this case, a life for a life. What makes these punishments remarkable is the role the community plays in bypassing and thereby subverting authority. This possibly has its roots in archaic Welsh law which, as John Davies tells us, 'was folk law rather than state law and its emphasis was upon

³¹ This is also true of Malcolm Pryce's Aberystwyth novels, which look towards American culture to rework a modern Welsh identity.

³² Richard Llewellyn, *How Green was my Valley* (1939; London: Penguin, 2001), p. 143.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-193.

ensuring reconciliations between kinship groups rather than keeping order through punishment. It was not concerned with the enforcement of law through the apparatus of state'.³⁴ Law and subsequent punishment are a communal decision reached through a majority consensus, rather than applied by a distant dominant power. Thus, withholding information from a Welsh figure of authority can be seen as a form of resistance to English law.

Clearly, the diminishment of the authority of the detective in this particular genre can lead to questions as to whether it can then be described as crime fiction. The title of this thesis alludes to Walter Benjamin's essay, 'On the Image of Proust' in which he suggests that 'all great works establish a genre or dissolve one [...] they are, in other words, special cases'.³⁵ I am not suggesting that the texts examined here are great works, yet they are worthy of consideration as they can 'dissolve' the genre of crime fiction, especially when they question and marginalise authority. And it is such subversions of the genre that will also suggest a text's inclusion as Welsh crime fiction.

Notwithstanding the inclusion of a variety of crime fiction sub-genres, I have omitted a large body of crime fiction: that of the historical murder mystery, and especially those set in the medieval period. While Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980) is often cited as the first medieval crime fiction, the Shropshire-born Edith Pargeter, writing as Ellis Peters, wrote the first of her Cadfael series in 1977. Cadfael, a Welsh monk at Shrewsbury monastery, solved his first mystery in *A Morbid Taste for Bones* some years prior to William of Baskerville's detection in Northern Italy. Since that time, there has been a proliferation in historical murder mysteries, spanning thousands of years from the prehistoric to the 1950s. Many Welsh writers appear to have an affinity with historical crime fiction, especially

³⁴ John Davies, *The History of Wales* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), p. 88.

³⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'On the Image of Proust' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 2 Part 1 1927-1930*, eds. Michael W. Jennings et al (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 237-247 (p. 237).

medieval crime.³⁶ Initial research for a chapter revealed not only a wealth of material from and about Wales but also the realisation that the choice of a medieval setting could not be discussed in one chapter alone but would merit an entire thesis.

While location and setting in crime fiction have always attracted scholarly interest, there appears to be an increase in attention to the use of place by the native writer.³⁷ Setting has always played an integral part in crime narratives, especially in urban crime fiction, for here the city is emblematic of official versions of national culture, state power and its by-product, corruption, while the teeming anonymous masses make it easier to commit crime and create the need for a detective figure. The early- to mid-nineteenth century City Mysteries exemplify this, for their favoured settings were Paris, Rome, and London. More recently, writers may eschew such traditional settings and choose to set their novels nearer home. In Europe, crime fiction is gravitating away from the conventional centres of power, as illustrated by the recent proliferation of Scandinavian crime fiction. Such fiction is not always set in Scandinavian capitals but often explores the outskirts, as demonstrated by Henning Mankel's Wallander series which is located in Ystad, rather than Stockholm.³⁸ Here in Britain, authors like Ian Rankin are also setting crime outside the traditional power centres; such writers point to what M. Wynn Thomas refers to as an 'internal difference'.³⁹ While Thomas is referring to the 'problematic diversity' of Wales, one that manifests itself in 'historical, social, cultural, linguistic'⁴⁰ differences, the notion of an internal difference can

³⁶ At the Criminal Intent Conference, held in Abergavenny in 2009, Welsh crime writer Bernard Knight talked about how his choice of a late-twelfth century setting was driven by a desire to write a Wales that existed separately from England. Unfortunately, the lack of coroners in Wales during this period meant he had to make his central detective figure, Crowner John, an Englishman.

³⁷ Examples of this sort of analysis include the collection of essays edited by Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate M. Quinn, *Investigating Identities: Questions of Identity in International Crime Fiction* (2009), David Geherin's *Scene of the Crime: The Importance of Place in Crime and Mystery Fiction* (2008), and the University of Wales Press European crime series which so far has examined French, Italian, and Scandinavian fictions

³⁸ Mankel's Kurt Wallander first appeared in *Faceless Killers* in 1991 but the series ended with Wallander's diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease in *Troubled Man* (2009).

³⁹ M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference: Twentieth-century Writing in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p. xi.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xii.

also be applied to the heterogeneity of British identity. Indeed, these divergent Scandinavian and Scottish crime fictions have become endemic enough to earn the labels, ‘Nordic Noir’ and ‘Tartan Noir’, respectively. These relocations of crime sites foreground and draw attention to local cultures which differ from the usual metropolitan meta-narratives.

However, some literary critics look beyond Europe and America to investigate crime fiction from other continents and many of these choose to do so through postcolonial theory. Essay collections such as *The Post-Colonial Detective* (2001), *Postcolonial Postmortems* (2006) and *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (2009) examine crime fiction from a variety of nations such as Africa, China, India, South America, all of which are often neglected in Western literary criticism. These collections often focus on the re-centring and re-imagining of the colonial subject and his or her cultural identity. This postcolonial re-examination has also returned to the colonial centres of power and now includes reappraisals of American and European crime fiction. Titles like *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story* (2005) bring these postcolonial reappraisals back home. Yet, with the exception of Stephen Knight’s essay, referred to earlier when discussing Glyn Daniel’s *Welcome Death* and which is published in *Postcolonial Postmortems*, there is no examination of Welsh crime fiction, postcolonial or otherwise. The need to analyse Welsh crime fiction as a genre written against a dominant culture, combined with its neglect by practitioners of postcolonial theory, necessitates the use of that very methodology in this thesis.

Other Welsh literary genres have been read through these postcolonial prisms. Kirsti Bohata’s *Postcolonialism Revisited* (2004) uses postcolonial theory to produce nuanced and politicised readings of Welsh literature in both languages. To do so, she appropriated and challenged the boundaries set by thinkers like Bhabha, arguing that Welsh writing can be

considered 'postcolonial'. Bohata's primary argument for its inclusion is that:

[i]n its engagement with cultural, geographical, political, gendered, sexual and temporal specificities, postcolonial writing (be it creative, academic or political) may be read as forming complex discourses which deconstruct and reimagine personal, cultural and national identities. The wide appeal of postcolonialism is surely due in no small part to this concern with shifting identity, with 're-membering' the self, and is of immediate relevance to and for a nation such as Wales, which has relied in recent centuries on a fairly self-conscious imagining of nation.⁴¹

While *Postcolonialism Revisited* looks at Welsh texts in both English and Welsh, my deficiency in the Welsh language means that my analysis is restricted to Anglophone texts. There does appear to be a healthy tradition of Welsh-language crime fiction, a genre that often crosses over into other media such as television and radio. For instance, Idwal Jones's *S.O.S Galw Gari Tryfan*, a children's radio detective series first aired in the 1940s and which ran for many years, was recently adapted for television in 2008 in its original Welsh. But it is this process of revisionism and reimagining referred to by Bohata that seems to be at the heart of the English-language texts. Indeed, some are politically overt in writing against cultural imperialism, as befits a nation that has long been associated with socialism, either a political socialism or a traditional connection with a more egalitarian community. With this in mind, Chapter III is dedicated to such political crime fiction. These texts intentionally use the populist and, perhaps more democratic, genre of crime fiction to foreground Welsh culture and to suggest an autonomy of sorts for its people. It is within these texts, which appear after the 1950s, that Wales appears not just for local colour but is re-centred in the narrative as a political act.

Such grouping together of key motifs, like an overt radical agenda, means that while I will attempt to deal with the material at hand with a rough sense of chronology, chapters will also be grouped thematically; an approach I hope will be useful in discussing certain Welsh cultural tropes which reveal themselves in Welsh crime fiction. As recurrent tropes are built

⁴¹ Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 2.

upon and developed by later writers, sometimes texts which were published some decades apart will be dealt with in the same chapter.

Despite the politicised work of writers mentioned in Chapter III, the idea of Wales as too safe and too rural to contain great crimes still exists. This is best exemplified by contemporary publishing: in 1989, the autumn edition of the *New Welsh Review*, a publication dedicated to Anglophone Welsh literature, devoted an issue to crime fiction. It sported a lurid cover in homage to pulp fiction and the contents contained essays and short stories by P.D. James and Lyn Pykett, amongst others. Under discussion came English, American, black and lesbian crime fiction. Surprisingly, the only concession to Welsh writing in English was a short story by Lesley Grant-Adamson, a crime writer of Welsh heritage, and an interview with Elaine Morgan, whose many television adaptations include episodes of detective shows *Maigret* and *Campion*. Lesley Grant-Adamson, when interviewed two years later for the same publication, was asked why she did not set her crime fiction in Wales. Her reply was that she had been discouraged from doing so by her publishers as ‘Wales doesn’t sell’, an admonition many other Welsh authors say they have been given by a variety of publishers.⁴²

Stephen Knight has suggested that the lack of Welsh crime fiction may be due to a lack of cultural self-awareness and confidence. Jane Aaron develops this argument when she suggests that devolution in 1997 would lead to a creative rebirth for many Welsh writers and artists.⁴³ Could one then look to Welsh devolution as a significant event for Welsh crime fiction, where Welsh crime fiction emerges and shapes itself in accordance with a new confident cultural identity? Previous colonial derogation of Wales and its culture may

⁴² Jackie Aplin, ‘Making a Killing Unless it’s Welsh’, in *New Welsh Review* 14 (Autumn 1991), 18-21 (p. 21). Other authors, such as David Williams and Katherine John, have confirmed they have been given similar advice. Katherine John spoke about it at the *Criminal Intent: Crime Writing Conference for the Valleys* on 14th November 2009, and a review that appeared in the *Independent* newspaper 13 October 2013 includes Williams’s anecdote about a publisher exclaiming that ‘[n]obody commits crime in Wales!’

⁴³ Jane Aaron and Chris Williams, ‘Preface’, in *Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. xv-xix (p. xv-i).

certainly have accounted for the reluctance of some Welsh writers to reclaim their homeland in their fiction, or even to take up the genre in the first place. For, as Stephen Knight proposes, ‘as an effective part of England, in crime fiction as in much else, Wales repressed its separate and physical identity, for a complex of reasons’.⁴⁴ While this resonates with many commentators on Welsh writing in English of all genres, it is certainly true that censorship, such as that imposed by publishers, has played its part in silencing Welsh crime fiction. Furthermore, this past silencing of Welsh crime fiction presents further problems for contemporary crime writers. As Anthony Brockway argues in a discussion of Welsh science fiction, the lack of a corpus of Welsh sci-fi is partly due to an ignorance of past fictions; as he contends, ‘for a tradition to exist authors have to be aware of each other’s work and respond to, build upon, previous writing’.⁴⁵ Similarly, the apparent lack of a tradition or canon of Welsh crime fiction could explain the reluctance of Welsh authors to engage with the genre. This, perhaps, explains why the male writers discussed in Chapter IV initially appropriate American hard-boiled models for their crime writing. The appropriation of American crime paradigms hints at a desire to avoid replicating English crime fiction rather than, as Knight has suggested, being a symptom of Welsh writers lacking cultural confidence.

As there is a chapter devoted to male-authored crime fiction, the following and final chapter will look at women writing crime. Unlike their male counterparts, women writers generally favour rural settings over the urban spaces used by the writers examined in the previous chapter. Unusually, these female crime writers seem untouched by the feminist appropriation of the hard-boiled P.I. by American and English writers from the 1970s onward. While P. D. James and Sara Paretsky re-examined the role of the private investigator through re-gendering,⁴⁶ Welsh women-authored crime has instead returned to the rural spaces

⁴⁴ Knight, ‘Crimes Domestic and Crimes Colonial’, (pp. 31-2).

⁴⁵ Anthony Brockway, ‘The Last Word’, in *New Welsh Review* 82 (Winter 2008), 91-95 (p. 93).

⁴⁶ In Britain, P. D. James introduced her female P. I., Cordelia Gray, in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972). Sara Paretsky’s Chicago P. I., V. I. Warshawski, first appeared in *Indemnity Only* (1982).

once occupied by English writers. Nonetheless, theirs is an act of reclamation rather than an assimilation of colonial values. The rural spaces of Wales are re-figured as matriarchal; places where crimes affecting women are discussed and solved.

Welsh writing in English is a field that has been subdivided into a proliferation of sub-genres such as the Welsh Gothic,⁴⁷ the Welsh Industrial novel, even Welsh sci-fi. But Anglophone Welsh crime fiction is a genre that has failed to gain such recognition. Perhaps for all the reasons stated above, Welsh crime writers pit their work against accepted norms, both as a riposte to English crime writers and to stretch crime fiction into structures more suited to Welsh culture. While they may not have a tradition to refer to and draw upon, this leaves Welsh crime writers free to re-write crime fiction's genres.

⁴⁷ For a detailed examination of this genre, see Jane Aaron's *Welsh Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

Chapter I: The English Imperial Thriller

From the late-eighteenth century, Wales became the site for many a literary tour, partly due to the difficulties of travelling abroad after the commencement of the French Revolution in 1789. Frequently, the travel writing engendered by these ‘home tours’ in Wales depicted a Rousseauesque, idyllic rural space sparsely populated by a simple yeoman stock. Wales and its people had, of course, been used as a fictional setting before, most notably in William Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1611), but the later part of the eighteenth century sees a projection of Romantic ideals onto the country. Wales became, as Moira Dearnley argues in *Distant Fields: Eighteenth-century Fictions of Wales*, ‘a place of virtue’. She goes on to explain that as Wales was ‘linked with prevalent ideas of Nature and the noble savage, the country was often depicted as the locus of innocence, uncorrupted by the iniquities of low life in the city or the fashionable vices of high society’.¹ Naturally, ‘a place of virtue’ implies an absence of its binary opposite, vice, and, consequently, crime. Moira Dearnley cites many little-known texts that feature a heroine fleeing wickedness and seeking sanctuary in the safe haven of the Welsh countryside, such as Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Ophelia* (1760) and Anna Maria Bennett’s *Anna, or Memoirs of a Welch Heiress* (1785). Dearnley also briefly examines William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794), mostly in comparison with other texts. But she fails to mention that this too features an escape, in this instance, from injustice, to the safety of Wales. Often cited as an early model for the detective novel, *Caleb Williams* tells how the eponymous Caleb flees from his persecutor, Mr Falkland, twice taking shelter in Wales. There, Caleb remarks, ‘[b]y all these persons I was received with kindness and hospitality. Among people thus remote from the bustle of human life there is an open spirit of confidence, by means of which, a stranger easily finds access to their benevolence and

¹ Moira Dearnley, *Distant Fields: Eighteenth-century Fictions of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. xvi.

goodwill'.² The example of *Caleb Williams* thus indicates that, even from its birth, crime fiction has difficulty in envisaging Wales as a crime site, possibly due to the inhabitants' perceived innate rural innocence and their remoteness from the corruption of the urban space.

The mid-nineteenth century saw a change in attitudes to the Welsh after the publication of the so-called Blue Books.³ As mentioned in the Introduction, events like the Rebecca Riots and Chartist demonstrations unsettled late-eighteenth century Romantic ideals about Wales.⁴ The Report's commissioners, rather than recording a rural idyll, instead wrote of the poverty and mean existence which they encountered amongst the Welsh. Their interpretation, one which could be viewed as colonial and was certainly coloured by their status as monoglot English speakers, was to attribute such poverty to the crippling effect of the Welsh language in education. The women of Wales were further demonised as slatternly and of loose morals. The commissioners drew frequent attention to their poor housekeeping but it was the seeming moral laxity of Welsh women that caused the greatest ire and anxiety. As one of the commissioners, Jelinger C. Symons, expounded:

I refer to the alleged want of chastity in the women. If this be so, it is sufficient to account for all other immoralities, for each generation will derive its moral tone in a great degree from the influences imparted by the mothers who reared them. Where these influences are corrupt at their very source, it is vain to expect virtue in the offspring. The want of chastity results frequently from the practice of 'bundling,' or courtship on beds, during the night—a practice still widely prevailing.⁵

It seems that women were to be castigated more than their male partners for such practices as they alone were seen as responsible for the corruption of each subsequent generation's moral sense.

² William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (1794; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 290.

³ For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see the collection of essays edited by Jane Aaron and Ursula Masson, *The Very Salt of Life: Welsh Women's Political Writings from Chartism to Suffrage* (2007) and Gwyneth Tyson Roberts's *The Language of the Blue Books: The Perfect Instrument of Empire* (1998).

⁴ A more thorough discussion of this turbulent period can be found in most reputable Welsh histories, such as John Davies's *History of Wales* (1993). Moreover, the historian David J. V. Jones has written on both the Rebecca Riots and the Chartist movement in Wales in *Rebecca's Children: A Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (1989) and *The Last Rising: The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839* (1999) respectively.

⁵ *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1848), p. 294.

Fiction was quick to perpetuate this stereotype; by 1853, Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, *Ruth*, used both Wales as a setting and the aforementioned bundling, or, as it is known in its original Welsh, *caru yn y gwely* [courting in bed], as a custom which included the shocking possibility of pre-marital sex. Gaskell also set other fictions in Wales which, as Jane Aaron wryly remarks, depicted Welsh women as 'libidinous, if subsequently contrite'.⁶ Wales was now no longer perceived as a 'place of virtue', by English writers, at least. Unsurprisingly, the Welsh were quick to counter this new perspective of a lazy, sinful people. Foremost in the vanguard of the campaign against such views were women such as Lady Llanover (1802-1896), credited with the invention of a national Welsh costume,⁷ who committed herself to the revival of other Welsh customs and culture. Another prominent figure who sought to restore the reputation of Wales and its people was Sarah Jane Rees (1839-1916), known by her bardic name, Cranogwen. Unlike Gaskell, then, some writers countered negative depictions of the Welsh. Katie Gramich points out in her essay, "'Every hill has its history, every region its romance": Travellers' Constructions of Wales, 1844-1913', that some Victorian travel writers were keen to rectify the idea that the Welsh were lazy and immoral and, as in the case of the Welsh educator, O. M. Edwards, used their travel writing to bring Welsh culture to the attention of their readership. However, as Gramich also observes, these narratives 'enact a retreat from modernity' and overwhelmingly depict an idealised rural space and appear to resurrect eighteenth-century fictional idylls, while ignoring increasing industrialisation.⁸ And whether denigrating or praising the Welsh, writers and reformers were mostly concerned with the morals of the Welsh, rather than any criminality.

⁶ Jane Aaron, *Nineteenth-century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 104.

⁷ Christine Stevens, *Welsh costume and the influence of Lady Llanover* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 2006)

⁸ Katie Gramich, "'Every hill has its history, every region its romance": Travellers' Constructions of Wales, 1844-1913', in *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Benjamin Colbert (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 147-163 (p. 161).

Nevertheless, concerns about criminality and Wales were starting to appear in fiction. Robert Williams Buchanan (1841-1901), born in England but of Scottish heritage, set his 1885 novel, *Matt: A Story of a Caravan*,⁹ in Wales. Buchanan was a popular novelist and poet, though largely forgotten now, and his fiction was set in many places around the world.¹⁰ *Matt* follows the pattern set by eighteenth-century travel writers in Wales, a pattern taken up by the later English crime writers discussed in this chapter, so that the text can be seen as a bridge between the two genres. The pattern established is of an upper-middle class English visitor arriving at a rural Welsh location; however, rather than fleeing wickedness, he arrives to be confronted by a mystery, as in the case of *Matt*, or crime, as in the thrillers some forty years later. The traveller in Buchanan's novel is Charles Brinkley, who travels to 'Anglesea' [*sic*] in a gypsy caravan with his Irish servant, Tim, in order to paint.¹¹ Again, this echoes the pursuits of some eighteenth-century travel writers who came to Wales to paint its sublime landscapes.¹² Despite this hint of bohemianism, 'every movement [Brinkley] made, every word he spoke, implied the "gentleman born"'.¹³ If there were any doubt left about Brinkley's eminence, the reader is told that Brinkley possesses a 'superior manner',¹⁴ and it soon becomes clear that he is of a higher class than the Welsh he encounters, such as the eponymous heroine, Matt, one of the three Welsh characters given a voice in this novel. Other Anglesey inhabitants are mentioned, as Brinkley and Tim meet other people and garner information from them, but this happens off-page and is often recorded after the event.

⁹ This was published in America as *Matt: A Tale of a Caravan*. I will be referring to the American edition throughout this chapter.

¹⁰ Buchanan is primarily known today as the critic who attacked the Pre-Raphaelites in his review of what he called 'The Fleshly School of Poetry'.

¹¹ Robert Buchanan, *Matt: A Tale of a Caravan* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1885), p. 5.

¹² Jane Austen neatly parodied this trend in her juvenilia, 'A Tour through Wales, in a Letter from a Young Lady' where the letter writer says:

My Mother rode upon our little pony, and Fanny and I walked by her side or rather ran, for my Mother is so fond of riding fast that She galloped all the way. [...] Fanny has taken a great many Drawings of the Country, which are very beautiful, tho' perhaps not such exact resemblances as might be wished, from their being taken as she ran along.

Catharine and Other Writings, eds. Margaret Anne Doody and Douglas Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 170.

¹³ Buchanan, *Matt*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Brinkley's natural sense of superiority as an English gentleman encourages him to embark upon solving the mystery of Matt's origins. Brinkley is also persuaded to turn amateur detective as he had when, a law student in Dublin, he had:

rapidly discovered that he loved artistic amateurship much better, he had often been known to work terribly hard at "cases" in which his curiosity was aroused; [...] he had shown on these occasions an amount of shrewdness which would have made him an excellent lawyer, if his invincible objection to hard work, *quâ* [*sic*] work, had not invariably interfered.¹⁵

Brinkley could be said to be following in the footsteps of the first amateur gentleman detective, Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin. Dupin, though living in an impoverished part of Paris, is a gentleman and, initially at least, endeavours to solve the mysteries of the Rue Morgue out of intellectual curiosity rather than for pay. Similarly, Brinkley takes on the mystery purely as an 'artistic' endeavour, one which will display his superior rational and intellectual skills. In this manner, the English gentleman is not tainted with the vulgarity of 'trade'.

The mystery of this novel, as mentioned above, is Matt's origins. The reader is told that she was washed ashore as a baby after a shipwreck. Matt, unlike her silenced neighbours, does play a central part in the narrative and first appears wearing that newly-minted symbol of Welsh identity: the stovepipe hat. She is described as 'a veritable child of nature',¹⁶ 'a wild ocean waif, a child of the wilderness'.¹⁷ These are tropes often found in Anglophone Welsh literature too, such as the popular novels of Allen Raine, the pseudonym of Anne Adaliza Puddicombe (1836-1908). As Raine's first novel, *A Welsh Singer*, was published eight years after *Matt*, it is not inconceivable that Raine was familiar with Buchanan's work. Raine's fictions are generally set on the Welsh coast and often feature shipwrecks, while transgressive acts play their part. However, Raine's narratives focus on the rural Welsh working-classes to the exclusion of any English visitors. Welsh culture is central to her fiction and a lack of an

¹⁵ Buchanan, *Matt*, p. 93.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

English education is not detrimental to her characters' progress. This is not so in the case of Buchanan's *Matt*. True to Rousseauesque ideals, this child of nature has received little formal education and can barely read and write. However, rather than this being seen as beneficial, the 'grammarless castaway'¹⁸ must be educated in order for her to be 'a fine young lady'¹⁹ and hence, a suitable match for Brinkley. This, again, can be read in the light of the Blue Books, where the 'low morals' of Welsh women were attributed 'entirely to want of education'.²⁰ *Matt* must be made a lady, and a virtuous lady at that, through schooling. As not a word of Welsh is spoken in *Matt*, it must be assumed that this education will be in English. For *Matt*, Anglicisation is the only considered route out of poverty, immorality and her class.

The mystery of *Matt*'s origins is solved as Brinkley discovers that she is a second cousin to Mr Monk, a local landowner who is pressing her into marriage. Monk is aware of *Matt*'s true identity but has concealed this knowledge so that he may take her inheritance. Marriage would ensure that the property was legally his. Though Monk is arrested, he is not charged, but his ill-gotten property is returned to *Matt* and Monk flees the country. Now that *Matt* is established as a gentlewoman by birth, she is sent off to school to be educated and to become a lady proper. Brinkley maintains contact with *Matt* and notes favourably the 'improvement in her grammar and the gentle art of speech'.²¹ Nonetheless, despite her education, this former child of nature retains her sexual frankness. Earlier in the narrative, *Matt*, though only sixteen, had perched herself upon Brinkley's lap and kissed him. Later, despite her newly-acquired ladylike polish, it is *Matt* who proposes to the blushing Brinkley. Welsh women, it seems, are still libidinous, in spite of the best efforts of English schools.

So, in what will prove to be a recurrent pattern for English authors setting fiction in Wales, the chosen crime reflects current English fears. Crime fiction, as a genre, acts as a site

¹⁸ Buchanan, *Matt*, p. 154.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁰ *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, p. 535.

²¹ Buchanan, *Matt*, p. 171.

of containment for contemporary anxieties. The use of Wales as a setting by English authors seems to speak of English fears regarding Wales. In this instance, it is the anxiety shared by the Blue Books: that the Welsh lack a proper, that is, an English education, and that rural idylls are no longer the locus of innocence but places where vice can prevail. Noble savages are no longer valorised in their rural spaces and, naturally, it is the English who will raise them out of their moral morass. As the Commissioners were sent into Wales, so is the English detective, changing the nature of the traveller into the principality from Romantic pilgrim to a figure of authority sent to correct Welsh ways. The wild Welsh waif will be educated and tamed and made suitable for the marriage market, while fears about her unknown origins will be laid to rest as her legitimacy is unveiled.

Despite this tentative early journey to Wales to solve a mystery and set right a crime, it is not until the 1920s that English-authored crime fiction which uses Wales as a primary setting truly emerges. Like *Matt*, this early crime writing still shares some of the tropes of eighteenth-century travel writing set in Wales. The narrative focus is provided by an English visitor, now a fully-fledged detective figure, one who travels to a mostly rural Wales. Like their eighteenth-century literary predecessors, English authors depict Wales as a sparsely populated country. What has changed is that Wales, once a place of safety, now contains a crime which becomes the reason for the English detective's visit to Wales. Moreover, these crimes threaten the security and health of England and because of this, not because of any threat to the Welsh nation, these crimes must be contained. However, crime is rarely perpetrated by the Welsh in these texts. Rather, the crimes are usually committed by a corrupt Englishman who heads a team of dastardly foreigners. In this respect, Wales acts as a *tabula rasa* onto which anxieties about the health of the English nation are projected, contained and resolved by an authoritative Englishman. Although the 1920s saw the emergence of so-called

Golden Age crime fiction,²² the English-authored crime narratives examined in this chapter can be instead treated as imperial thrillers for, to some degree, threats to England are resolved while the treatment of Welsh subjects smacks of colonialism. The texts examined here are all concerned with such threats: W. Townend's *Once to Tiger Bay* (1929), Harold Wimbury's short story, 'Intrigue' (1930), L.A. Knight's *Deadman's Bay* (1930) and Showell Styles's *Traitor's Mountain* (1946). Interestingly, as in the case of Matt, who is washed ashore after a shipwreck, all feature the Welsh coast as a point of entry. These texts seem to display an anxiety about the risk Wales poses to English security as the Welsh coastline 'leaks', allowing entry to differing threats to the English nation and, consequently, to English identity.

The appearance of Wales in early twentieth-century crime fiction also highlights an interwar concern – the decline of British imperial power. As colonial rule weakened elsewhere, English authors looked nearer to home to play out anxieties about the loss of imperial power. In her examination of the role travel writing played in European expansionism from the mid-eighteenth century to the late-twentieth century, Mary Louise Pratt suggests that it created what she refers to as ““contact zones”, social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination’.²³ Rather than travel abroad, both travel writers and later crime writers create contact zones closer to home within Wales, zones in which to play out fears such as the loss of Empire. Moreover, commentators such as Colin Watson have suggested that the compartmentalisation of the classes characteristic of the interwar period, constructed ‘not only by class barriers but by physical, geographical divisions’, was

²² For a more detailed examination of Golden Age fiction, see Chapter II.

²³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

reflected in crime fiction's rigid conformity.²⁴ There is little mention within crime fiction of this time of 'lockouts and riots, naval mutiny, the national paralysis of 1926 and the hunger marches of the 1930s'.²⁵ Crime fiction of this period, as typified by the work of Agatha Christie, tended instead to reinforce social hierarchies; the servant classes had no real agency within these texts – the butler rarely 'did it' – and foreigners such as Christie's Belgian detective, Poirot, were depicted as peculiar and 'alien'. The restored status quo was a nostalgic one; rather than reflecting contemporary social change, crime fiction of the period, such as that examined in this chapter, looked back to an imperial Edwardian, or possibly even Victorian, pre-war order where class, race and gender were strictly defined.²⁶ Watson argues that this reflects the concerns of a middle-class readership, which he defines as those with the money to subscribe to a circulating library, enough leisure time to consume the increasingly numerous works of crime fiction and especially those who regularly commuted in the Greater London area and accounted for a great part of the sales of crime fiction at railway bookstalls. For these readers of the middle classes, crime fiction acted as a refuge and a soporific against an uncertain world.

The issue of class in Welsh-set crime fiction is an interesting one. Industrialised Wales became increasingly associated with the socialist radicalism mentioned by Watson. Hence, the class-demotion of the Welsh in comparison with English characters can be interpreted as English authors putting the Welsh in their perceived place. And while there had been a healthy political interest in Home Rule in Wales for some time, 1925 saw the establishment of the movement's most enduring and successful political party, Plaid Cymru.

²⁴ Colin Watson, *Snobbery with Violence: English Crime Stories and their Audience* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), p. 36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ See Ernest Mandel's *Delightful Murder* (1984) and Stephen Knight's 'The Golden Age', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (2003). Nevertheless, these perceptions of Christie's fictions, at least, have been subject to reinterpretations, especially by feminist critics in such work as Alison Light's *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (1991) and Gill Plain's *Twentieth-century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (2001).

Fears of a declining British Empire, with its rigid class hierarchies, and of a divided Britain, mean that this type of narrative survives the Second World War as English crime writers struggle to contain eruptions of Welsh national identity, culture and politics within their work.

Harold Wimbury's short story, 'Intrigue', first appeared in the weekly magazine *The Thriller* in 1930. Wimbury (1883-1949) was a magazine editor for many years and also wrote novels and plays. 'Intrigue' sees Detective Mars of Scotland Yard go undercover to investigate an assassination attempt on Professor Senat, inventor of a death ray. Far-fetched though this seems, throughout the 1920s and 1930s several people had claimed independently to have invented an electromagnetic machine with the capacity to kill, including Harry Grindell-Matthews who later settled in Betws, South Wales.²⁷ Wimbury's fictional inventor, Professor Senat, is sent to an island off the coast of North Wales to stay with Baronet James Dampling MP in the belief that he 'will at least be safe at Rock Island'.²⁸ Detective Mars is sent along to the island to watch over the Professor and on arrival is further cut off from the outside world as a storm blows in. Already present are the recurring tropes of English fiction which uses a Welsh setting: Rock Island is a place of safety, partly due to its remoteness, while its name suggests a barren ruggedness.

Unfortunately, the Professor is soon murdered and the discovery of hidden rooms in the Dampling House and a secret tunnel from the island to the mainland reveal another plot: that of drug smuggling. Drawing on newspaper reports of the 1920s, as well as crime fiction of that period, Colin Watson has concluded that, for a 1920s readership, drugs were believed to 'transform the taker, more or less immediately, from a harmless and respected member of society into a monster of guile, violence and depravity',²⁹ qualities, it could be argued, that

²⁷ See Jonathon Foster, *The Death Ray: The Secret Life of Harry Grindell-Matthews* (London: BPR Publishers, 2009).

²⁸ Harold Wimbury, 'Intrigue' in *The Thriller*, 20 September 1930, pp. 267-285 (p. 268).

²⁹ Watson, *Snobbery with Violence*, p. 125.

were also seen as un-English and foreign. James Dampling is revealed as an imposter; the true heir, his elder brother, has been locked away in one of the secret rooms (surprisingly, unnoticed). So the younger Dampling is indeed a ‘monster of guile, violence and depravity’ and his unlawful theft of his brother’s inheritance marks his unfitness to take his place in Parliament and the upper echelons of the class system. Dampling’s unsuitability as an Englishman is further reinforced by the revelation that the German assassin, Hans Konig, is his henchman. By siding with an old enemy, Dampling exposes his traitorous character.

The story is concluded with Mars’s successful apprehension of the villainous Dampling. There is a scene in which the local police take part in a gun battle with the criminals but the Welsh police are all killed without speaking a word. Not only are they silenced, but they are ineffectual in comparison with a Scotland Yard detective. Remote rural Wales, as exemplified by Rock Island, is no longer a locus of innocence. Once a place of safety, the Welsh coast, with its inferior police force, allows drug-smuggling to threaten the purity of England. Its remoteness no longer signals a place of virtue but somewhere that allows the villain to go undetected. Luckily, this is a threat that seemingly can be contained by an English detective as the long arm of the (English) law stretches to the furthest reaches of North Wales.

Drug-smuggling plots were common during this period: for instance, Sax Rohmer’s Fu Manchu series (1913-59) exemplify anxieties about the corrupting influence on the nation’s health from foreign drug-smugglers. Wales, with its perceived remoteness and poorly-policed coastline, provided a prime setting for such fiction. Another such text is L. A. [Leonard Alfred] Knight’s *Deadman’s Bay* (1930). Knight (1895-1977) was born in Surrey but lived in Bridgend, South Wales during the 1920s while working for a petroleum

company, and much of his crime fiction is set in South Wales.³⁰ Similar titles followed: *The Creaking Tree Mystery* (1931) and *Valley of Green Shadows* (1955), titles which hint at the dichotomous relationship English writers have with Wales, a place seen as simultaneously natural and sinister. *Deadman's Bay* is the first of the Jerry Scant series and is set in Pembroke. Essentially a series of thrillers, for the villain of the piece is revealed almost from the start, they follow the adventures of Jerry, a Welsh gypsy. However, naming the series thus is misleading as the texts also feature higher-status Englishmen visiting from elsewhere who pair up with Jerry to solve crimes, and it is these men, rather than Jerry, who provide the narrative voice. In this instance, it is Colonel Bill Warren who is sent by the British Secret Service from his home in Sussex to investigate the smuggling of cocaine, 'a vile drug pouring into this England to undermine the health and reason of it's [*sic*] victims'.³¹ The implication here is that, though being imported via Wales, it is destined only for English citizens. Wales acts as a conduit for the 'vile drug' that threatens the English nation's health and sanity.

The smuggling plot of *Deadman's Bay* necessitates a sparsely populated, isolated setting in order for the crime to go unnoticed. Pembrokeshire, as the furthestmost south-westerly point of Wales, seems suited for this purpose. Its geographical distance from the centres of government and law position it as an 'other' place, one set on the margins. In common with many detective stories of this period, the text is preceded by a plan of the crime scene. Generally these show the layout of the country house in which the crime often occurs – Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) is just one well-known example – but in this instance, Knight prefaces his narrative with a map of Pembrokeshire. Running through it is the ancient road of Via Flandrica, the road laid down by 'the old Flemings',³² who colonised the area, as did the Romans. The colonisation of the area is also reflected in

³⁰ 'Leonard Alfred Knight', in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, ed. Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 420.

³¹ Leonard Alfred Knight, *Deadman's Bay* (London: Sampson Low, 1930), p. 17.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 271.

the Anglicisation of Welsh place-names, Teify for Teifi, for instance, while no mention is made of Pembrokeshire's original Welsh name, Sir Benfro. Warren's initial undercover disguise is that of a man on a 'walking tour',³³ a modern descendent of those eighteenth-century tourists and, as his is the narrative voice, the prefatory map can be taken as his too. Warren can be viewed as, in Mary Louise Pratt's words, a 'seeing-man', a term she describes as 'an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse – he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess'.³⁴ Akin to the previous generations of travel-writers and colonisers who have made their mark on rural, wild Wales, Warren names and contains Pembrokeshire through maps while providing the reader with the experience of armchair tourism through crime fiction.

Wales's difference is also signified by its antiquity, another similarity shared with the Wales described in eighteenth-century travel narratives. Dotted with cromlechs and Druids' groves, the Pembroke of *Deadman's Bay* exists in a prehistoric past. The first clue is a scrap of paper on which is written 'Twrch Trwyth'.³⁵ Warren's response, 'Jackson...[sic] fetch me the *Mabinogion*',³⁶ must surely be one of the most unlikely commands in crime fiction. Perusal of the *Mabinogion* reveals Pembroke harbour as Twrch Trwyth's landing place from Ireland and now a possible site for modern day smugglers. The story of the hunt of Twrch Trwyth, an enchanted wild boar, appears in the *Mabinogion* story, 'How Culhwch won Olwen'. Twrch Trwyth, a fierce beast, is protected by his poisonous bristles. One of the tasks set for Culhwch in order to win Olwen is to retrieve the comb and scissors between the boar's ears, an undertaking completed for him by his cousin King Arthur and his men.³⁷ The

³³ Knight, *Deadman's Bay*, p. 25.

³⁴ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 7.

³⁵ Knight, *Deadman's Bay*, p. 20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21. The *Mabinogion* is a collection of eleven tales, not the work of a single author but found mostly in two medieval manuscripts. These tales are rooted in an older oral tradition and draw on Celtic mythology and Arthurian romance.

³⁷ 'How Culhwch won Olwen' in the *Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 179-213.

smugglers of *Deadman's Bay* also bring in dangerous contraband from Ireland, Twrch Trwyth's native land, continuing ancient Celtic connections. Like Twrch Trwyth's bristles, this cocaine contraband is injurious to the health of those who come into contact with it.

Further research is needed for Warren to go undercover in Pembroke, calling for him to buy 'one or two books on the county, and swot [...] up its history'.³⁸ The second in the Jerry Scant series, *The Creaking Tree Mystery* (1931), also sees an English hero research Wales through literature such as 'Fenton's *Tour in Pembrokeshire*, Owen's *Pembrokeshire*, Geraldus Cambrensis, *The Mabinogion*'.³⁹ However, living Welsh culture and language is absent from Knight's crime fiction, as is any contemporary literature, while ancient texts and history are valorised. There are occasional nods towards a non-English identity; a contemporary of Jerry bears the name 'Jonathan *bach* [Little Jonathan]' to differentiate him from his dour chapel-going brother, also named Jonathan, but these are few. In *Deadman's Bay*, it seems that Welsh culture is best preserved in ancient literature, as seen by Warren's pre-visit research.

This was an idea popularised by Matthew Arnold some decades earlier in his lecture, 'On the Study of Celtic Literature' (1867). This seminal work opens with the author's visit to Llandudno, where he celebrates Welsh cultural identity and Wales as a place 'where the past still lives, where every place has its tradition, every name its poetry, and where the people, the genuine people, still knows this past, this tradition, this poetry, and lives with it, and clings to it'.⁴⁰ Still, this is a culture that should be disseminated through the English language as Arnold insists 'let the Welshman speak English, and if he is an author, let him write English'.⁴¹ Arnold would later be responsible for carrying out the Blue Books' proposals that Welsh children should be educated in English in his capacity as Her Majesty's Inspector of

³⁸ Knight, *Deadman's Bay*, p. 27.

³⁹ Knight, *The Creaking Tree Mystery* (London: Sampson Low, 1931), p. 24.

⁴⁰ Matthew Arnold, 'On the Study of Celtic Literature', in *On the Study of Celtic Literature and other Essays* (London: J. M. Dent, 1910), pp. 13-136 (p. 14).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, (p. 21).

Schools, so was able to put this ideology into action. Despite Wales's living history, its language is to be made extinct, fit only for academic study. As Benjamin Colbert notes in his Introduction to *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland*, 'British peripheries in Wales, Scotland and Ireland were brought together as living museums of an inter-related Celtic heritage by numerous tourists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.⁴² Arnold, it seems, shared views similar to those tourists as he wishes to destroy an aspect of Welsh culture, its language, while preserving it in the aspect of English in order to make it a fit subject to study. One can see a faint, gossamer-like line that trails from the rural idealisation of eighteenth-century travel narratives to mystery fiction that has echoes of both the Blue Books and the Arnoldian insistence on an English education, to 1920s imperial thrillers that silence the Welsh language and present the Welsh countryside as a living folk museum.

I would like to suggest another reason for the choice of Pembroke as a setting in *Deadman's Bay*, one which also alludes to Wales's past but, in this instance, its revolutionary past. Milford Haven was the landing site of the Pembroke-born Henry VII (Harri Tudur), who defeated Richard III to become the only 'Welsh' king of England in 1485.⁴³ Moreover, in 1797, Fishguard was invaded by French troops in what has since become known as the 'last invasion of Britain'.⁴⁴ The French invasion was supposed to be a two-pronged affair, with other troops destined to land in Ireland but this was prevented by poor weather. The objective was to support Irish nationalists and both invasions were made with the aim of overthrowing current English rule and government. The Republic of Ireland had, of course, gained independence before the publication of *Deadman's Bay*. So, while the passage of cocaine from Ireland to Wales is reminiscent of the journey Twrch Trwyth takes in the *Mabinogion*, this connection between Ireland and Wales also hints darkly at past and present revolutionary

⁴² Benjamin Colbert, 'Introduction', in *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Benjamin Colbert (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1-12 (p. 4).

⁴³ John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), p. 212.

⁴⁴ John S. Kinross, *Fishguard Fiasco: An Account of the Last Invasion of Britain* (1974, Herefordshire: Logaston Press, 2007).

zeal and a further division of Britain through demands for Home Rule. Setting these fears within the pages of English crime fiction gives the opportunity for the fictional English detective to travel to Wales to plug up such leaks in the Welsh coastline.

Ideologically, one can see why it is preferable to have an English detective in these circumstances. Moreover, it seems that a Welsh detective would be a statistical impossibility in this text as it depicts a countryside that is seemingly devoid of the native Welsh. The prologue is at pains to point out that this is a ‘delectable piece of land known as “Little England Beyond Wales”’.⁴⁵ The second in the series, *The Creaking Tree Mystery*, elucidates further, stating that Pembrokeshire:

supports the two races, the English and the Welsh. South of a line drawn from Narberth to Haverfordwest and Dale the inhabitants are as English as those who live, say, in Gloucester. They speak no Welsh and cannot produce the Celtic double L. To the north of this line are the Welsh, and very old and true Welsh at that. In some of the more remote farms in the hill districts are to be found men and women who speak no English.⁴⁶

The drug-smugglers pose as an English film company who have set up house in Pembroke. True to W. H. Auden’s dictum that the detective novel should focus on an isolated group,⁴⁷ Knight has transported an English country house and its inhabitants into the Welsh countryside, rather than use its native people. As mentioned previously, Jerry Scant does help Warren solve the crime, but he, like the few Welsh characters that emerge within the narrative, is of a lower status. Between these pages the Welsh are represented by the *gwerin* [folk]: farmers, fishermen and publicans. Rather than acknowledge the possibility of a Welsh middle-class, Knight has brought in the middle-class from elsewhere.

Warren and Henry Todd of Showell Styles’s *Traitor’s Mountain*, discussed later in this chapter, both enter Wales by being washed ashore. Warren fakes his own death then crawls ashore in order to go undercover, whilst Todd is thrown overboard from a ship, only to

⁴⁵ Knight, *Deadman’s Bay*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Knight, *The Creaking Tree Mystery*, p. 30.

⁴⁷ W. H. Auden, ‘The Guilty Vicarage’, in *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 147-158.

arrive safely on shore in a discarded crate. Similarly, Detective Mars of 'Intrigue' is rowed to an island which is immediately cut off from the outside world. Not only does this give the impression of Wales as a separate country, one which has a physical boundary that needs to be crossed, but that it is a perilous crossing. Wales is no longer attached to England but is remote and, being cut off from civilisation, is possibly savage. Like Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the English detective arrives exiled from his own kind, though in the case of the detective, not in shame but in order that he may work undercover. Frances A. Yates has suggested that John Dee, of Welsh heritage and known for his roles as alchemist, mathematician, astrologer and adviser to Elizabeth I, was a model for Prospero by drawing attention to the parallels between them.⁴⁸ But for modern crime writers the detective/Prospero figure is most definitely an Englishman. Reflecting this, each arrives with his own sense of privileged ownership and expects unquestioning loyalty from the natives, only to return home in triumph once the task is completed. And, like Prospero, the visiting detective can commandeer a native guide. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has named this type of colonised subject the 'native informant', one who is denied a voice through 'foreclosure'.⁴⁹ He is given a space within the text but is denied 'access to the position of narrator'.⁵⁰ For, in the instance of *Deadman's Bay*, it is the English Warren who is central to the narrative, while the Welsh speak usually in response to his questioning.

The detective's travel into an almost empty landscape permits him to interrogate the native people at will. Obviously, this is a useful quality for one investigating a crime but it also highlights a sense of innate English superiority. Once again, this may be said to have its roots in earlier travel writing; George Borrow's *Wild Wales* (1862) includes encounters with the native Welsh, whom Borrow interrogates on their knowledge of Welsh language and

⁴⁸ Frances A. Yates, *Theatre of the World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), p. 171.

⁴⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

literature, marital status, religious belief and family background – none of whom appears to question his right to do so.⁵¹ Not long after the publication of *Wild Wales*, Amy Dillwyn saw fit to satirise this English tendency in her hybrid crime narrative, *A Burglary or 'Unconscious Influence'* (1883). In Dillwyn's novel, the English visitors to Llwyn-yr-Allt, one of whom has been robbed of her jewellery, go to a cottage in order to interrogate the owner who is suspected of being the burglar. The owner's wife is 'evidently a thorough slattern, unwashed, unkempt, and with dishevelled hair',⁵² and here there are echoes of the Blue Books' condemnation of Welsh womanhood. Nonetheless, this 'slattern' elicits sympathy from her fellow Welshwoman, Imogen, resident of Llwyn-yr-Allt, for, as she remarks, '[p]oor people are one's fellow-creatures after all, and it seems rather a shame to go and bully them in their homes like that, when they can't get away from one'.⁵³ This 'bullying' of the lower orders continues in English-authored crime fiction. Colin Watson describes how, in the Bulldog Drummond novels, 'none of Drummond's companions ever questions the rightness of his decisions or fails to carry out his orders',⁵⁴ and *Deadman's Bay*, too, depicts a world in which the English exercise an automatic right to rule without question. Warren's English identity gives him the authority to demand that the people of Pembrokeshire risk their lives in his service. In this manner, Pembroke's Welsh identity is diminished, as it becomes subject to English rule.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that Jerry Scant's prominence within the text foregrounds Welsh identity in a way that has been missing from English-authored crime fiction previously. His first appearance within the narrative sees him described as 'Rogue, and Nature's gentleman'.⁵⁵ Although of a lower class than Warren, Jerry frequently refers to

⁵¹ George Borrow, *Wild Wales: Its People, Language, and Scenery* (London: John Murray, 1868).

⁵² Amy Dillwyn, *A Burglary or 'Unconscious Influence'* (1883; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2009), p. 93. Chapter II will give a more detailed analysis of Dillwyn's novel.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵⁴ Watson, *Snobbery With Violence*, p. 70.

⁵⁵ Knight, *Deadman's Bay*, p. 2.

Warren as ‘pard’[ner],⁵⁶ and the latter, towards the close of the novel, addresses Jerry likewise, levelling the class disparity between them. Jerry’s empathy with his surroundings also advances him from potential villainous gypsy to a noble savage. Jerry’s gypsy heritage provides Warren with the knowledge of the surrounding countryside necessary to track and prevent the villains from committing their crime; Warren frequently emphasises Jerry’s superior woodsman’s skills and how the mystery would have remained unsolved without his help. Stephen Knight suggests James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) as a progenitor for early American crime fiction where an independent proto-detective utilises native tracking skills but there is a similar influence in the English-authored *Deadman’s Bay*. Warren, the frontiersman in an alien landscape, is aided by a native tracker, Jerry, in order to hunt criminals together.⁵⁷ Jerry’s life as a gypsy and poacher, rather than automatically casting him in the role of a villain, provides him with the independence necessary for the detective figure of this era; as Heather Worthington points out, police officers were initially drawn from the lower classes.⁵⁸ This could be problematic in such a hierarchical genre as crime fiction so one sees the emergence of a higher-status gifted amateur or a private professional. Like the upper-middle class fictional detectives of this time, of whom Warren is an exemplar, Jerry is not in such lowly employment as the police force. Furthermore, his lack of family and regular employment free him to detect crime. Similarly, though Warren is employed by a government agency, his undercover work in Pembroke isolates him from recognised authority. Of independent means through an inheritance, Warren possesses an air of gentlemanly amateurism, similar to the aforementioned Charles Brinkley of *Matt*; Warren works for his country from patriotic duty rather than financial necessity.

⁵⁶ This term is also reminiscent of Westerns, a genre which, like crime fiction, seeks to contain and punish wrongdoers within its strict confines and which was an inspiration for later hardboiled crime fiction.

⁵⁷ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 21. American culture has had a similar influence on Welsh-authored crime fiction; this is examined in more detail in Chapter IV.

⁵⁸ Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 20.

It is unusual that Jerry is not part of a gypsy community. As the narrative voice tells us, ‘Jerry Scant was one of the solitary ones, an outlier from the tribe’.⁵⁹ Again, the use of one individual from a community is a useful literary device that continues the idea of a sparsely populated Wales. In this manner, Wales is kept as a wilderness. It is also useful in making the natives tractable. A band of gypsies would outnumber Warren and suggest a certain amount of autonomous strength. By portraying one solitary ‘outlier’, Jerry stands in for all of his tribe while lacking the power of a community. Furthermore, Jerry’s relationship with Warren echoes previous pairings like Prospero and Caliban, Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday, or the Lone Ranger and Tonto, where native skills are employed for the survival of the superior incomer.

Another reason for Jerry’s pairing with the upper-class Warren is explained through an examination of Jerry’s dialect. Not only is he one of Nature’s gentlemen, but his speech reveals him to be an honorary Englishman, too. Despite the fact that he ‘had just a faint trace of Scottish accent underlying the Pembrokeshire accent’,⁶⁰ the apparent result of his peripatetic life, Jerry’s reported speech also contains an element of English working-class caricature. During an encounter with the actors of the film company, Jerry asks them to ‘buy a collar stud, guv’nor, and I’ll tell ye the way’.⁶¹ This has echoes of the Welsh working-class speech in Buchanan’s *Matt* where ‘ye’ is also commonly used. Rather than replicating Welsh accents, there appears to be a generic anglicised mode of speech that stands in for all rural working-class characters, regardless of whence they originate. *Deadman’s Bay* does contain the occasional ‘look you’, a favoured shorthand for many writers hoping to mimic Welsh speech patterns.⁶² Jerry, however, unlike other Welsh characters in *Deadman’s Bay*, displays no such patterns of Welsh in his speech and is effectively made English.

⁵⁹ Knight, *Deadman’s Bay*, p. 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

In Jerry, Warren finds, to his surprise, that ‘where I expected simplicity I had discovered subtlety. His was one of the first-class brains which, as well as seeing the broad outlines of things, grasped the details also’.⁶³ As Jerry’s accent belies his national identity, so elements of his speech appear to refute this subtle intelligence. He frequently lapses into boasts which are always cut short by his English partner – a pattern that is repeated throughout the series. For instance, on being told of Warren’s narrow escape, Jerry exclaims, ‘I bet that nigger was frightened! I’ll lay a flask of rum to a nettle he was frightened. I’ll lay two flasks of rum to a nettle he was frightened. I’ll lay-’ only to be interrupted by Warren’s terse ‘Quite right’.⁶⁴ Jerry’s prolixity is cut through by the cooler Warren and reveals Jerry as excitable and verbose, a common stereotype of the Welsh. In spite of Jerry’s superior woodsman’s skills and subtle intelligence, occasionally he oversteps the mark and Warren has to reinstate the old social standing thus:

Then I got on to my hind legs. He might be the one and only Jerry Scant. He might be as strong as Beelzebub himself. He might be a pro tem. partner with special powers and prerogatives. But I would be hanged if he thought he was head cook and bottle washer. I talked him up and down in his own vernacular. I let him have it, as the saying is, with both hands.⁶⁵

Status may be set aside in order to solve crime but while the native guide may possess superior skills, he must never forget his natural inferiority to the middle-class Englishman.

Warren is a product of the Empire who has had a ‘surfeit of adventures during the war [...] and a hectic year of hide and seek played with the inscrutable and fanatical Chinese’.⁶⁶ Tellingly, a dangerous spying mission is metaphorically portrayed as a child’s game. Sport is a common metaphor in imperialist crime narratives; E. W. Hornung’s gentleman-thief, Raffles (1899-1909), is a superb cricketer, for example. These crime narratives are often influenced by earlier Victorian discourses such as Henry Newbolt’s ‘Vitaī Lampada’ (1897)

⁶³ Knight, *Deadman’s Bay*, p. 105.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

which depicts the lessons learned from school cricket matches being played out on the battlefield.⁶⁷ Similarly, Rudyard Kipling's school-stories in *Stalky & Co.* (1899) see school as preparation for a life in the British army serving in India.⁶⁸ Lord Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (1908) also espoused physical activity, specifically camping and woodcraft, in order to educate young boys in citizenship and as a preparation for serving the Empire. In fact, the scouting movement sprang from Baden-Powell's experience of the Boer War. Furthermore, *Scouting for Boys* contains a chapter on tracking skills which echoes the language of crime fiction: scouts are encouraged to observe small details and to look for clues.⁶⁹ Such jingoistic ideology permeates *Deadman's Bay* and similar imperial thrillers discussed in this chapter. This type of narrative familiarises the reader with the idea of English fair-play and physical fitness whilst associating colonial expansionism with a harmless pursuit like sport. Boy's Own adventure stories, the little brother to the imperial thriller, if you will, also perpetuated this kind of dogma, hints of which emerge in *Deadman's Bay*. Warren's masculinity is a product of his Englishness, for 'campaigning, hunting, and Secret Service work under all conditions had hardened me to the utmost rigours. I was fit, still on the right side of forty, and had all the zest of a boy for adventure'.⁷⁰ Sending such a fine specimen of the imperial male to Wales hints at colonial enterprise. I have already discussed how Wales is metaphorically reimagined as an island cut off from a sophisticated outside world. Sending a bluff imperial detective there also suggests that Wales is a dark continent in need of civilisation.

By contrast, the foreigners within the film company are also undeniably masculine but theirs is a corrupted, unnatural masculinity. The actor, El Draco, is described as 'one of those strongly masculine men with effeminate good looks', while the African chauffeur, who

⁶⁷ Sir Henry Newbolt, 'Vitaï Lampada', in *The Victorians: an Anthology of Poetry and Poetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 1012.

⁶⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *Stalky & Co.* (1899; London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1965).

⁶⁹ Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* (1908, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷⁰ Knight, *Deadman's Bay*, p. 122.

remains nameless, being referred to as ‘the Nubian’⁷¹ by Warren or ‘the nigger’ by Jerry,⁷² possesses an inhuman, unnatural strength. This xenophobic discourse serves to ‘other’ those from elsewhere, while their trade in drugs signals their threat to national purity. They are led by an Englishman, Antrobus, but his barking laugh, said to resemble a fox cry,⁷³ dehumanises him. Antrobus wears purple-lensed glasses which hints at a *fin-de-siècle* degenerate aesthetic and suggests that, unlike Warren and Jerry, he is not a figure of healthy masculinity. Luckily, the villain and his henchmen are killed off, one through the ingestion of drugs, the others through the intervention of Warren and Jerry. The local police are all but invisible during the final battle, as in Wimbury’s ‘Intrigue’. While England is made safe, it is due to the actions of a middle-class Englishman and his side-kick rather than a Welsh police force. The novel ends with Jerry looking steadily at Warren with his ‘brown dog-like eyes’ while they part on a handshake.⁷⁴ Even as they part, the reader is left in no doubt as to Jerry’s fidelity to his English superior.

Nevertheless, some English-authored crime texts do display a degree of sympathy with Wales. Threats to England are still the primary concern but Wales is not just a conduit for danger but an entity that also requires protection from harm, like its sister country. One such crime text, Showell Styles’s *Traitor’s Mountain* (1946), is set in the mountains of North Wales. Born in Birmingham, Frank Showell Styles (1908-2005) spent his holidays as a schoolboy in North Wales and later set most of his work there. Also writing under the names Glyn Carr and C. L. Inker, he published work that includes historical novels; children’s fiction, especially stories which draw on ancient Welsh tales; and non-fiction – often on the

⁷¹ Knight, *Deadman’s Bay*, p. 39.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

subject of mountain climbing in Snowdonia.⁷⁵ His adoption of the Welsh name Glyn as a pen-name is symptomatic of his empathy with Wales. *Traitor's Mountain* is set mostly in Tryfan, a mountain in Snowdonia which is popular with climbers. Although this is the first of his Sir Abercrombie Lewker series, Sir Lewker – whose nickname, 'Filthy', puns on the expression 'filthy lucre' – only takes a supporting role in the novel. A thriller, set in 1941 during the heaviest bombing of Britain, the narrative is divided into three books: 'England', 'Egypt', and 'Wales'. The novel follows Henry Todd as he is inducted by a Welsh girl, Myfanwy Hughes, into an underground Column Six whose purpose is to trace Nazi Fifth Columnists in Britain and abroad who threaten the security of wartime Britain.

The narrative clearly signposts an image of Wales back to its travel-writing roots, the imperial thriller's precursor. In his description of Tryfan's 'savage' North Ridge, Henry Todd muses on how 'a Victorian traveller [...] would have been vastly relieved when the coach rocked and bucketed through the narrow gateway of the mountains and began the long descent of the Nant Francon to the fields and trees of tamer, lower lands'.⁷⁶ Savagery notwithstanding, this idea of rural Wales is one which puts it on the periphery of the war. During bombing raids, though 'the sirens sent their thin, weird ululations along the sleeping coasts and the thunder of the guns and bombs from Liverpool and Manchester shook the windows',⁷⁷ the Welsh countryside remains untouched. Initially, Todd's presence in the countryside is explained as a rest-cure, which is unquestioned by the local people. Snowdonia, as in earlier-eighteenth century narratives, is a place of refuge and healing, for Todd is not alone in seeking sanctuary in North Wales. Later in the narrative, Todd goes undercover at a hill farm which also houses two evacuees. Safe from the raids on their Birmingham home, these evacuees soon become 'uncannily wise in such matters as lambing,

⁷⁵Showell Styles is not alone in setting fiction in the Welsh mountains. Other such works include Catherine Hutton's *The Welsh Mountaineer: a Novel* (1817) and the first of Gwen Moffat's Melinda Pink crime series, *Lady with a Cool Eye* (1973), which will be examined in Chapter V.

⁷⁶Showell Styles, *Traitor's Mountain* (London: Selwyn and Blount Ltd., 1946), pp. 135-6.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 28.

shearing, the making of butter and hay and the killing of fowl. They rattled away in Welsh or English with equal fluency, and to see them descend a steep of rocks and heather at speed sent one's thoughts to splints and bandages'.⁷⁸ Far from the metropolis, Todd regains his health and the evacuees become children of nature, who roam the countryside freely. Though in reality parts of the Welsh countryside did remain untouched by war – for farming was a reserved occupation, necessary to feed the nation – this depiction ignores the fact that Welsh ports, Swansea in particular, were also heavily bombed in 1941, while the industrialised South Wales coalfields kept working to aid the war effort. *Traitor's Mountain* presents a timeless rural Wales that seems to act as a counterpoint to modernity, a common thread through narratives about Wales. In contrast, the scenes set in English ports, Liverpool and London, depict the city as a place of danger, under attack from air raids and populated by 'blue-chinned seamen, squat Chinese, jabbering Lascars, blousy women, Jews, and a crowd of shabby, cheerful people', notably mostly non-British subjects, amongst whom Henry Todd feels 'lost and miserable'.⁷⁹ The novel's imagined Wales not only acts as a counterpoint to the alienation of the urban ports but as a curative to the horrors and, it could be argued, the 'crime' of war.

As mentioned earlier, the English Todd enters Wales by being washed ashore and is nursed back to health by Myfanwy. So far, this seems to follow the paradigms set by previous writers: an Englishman arrives in a rural, sparsely populated Wales and soon finds himself investigating crime. However, Styles's text differs somewhat from previous fictions. Wales is not merely a stage set or a *tabula rasa* but is, initially at least, an inclusive part of British identity. Todd is recruited by Myfanwy, rather than being sent to investigate by a distant authority, so Wales becomes an active part of the war effort to some degree. Unlike the earlier crime narratives, which saw Wales being invaded by English authority in order to

⁷⁸ Styles, *Traitor's Mountain*, p. 137.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

protect the English nation, Wales is now worth defending in its own right. Early on in the novel, Gideon Hazel, known as 'The Poet', who is Myfanwy's fellow Column Six compatriot, gestures towards Tryfan and states, '[this] is what I am fighting for'.⁸⁰ The discourses surrounding the English nation, which suggest that it is a cause worth dying for, are extended to the Welsh countryside as Wales becomes a place to protect against alien invasion. In this text, Britain goes some way to being represented as a cohesive entity, one which includes Wales.

Though the different countries are separated by the narrative structure, visions of Wales permeate the Egyptian section, so potent is its power. While imprisoned in an Egyptian catacomb, Henry has vision of Tryfan and its surroundings: 'a deep valley flecked with cloud shadows on pasture-green and lake-blue, a challenging pointed peak thrusting against the sky from a wall of mountains'.⁸¹ Todd's vision of Wales, a moment of geopiety⁸² that spiritually bonds him to the landscape, acts as an ideal to fight for. As in *Deadman's Bay*, the landscape of *Traitor's Mountain* is suggestive of a Welsh prehistoric past. Back in Wales, gazing at the Ogwen vale at dusk, Todd muses on 'the ancient hills of Wales' and finds himself 'remembering legends older than history which had their origin in this rugged land of Snowdon, Arthur and Merlin, Idwal and Llewellyn, vague shapes linking fairyland with history'.⁸³ This connects to another strand of late-nineteenth century writing: the re-writing of Arthurian legend. In his *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling and Conan Doyle*, Robert Fraser points out how, in the later part of the nineteenth century, 'enthusiasm for Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table amounted to almost a craze'⁸⁴ and examines

⁸⁰ Styles, *Traitor's Mountain*, p. 32.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁸² Geopiety is a term coined by John Kirtland Wright in *Human Nature in Geography: Fourteen Papers, 1925-1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966) to express the 'pious emotion evoked by the wonder and terror of the earth in all its diversity'. (p. 250)

⁸³ Styles, *Traitor's Mountain*, p. 165.

⁸⁴ Robert Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling and Conan Doyle* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), p. 7.

how these myths came to influence the Victorian Quest Romance. He posits that these Victorian re-workings, also referred to as ‘travel romance’ and ‘adventure romance’,⁸⁵ were an inspiration for imperial writers such as Kipling. I mentioned briefly the influence Victorian discourses, like Kipling’s school stories, had upon imperial thrillers. Here, in *Traitor’s Mountain*, the reader can still catch the echoes of Victorian fictions which combine the twin traces of ‘travel’ and ‘adventure’ and which perpetuated the idea of the ‘rightness’ of British imperial expansionism. The hints of a Christian quest are further reinforced by Todd’s description of Mehram, a spy and Nazi collaborator in Egypt who, ‘[w]ith his height and his deep voice [...] was a commanding figure, fit to lead the Faithful in some great battle against the Unbelievers’,⁸⁶ reminding us of the medieval Crusades against Muslim domination in the Middle East and Europe. Like *Deadman’s Bay* before it, Todd’s gaze interprets a Welsh landscape that can only be described in terms of its picturesque past, one which precludes the possibility of any vibrant present but one which includes Wales in a new crusade against Nazi infiltration. Wales, it appears, is included in a unified British identity during wartime, to campaign against crime and protect the nation from invasion.

Styles’s idealised Wales is one that does include vestiges of a native culture, unlike Wimbury’s ‘Intrigue’ and Knight’s *Deadman’s Bay*. Welsh words and phrases, such as ‘*cwm*’⁸⁷ [valley] and ‘*myn diaw*’ [*sic*]⁸⁸ [by the Devil!] appear in the text, their italicisation marking their difference, but without gloss. This may appear to foreground the Welsh language. However, in their essay, ‘Raids on the Articulate: Code-Switching, Style Shifting and Post-Colonial Writing’, Elizabeth Gordon and Mark Williams describe this scattering of second language words and phrases as ‘extrinsic code-mixing’. They go on to explain how

⁸⁵ Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance*, p.7-8.

⁸⁶ Styles, *Traitor’s Mountain*, p. 79.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

occasional use of another language provides ‘local colour’⁸⁹ and that ‘none of these phrases is essential to the understanding of the text – they are exclamations, forms of address or tags where the meanings can be adduced from the context or are inessential to an understanding of the text’.⁹⁰ Although untranslated, these Welsh words do not detract from a reading of *Traitor’s Mountain*, so their meaning is unimportant and serve only to provide local colour while heightening Welsh cultural difference and ‘otherness’.

Unlike Jerry Scant’s homogenised working-class accent, which appears on the page as a strange hybrid of West Country and Cockney speech patterns, the speech of the local people of Tryfan in Styles’ novel is an accented English which reflects the influence of their native Welsh language. For example, on enquiring after Lewker at a local inn, Todd is told that ‘he iss in num-ber fife’.⁹¹ Here the text attempts to reproduce the North Walian voice without caricaturing its speech patterns, although sometimes coming close to doing so. However, accent is also a marker of class, for it is only the working-class chambermaids, barmaids and farmers who talk in this manner. While the female protagonist and love-interest of *Traitor’s Mountain*, Myfanwy Hughes, has a voice that is ‘rather low and sing-song-y’,⁹² her reported speech is reflective of the English middle-classes. This is indicative of her apparent equality with Todd, since in order for her to act as a partner or a Girl Friday to Todd, Myfanwy requires a degree of anglicisation.

Myfanwy Hughes is of some importance within the text; she becomes the focus of Todd’s affections not merely through her looks but because of her place within Column Six and, possibly, due to her apparent class equality. She has a remarkable degree of agency, disappearing off alone to go on dangerous missions and, like Jerry, Myfanwy has skills that are intrinsic to the success of the mission. When she is captured along with Todd, her sailing

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Gordon and Mark Williams, ‘Raids on the Articulate: Code-Switching, Style Shifting and Post-Colonial Writing’, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 33:2 (1998), 75-96 (p. 80).

⁹⁰ Gordon and Williams, ‘Raids on the Articulate’, p. 81.

⁹¹ Styles, *Traitor’s Mountain*, p. 129.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

expertise and practicality facilitate their escape from Egypt. Like many women in imperial thrillers before her, Myfanwy displays pluck. She cuts an androgynous figure who has a taste for beer and whose ability to make sails from scraps of cloth and abandoned rope aids their escape. Nonetheless, Myfanwy should not be considered a wholly feminist figure, for her ability to move easily in the male world of espionage is the result of her being given honorary male status. In this manner, Todd is provided with a love interest, but one which does not threaten the homosocial bond he enjoys with the other male characters in the text. Myfanwy's boyish traits help keep the narrative within the bounds of an imperialist 'Boys' Own' adventure.

Column Six members, such as Myfanwy, frequently travel away from the idyllic Tryfan, as the threats to the newly inclusive British nation come in via English port cities: London and Liverpool. It seems at first that, unlike in earlier crime narratives, the Welsh coastline is secure. Still, while the coastline may now have had its leaks plugged up, the final section of the novel reveals that information is being passed to the Nazis through Wales and that 'the leakage must somewhere cross the line of mountains'.⁹³ As in previous thrillers, the villain is an Englishman who is collaborating with the enemy; Tryfan's peak has been used as a hiding place for a radio transmitter which sends information to an 'enemy submarine base on a reef off the south-west coast of Ireland'.⁹⁴ And again, as in *Deadman's Bay*, there are connections between a shadowy Ireland and Wales. Ireland remained neutral during the Second World War and some Welsh nationalists, like Saunders Lewis, were sympathetic to this stance. It appears that no matter how secure it seems, Wales is suspected of providing a point of entry to those wishing harm to England. The novel ends with the capture or death of the Nazi Fifth Columnists. There is little doubt that order is restored when the Welsh Myfanwy says of the death of the leading Fifth Columnist, "[w]hatever he was, whatever he

⁹³ Styles, *Traitor's Mountain*, p. 137.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

believed in, he was on the side of Wrong. As far as England's concerned, he's better dead."⁹⁵

Ultimately, despite the apparent wartime cohesion of Britain, once the villain has been apprehended and the crime solved, it is England, rather than her sister nation, that is the concern in these thrillers.

So far, I have examined crime in rural representations of Wales. Yet eighteenth-century travel writing also casts its shadow over urban crime fiction and I would like to examine briefly how Romantic and Victorian discourses influence representations of Welsh city spaces. *Once to Tiger Bay* (1929) by W. Townend is such a crime narrative. Tiger Bay was situated near to Cardiff's docklands and emerged from the earlier sailortown which catered to visiting seamen after the expansion of the port in the 1850s. Soon, many of these seamen settled in Cardiff and married Welsh women. The area became famous as an early example of multiculturalism but has since been demolished in the 1950s and '60s by well-meaning, if short-sighted, town planners. However, fictional Tiger Bay, like its imagined rural counterpart, seems barren of native Welsh and acts as a clean page onto which are projected the anxieties of the English imagination.

W. [William] Townend (1881-1962) wrote mostly sea-voyage adventure stories but is probably better known as a friend of P. G. Wodehouse since their schooldays at Dulwich College; their correspondence has since been published as *Performing Flea* (1953).⁹⁶ Townend was not a successful novelist, but the ever-loyal Wodehouse waited until after his friend's death to admit to fellow writer, Tom Sharpe, that he found Townend's writing 'frightfully dull'.⁹⁷ Still, Townend had served on board ship and it was those experiences he drew on when writing his adventure stories. *Once to Tiger Bay* (1929) is a mystery novel that sees its protagonist, Norman Pentland Durwen, or Pen as he is more commonly known, try to

⁹⁵ Styles, *Traitor's Mountain*, p. 190.

⁹⁶ Incidentally, the hardboiled crime writer, Raymond Chandler, also attended Dulwich College but started his education the year that Townend and Wodehouse left.

⁹⁷ Robert McCrum, *Wodehouse: A Life* (London: Viking, 2004), p. 406.

uncover the secret behind his father's disappearance and it has much in common with the imperial thrillers of its time. Pen epitomises the qualities of the English imperial male: healthy, pure, quick with his fists and devoted to his mother. Pen sees foreignness as a threat to civilised society; as he declares, 'English will take one anywhere. Encourage the study of foreign languages and what happens? First thing you know, you'll have all these dago people and squareheads giving up learning our language and expecting us to learn theirs!'⁹⁸ Reading *Once to Tiger Bay*, one wonders if such statements are actually proof of a subtle irony on Townend's part. However, such imperial racism peppers the text until the reader can only conclude that, rather than parodying Pen's priggishness, Townend is writing to an accepted type of the time, one which saw English identity as innately superior.

Cardiff's Tiger Bay provides only a temporary setting within this thriller but its treatment speaks volumes about imperial attitudes to non-British subjects. The novel has a preface that conflates Tiger Bay with sex and violence. Tiger Bay was often equated with squalid behaviour and low morals, especially in the contemporaneous press.⁹⁹ However, while sex remains a concern for all writers setting fiction in Tiger Bay, Welsh writers were often more sympathetic, especially towards depictions of the immigrant men who settled there.¹⁰⁰ For English writers, the threat of inter-racial relationships persists as a constant. This lurking fear is further emphasised by the preface that replicates the storytelling frame narrative of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), as the tale appears to be related on board ship. *Once to Tiger Bay* opens with the following dialogue:

"Give 'em blood," said the second engineer.
"Give 'em sex," said the mate.

⁹⁸ W. Townend, *Once to Tiger Bay* (London: Herbert Jenkins, Ltd, 1929), p. 121.

⁹⁹ For a more detailed explanation, see Ross Cameron, "'The most colourful extravaganza in the world': images of Tiger Bay, 1845–1970", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 3/12, 59–90 (62).

¹⁰⁰ For a fuller account of Tiger Bay-set crime fiction, see my essay, 'Corralling Crime in Cardiff's Tiger Bay', in *Crime Fiction in the City: Capital Crimes*, eds. Lucy Andrew and Catherine Phelps (Cardiff: University Wales Press, 2013).

*“Why not tell ‘em that yarn about Mother Jubilee, of Bute Street,” said the chief, “and the beachcomber.”*¹⁰¹

This stereotyped view of Tiger Bay also appears to be shared by the publisher since the text is preceded by a note titled ‘What this story is about’ which ends, ‘[t]his is a book about real men and women, a book which goes to the heart of things’.¹⁰² For Townend and his publisher, then, Tiger Bay is the dark heart of Wales, an uncivilised, exotic place. The title of the text, with its echo of ‘once upon a time’, immediately alerts the reader to the mythologised status of the area.¹⁰³

Once onshore, Pen travels into Butetown: ‘Cardiff was Wales, of course: Cardiff, Bute Street, with its little, queer, ugly shops, sailortown, Tiger Bay, pubs, loneliness, pawnbrokers, harlots, out-of-work seamen, shuffling Asiatics, half-caste children’.¹⁰⁴ While this does recognise Tiger Bay’s multicultural nature, it silences the Welsh culture that thrived alongside its immigrant community. In fact, its only Welsh character, Captain Paul Fuller, has abandoned his Welsh identity and has chosen to be American instead. Confusingly, this choice was precipitated by his ill-treatment at the hands of another Captain, an Englishman. Rather than recognising a Welsh identity that could form itself in opposition to English identity, Townend instead implies that the Welshman has to align himself with a revolutionary New World. However, there is still a covert fear surrounding England’s Welsh neighbours as when in conversation Fuller declares: ““To hell with the bloody English! The same as the rest of ‘em!””, to which a fellow English seaman replies ironically, “But never to hell with the bloody Welsh!”¹⁰⁵ revealing anxieties about the Welsh and their propensity for treasonous thought.

¹⁰¹ Townend, *Once to Tiger Bay*, p. 7. Italics in the original.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, flyleaf.

¹⁰³ Mythmaking surrounding the area is reflected in a later crime novel with a similar title: J. M. Walsh’s *Once in Tiger Bay* (1948).

¹⁰⁴ Townend, *Once to Tiger Bay*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

In what becomes a recurrent pattern for later crime fiction writers, Townend's Tiger Bay is populated by the stereotypes found in the contemporaneous local press and memoirs. Here, there are hints of the real crime contained within the text. Mother Jubilee exclaims to Pen, '[a] great place, Cardiff! Cosmopolitan, you might call it. A home from home for all Chinks, Dagoes, Blacks and Asiatics'.¹⁰⁶ Despite the celebratory tone, the derogatory language hints at darker fears. While men of other races are frequently referred to, none is depicted as characters in Townend's Tiger Bay. The real fear is the threat to women's purity. Pen displays an almost pathological dislike of sex. He remembers a visit to another port town during his early career at sea where:

wretched girls, drunk and naked, made drunk through the generosity of the dance hall's patrons, danced the can-can before a howling cosmopolitan audience of men. The performance, apparently enjoyed to the full by everyone else, had been the most horrible experience of Pen's life [...] All his impressions of the sordid sex traffic of the seaports had been based on this one incident: the nausea that he felt then came back to him now.¹⁰⁷

Ports are associated with a sickening depravity and their women, or as Pen puts it, 'harlots', are immediately reduced to the single role of prostitute by dint of residency. While this may be the last dying resonances of the Blue Books and their views of Welsh womanhood, the fears here also draw on eugenicist anxieties. In the instance of Cardiff's Tiger Bay,¹⁰⁸ Neil Evans points out in 'Regulating the Reserve Army' that though the 'need and a lack of alternative jobs or business activity drew people into prostitution and procuring, there is no evidence of widespread involvement: on the contrary the evidence points to [the residents'] respectability'.¹⁰⁹ Despite this, Tiger Bay women in the novel are deemed to be immoral and dangerous: Welsh women, by mixing with and marrying immigrant men, give birth to the

¹⁰⁶ Townend, *Once to Tiger Bay*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁸ This was a name shared by other 'sailortowns' but Cardiff's Tiger Bay is the one which remains in popular memory.

¹⁰⁹ Neil Evans, 'Regulating the Reserve Army: Arabs, Blacks and the Local State in Cardiff, 1919–45', in *Race and Labour in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Kenneth Lunn (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1985), pp. 68–115, (pp. 72–3).

‘half-caste children’ mentioned at the start of the novel. This was perceived as a real threat at the time. In 1929, the Chief Constable of Cardiff, James Wilson, called for anti-miscegenation laws which would have criminalised such relationships and their offspring.¹¹⁰ Racial purity and the sexual threat posed by the racial ‘other’ plays a great part in thrillers of this period, such as the veiled threat of the white-slave trade in the aforementioned Sax Rohmer’s Fu Manchu novels. So, not only does the coastline of Wales allow the ingress of immigrants, its women threaten the racial purity of the nation by having relationships with non-white men.

The novel concludes with the revelation that Pen’s father had fallen into disgrace, including illegal gun-running to England’s enemies and culminating in the father’s murder of his partner in crime. Still, his father redeems himself by killing Captain Poolis, Pen’s adversary, who has threatened his mother with eviction from the beloved family home on the east coast of England. Pen’s father then does the honourable thing and drowns himself in one of Cardiff’s docks. Just as the port allows entry to those who threaten the safety of the nation, such as immigrants and drug-smugglers, the father’s self-immolation in its depths speaks of a natural retribution. Pen’s saintly mother now may no longer fear the improper advances of Captain Poolis or the return of her depraved husband. English women are safe once again to live virtuous lives, unlike their Welsh counterparts.

So, it appears that for English crime writers of this early period, no matter how great their sympathy for Wales and Welsh culture, there are hints of harboured, covert fears about the reliability of the nation. As Styles’s title, *Traitor’s Mountain*, suggests, there are always underlying anxieties about the loyalty of the Welsh towards the English nation. In these texts, it is clear that the English nation and English identity is of prime importance, while Wales acts as a colonial satellite, required to help England in its hour of need but untrustworthy all

¹¹⁰ ‘Coloured pests’, *Western Mail*, 23 January 1929, p. 9.

the same. For, as the poet R. S. Thomas stated, 'Britishness is a mask. Beneath it is only one nation, England'.¹¹¹ It is this paradigm that the Welsh authors discussed in the following chapter write against and, in doing so, subtly undermine the genre to make it their own.

¹¹¹ R.S. Thomas, 'Undod' ('Unity'), in *R.S. Thomas: Selected Prose*, ed. Sandra Anstey (Bridgend: Seren, 1995), pp. 143-58.

Chapter II: The Emergence of Welsh Crime Fiction

Although called upon, the men of Scotland Yard were not interested in a clueless case and were bored by the austerity of the countryside as well as by the mystifications of the Welsh character. They began to fill their notebooks with lengthy and bewildering conversations over which they groaned in despair, but they soon gave it up. Inspector Bruell decided that our Jones was “merely crazy”; and when you are dealing with a crazy man,—well, there’s nothing in it; there are no motives, no clues, none of the proper ingredients of a “case”. And so Inspector Bruell and his companion, Detective Sergeant Wardlaw, spent a few pleasant hours playing snooker with Sergeant Harri at the Harp and Eagle and then decided to return to London on the following day. Give us Camden Town or Notting Hill, they said, where you have a clue at every step and a potential witness in every house and a lot of real good serious crime; something for a man to get on with.¹

As this excerpt from Twm Teg’s *Jones: A Gentleman of Wales* (1954) shows, there are difficulties in placing crime in Wales. *Jones* is not crime fiction; rather it is a picaresque tale about the Edwardian Welsh gentry. Its author had previously written crime fiction under another alias, Anthony Rolls, and under his own name, C. E. Vulliamy. Vulliamy also wrote biographies and academic works, but it is his crime writing which permeates this particular section of *Jones*, albeit a section which parodies the problem of setting crime in Wales. Firstly, there is the problematic nature of the Welsh; loquacious yet bewildering, they mystify English authority and appear unknowable. Secondly, as touched upon in the Introduction, the general perception of English authority, parodied here, is that serious crime does not happen in Wales. On this occasion, the aged eponymous Jones has not been vilely murdered but has simply walked off into the countryside, only to return without explanation many weeks later. Clearly, crime belongs in the crowded metropolis rather than in an austere rural landscape.

Nonetheless, as the previous chapter showed, English authors were setting crime in Wales by the 1920s. This leads to the question: when did Welsh authors turn to crime fiction? There is little early Welsh crime fiction left in print and, as products of a genre that can be seen to lack prestige, much has now been forgotten. Recent work by Welsh academics has

¹ Twm Teg [C. E. Vulliamy], *Jones: A Gentleman of Wales* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1954), p. 220.

brought many a marginalised text back into the public domain through research, republication and teaching.² Crime fiction has been mostly ignored until recently when Amy Dillwyn's *A Burglary* (1883), to be discussed further in this chapter, and Raymond Williams's *The Volunteers* (1978), the subject of the following chapter, were brought back into print by Honno and the Library of Wales in 2009 and 2012 respectively. Still, it was not until the 1920s that Welsh writers started to produce texts that are recognisable as fully-fledged crime fiction. During this and the following decade, Welsh writers started producing crime fiction in two of its more conservative forms: the thriller and the clue-puzzle plot. Imperialist-inflected thrillers have been examined in the previous chapter and need no further definition here, whereas the use of the term clue-puzzle does warrant some explanation. For several decades, from the 1970s on, crime fiction produced between the wars was placed by critics in a homogenous category labelled 'Golden Age' fiction.³ This has been since redefined for, as Stephen Knight points out, the label ignores the breadth and range of crime fiction produced in the period. Knight prefers instead to apply the term 'clue-puzzle' to texts where 'the crime is murder [...] the social setting is [...] exclusive [...] the victim has some wealth and authority'.⁴ More importantly, such texts will also invite the reader to solve the puzzle by tracking the clues that appear in the text and therefore, in Knight's words, foreground '[t]he detective technique, that ensemble of actions, thoughts, attitudes and appearance that constructs the values which the fiction offers against the threats of crime and deception, [and] always emphasises rationality'.⁵ So, while Golden Age will, in this chapter, refer to the interwar period, following Knight's example, the 'clue-puzzle' will denote a sub-genre

² Courses in Anglo-Welsh literature were first introduced in what was then Trinity College, Carmarthen in 1971. Other courses at HE level followed in Aberystwyth, Swansea, Lampeter, Bangor, and Cardiff. More recently, the Welsh presses Honno and Parthian's Library of Wales series have brought neglected Welsh classics back into print.

³ Although Stephen Knight suggests in *Crime Fiction 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* that Howard Haycraft was the first to use the term 'Golden Age', Julian Symons was one of the first to provide a thorough definition of 'Golden Age' crime fiction in *Bloody Murder* (London: Palgrave, 2004), p. 85.

⁴ Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800-2000*, p. 87-8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

common to that era yet still produced beyond it. It appears that, by writing these sub-genres, early Welsh crime writers chose to conform to English paradigms: the voice of the imperialist or one in which a cool rationality is the tool of detection and where everything can be made known to the reader. Possibly, these paradigms were chosen as they were the most popular models at the time and, hence, the most marketable.

Alternatively, the use of these models could be the result of English cultural imperialism. Chapter I discussed the role of Welsh characters as ‘native informants’ in English-authored crime fiction. The first section of this chapter will look at authors, who, on first inspection, appear to be ‘learned [*sic*] natives’, a term coined by Thomas Macaulay in his ‘Minute on Indian Education’ (1835).⁶ Macaulay was using the term to describe the English imperial endeavour in India where, rather than encouraging the study of native culture and languages, he suggested that select Indians should be funded by the British government to study the vastly superior, in his eyes at least, language, literature and history of England. They would then disseminate this new knowledge to their native population. A barely concealed act of assimilation, this enterprise was enthusiastically endorsed by the later writers of the notorious Blue Books and applied by the British education system in Wales. By operating within such strictly English crime parameters, it could be argued that early Welsh crime writers assimilated English paradigms and conformed to the ideal of the learned native. However, a closer examination of their texts reveals a much more subversive appropriation of the thriller and the clue-puzzle plot, one which unsettles the English cultural imperialism they appear to have adopted.

This chapter will firstly examine the work of Gwyn Evans (1898-1938) and C. E. [Colwyn Edward] Vulliamy (1886-1971). Evans wrote mostly thrillers, while the latter favoured clue-puzzle plots. In order to avoid the problematic Welsh setting parodied by

⁶ Thomas Babington Macaulay, ‘Minute on Indian Education’, in *Macaulay: Prose and Poetry* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952), pp. 719-730 (p. 719).

Vulliamy in the opening quotation, their texts rarely make forays into Wales, preferring to set crime elsewhere. These same texts may not contain any overt reference to a Welsh cultural specificity but clues to the authors' nationality frequently erupt through the English construction of the text. As such, these texts could be said to act as a form of subversive ventriloquism.

Nonetheless, some Welsh crime fiction had started to become more identifiable as Welsh, while conversely becoming less recognisable as crime fiction. The later section of this chapter will focus on the so-called crime writing of Amy Dillwyn (1845-1935), Emlyn Williams (1905-1987) and Rhys Davies (1901-1978). These texts combine elements of different genres to produce hybrid narratives and, as such, it is debatable whether they are actually crime fiction at all. The usual elements of crime fiction, such as detection and punishment, are subverted or omitted entirely. As there is no doubt of their cultural specificity, I wish to argue that these are in fact Welsh crime texts, albeit the first faltering steps of a true Welsh crime fiction, one which is comfortable with its native identity and which, in shucking off anglicisation, dismantles the tropes of English authority and justice.

I

The so-called Golden Age was just as industrious a period for Welsh crime writers as it was for their English counterparts. Those who gained most recognition for their work at that time were those whose fiction conformed to English paradigms. The earliest of these was Bangor-born Gwynfyl Arthur Evans, son of a Wesleyan Methodist minister and great-nephew of Mary Ann Evans, better known as George Eliot.⁷ By 1901, the family had moved out of Wales, initially to Birkenhead. This was not necessarily a move away from Welsh culture for, at this time, Birkenhead had a large Welsh community. Penbedw, as it was named by its

⁷ David Ashford and Norman Wright, 'Christmas with Sexton Blake', in *Book and Magazine Collector* 328 (2010), pp. 71-78 (p. 72). Available at <http://friardale.co.uk/Ephemera/Book%20and%20Magazine%20Collector/B&MC%20328.pdf> [accessed 14 March 2012]

diasporic community, was served by several Welsh-language chapels.⁸ The 1911 census shows a further move for the Evans family, this time to Bootle, Lancashire.⁹ The appearance on that census of a daughter named Gwladys Eluned suggests that this was a family still in touch with their Welsh roots. The recording of visitors from Wales on both nights of the 1901 and 1911 censuses also hints at a family very much in contact with home and, tangentially, their native culture. However, during his writing career Evans undergoes a process of anglicisation and any vestigial Welsh identity eventually disappears. This begins with the truncation of his first name from Gwynfyl to the more generic Gwyn.¹⁰ Writing under this name during the 1920s and '30s, Evans was a prolific writer of short stories for weekly magazines like *The Detective Magazine*, *The Thriller*, and *Union Jack*. Evans's career as a novelist was equally prolific. With his early career in mind, I will examine two short stories, 'The Welsh Wind' (1924) and 'Sexton Blake and the Time-Killer' (1924), and his first novel, *Hercules Esq.: A Tale of Mystery and Millions* (1930).

'The Welsh Wind' appeared in *The Detective Magazine*, a publication that Evans contributed to many times in the early 1920s. This particular short story is the most recognisable as Welsh. Set in the village of Llandwr, it focuses on a tramp, 'Shorty' Jones, who has been incarcerated for the theft of a tin of peaches but, finding the cell unlocked, escapes and is drawn to an impromptu evangelical meeting. Inspired by the lay preacher's words, Shorty decides to return to his white-haired mother in North Wales, only to be recaptured and returned to the police station. Nevertheless, the true miscreant is the lay preacher leading the meeting who, in reality, is a con artist. His identity and that of his female accomplice remain hidden from the people of Llandwr and they escape undetected. As this

⁸ My thanks go to Professor Katie Gramich for this information.

⁹ 1901 and 1911 census. Available at <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/ncestry.co.uk> [accessed 2 February 2012].

¹⁰ In his *Dictionary of Pseudonyms* (London: McFarland and Co., 2010) Adrian Room lists Gwyn Evans under the pseudonyms Arthur Gwynne and Barry Western. I have so far been unable to find work under these names but as Room also states that Evans wrote stories for boys, it is possible that stories did appear under these names but in non-crime publications.

summary indicates, this is a story replete with Welsh tropes. From the ‘awful solemnity of a Welsh Sabbath’¹¹ to the ‘shiver of religious fervour [that] swept through the crowd’,¹² the reader is reminded of the history of Nonconformist worship in Wales and subsequent religious revivals.¹³ Despite this, Welsh is not spoken in this short story, nor is the Welsh language alluded to at any point. While it has been shown that English authors like Leonard Knight will appropriate Welsh terms, often misspelt, to add local colour and exoticism, this absence of what must have been Evans’s native language, speaks volumes. Already there is a silencing of language and identity either through self-censorship or editorial intervention.

Still, there is also an element of parody present. The threadbare Shorty experiences ‘melancholy’ and becomes ‘homesick’¹⁴ for his native North Wales on hearing the tune ‘Aberystwyth’ by the Welsh composer, Joseph Parry. While this may be colluding with the stereotype of the gloomy Celt, it can be no coincidence that, like Shorty, Evans too was far from his birthplace. And though one cannot make assumptions about Evans’s early years, allotting the role of villain to a preacher, his father’s occupation, suggests a certain amount of Oedipal anxiety. What is most striking, however, is the element of performance present. This performance and masquerade is a theme that is present to some extent amongst all of these early Welsh crime fiction texts. While Evans’s fiction became more anglicised, the performative tropes within the narrative remain. It is common in crime fiction of this period for things not to appear as they first seem. This is, in part, a legacy from earlier, mostly city-based, crime fiction and its anxieties about living in the growing urban space; unlike a close rural community where we may have a more intimate knowledge of our neighbours, we see only the surface of our fellow city-dwellers and cannot immediately ascertain their capacity

¹¹ Gwyn Evans, ‘The Welsh Wind’, in *The Detective Magazine*, 26 September 1924, pp. 971-974 (p. 972).

¹² *Ibid.*, (pp. 973-4).

¹³ An unusual trope in crime fiction, nonetheless, Nonconformity has made its mark on Welsh writing in English. For a thorough discussion of this subject, see M. Wynn Thomas’s *In the Shadow of the Pulpit: Literature and Nonconformist Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Evans, ‘The Welsh Wind’, (p. 973).

for violence and crime, or paradoxically, benignity. Also, Victorian ideas that criminality and immorality were physically visible, posited in texts such as Cesare Lombroso's *The Criminal Man* (1876) and Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1897) and apparent in the works of writers like Charles Dickens where, as Heather Worthington points out, generally, 'good characters tend to be attractive and physically unblemished, unpleasant or evil characters are often ugly and deformed',¹⁵ no longer had the scientific credibility that they once had. Reflecting this, later criminals in fiction were not always immediately visible.¹⁶ When clue-puzzle plots later moved back to a closed, often rural community, they focused on a mainly middle-class society. The disappearance of visible villainy in these later texts, combined with a middle-class emphasis on the importance of reputation, leads to an increase of performative tropes within the clue-puzzle. The detective's role was then to strip away these layers of performance to reveal the truth behind each character's action, allowing the detective to showcase his or her superior ratiocination. One has only to consider Christie's final drawing room scenes, where a cast of characters are gathered while Poirot or Miss Marple unveils their secrets and possible motives for murder. And detectives themselves would often change their appearance in order to follow suspects undetected. Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes was the undisputed master of disguise, to the extreme of appearing shorter than he was in reality in 'The Adventure of the Empty House' (1903). Still, for Welsh writers, performance and masquerade become a recurring theme in this early work, noticeably more so than their English Golden Age contemporaries, possibly due to the authors' concealment of their own national identity. Homi K. Bhabha has suggested that mimicry, once the desire of colonial authority, necessary for the production of the learned native, constructs a new

¹⁵ Heather Worthington's *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* gives a thorough survey of criminality and visibility from the biblical story of the mark of Cain to the present day (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 72-75.

¹⁶ Unless, of course, the villain was of another race, where his or her difference was visible in contrast to the other English characters, a process that both 'othered' and villainised those of a foreign background and played to an imperialist xenophobia. Commentators such as Colin Watson point to the aforementioned Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu stories (1910 to 1959) as an early example of such literary xenophobia.

ambivalent subject that still has ‘a difference that is almost nothing but not quite’.¹⁷ The tropes of performance and masquerade in Welsh crime fiction, then, can be seen as a literary manifestation of the learned native’s difference. And, while their texts also mimic the forms of imperial thriller and clue-puzzle, they reveal their difference, too, by being almost the same ‘but not quite.’

As mentioned earlier, traces of Gwyn Evans’s cultural background diminish in his crime fiction as his career progresses. Another of his short stories, also published in 1924, does contain a central Welsh character, yet the action takes place in London and the fictional Mediterranean island, Rosario. Evans, like his contemporary, Vulliamy, resolves the difficulty of setting crime in Wales by moving the action to more accepted locations. Nonetheless, masquerade and performance continue to play a part in the narrative as it did in ‘The Welsh Wind’. ‘Sexton Blake and the Time-Killer’ originally appeared in *Union Jack* without an author credit.¹⁸ A creation of the writer Harry Blyth, Sexton Blake first appeared in *Halfpenny Marvel* in 1893. Blake’s adventures appeared in other weekly magazines, written by a number of different authors. David Stuart Davies describes him as ‘the office boy’s Sherlock Holmes probably because there was an air of comic-book heroics about many of the stories’.¹⁹ Like Holmes, the pipe-smoking Blake lives at Baker Street with a hero-worshipping sidekick and devoted housekeeper. Davies goes on to describe ‘The Time-Killer’ as ‘typical of its kind’.²⁰ Already, in Evans’s story then, layer upon layer of performed identity stands between the reader and the text. The author, a Welshman, writes an English

¹⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 91.

¹⁸ The author Mark Hodder has credited Gwyn Evans as the author on his website Blakiana: The Sexton Blake Resource [Available at <http://www.sextonblake.co.uk/index.html>]. Hodder has confirmed that he traced Evans as the author through the byline “‘By the author of [story title]” which was common practice in the *Union Jack* paper.’ [In a private email to me]. This, and a main character named Professor Llewellyn point to Evans as author.

¹⁹ David Stuart Davies, ‘Introduction’, in *Shadows of Sherlock Holmes* ed. David Stuart Davies (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1998), pp. vii.-xxi (p. xx).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, (p. xxi).

detective who in turn plays the part of a poor man's Sherlock Holmes, the archetypal English detective written by a Scotsman.

The plot of 'Sexton Blake and the Time-Killer' also alludes to its Holmesian inspiration: the narrative begins with the ghostly apparition of a giant, other-worldly hound at a London Underground station at midnight. As with Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901), there is a prosaic, rather than supernatural, explanation. In this instance, Blake reveals that it is a marketing ruse by a publicity man, Brian 'Booster' Bruce, for an 'American super-film'.²¹ This is the initial mystery of 'The Time-Killer' but, as the narrative progresses, another plot emerges: the hunt for a box of missing microbes from the laboratory of Professor Rufus Llewellyn. Llewellyn is the archetypal mad scientist, albeit a benign presence. As his name suggests, he is Welsh. Nevertheless, the first mention made of Professor Llewellyn is by the housekeeper, Mrs Bardell, who describes the professor as a 'foreigner' who could not 'be trusted even with the doormat'.²² Linguistically, Llewellyn's accent sets him apart from British identity, as Mrs Bardell's attitude indicates that this is a Britishness that is exclusively English, while his nationality plays to the nursery-rhyme stereotype of Taffy the Welshman, Taffy the thief. Already, Welsh identity is signified as different, 'other'. But there is a sense of ambivalence surrounding the portrayal of his national identity. Though Blake sees him as 'brusque, excitable', symptomatic of the emotive Celt of English stereotype, he also notes the professor 'genius'.²³ Blake's assistant, Tinker too sees the 'kindliness and good humour'²⁴ beneath the professor's roughness. Nonetheless, Evans is not afraid to use stereotype when recording Llewellyn's speech. Peppered with 'look you', and 'whateffer', Llewellyn's speech could be that of the comic Welshman of an English imagination.²⁵ As in 'The Welsh Wind',

²¹ Gwyn Evans, 'Sexton Blake and the Time-Killer', in *Shadows of Sherlock Holmes* ed. David Stuart Davies (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1998), pp. 278-323 (p. 294).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 281.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

the Welsh language is largely absent, apart from a solitary interjection of ‘Diawch’.²⁶ It is through the use of this mild expletive that cannot be literally translated that Llewellyn’s native language erupts through the usual English and onto the page.

Eventually, the American Booster Bruce is found to be the culprit who has stolen the professor’s missing microbes. Again, this is part of a marketing ruse as the microbes produce an effect called ‘chronoperdia’²⁷ or a loss of the sense of time. Despite its convoluted and fantastic plot, common to the periodicals of this time, ‘The Time-Killer’ shares some similarities with the simpler narrative of ‘The Welsh Wind’. The true miscreants are not captured and punished – in the Blake story, Booster pays Blake for his time and trouble and is let off. Consequently, the importance of the ‘crime’ is diminished. Heather Worthington has pointed out how early crime narratives centred on property or theft, Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1721) being a prime example of this. Despite the early-nineteenth century Reform Acts, which abolished capital punishment for theft, plots involving inheritance, fraud and property remain central to crime narratives. Worthington locates the emergence of murder as a central crime in the later clue-puzzle plots, typified by Agatha Christie’s novels.²⁸ In these Welsh-authored stories, though, the crimes are neither robbery nor murder. It could be argued that the crimes here are ones of deceit: in ‘The Welsh Wind’ it is a masquerading under a false identity, and in the Sexton Blake story, it is a false sense of time that is manufactured. In fact, both crimes in the Sexton Blake story, if one includes Booster’s phantom hound, contain elements of magic tricks. This is further emphasised by Booster’s occupation as publicity man, a precursor to the advertising agency, which sells a fake reality in order to market and sell commodities. Hence, the criminal is not the usual villain, but rather a magician who performs a sleight of hand. As such, Booster is not vilified in the text and Tinker sees him

²⁶ Evans, ‘Sexton Blake and the Time-Killer’, (p. 285).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, (p. 320).

²⁸ Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, pp. 11-13.

admiringly as ‘a new kind of fish’.²⁹ As Tinker spots the kindness beneath Professor Llewellyn as a stereotypical mad scientist, so he can admire the bravado behind Booster’s performance of a brash American, which suggests an authorial sympathy for those normally stereotyped by English imperial crime writers.

So, to return to the scene of the crime, as it were; in Evans’s short stories, crimes go undetected, as do the criminals. In ‘The Welsh Wind’ the true villains evade justice through masquerade and deceit. In the Sexton Blake story, the crime itself is revealed to be a performance and is no longer considered a criminal act. Authority, in the shape of both the Welsh village police and the English Sexton Blake, appears redundant. Blake does partially fulfil the role of detective by uncovering the mystery but there is no hint of restorative punishment. Booster is allowed to go on his way while Blake is paid off as if he were a tradesman, rather than the usual revered figure of authority. Despite Evans’s own masquerade as an anglicised writer, the authority of the text is subverted and one might argue that Welsh-authored crime fiction fails to contain crime. And by ‘contain’, I mean the verb in two of its senses: firstly, that crime has disappeared from the narrative (which leads one to wonder whether these texts can be considered crime narratives in the strictest sense) and secondly, that crime fiction normally functions as a genre in which to contain and make safe social anxieties. Removing crime from the narrative and hence failing to contain social anxiety is an intensely anarchic act, one which destabilises the conservative norms of crime fiction.

Welsh characters did occasionally make further appearances in Evans’s work. A notable example is a tale written for the *Union Jack* Sexton Blake Christmas edition, ‘The Mistletoe-Milk Mystery’ (1929), which features Sir Cymric Elias Jenkins, Director of the Board of Amalgamated Welsh Diaries, and a villainous profiteer. In this instance, portrayal of

²⁹ Evans, ‘Sexton Blake and the Time Killer’, (p. 323). One can assume that Evans had some admiration for American culture as he later introduced the American private agent, Ruff Hanson, to the cast of Sexton Blake characters in ‘Guns is Guns’ (1926). While not the first American ‘tough guy’ detective, Ruff appears just a few years after the first appearance of such a detective in the American periodical *Black Mask* in 1923.

the Welsh becomes less sympathetic and it appears that Evans's assimilation into English culture is complete. During this later period, Evans turns to writing novels. The first of these, *Hercules Esq.: a Tale of Mystery and Millions* had previously been serialised in *Union Jack* in 1928, then again in *The Thriller* in 1939. This particular thriller contains no Welsh characters or settings and is imperialistic in flavour. A group of millionaires, having conquered the world of finance and finding themselves jaded by the lack of new challenges, form a secret society, the 'Secret Six'.³⁰ The aim of this society is to set an individual several Herculean tasks, and to this end, the vagabond and ex-journalist Bill Kellaway is lured by the promise of a million pound reward should he complete the tasks. On the surface, Kellaway has much in common with another imperial hero of this time: Bulldog Drummond, who first appeared in Sapper's eponymous novel in 1920.³¹ Like Bulldog, Kellaway is clean-living and masculine, a man who can be restored with a 'cold bath and a brisk rubdown'³² and who elicits unquestioning loyalty from the lower orders. Kellaway's nationality is not alluded to but must be assumed to be English and he is depicted as bluff, not terribly intellectual yet good-natured. In contrast, foreigners are shown to be peculiar or sinister, a typical device of the imperial thriller. There is also a hint that Kellaway has served overseas as suggested by his smattering of Arabic.

However, further examination of the plot reveals very little crime either, a continuing trope of Evans's work. Criminal acts do occur in the text: the Secret Six plot to lock Bill Kellaway into a house with a dead body and alert the police, for instance. Yet there is no central crime, nor a capture and punishment of a criminal to complete the narrative. There is a sense of resolution to the novel as Kellaway manages to complete the tasks and win the

³⁰ Gwyn Evans, *Hercules Esq.: A Tale of Mystery and Millions* (London: Harold Shayler, 1930), p. 2.

³¹ Sapper was the pseudonym of H. C. [Herman Cyril] McNeile. His Bulldog Drummond spy series featured the demobilised Captain Hugh Drummond who advertises as a private detective to combat peacetime boredom. Bulldog, 'a sportsman and a gentleman', epitomises the English war hero. (1920; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), p. 20.

³² Evans, *Hercules Esq.*, p. 36.

million pound reward but justice is not meted out for any crimes in the text. It is not unusual for the police to inhabit the margins of crime fiction during this period; the police procedural, the genre that focusses on the detective work of a police team, did not appear until the 1940s,³³ and crime written at this time was generally solved by a gifted amateur or private detective. The police do play a part in *Hercules Esq.*, but in this instance they add an element of danger, as Kellaway is forced to break the law in order to complete his tasks. Generally, a police presence is necessary in order to give some realism to crime texts. Despite Sherlock Holmes's superior powers of deduction, it is only the police who have the legal powers of arrest. Yet here, the police are used as a narrative device to drive the plot rather than to bring about state-sanctioned justice and it seems that, in Evans's text, state authority is not recognised. Despite the fact that this is an imperial thriller complete with the hierarchies associated with that genre – despite his poverty, Kellaway acquires a loyal valet-butler, Henry Henry (or Henry Squared as he is amusingly nicknamed) – the hierarchy of state law goes unrecognised. In Evans's texts, criminality and, hence, legality is dispensed with.

What is extraordinary in *Hercules Esq.*, as with Evans's short stories, are the performance and masquerade within the narrative. Bill Kellaway's first conversation in the novel is with a man he first believes to be an Arab but who is in reality a cockney dressed as such in order to sell cigarettes – and here is another advertising ploy similar to that in 'Sexton Blake and the Time-Killer'. Each of the Secret Six dresses for meetings in 'full evening dress, and with his face masked with a black domino, from which descended a strip of black lace, completely obscuring the features'.³⁴ Buildings and scenery are not exempt from

³³ George N. Dove, *The Police Procedural* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982).

³⁴ Evans, *Hercules Esq.*, p. 28. This description is similar to one given in another Gwyn Evans short story, 'The Crook Crusaders' (1930), in which a burglar spots a 'man in full evening dress with a silk-lined opera cloak hanging in graceful folds from his shoulders. But it was not the sartorial magnificence that brought a gasp to Kid's lips. It was the fact that the stranger's face was masked by a deep white domino.' (*The Thriller*, 12 July 1930) It may be that Evans, being required to produce punchy, sensational short stories in a short space of time, relied on well-worn and repetitive tropes. However, it is significant that he returns to the urbane yet faceless man in his thrillers.

performance either: the Secret Six's headquarters uses a café, 'Ye Olde Browne Potte',³⁵ as a front, and a rural village is described as 'too good to be true, like the drop scene of a pantomime'.³⁶ Nothing in Evans's texts is quite what it seems, giving a sense of intangibility to his crime fiction.

Despite their marginalisation in the text, the police are also not exempt from the tropes of performance. The reader is told that the leading detective, Inspector Barker of the Yard, has the appearance of a 'painstaking but dunderheaded blockhead' but:

[t]he waxed moustache, the square-toed boots, the hard bowler hat that looked so obviously a part of him, were, in reality, the subtlest form of disguise. On holiday in Wales he was an entirely different person. His hobby was palaeontology, and he was a keen student of the classics.³⁷

Like many other tropes in Gwyn Evans's writing, the detective's role is partly a 'disguise' or performance. The Scotland Yard detective, who in this text lacks authority, uses stereotyped masquerade in order to conceal a more sensitive and subtle man. What is more, it is only on a holiday in Wales that his true character can be revealed. Wales once more becomes a safe haven for the English visitor, as discussed in the previous chapter, one where Barker can strip away the layer of authority and reveal his erudition. So, not only does Evans remove crime from the text and destabilise crime fiction by the suggestion of performance but he also suggests that the English visitor to Wales can finally lay aside performed authority.

Evans was not the only Welsh writer to subvert crime fiction in a Bhabha-esque mimicry through the appropriation of English crime paradigms. C. E. Vulliamy, whose work provided the epigraph to this chapter, was writing crime fiction shortly after Gwyn Evans, initially using the pseudonym Anthony Rolls. Born in Radnorshire, Vulliamy was a writer of some variety, encompassing crime fiction, academic work, and biographies. Although varied, his fiction has a common strand: satire. His gift for parody led to Vulliamy being recognised

³⁵ Evans, *Hercules Esq.*, p. 72.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

as ‘a descendant of the Augustan satirists’.³⁸ Vulliamy’s crime novels follow a reverse trajectory from Evans’s in that they become more identifiably Welsh over the decades. Unlike Evans, his name also becomes more Welsh, changing from the anglicised Anthony Rolls to his own given name, albeit coded by the use of initials for his first two names, to the Welsh pseudonym, Twm Teg. In fact, the jacket of *Jones*, written under this latter pseudonym, states that the ‘author prefers to be anonymous’. So Vulliamy moves from a performed English identity to a performed Welsh identity. This move back to a native identity is apparent in a comparison of his first crime novel, *The Vicar’s Experiments* (1932),³⁹ and a later crime novel *Don Among the Dead Men* (1952), published under his own name.

The Vicar’s Experiments contains many of the tropes of the clue-puzzle plot. In accordance with Stephen Knight’s sketch of the sub-genre, the social setting is exclusive and the victims have some wealth and authority. Set in the fictional rural village, Lower Pydal in Buckfordshire, it features the cast of characters usual to the clue-puzzle: a vicar, a retired army Colonel, and a trio of elderly spinster sisters. Village hierarchy is, moreover, strictly adhered to; it is taken for granted that a member of the local aristocracy will open the church fete, while Colonel Cargoy is guaranteed a place on the parish council despite being ‘an infernal ass’.⁴⁰ This is clearly an English village, but there are minute clues as to the author’s nationality. Some names within the novel have Welsh origins: the lord of the manor is Sir Basil Watkins, and the spinster sisters are named Hedly-Puffyn, not a Welsh name as such but one which alludes to a Welsh spelling; yet these hints are minor and the setting and genre point towards Vulliamy’s use of English models of crime fiction.

³⁸ Meic Stephens, ed., *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 761.

³⁹ This was later republished as *Clerical Error* (1944). This second edition bore Vulliamy’s real name, presumably to take advantage of his success with other non-crime fiction. The dustjacket of this second edition has the blurb, ‘An entertaining novel by the Author of “The Polderoy Papers”’. It is this edition that I will refer to in this chapter.

⁴⁰ C. E. Vulliamy, *Clerical Error* (London: The Richards Press, 1944), p. 13.

However, it is Vulliamy's playfulness with the last element of Knight's sketch of the clue-puzzle – that the detective process should always be rational – which undermines this particular sub-genre. Whilst there is detection in this text and that detection is logical and rational, it is mostly rendered redundant as the reader is aware of the murderer's identity from the opening pages: *The Vicar's Experiments* follows the village vicar, Geoffrey Virgil Pardicott, as he attempts to murder the Colonel, the Canon and his own wife. Vulliamy makes a major departure from the accepted patterns of crime fiction by focusing on the murderer and giving access to his emotions and motives. The police are later brought into the narrative and are portrayed in a sympathetic light; despite the fact that 'they were not quite up to the social standard of the links',⁴¹ the men of Scotland Yard frequently display a 'sharp gleam of intelligence'.⁴² Yet their detection is not the focal point of the narrative. Rather, it is the usually silent voice of the murderer that is heard here. Also, when the vicar is finally brought to justice by the police, he is let off at his trial, presumably due to his mild-mannered appearance and social standing. Eventually, the police uncover fresh evidence but the vicar once more eludes capture by committing suicide.⁴³ It could be argued that the vicar's death does bring a sense of resolution and justice to the text. However, his initial act of getting away with murder in court does much to destabilise conservative notions of rational detection, state justice and authority. Beneath Vulliamy's ventriloquism of a clue-puzzle plot lies subversion.

Vulliamy's true act of subversion is his skill in parodying the clue-puzzle plot. This act of parody may indicate that Vulliamy used humour in reaction to feeling ostracised from the genre by virtue of his nationality. After all, crime does not happen in Wales. *The Vicar's Experiments* draws much of its humour from satirising the conventions and conservatism of

⁴¹ Vulliamy, *Clerical Error*, p. 186.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴³ This has parallels with Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) in which the murderous Doctor Sheppard is given the choice of handing himself in and facing disgrace or doing the honourable thing by killing himself.

English crime fiction. I have mentioned Vulliamy's use of characters lifted directly from clue-puzzle detective fiction, and the casting of benevolent vicar as villain provides the initial comedy. Vulliamy makes frequent allusions to the very conservatism and stock stereotyping of such characters; when Lady Swading opens the village fete, the narrative notes her 'liberal use of such words as loyalty, courage, devotion, empire, home, duty, dignity, and progress [...] Through mere facility, she had ended by persuading herself that all the fine things of which she spoke so glibly did really exist'.⁴⁴

The Vicar's Experiments is a very self-conscious novel, one which further parodies the conservative clue-puzzle by drawing attention to itself as a piece of crime fiction. It is not uncommon for crime fiction to make reference to other crime fiction. In *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), for instance, Dr Watson draws a comparison between Sherlock Holmes and Poe's detective, C. Auguste Dupin. There is a similar moment in *The Vicar's Experiments* when a Scotland Yard detective is described as looking 'not unlike the pictures of Sherlock Holmes'.⁴⁵ Dr Richard Apscombe, or Dr Dick as he is known by the village, is the first to suspect the vicar. When he does so, he sits down with his pipe to puzzle out the mystery, as Holmes was wont to do, and 'played the part of a special detective'.⁴⁶ The emphasis is on performance, albeit on a well-known and well-worn trope. However, the narrative takes crime fiction's self-referentiality further. In a number of instances, the novel refers to its own fictional nature, such as when Dr Dick considers that '[s]uch fantastic things might occur in bookstall fiction; but was it possible they could occur in real life, in the dull placid world of Lower Pydal?'⁴⁷ Contrasting the fantastical world of crime fiction with the supposedly real

⁴⁴ Vulliamy, *Clerical Error*, pp. 97-8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

world imagined by the text is not unknown in crime fiction.⁴⁸ And as Lower Pydal is the exact copy of the crime settings favoured by bookstall fiction of this period, it is not such a fantastical notion.

Yet the narrative of *The Vicar's Experiments* teeters towards postmodernism, albeit some forty years before its recognition as a literary device, as it gestures towards itself as a piece of fiction. *The Vicar's Experiments'* most striking example of metafictionality occurs when discussing motive. Virgil Pardicott's murderous actions are inspired, he believes, by an 'Inscrutable Purpose'⁴⁹ though it is clear that lust, for Colonel Cargoy's wife and for power, is his prime motivation. This leads to a philosophical discussion which also appears to analyse the need for crime fiction when an authorial voice states, '[w]e are so anxious to find a reason for everything that we recoil from the notion of a crime without a clear directing purpose. The most illogical thing a man can do is to be explained in terms of plain logic.'⁵⁰ While this addresses the reader's need to contain anxieties about criminality within the security of fiction, this reflection could also be regarded as criticising crime fiction itself. Vulliamy was writing prior to the emergence of hardboiled fiction and its attempts to portray a more realistic, gritty world, yet he addresses a problem not often tackled by crime writers: that real crime is often motiveless and illogical, unlike its fictional counterpart. This discussion ends on the wry observation, '[i]t is important to insist on this, because otherwise it might be assumed that Mr Pardicott is a mere invention. Of course he is nothing of the sort'.⁵¹ So, as Vulliamy satirises the conventions of the clue-puzzle and its stock characters, he also pokes fun at the motivation to fictionalise crime. In doing so, he draws the reader's attention to the text as a fiction and appears subtly to deconstruct the genre.

⁴⁸ Malcah Effron's "'If only this were a detective novel": Self-Referentiality as Metafictionality in Detective Fiction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Newcastle University, 2010) is a detailed examination of such a phenomenon. It provides a plethora of examples, especially in Chapter I.

⁴⁹ Vulliamy, *Clerical Error*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Vulliamy's first crime fiction to be published under his own name from its first print run (*The Vicar's Experiments* bore his name on the second edition) was *Don Among the Dead Men* (1952) and it shares many similarities with the earlier novel.⁵² Set in the late 1920s, during the beginnings of crime fiction's Golden Age, *Don Among the Dead Men* also satirises the conventions of the clue-puzzle plot. As the title infers, it is set in academia, in the fictional University of Ockham.⁵³ Like *The Vicar's Experiments*, the narrative reveals the murderer early on in the text; in this instance, the murderer is Professor Kerris Bowles-Ottery. Consequently, this precludes any element of detection and, as much of the narrative is provided by the Professor's diary, the reader is given an unusual insight into his motives throughout the novel, unlike the standard clue-puzzle where motive is revealed with a flourish at the conclusion, usually by an all-knowing detective figure. Like Reverend Pardicott, the professor kills to further his career and remove those who threaten his position, such as his discarded, blackmailing lover, Delia. And, again in common with the murderous vicar, Bowles-Ottery convinces himself that his motive in killing is 'for the benefit of the whole civilized world',⁵⁴ going so far as to name it the 'Social Service through Selective Elimination'.⁵⁵ His method of elimination is that favoured by the clue-puzzle: poison. Bowles-Ottery uses a poison discovered by chance in his laboratory, one which produces a period of hilarity and euphoria in its victims, before they succumb to a painless death. Like the vicar, the Professor is concerned that his victims do not suffer, which surely suggests a certain amount of authorial squeamishness, despite the satirical bent of the text. In comparison with the preferred poisons of other clue-puzzle authors like Agatha Christie

⁵² *Don Among the Men* was later filmed as *A Jolly Bad Fellow* (1963) but was released a year later in America as *They All Died Laughing*.

⁵³ Academia has been a popular setting for crime writers for, as commented on by W. H. Auden in his essay 'The Guilty Vicarage', a university setting fulfils one of the criteria for clue-puzzle fiction as it provides a closed community. Other Welsh authors have also favoured this setting, such as Glyn Daniel's *The Cambridge Murders* (1945) and the Birmingham-born Kathleen Freeman's *Town and Shroud* (1947) but theirs is a 'straight' treatment of crime within academia.

⁵⁴ C. E. Vulliamy, *Don Among the Dead Men* (1952, London: Penguin, 1955), p. 36.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 110-1.

whose murderers favour arsenic, the misuse of which leads to an agonising death, Vulliamy's imagined poisons seem benign though equally deadly.

So far, Vulliamy and his earlier pseudonym, Anthony Rolls, seem to share so many similarities as to be indistinguishable from each other. Where Vulliamy does differ from his previous alter ego is in the emergence of Welsh settings and characters in his later text. The Professor takes a holiday in Pembrokeshire, as does the wily Delia. In common with Gwyn Evans's Inspector, he is drawn there by palaeontology. *Don Among the Dead Men* also features a detective team who, though of a lower social status, nonetheless, display a sharp intelligence. Despite this, detection of any sort occurs outside the text.⁵⁶ What does instigate the (unseen) investigation and eventual bringing to justice of Professor Bowles-Ottery is the dogged determination of David Evans, a theological student from Lampeter, in whom the spurned Delia confides. David Evans has much in common with Gwyn Evans's Welsh characters: loquacious, eccentric, different. True to the stereotype of the Welsh as a racially different, Celtic Other, Mr Evans is 'a small dark man, wiry and alert'.⁵⁷ Yet, like Gwyn Evans's Professor Llewellyn, Mr Evans is an intelligent man whose brain works 'with all its native rapidity'.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, it is his 'imagination: ... one of the gifts of our people, the people of Wales',⁵⁹ rather than a cool rational logic, that is instrumental in bringing Bowles-Ottery to answer for his crimes. Thus, Vulliamy reintroduces native characters into his work and, while in some respects they conform to stereotypical norms, he imbues his Welsh characters with the qualities of intelligence and acuity.

As in *The Vicar's Experiments*, this text also ends on a courtroom scene. Mr Evans continues to play a part, albeit minor, in the plot to the very end when he is removed from

⁵⁶ Although written after the emergence of the police procedural, it is set in the 1920s, so the police would not necessarily be the focal point of the narrative. Nonetheless, no other detection takes place either; that is, the crime is not shown being solved by the use of 'little grey cells' or a keen rational logic.

⁵⁷ Vulliamy, *Don Among the Dead Men*, p. 129.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 130.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 211.

court because of his enthusiastic interjection in response to the proceedings. This particular Welshman shows little reverence for the proceedings, going as far as to write up his report of the trial for a Welsh paper the day before the verdict takes place. One could argue that this parallels the author's irreverence towards fictional justice. Professor Bowles-Ottery, in common with Reverend Pardicott, is found not guilty, due to his social standing and status. Yet the clue-puzzle demands some form of justice, so Bowles-Ottery is charged with another, similar crime which he did not commit and of which he is found guilty. But rather than being hanged, the off-page justice rarely depicted in clue-puzzles, Bowles-Ottery commits suicide by taking his own poison, a literal case of having a taste of one's own medicine. Like the marginalisation of the detective(s) to the outside of the text, this failure of courtroom justice surely indicates a lack of confidence in state authority. Justice is done eventually but not by the state. The text ends on the ambiguity of the Professor being punished for a crime of which he was innocent when he was previously freed for the crimes of which he was guilty. The closing observation is, 'for Justice (like her sister, Truth) may wear the mask of irony'.⁶⁰ Likewise, this text wears a mask of irony; one which subverts the English clue-puzzle through satire. Authority, state-sanctioned or that endowed through class and status, is undermined and unsettled. One could argue that, like his protagonists Virgil Pardicott and Professor Bowles-Ottery, Vuillamy is conducting a series of experiments on the genre, one which deconstructs English paradigms.

So, Evans and Vuillamy produce crime texts that mimic English patterns but are 'not quite' the same. They produce texts which, on close reading, yield up a Bhabhian difference. On the surface, they appear to conform to English paradigms and in doing so, may be said to perpetuate an English cultural imperialism. Nonetheless, the narratives, with their tropes of performance and masquerade, point to the act of mimicry in which they engage, an act of

⁶⁰ Vuillamy, *Don Among the Dead Men*, p. 224.

mimicry that Bhabha argues is terrifying in its performance as ‘the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.’⁶¹ The areas in which they display difference, the depictions of detection and punishment, or the lack thereof, all point to a dismissal of recognised authority.

II

So far, this chapter has considered Welsh writers who are identifiable as crime writers but whose national identities are submerged beneath a performance of Englishness. I will now turn to writers who have engaged with their native culture in their work but who are not generally viewed as crime writers. Amy Dillwyn, Emlyn Williams and Rhys Davies frequently returned to their country of birth in their work. Literary critics have acknowledged the contribution that Dillwyn and Davies made to Welsh writing in English, though Williams is sometimes denigrated by those same critics. The Library of Wales has brought work by Davies back into print, as Honno Press has with Dillwyn. But apart from Huw Osborne’s critical study, *Rhys Davies* (2009), there has been little examination of their work as crime fiction and the relevance that may have to Welsh literary criticism and cultural identity. This may be due in part to the self-conscious wishes of those involved in building a canon of Welsh writing in English; to align a writer’s work with a popular genre could be perceived as detrimental to that work. Nonetheless, Williams achieved great commercial success while the quality of Davies’s crime writing was recognised outside Wales when he was awarded an ‘Edgar’, named in honour of Edgar Allan Poe, by the Mystery Writers of America for his short story, ‘The Chosen One’ (1967). The latter text, in conjunction with Davies’s *Under the Rose* (1940), Dillwyn’s *A Burglary* (1883) and Williams’s *Night Must Fall* (1935) will be examined in the second section of this chapter to consider the connections, if any, with the previously discussed texts; how the increased visibility of Welsh cultural identity affects the

⁶¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 88.

nature of the genre, and what these changes herald for Welsh crime writers following in these writers' footsteps.

Amy Dillwyn was born in Swansea into the Welsh gentry. David Painting's biography, *Amy Dillwyn* (1987), portrays an unconventional figure, the descendant of abolitionists on one side of the family and West Indian plantation owners on the other. Dillwyn achieved fame during her lifetime, not only for her unconventional manner but through the restoration to solvency of the family's zinc factory.⁶² However, the story of Dillwyn's overnight change from Victorian neurasthenic to a successful if eccentric industrialist is a simplistic one which ignores the many transgressive elements that were already present in her novels, novels which were produced during her period of reclusive domesticity. The previous chapter briefly discussed how Dillwyn's *A Burglary* acted as a riposte to the Blue Books and the English visitor's perceived right to question the Welsh native at will. *A Burglary* can also be seen as a precursor of Welsh authors' appropriation of other genres when writing crime as the novel is a hybrid of crime narrative, comedy of manners and lesbian Bildungsroman. Crime is a frequent occurrence in Dillwyn's novels and short stories; however, it is *A Burglary* that I wish to focus on here as it follows the more accepted pattern of crime fiction: the crime is fairly central to the narrative, an element of detection occurs and there is a final sense of resolution as the identity of the transgressor is unveiled. This story of a diamond thief predates E.W. Hornung's gentleman burglar, Raffles, and the plot centres on the theft of Ethel Carton's jewels during a visit to her cousin's home, Llwyn-yr-Allt, in fictional Cwm-Eithin. The thief, William Sylvester, is an impoverished gentleman who turns to crime to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. One unflattering contemporary review described *A Burglary* as 'this strange mixture of sensational drama and

⁶² David Painting, *Amy Dillwyn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987).

discursive twaddle'⁶³ and concludes that it is an 'eccentric novel',⁶⁴ an admission of the reviewer's uneasiness at the novel's hybridity of form.

As the review points out, the sensation novel is a clear influence, yet simultaneously *A Burglary* confounds generic expectations. This may be due to Dillwyn writing at a time when crime narratives were in their infancy, so patterns and forms were to some extent experimental. Nonetheless, the aberrations that occur within this novel also repeat themselves in the later, more noticeably Welsh crime texts that will be examined in this chapter, suggesting that they may be due, instead, to a cultural specificity. Unlike in the fiction of Evans and Vulliamy, Welsh characters and culture are foregrounded, though as they are seen through the perspective of a Welsh middle-class, it is a somewhat anglicised view. Unusual, too, is the confounding and unsettling of given roles. Much has been made of the role that transgression plays in Dillwyn's novels by literary critics, as exemplified by Katie Gramich's 'Introduction' to *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880).⁶⁵ These analyses often focus on the blurring of boundaries between roles, most noticeably, the crossing over between genders. *A Burglary* also upsets perceived societal roles but is significant in its treatment of victims, villains, authority and punishment.

The text shares the same prejudices towards the local Welsh police seen later in English-authored crime fiction set in Wales, for 'the local constables were not remarkable for detective talent, promptitude of action, or fertility of imagination'.⁶⁶ Two Welshmen take over the investigation: the magistrate father of the main protagonist, Imogen Rhys, and a visiting barrister. But, like the local constables, they too lack 'fertility of imagination' and pursue the wrong man, a poacher named Richards. Luckily, Richards is let off by a local jury

⁶³ 'A Burglary: Or, Unconscious Influence' in *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 57(1482), March 22 1884, pp. 379-381, (p. 379).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, (p. 381).

⁶⁵ Katie Gramich, 'Introduction' in *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880, Dinas Powys: Honno, 2004), pp. v-xxi.

⁶⁶ Amy Dillwyn, *A Burglary: or 'Unconscious Influence'* (1883, Dinas Powys: Honno, 2009), p. 66.

with the verdict, ‘Not guilty—but don’t do it again!’⁶⁷ While Vulliamy’s novels portray guilty men set free due to their social standing, Dillwyn’s narrative depicts a local jury that is aware of Richards’ illegal poaching proclivities yet refuses to let one of the working-classes pay to appease the middle-classes. The undermining of accepted authority, whether that be a state authority or a sense of middle-class privilege, here makes an appearance in early Welsh crime narratives, an appearance that continues in later Welsh crime fiction.

Despite the efforts of the law, it is the victim, Ethel, who eventually identifies Sylvester as the thief. Ethel’s behaviour when tied up and robbed unsettles Victorian ideas of fragile femininity. Instead of succumbing to ladylike hysteria, she displays so much *sang froid* as to fall back asleep until her maid discovers her. The subsequent act of identifying her attacker re-situates power with the victim, a figure normally relegated to the margins in crime fiction. Ethel decides Sylvester’s fate, that he must turn himself in to the police and take his punishment, but, in a narrative twist, Sylvester is caught in a fire at a ball and redeems himself by attempting to save others before being overcome by the conflagration. The text had earlier described how Sylvester’s wickedness was the result of a neglected and unloving childhood, an early example of crime fiction revealing an insight into the villain’s psychological drive. Rather than advocating state punishment, Dillwyn concludes the narrative with Sylvester’s act of Christian redemption. Again, this sets the pattern for later Welsh crime narratives, as recognised state authority and punishment are marginalised, even dispensed with entirely, making Welsh crime narratives difficult to label as such.

Emlyn Williams’s play, *Night Must Fall* (1935), also gives us a psychological glimpse into the mind of a murderer. Williams said, ‘[f]or years I had been fascinated by real-life murders, and accounts of murder trials: I found myself wanting to write a play in which the audience knew as the curtain rose, that the murderer had not only ‘done it’, but was to be

⁶⁷ Dillwyn, *A Burglary*, p. 129.

hanged for his crime'.⁶⁸ Instead of crime fiction's usual detection-driven narrative, Williams's play is a 'whydunnit' rather than a 'whodunnit'.⁶⁹ The first volume of Williams's autobiography, *George* (1961), details his early years, including growing up in rural Flintshire, while recording his literary influences. Allen Raine, the Welsh novelist mentioned in the previous chapter, had a profound effect. Edgar Allan Poe had a similar influence; after reading him, Williams 'emerged drowned in horror and determined to write like that, no more no less'.⁷⁰ *George* also mentions the gift of a Sexton Blake story as a reward for receiving his first scholarship but, too early, unfortunately, for it to have been a Gwyn Evans-authored tale. Interestingly, Williams also mentions in passing how that same summer he read *From Log-Cabin to White House* 'about President Lincoln, at least I had started with the murder and skimmed backwards'.⁷¹ These early influences tell, in part, of a fascination with crime while his unconventional reading of this biography prophesies his own treatment of crime in *Night Must Fall*.⁷²

The play shares the English settings favoured by Gwyn Evans and C. E. Vulliamy; in this instance, Essex. The villain is Dan, an engaging yet psychopathic Welshman who charms his way into the home of an elderly, rich valetudinarian, Mrs Bramson.⁷³ Dan 'never saw my mam, and I never had a dad, and the first thing I remember is... [sic] Cardiff Docks'.⁷⁴ In common with other writers, English and Welsh alike, Cardiff's docklands act as a literary

⁶⁸ Emlyn Williams, 'Author's Introduction', in *The Collected Plays of Emlyn Williams: Volume I* (London: Heinemann, 1961), pp. vii-xxv (p. xvi).

⁶⁹ The form is subverted in other ways too. Despite the *noir* influences: the psychological insight into the killer's mind, the early revelation of the murderer and the claustrophobic domestic setting, *Night Must Fall* is also darkly comic at times.

⁷⁰ Emlyn Williams, *George: An Early Autobiography* (1961, London: Penguin, 1982), p. 185.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115. Williams is mistaken about this biography. This is actually an account of the life of another assassinated American President, James A. Garfield.

⁷² Williams is better known for his plays and screenplays but he also went on to write an account of the notorious so-called Moors Murderers, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, in *Beyond Belief* (1967) and a fictionalised 'Doctor Crippen's Diary' in *Great Cases of Scotland Yard vol. (1978)* - another exemplar of Welsh crime writers' partiality for mimicry and performance.

⁷³ *Night Must Fall* was also filmed in 1937 and 1964, and re-staged on Broadway in 1999 though it must be said that Robert Montgomery's and Albert Finney's Welsh accents in the films fail to convince.

⁷⁴ Emlyn Williams, *Night Must Fall* in *The Collected Plays of Emlyn Williams: Volume I* (London: Heinemann, 1961), pp. 1-110 (p. 74).

shortcut for suggesting depravity and violence. M. Wynn Thomas has charged characters in Williams's *The Corn is Green* (1938), the play for which he is best known, with being 'Uncle Tom[s]',⁷⁵ a reference to Harriet Beecher Stowe *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851). Uncle Tom, the eponymous central character of the novel, has become an epithet for one who contributes to their people's subjugation through subservient behaviour towards their oppressors. Dan first appears to be playing a similar type in *Night Must Fall*; he is a semi-literate man who nonetheless can quote biblical passages by heart, like the rural Welsh questioned by the Blue Books' commissioners. However, this need not be interpreted as Williams's denigration of his native cultural identity. Williams wrote the play with the intention of playing Dan, '[f]or the facial picture of Dan, I did not have to look far; I put a fag-end between my lips and looked in the mirror'.⁷⁶ And he also spoke of how he had written *Night Must Fall* while working as a scriptwriter for a film company and how '[t]he summer of 1934 was, for me, one of megalomania burrowing underground: though they knew it not, Gaumont-British had, under contract, a Welsh mole'.⁷⁷ It would seem that Williams's nationality is underground, suppressed, only to erupt in the portrayal of deviant and transgressive characters.⁷⁸ This is further confused by the way Dan's character is based on performance. On several occasions, the audience or reader is told that Dan is 'acting' and that his 'personality is completely assumed'.⁷⁹ It is only on his arrest, when his transgression is revealed, that he becomes real. Again, like Gwyn Evans writing Sexton Blake, Williams creates a palimpsestic identity in writing Dan. Moreover, Dan's psychopathy can be seen as a warning about the psychological dangers of adopting and performing national stereotypes. Still, Dan may appear to be an

⁷⁵ M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference: Twentieth-century Writing in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p. 73.

⁷⁶ Williams, 'Introduction', p. xvii.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Williams also played Welsh villains onscreen: in both the early *noir* thriller *They Drive by Night* (1938) and the melodrama, *The Last Days of Dolwyn* (1949), the last written and directed by Williams and which featured an early onscreen appearance by Richard Burton.

⁷⁹ Williams, *Night Must Fall*, p. 29.

Uncle Tom yet it is an ambiguous performance which gulls his victims into trusting him and allows his deviant behaviour to pass unnoticed for some time.

Rhys Davies, too, provides an insight into a murderer's motives, but his work moves into the realm of *noir* as his crime narratives provide a shifting subjectivity. Born in Blaenclydach to a lower-middle-class family in a working-class community, Davies moved away from the South Wales valleys in his twenties to make his name as a writer.⁸⁰ In his monograph, *Rhys Davies* (1975), David Rees describes the writer as 'the first, and amongst the most highly-regarded' of a new generation of Welsh writers in English during the 1930s.⁸¹ The monograph begins by focussing on the opening pages of Davies's autobiography, *Print of a Hare's Foot* (1969), when a visit to Carmarthen by the elderly Davies sparks a childhood memory. In opening on a rural, 'traditional', Welsh-speaking Wales, one which awakens a Proustian memory, Rees argues that Davies is drawing attention to and aligning himself with a specific cultural identity. However, Rees's account makes little mention of the significance of crime in Davies's writing. Rees does point out that 'The Chosen One' was awarded an Edgar but manages to do so without mentioning that the award is for mystery and crime writing. Indeed, Rees avoids any mention of this particular genre at all.⁸² However, *Print of a Hare's Foot* also contains a lengthy anecdote in an early chapter concerning the colourful Dr William Price and his flight, disguised as a woman, from the law.⁸³ This, like the remembered Carmarthen, also sheds much light on Davies's work, both his crime writing and other fiction, and its sympathetic portrayal of transgressive figures who refuse to recognise social norms and so undermine state-sanctioned authority.

⁸⁰ Much of Davies's life has been documented elsewhere and as it seems to have little relevance to his crime writing, there will be little discussion here.

⁸¹ David Rees, *Rhys Davies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), p. 11.

⁸² David Rees also manages to evade all mention of Davies's sexuality in his monograph. This could be interpreted as misguided tact on Rees's part; however, his description of a lesbian relationship in *Nobody Answered the Bell* (London: Heinemann, 1971) as a 'maladjusted passion' (p. 61) suggests otherwise.

⁸³ Rhys Davies, *Print of a Hare's Foot* (London: Heinemann, 1969), pp. 14-21. Dr Price had fathered a child, Iesu Grist, at the age of eighty-one. Following the death of his son, Price illegally cremated the child in accordance to what he felt were Druidic practices, which resulted in his flight to France.

Huw Osborne, however, does recognise the importance of crime in Rhys Davies's fiction. Osborne classifies some of Davies's work as *noir*, citing Lee Horsley's definition of this genre as 'characterized by its stress on the subjective point of view, by the shifting roles of the protagonist and society, generating the themes of alienation and entrapment' and that those protagonists may be 'victims, transgressors or investigators'.⁸⁴ So, like much *noir*, by using a transgressor as a central protagonist, Davies often provides insight into the murderer's psychological state. His crime writing also shares another element common to *noir* fiction; a lack of detection and, hence, a marginalisation of the detective figure. *Under the Rose* and 'The Chosen One' both render detection unnecessary as, like Vulliamy's novels, the murderer is made known to the reader through the narrative rather than having their identity revealed by a detective. Moreover, Davies was also influenced by crime fiction's beginnings, prior to the appearance of *noir* fiction. His autobiography lists his literary influences as a child and includes a reference to the previously mentioned Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-3). Sue's work spawned a series of City Mysteries which are acknowledged as proto-urban crime fiction by critics such as Maurizio Ascari and Stephen Knight.⁸⁵ Notably, the Mysteries are also detection-free. So, rather than perceiving the lack of detection as a failure on Davies's part to create recognisable crime fiction, one could argue that Davies has taken early, non-English, crime fiction paradigms to shape a genre suitable for Welsh writing in English. Not only does Davies remove the central authoritative detective figure, he also avoids English crime fiction models, such as the clue-puzzle and the imperial thriller.

This re-working of genres also allows writers to set crime in Wales but from a different perspective to that offered by English writers. Rather than have a visiting English

⁸⁴ Huw Edwin Osborne, *Rhys Davies* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2009), p. 114.

⁸⁵ Maurizio Ascari draws links between the City Mysteries and contemporary thrillers set specifically in the Vatican City in 'The Mysteries of the Vatican: From Nineteenth-century Anti-clerical Propaganda to Dan Brown's Religious Thrillers' in *Crime Fiction in the City: Capital Crimes* eds Lucy Andrew and Catherine Phelps (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 107-125 (p. 108). For a more detailed discussion, see Stephen Knight's *Mysteries of the Cities* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011).

detective as a focal narrative point, as did the writers discussed in the previous chapter, Davies's murder stories do away with the detective altogether and focus on multiple perspectives, including that of the transgressor. This allows for the inclusion of Welsh voices and, unlike the English-authored texts of the previous chapter, moves the Welsh from the role of colourful extras or native informants to the centre of the narrative. For instance, *Under the Rose* centres on Rachel Lloyd and her murder of her ex-lover, Stephen Meredith, who jilted her to elope with the local, Bristol-born barmaid. When he returns to Sarn in the Vale of Glamorgan to blackmail her, Rachel stabs him with a bread knife and then buries him under her prize-winning rose bushes. The weapon and choice of burial place point to a singularly feminine setting for a murder. Osborne remarks on Davies's 'focus on the psychology of murdering women in vaguely Gothic domestic settings'⁸⁶ and attributes this to Davies's sympathy with *noir* sensibilities and its tropes of 'unstable masculinity, [and] threatening femininity'.⁸⁷ However, this ignores Davies's debt to *noir*'s predecessor, the Gothic, specifically, the Female Gothic.⁸⁸ Early female-authored Gothic novels, such as Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), often featured women locked in secret rooms or underground labyrinths. In *Under the Rose*, Davies plays with this particular Gothic element by overturning gender roles. Rachel's murderous act is one of resistance and revenge. After the murder, like her roses which feed off the buried Stephen, Rachel appears to blossom. She is seen 'shimmering in a silk dress [...] Why, she looked ten years younger'.⁸⁹ For Rachel, murder is a means of regaining power and control; the victim becomes a transgressor. It is the male lover who is incarcerated, made secret, though in this case, he is hidden under a

⁸⁶ Osborne, *Rhys Davies*, p. 116.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁸⁸ For detailed discussions of the Female Gothic from its early recognition as a genre to the present day, see Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976, London: The Women's Press, 1978) and *The Female Gothic: New Directions* eds Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁸⁹ Rhys Davies, *Under the Rose* (London: Heinemann, 1940), p. 195.

flowerbed rather than in a castle dungeon. The act of murder frees Rachel, who then returns to society and the public space she shunned on being jilted.

Rachel also gains a freedom of sorts from investigation, capture or justice at the close of the novel by throwing herself off a mountain. Unsurprisingly, as I have already remarked, mountains are common in Welsh-set fiction. In her introduction to the short story anthology, *A View across the Valley* (1999) Jane Aaron points to the way in which Welsh women writers place their characters, often social outsiders, in what she terms ‘wild zones’⁹⁰ where they encounter ‘their destinies in isolated valleys, on barren hilltops or rough seas’.⁹¹ Generally, mountains act as geographical signifiers of Welsh culture but they have also served writers of both genders as locations for transgressors. I have already mentioned how Richard Llewellyn’s *How Green was my Valley* (1939) depicts a vigilante act of retribution on the mountain, away from the village community but mountains appear elsewhere in Welsh fiction as transgressive sites. For instance, the eponymous anti-hero of Ron Berry’s *So Long, Hector Bebb* (1970) successfully hides out in the mountains after killing his wife’s lover. Similarly, by choosing this location to evade justice through suicide, Davies’s victim-transgressor reclaims the mountains, for here she is immune to state authority. Rather than being seen as an act of defeat, Rachel’s suicide can be read as a final act of anarchy which undermines the right of the state to capture and punish, while awarding a final act of agency to the transgressor. Jane Aaron draws interesting parallels between the central characters of her chosen short stories and their native country:

for Wales too[...] is itself imagined as a social outsider. It is figured as a dispossessed, anarchic country, closer to nature than to culture, wild because it has not yet arrived at adult accountability and self-responsibility but is still, in childlike fashion, living its own intense and secret life under the governance of a distant parent.⁹²

⁹⁰ Jane Aaron, ‘Introduction’ in *A View across the Valley* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. ix-xx (p. x).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

⁹² Aaron, ‘Introduction’, *A View Across the Valley*, (p. xii).

Davies, too, makes connections between Rachel and an anarchic Nature, seen in the many references to her appearance, such as her hair which is ‘wild intractable stuff, leaping with a savage untidy life of its own’.⁹³ As I have pointed out, the connection between characters and countryside is not solely engendered by women writers, but the suggestion that rural settings for encounters, or in the case of crime, acts of transgression, can be anarchic in themselves may also be applied to the work of both genders. Though Aaron focuses on unspoilt rural locations and the example I have cited is an area that has grown wild since the decline of industrialisation – Davies’s Sarn mountain contains a disused quarry – the analogy still holds true. Rather than a state punishment being meted out to Davies’s transgressor, her suicide upon the mountain can be seen as an act of natural, ancient, albeit anarchic, justice that predates an imposed state authority.

Undoubtedly, there is now a movement on the part of Rhys Davies, and, in his later work, C. E. Vulliamy, away from modes of earlier Welsh crime writing. The first section of this chapter discussed how Welsh crime writers camouflaged their national identity by setting their fiction in accepted English crime scenes - Holmesian London, quaint rural villages – and through the use of English crime fiction paradigms, albeit subversively. Later writers appear to have gained cultural confidence by placing crime in their native countryside. Nonetheless, moving crime back to Wales seems to blur the sharp outlines of the genre, making it slippery and intangible. And *Under the Rose* is undeniably a Welsh novel; from the native characters to their Welsh-inflected speech patterns, even going so far as to include a house keeper named Olwen, whose name originates from a *Mabinogion* tale, and who plays the harp, an instrument redolent of Welsh national identity. Divided into three sections, the second, ‘The Offence’, which looks back at the days prior to Rachel being jilted, is the most noticeably Welsh section of the text and tends to an Edenic portrayal of Welsh rural life,

⁹³ Davies, *Under the Rose*, p. 112.

while the two sections which enclose this portray a contemporary, more anglicised Sarn, and it is in these sections that the crimes occur. However, a 1940 review in *The Tribune* by Daniel George, titled 'Under the Welsh Rose', makes clear the focus of the reviewer's criticism. Derogatory in tone, the review mocks the realism of the novel but seems to link this with national identity, remarking of Rachel's wild behaviour that '[n]o, she had not been in an air raid. She was, I gather, just being Welsh'.⁹⁴ George's emphasis on the supposed unusual behaviour of the Welsh gives him sufficient reason to dismiss the novel entirely, admitting that he did not read past page seventeen. For this reviewer at least, the novel's alleged lack of merit is based, in part, upon the visibility of Welsh identity. This highlights a problem for Welsh writers and their engagement with crime writing during this period: to write successful crime, it would appear that one has to hide behind an English identity. If Welsh national and cultural identity is foregrounded, the crime becomes submerged beneath that identity.

Unlike *Under the Rose*, Davies's much later story 'The Chosen One' (1967) is set in an unnamed, fictional Welsh village. Here, the village boasts 'a disused cattle market, a recently built confectionery factory, a nineteenth-century Nonconformist chapel, which had become a furniture depository, [...] a row of cottages remaining from days when the town profited from rich milk and tough flannel woven at river-side mills'.⁹⁵ Despite the plethora of Welsh tropes, Davies portrays a small town which is gradually losing its rich rural and religious life. The focus of the story is the relationship between Audrey Vines, owner of the Plas Idwal estate, and her tenant, Rufus. Rufus's grandfather had been cheated out of the rights to his home, Brychan Cottage, by Mrs Vine's father and now Rufus is soon to be

⁹⁴ Daniel George, 'Under the Welsh Rose', *The Tribune*, 27 February 1940, p. 22. Available at <http://archive.tribunemagazine.co.uk/article/27th-september-1940/22/--under-the-welsh-rose> [Accessed 4 April 2012]. This view of Welsh womanhood as disposed to irrational behaviour has a predecessor in Arthur Conan Doyle's short story 'The Musgrave Ritual'. A murderous servant girl, also named Rachel, is described as 'a very good girl, but of an excitable Welsh temperament'. 'The Musgrave Ritual' in *Sherlock Holmes: The Major Stories with Contemporary Critical Essays* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 197-213 (p. 201).

⁹⁵ Rhys Davies, 'The Chosen One' in *Rhys Davies Collected Stories Volume II* ed. Meic Stephens (1967, Llandysul: Gomer, 1996), pp. 250-277 (p. 262).

evicted. Eviction and dispossession are recurrent themes in Welsh writing; here the trope is further accentuated as the cottage bears the name of a fifth-century South Walian king whose descendants have long since been deposed by English rule.⁹⁶ In an attempt to plead his case with Mrs Vines, Rufus visits her late one evening and drunkenly kills her.

As in *Under the Rose*, Davies does not make a detective figure the focal narrative point, but he employs a heterodiegetic narration, allowing the reader some insight into the psychology of several characters, including the murderer and victim. This is not unusual in crime fiction. I have discussed Emlyn Williams's *Night Must Fall* and the glimpse given into the killer's motives; some American crime novels, such as Jim Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me* (1952) and Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1955), predate Davies's use of a killer's perspective. However, Tom Ripley and Thompson's Deputy Sheriff Lou Ford, like Williams's Dan, are clearly psychopathic. In Davies's crime narratives, the transgressors are first victims. As with Rachel Lloyd, the motive for murder in Davies's 'The Chosen One' is not to achieve wealth and status or to evade detection through acts of senseless violence but it is an act by the powerless finally striking back. This can lead to the further difficulty in categorising Welsh writers' work as crime fiction as villainy is not contained but explained. Rather than demonising the killer, Davies, like his predecessor, Dillwyn, provides reasons why they committed this aberrant act.

Such a modification of genre norms may initially be seen as a liberal rewriting of conservative crime fiction, yet the explanations offered in *Under the Rose* and 'The Chosen One' are culturally specific. Rachel Lloyd kills to free herself from the oppression of an old lover and her action could be viewed as a feminist blow for freedom. Rufus kills Audrey Vines after being threatened with eviction from his home, Brychan Cottage, which 'always

⁹⁶ Examples range from Allen Raine's 'Home, Sweet Home: A True Story' (1908), Gwyn Thomas's 'Oscar' (1946), to Niall Griffiths's *Sheepshagger* (2001).

belonged to my family'.⁹⁷ The Vines' treatment of Rufus and his grandparents can be seen as a criticism of English middle-class families who buy up land in Wales to the detriment of the local population. In reality, the local colliery owner in Clydach Vale during Davies's childhood was a Welshman, D. A. Thomas, later Viscount Tonypandy. But not all landowners were Welsh, nor did they enjoy Thomas's good reputation. Many had come from elsewhere and Davies would have been aware of neighbouring landowners like the Crawshays and the Butes who grew rich from the industrialisation of the south Wales valleys sometimes at the cost of its native working-class Welsh. For instance, in 1831, workers took to the streets, in what became known as the Merthyr Uprising, to protest at the lowering of their wages by William Crawshay leaving many dead when soldiers fired upon the crowds.⁹⁸ Perhaps such local history influenced Davies's portrayal of a malevolent landowning family in 'The Chosen One'. Rather than profiting from coal, the fictional Vines have bought land cheaply from Rufus's grandfather, 'a man who couldn't read or write',⁹⁹ only to profit from subsequent industrialisation, in this case, from allowing rail rights across the recently-purchased land. Rufus and his family have been exploited and continue to be at the whims of a landowning family.

The latest descendant of this line, Audrey Vines, displays a peculiarly colonial attitude to Rufus. Spying on him through binoculars renews in her 'an interest in studies begun during long-ago travels in countries far from Wales, and she often jotted her findings into a household-accounts book'.¹⁰⁰ Audrey has lived for a time in Africa and describes Rufus anthropologically: 'the prognathous jaw, broad nose, and gypsy-black hair of this heavy-bodied but personable young man bore distinct atavistic elements'.¹⁰¹ This is also the language of the coloniser and Rufus is labelled in terms normally reserved for the African

⁹⁷ Davies, 'The Chosen One', (p. 274).

⁹⁸ John Davies, *History of Wales* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), pp. 356-7.

⁹⁹ Davies, 'The Chosen One', (p. 255).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Davies, (p. 257).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

‘savage’. The othering of Rufus is complete when the reader is told that, in Audrey’s view, he is a ‘throwback descendant of an ancient race’,¹⁰² a description that owes much to the myth of the Celt as racially-different from the later Anglo-Saxons. The historian John Davies suggests that the ideology of a dark Celtic other as racially inferior to the English was ‘the central myth of British imperialism’.¹⁰³ The fictional Audrey embodies this belief in imperial superiority. Furthermore, Rufus also shares another element with the African Other: the fear engendered in the coloniser of an unbridled and unnatural sexuality. Later, Audrey tells Rufus how she has watched him swim naked in the river and observed how he is ‘almost as hairy as an ape [...] but your organs are exceptionally pronounced’.¹⁰⁴ Rufus’s nationality robs him of power until he is subject to a female gaze – a reversal of usual gender relations –, objectified and reduced to the status of a zoological exhibit. Kirsti Bohata has remarked how Davies ‘make[s] deliberate and occasionally ironic use of atavistic imagery’.¹⁰⁵ As Rufus’s eviction letter comes shortly after Audrey sees him with a local girl, one can deduce that Audrey’s interest is not merely scientific but that there is also an element of sexual jealousy present. Far from Audrey being an objective observer, she is lasciviously voyeuristic in her scrutiny of Rufus. One could argue that it is Audrey who commits the criminal act in this particular text.

Notwithstanding Audrey’s power over Rufus, the Gothic interior of Audrey’s house, especially the kitchen, traditionally a woman’s realm, suggests a power in decline. Dressed for dinner, Audrey dines by candlelight in her filthy kitchen on tinned sardines, foil-wrapped processed cheese and champagne. Earlier Gothic texts often depicted the dissolution of a

¹⁰² Davies, ‘The Chosen One’, (p. 257).

¹⁰³ Davies, *History of Wales*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁴ Davies, ‘The Chosen One’, (p. 270).

¹⁰⁵ Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 30. Bohata devotes a chapter, ‘Stereotypes of Alterity: Race, Sexuality and Gender’ (pp. 29-58) to the use of such tropes by Welsh writers.

once-aristocratic line.¹⁰⁶ ‘The Chosen One’ depicts something similar, yet here, the ruling class lack nobility, past or otherwise. Audrey’s murder is exceptionally Gothic: Rufus strikes her with the three-branched candelabra, its flames guttering out as he plunges it down. The choice of weapon, a redundant antique in a modern age, is significant. Again, as Osborne has remarked, Davies portrays a woman in a domestic yet Gothic setting. Like Rachel Lloyd, Audrey Vines’ isolation in the domestic space is a self-imposed containment. Audrey’s freedom from this containment is also through death, not by suicide but at the hands of Rufus, an act she has desired and stage-managed; hence the title, ‘The Chosen One’, for Rufus has been picked for this role. Again, this is a subversive act for crime fiction. Normally, the victim is a necessary plot device and his or her character and actions are investigated after death as a detective unravels the motive for murder. Rarely are they complicit in their own death.¹⁰⁷ This is another facet of Davies’s crime fiction that makes it difficult to place in any of its subgenres.

So, in Davies’s crime texts, murderers are also victims, victims have some agency in their own demise and, in common with the other texts discussed in this chapter, the detective has no central role. At the close of the story, Rufus turns himself in to the local police station where an officer glances up ‘in mild surprise’.¹⁰⁸ While the story ends on the containment of the transgressor, this is a self-imposed containment, curtailing the need for police investigation. Like Audrey choosing her murderer, Rufus chooses to hand himself in.

By examining these common themes and tropes, a clear progression can be seen from the early, anglicised crime texts to later culturally-inflected narratives. Not only are shared

¹⁰⁶ Much of Ann Radcliffe’s work expands upon this theme, the aforementioned *A Sicilian Romance* being just one example. However, Mary Wollstonecraft’s unfinished *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) is one which makes this theme overt. This is something that is still being dealt with today by contemporary writers; Rachel Tresize’s *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000) moves the setting to the constraints of a council estate rather than a castle but contains many tropes which are similar to those of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel.

¹⁰⁷ Martin Amis’s *London Fields* does have the eventual victim arrange her own murder but this was not published until 1989, over twenty years after ‘The Chosen One’.

¹⁰⁸ Davies, ‘The Chosen One’, (p. 277).

themes apparent - the subversion of authority, the question over what constitutes crime, and the blurring of boundaries in the roles of victim and transgressor – but it is evident that the treatment of these tropes has evolved. The texts themselves move from a subversive mimicry via Emlyn Williams's warning about the dangers of madness inherent in mimicry to an overt unveiling and validation of national identity. Nonetheless, all the writers discussed have produced crime fiction which displays traces of their cultural identity, whether that be through the unsettling nature of mimicry or through foregrounding cultural specificity while moulding crime fiction into new, albeit rough, shapes. It is these new plastic forms that offer later writers the opportunity to further adapt crime fiction to their own ends.

Chapter III: Socialist Crime Fiction

In an editorial piece for *The Guardian* in 2011, Deborah Orr asked ‘Can Scandinavian crime fiction teach socialism?’¹ Orr argued that socialism is inextricably bound up with Scandinavian crime fiction, tracing the source of this politicised genre back to Sweden’s Maj Sjöwall’s and Per Wahlöö’s ten-part police procedural series, *Roman om ett brott* (*The Story of a Crime* 1965-1975). By tracking and critiquing the failings of the Swedish welfare state, Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s novels challenged the idealised Sweden portrayed in previous crime fiction as exemplified by Stieg Trenter’s Harry Friberg series (1944-1967).² Orr goes on to suggest that Scandinavian crime fiction resonates with British audiences as it often discusses the tensions between a socialist left and a liberal left, in other words, between state regulation and liberalism, tensions which were heightened during Tony Blair’s government and which are still debated today. In this respect, modern Scandinavian crime fiction contradicts the often repeated and accepted truism that crime fiction is a hierarchical, conservative form that seeks to contain an anarchic act, usually murder, through detection and revelation, capture and punishment, in order to restore stability to a prevailing status quo. Stephen Knight uses the example of the clue-puzzle to exemplify crime fiction’s perceived conservatism and defines it thus: ‘a wealthy person is murdered and an elite individual resolves the problem: the poor, the police, the oppressed and the collective have no place in this particular fantasy’.³ While Scandinavian crime fiction does fulfil its conservative function of containing crime, it also addresses socio-economic concerns – immigration is a prevailing theme, for instance, as

¹ Deborah Orr, ‘Can Scandinavian crime fiction teach socialism?’, *The Guardian* 24 February 2011. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/24/can-scandinavian-crime-fiction-teach-socialism> [accessed 25 February 2011].

² For more on these authors’ political engagement with crime fiction, and on crime fiction set in Sweden’s capital city, Stockholm, see Kerstin Bergman’s ‘From National Authority to Urban Underbelly: Negotiations of Power in Stockholm Crime Fiction’, in *Crime Fiction in the City: Capital Crimes*, eds. Lucy Andrew and Catherine Phelps (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

³ Stephen Knight, ‘Radical Thrillers’ in *Watching the Detectives: Essays on Crime Fiction* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), pp. 172-188 (p. 172).

is the role of women in the workplace and the home – but does so through a leftist or socialist perspective.

Moreover, other, earlier exponents in Britain and America were also using the genre to censure socio-economic norms and their malign influence on society. Though his Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (1853) is one of the earliest depictions of a detective, Charles Dickens was not strictly a crime writer. Nonetheless, he used criminality to highlight the conditions of the poor. *Oliver Twist* (1838), for example, uses a proto-crime narrative to draw attention to Dickens's social concerns. Similarly, *Little Dorrit* (1857) critiques the criminalisation of the poor. A much later instance is the American Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* (1929), considered one of the first fully-fledged socialist detective stories, which centres on city corruption, crooked police and shady yet powerful industrialists. Bran Nicol has suggested that a study of crime fiction has to recognise 'the role of crime fiction and film in shaping modern notions of criminality – rather than simply *reflecting* them, or allowing us to escape them'.⁴ As well as signalling a move away from the study of crime fiction to a study of crime *in* fiction [my emphasis], Nicol's cultural materialist response suggests that crime fiction does not always have to mirror prevailing norms but can be used as a space in which to redefine criminality. In Hammett's text, the message is that the real crime is capitalism itself, as its detective figure, the 'Continental Op', quickly discovers the identity of the murderer but then takes it upon himself to investigate 'crime and political corruption in Personville', a town owned and run by a sole wealthy industrialist.⁵ Murder, for this detective, is secondary to political corruption.

As well as attacking prevailing socio-economic systems, some crime fiction has provided a space in which to attack governments and the state. Commentators like Margaret

⁴ Bran Nicol, 'Introduction: Crime Culture and Modernity', *Crime Culture: Figuring Criminality in Fiction and Film* (London, New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 1-9 (p. 6). Emphasis is in the original.

⁵ Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* in *The Maltese Falcon, The Thin Man, Red Harvest* (London: Everyman's Library, 2000), pp. 433-644, (p. 477).

Attack have discussed the politicisation of French crime fiction, especially the *néo-polar*, a hardboiled genre which she explains is ‘directly related to 1968 and the themes of protest: the power of the state, police brutality, [and] the need for social and political change’.⁶ British writers too have responded to dominant political systems in their crime fiction, more often in the form of political thrillers. Chris Mullin, a Labour MP for many years, wrote his novel, *A Very British Coup* (1982), during the early years of Thatcherism; this thriller depicts a Socialist utopian government and its destruction by right-wing establishment forces. It appears that, despite their national diversity, these crime writers are united by their socialist sympathies. Thus, crime fiction can sometimes attack and critique the status quo, rather than maintaining dominant hierarchies.

So what of Welsh socialist crime fiction? Some Welsh authors have indeed written crime fiction that engages with political systems. The most successful is Cardiff-born Ken Follett, who is married to the politician Barbara Follett; although he is well-known as a writer, they are both also recognised for their support and fundraising activities for New Labour. Nonetheless, Follett’s thrillers do not overtly critique dominant political and socio-economic systems but are written with mass markets in mind. More importantly, there is little trace of Follett’s national identity in his work, as Welsh characters and settings are mostly absent. Recently, however, Follett has depicted Welsh characters and culture in his *Century* trilogy, the first of which is *Fall of Giants* (2010). However, this is an historical epic, rather than a thriller. It seems that mass markets can only absorb Welsh culture if it is viewed through the prism of nostalgia, making it distant enough to be palatable. Unlike Follett, the authors whose work I discuss in this chapter, Menna Gallie’s *Strike for a Kingdom* (1959), Raymond Williams’s *The Volunteers* (1978) and Robert Lewis’s *The Last Llanelli Train* (2005), have not only produced socialist-inflected crime fiction but their Welsh cultural

⁶ Margaret Attack, *May 68 in French Fiction and Film: Rethinking Society, Rethinking Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 123.

heritage is clearly visible. I would argue that the very act of infusing crime fiction with a specific cultural identity is a political decision. The Welsh authors I discussed in the previous chapter made powerful cultural statements by writing Welsh characters at a time when such characters were marginalised or demeaned by their English counterparts, or through the subversion of current English paradigms. In this chapter, I will be looking at Welsh crime fiction that is overtly political in its aims and uses socialist theory and discourses as a riposte to cultural imperialism and critically to evaluate the status quo. The writers here all originate from south Wales: Ystradgynlais, Pandy, and Abergavenny, respectively. This is a south Wales affected in some way by its industrial past and where traces of a once radical socialism still exist. So perhaps it is no surprise that these particular authors have chosen to write texts that present an alternative socialist-postcolonial representation to the more accepted conservative norms of crime fiction. These writers not only confer a specific cultural heritage upon place but they also allude to a south Welsh political heritage.

The use of crime fiction can be a politically charged decision on the part of the author too and the deployment of this particular genre is a departure for two of the writers discussed here. Menna Gallie's work has been the subject of feminist and cultural reclamation through republication by Honno Press, while Raymond Williams was a renowned academic whose fiction is considered part of the canon of Welsh writing in English. Both are writers whose work is recognised for celebrating and shaping a unique cultural identity. As I touched upon in the preceding chapter, crime fiction has often been denigrated in the past as 'lowbrow' and not a fit genre for recognised canonical writers, or for literary criticism. Nonetheless, the use of crime fiction, a populist genre, is an important political gesture on the part of these writers. The genre has the advantage of being a more effective medium in which to proselytise: crime fiction provides a much wider audience in terms of both number and egalitarian reach. To write within this genre could also be construed as a political decision not to place literature,

high- or low-brow, within an elitist hierarchy. One of the earliest proponents of this democratic ideal was Richard Hoggart. His influential work, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), was an early analysis of what he termed ‘mass publications’: magazines, films, popular music - in effect, any entertainment enjoyed by the working-classes.⁷ Hoggart takes issue with the sentimental, romanticised and patronising portrayal of the working-class in literature. Instead, he attempts to portray a specific working-class culture which, though deemed lowbrow, reflects the values and sentiments of a particular class. In this manner, often denigrated media, such as the cheap weekly magazines, are occasionally valorised. Hoggart devotes a section to ‘gangster-fiction’ magazines and pulp publications, a genre that would be referred to as ‘hardboiled’ or ‘*noir*’ today.⁸ In this segment, he compares pulp fiction with the work of writers such as William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and even Jane Austen. Hoggart concedes that the prose of gangster-fiction can be limited; however, he does see that similar themes occur across the two types of literature, though they are often set in diametric opposition to each other. Hoggart recognises the importance of the study of a previously marginalised class of publication, a study of which is revelatory of a previously marginalised class of people. Hence, the choice of a populist genre such as crime fiction by self-proclaimed socialists like Menna Gallie and Raymond Williams speaks of a desire to reach a working-class audience while delivering a politically subversive message in their work.

I

In her ‘Introduction’ to Menna Gallie’s *Strike for a Kingdom* (1959), the historian Angela V. John notes that this is ““a poet’s novel” *despite* being partly a “whodunit””⁹ [my emphasis]. In order to place Gallie (1919-1990) within the canon of Welsh writing in English, in this

⁷ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of working-class life with special references to publications and entertainments* (1957, London: Penguin, 1965), p. 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 258. Hoggart points out many common tropes of ‘gangster-fiction’ discussed by later commentators: the isolation and alienation of the narrative figure, the role of a femme fatale and the valorisation of the criminal or, at least, a blurring between illegality and criminality.

⁹ Angela V. John, ‘Introduction’, *Strike for a Kingdom* (1959, Dinas Powys: Honno, 2011), pp. vii-xii (p. ix).

instance through re-publication by Honno Press, it is deemed necessary to denigrate its populist element, as this may detract from its literary merit. Nonetheless, as in the case of Rhys Davies's 'The Chosen One' which, as discussed in the previous chapter, won an Edgar award, the quality of Gallie's crime writing was also recognised outside Wales: *Strike for a Kingdom* was shortlisted for the Crime Writers' Association Golden Dagger award in 1959. John's implied disparagement of crime fiction also ignores Gallie's possible reasons for choosing such a genre. Gallie's writing generally is unarguably of literary and cultural merit while remaining accessible to the reader. The use of a mass-marketed genre such as detective fiction does not signal literary elitism but, as outlined above, suggests an author's desire to reach a larger, more egalitarian readership. As Menna Gallie came from a proudly socialist family – her monoglot Welsh grandmother's two English phrases were 'I like ice cream' and 'Keir Hardie called me Comrade'¹⁰ – it is not such a leap to suggest that the choice of a popular, accessible genre was partly politically motivated.

Like the emergent Welsh crime fiction discussed earlier, *Strike for a Kingdom* continues the foregrounding of a Welsh cultural specificity. The novel is set in the fictional mining village of Cilhendre and centres on the murder of the disliked mine manager, Mr Nixon. Welsh characters are placed centre-stage and are frequently valorised over other English or anglicised figures. There are un-translated Welsh terms and phrases in the text, but these may initially suggest a marketable exoticism for the English reader: their lack of gloss does not detract from an understanding of the text as they are mostly exclamations or forms of address. Nonetheless, the Welsh terms included shift from those that may be familiar to an English audience; *bach* [little one], for instance, is a term sometimes used by English authors but Gallie also uses colloquialisms that do not have a direct English translation, like 'twt-y-

¹⁰ John, 'Introduction, (p. viii).

baw,¹¹ [bah] or even an English equivalent, such as ‘*myn uffern i*’.¹² These hint that this is a novel written with a Welsh readership in mind, as well as being aimed at English markets looking for local colour.

Gallie also claimed that the initial idea for the story arose from a childhood memory of deprivation in her native Ystradgynlais during the General Strike of 1926, the period in which the novel is set.¹³ Julian Symons’s *Bloody Murder* discusses the self-imposed restraints of 1920s crime fiction and how ‘[i]n the British stories the General Strike of 1926 never took place, trade unions did not exist, and when sympathy was expressed for the poor it was not for the unemployed but for those struggling along on a fixed inherited income’.¹⁴ The exclusion of such subject matter from interwar crime fiction did provide its readership with a literary escapism in an uncertain time. However, Symons goes on to state that ‘[i]t is safe to say that almost all the British writers in the twenties and thirties, and most of the American, were unquestionably right-wing’.¹⁵ Gallie’s decision to set crime fiction during this period could be seen as an act of reclamation for a previously silenced period of British political activism. Written during the post-war 1950s, a period when rationing was finally coming to an end and in which Harold MacMillan declared that ‘most of our people have never had it so good’,¹⁶ the novel acts as a reminder of the poverty and radicalism of the past, one which was ignored by contemporaneous crime fiction. This placing of crime fiction in an industrialised community also acts as a rebuttal to the Romanticised Wales depicted by English authors who, though writing during and shortly after the General Strike, make no mention of it, nor, indeed, recognise industrialisation in Wales at all. The setting of the working-class village of

¹¹ Menna Gallie, *Strike for a Kingdom* (1959, Dinas Powys: Honno, 2011), p. 35.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹³ John, ‘Introduction’, (p. vii)

¹⁴ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder* (1972, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 118.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Macmillan, (Maurice) Harold, first earl of Stockton (1894–1986)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40185> [accessed 7 Sept 2012].

Cilhendre suggests an appeal to a working-class audience, rather than the middle-class readership alluded to by Colin Watson and cited in Chapter I, further unsettling accepted notions of crime fiction and its consumption.

Symons makes no mention of *Strike for a Kingdom* in *Bloody Murder*. There is the possibility that if Symons was aware of the novel, he may not have classified it as a detective novel, for *Strike for a Kingdom*, like some of its Welsh predecessors, is a hybrid text, making it difficult to recognise as crime fiction. The form appropriated and blended with detective fiction here is the Welsh industrial novel. Raymond Williams has discussed how this particular form appeared later than its English counterparts for, in the case of the Welsh novel, it is ‘written from *inside* the industrial communities’ rather than by an outside middle-class observer, as in the English novelistic tradition of industrial-set novels, such as those by Elizabeth Gaskell.¹⁷ As these Welsh authors lacked the privilege and circumstances in which to write, the Welsh industrial novel took longer to establish. Williams goes on to suggest that the appearance of the Welsh industrial novel was also hampered by the ‘problems of the two languages and the relative unfamiliarity, in Welsh, of the appropriate realist form’.¹⁸ There are echoes here, perhaps, of the delayed emergence of Welsh crime fiction, itself a late developer in an established genre where, initially, there were only English patterns to follow. I mentioned in the Introduction Anthony Brockway’s argument with regard to Welsh science fiction and the lack of a tradition on which to build; this also rings true of the Welsh industrial novel. However, in Gallie’s political text, there are traces of a Welsh heritage and tradition, both of the industrial novel and of Welsh crime fiction. I can only conjecture that the hybridisation of these forms in one text is the reason critics like John have difficulty with acknowledging its crime fiction patterns. *Strike for a Kingdom* was originally published by the left-wing Victor Gollancz, a company that published other Welsh authors who wrote of

¹⁷ Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1979), p. 7. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the industrial experience: Gwyn Thomas, for instance. However, Gollancz also published much crime fiction¹⁹ and it is this aspect of Gallie's text that I wish to examine here.

Raymond Williams finds that at the heart of so many Welsh industrial novels lies 'one decisive experience: the General Strike of 1926'.²⁰ Perhaps it is the appearance of the 1926 dispute in a crime fiction-influenced *Strike for a Kingdom* rather than in its customary place, Welsh industrial fiction, that makes the text so difficult to place. The General Strike has no traditional role in crime fiction, but it does in the Welsh Industrial novel, a genre often seen as a male preserve. However, any recognition of *Strike for a Kingdom* as a crime text is further hampered by the novel's subversion of the accepted roles within crime fiction. This is a subversion hinted at in previous Welsh crime writers' fiction. For instance, like that of her Welsh predecessors, Gallie's treatment of the detective figure consistently undermines his authority. What is also of interest is the creation of anarchic sites within fictional Cilhendre, places in which everyday law and rules are ignored. Initially, the novel follows a chronological narrative that is driven by the crime: after a brief lead-up to the murder in which the scene is set and characters sketched in, the local magistrate, D. J. Williams, is told at a local carnival during the judging of the fancy dress competition, of the manager's murder. This sets the tone of the novel: a carnival is a space for misrule and anarchic mayhem, while the fancy dress hints at masquerade and performance, echoing earlier Welsh crime fiction. However, within this anarchic space, the constables who break the news to D. J. in the carnival field, actually have their performance of power stripped away as they are seen wearing their 'everyday, doing-a-bit-in-the-garden faces, not their point duty masks'.²¹ Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the carnival is a space in which 'folk-culture' can flourish. He goes on to suggest that 'folk-humour', which is given free reign at carnivals or similar

¹⁹ Some years later, Gollancz would also publish Gwen Moffat's *Lady with a Cool Eye* (1973), a detective novel by an English author set in Snowdonia (see Chapter V).

²⁰ Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, p. 12.

²¹ Gallie, *Strike for a Kingdom*, p. 18.

festivities, is also a reaction against sober authority.²² As the news of the murder, brought by the constables, spreads across the carnival field, the mirth and misrule dissipates. Though there have been echoes of the Twelfth Night tradition where servants and the lower orders ruled over their masters for the day, and the constables have been put back on equal terms with their community, still their 'sober authority' dampens the anarchic festivities.

The constables are village men who retain the local accent and remnants of spoken Welsh. On breaking the news of her husband's murder to Mrs Nixon, PC Glyndwr Thomas says to her, '[d]on't you take on, Mrs. Nixon fach. Sit you down by there'.²³ For the local PCs, authority does not come naturally but has to be performed. Later, intimidated by the manager's house, PC Thomas has 'to remind himself that he was a member of The Force (Capitals)'.²⁴ Still, power is embraced by those higher up the hierarchy. Inspector Evans is put in charge of the investigation. Evans is 'red-faced, like an angry boil. A tall, broad man, with white hair and a military moustache, full as a balloon of his own esteem'.²⁵ The Inspector is Colonel Blimpish, an authority figure, yet foolish in his self-regard. He is oppressive, like the mine manager, and it is only when his constables are away from him that they can 'win back their manhood and their humanity'.²⁶ *Strike for a Kingdom* is overtly a socialist text in its depiction of such oppressive hierarchies; nonetheless, this is a specific Welsh socialism displayed, for what truly sets the Inspector apart from his own community is his anglicisation. A telling scene shows the Inspector and a constable calling on a farm overlooking the mining village, only to be threatened with a shotgun by its owner, Peci Brynhir. The Inspector, unlike his constable and the rest of the community, is unaware of Peci's propensity to protect her property in this manner. Peci, a matriarch who rules over the

²² Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Folk Humour and Carnival Laughter', in *The Bakhtin Reader* ed. Pam Morris (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1994), pp. 194-205 (p. 196).

²³ Gallie, *Strike for a Kingdom*, p. 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

family farm, will only speak Welsh. The Inspector does speak his native language but prefers ‘not to let it be known that he suffered from this disability’.²⁷ Eventually, at the advice of his officers, Inspector Evans does not cross into Peci’s farm. And this leads us to the crux of the matter. A communal, Welsh authority, one which is driven by compassion rather than the will to punish, is frequently valorised in this text. Rather than undermine authority in its entirety, Gallie suggests alternative methods of justice and law. For instance, while Peci’s cultivated farm is not quite the ‘wild zone’ described by Jane Aaron and discussed in the previous chapter, it is another anarchic site in which the Inspector’s anglicised patriarchal rule is not recognised but, nevertheless, is respected by the local constables.

But, as in other Welsh-authored texts, the police are largely redundant. Rather than garnering clues, the Inspector is thwarted at every turn through misinformation and silence. Eventually, the community becomes aware of the murderer’s identity, yet they fail to hand him in. As in the case of Rhys Davies’s treatment of his transgressors, Gallie’s text provides reasons for the murderer’s transgressions and hence elicits a measure of the reader’s sympathy. In this instance, the murderer is D. J.’s neighbour, Gerwin, who, when attempting to bury his sister’s secret stillborn baby, is caught in the act and taunted by the mine manager. When the police do discover the identity of the murderer, Gerwin foils their attempts at arrest by killing himself on the local mountain that overlooks the community of Cilhendre, a similar act to that of Davies’s Rachel Lloyd in *Under the Rose*. The mountain, an industrialised site made quiet by local men withdrawing their labour, has become another anarchic ‘wild zone’. This has similarities with another of Gallie’s novels, *The Small Mine* (1962). Also set in Cilhendre, but some years later, *The Small Mine* likewise sees an industrial site made quiet, but through the violent act of murder. The murderer’s choice of site for self-annihilation in

²⁷ Gallie, *Strike for a Kingdom*, p. 85.

Strike for a Kingdom could be a final reclamation of the mountain, an act initiated by the strike and reinforced by the murder of the mine manager.

As in other texts, authority is flouted but, in this case, the distaste for authority is overt. Rather than remain coded as in the earlier texts, *Strike for a Kingdom* makes clear why there is no respect in this text for such state authority since it is an authority that has distanced itself from the needs of its own community, an authority which serves a minority English middle-class rather than its Welsh working-class majority. Anyway, as Mrs Nixon tells the Inspector, '[t]he people will not care about the abstraction of seeing justice done'.²⁸ English law is seen as distant and ineffectual compared to the older laws of biblical justice. For example, the mine manager's mistress, Jess Jeffries, is more frightened by the possibility of the exposure of her transgressions in chapel, since 'chapel was reality and its laws much nearer home than the law of Judge and Jury'.²⁹ As criminals would have been taken to the nearest town, Swansea or Cardiff, to be tried, this is geographically as well as metaphorically true. Condemnation in chapel is instantaneous and carries the further humiliation of being judged in front of one's own neighbours.

In spite of the fear people there harbour of being unmasked in chapel, Gallie's Cilhendre is a community driven by compassion, rather than a thirst for vengeance or justice. This view of justice is based in part on the community's idea of the real crime in this text. Few are sorry about the oppressive mine manager's death, including his own family. Nonetheless, the funeral of Gwen, Gerwin's sister, who dies of tuberculosis shortly after giving birth, 'was one of the largest remembered in Cilhendre'.³⁰ A few pages earlier, a conversation about Gwen amongst the men gathered on the tips of the quietened mine reveals

²⁸ Gallie, *Strike for a Kingdom*, p. 45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

what they consider to be the true crime in Cilhendre:

‘There we are again, see,’ the revolutionary of the police cell spoke up, ‘that girl has been murdered by economic conditions; if she had had proper nourishment as a kid, she wouldn’t have caught the old germ. And if she’d had any money she could have gone to Switzerland to be cured, instead of being sent home from the old Sanatorium. You wait till we have a Revolution or they nationalise the pits, any one will do, we’ll all claim a decent wage – the money we deserve and our kids won’t die of T.B. no more. We’ll have good food and good houses and, boys, we’ll have work; guaranteed, regular work. Sounds too good, don’t it?’³¹

Polemical though this is, the majority of the men agree with the sentiment. Like Hammett’s *Red Harvest*, the real crime perpetrated here is a capitalist oppression of the workers and their community. Nonetheless, Gallie’s novel does provide some consolation in the shape of Cilhendre’s community. Instead of crime fiction’s usual conclusion with the punishment of the murderer, this text ends with the funerals for Gerwin, the murderer of the mine manager, Gerwin’s sister Gwen, and her stillborn child. The community pulls together to support their bereaved mother: ‘Mrs Nixon sent a wreath, Elwyn Jefferies sent a salmon to help feed the visiting relatives, Everynight brought his five shillings fox money because he claimed Maggie’s beer was flat that week, and Maggie herself sent down a dozen bottles of stout’.³² The English Mrs Nixon and the villagers combine to show their respect and support, surprisingly so in the case of Mrs Nixon, as she has been widowed by Gerwin. Of equal importance to Cilhendre’s community is the ritual of the funerals for ‘some inner need was satisfied, the opium of the poor was a powerful drug, and they left the chapel refreshed and belonging and reassured for the time’.³³

The novel closes with D. J. Williams composing a poem. Rather than crime fiction’s usual desire for containment and punishment, the murders and disruption end in a creative act. D. J. is putting aside his authority as a magistrate, and, having come from the chapel, becomes once more a collier-poet. Healing, rather than punishment, is celebrated here and

³¹ Gallie, *Strike for a Kingdom*, p. 133.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³³ *Ibid.*

authority is laid aside in favour of cultural specificity, one which celebrates a Welsh communality. By rejecting crime fiction's usual pattern in which justice is seen to be done, Gallie ultimately seems to be critiquing the genre's ability truly to reflect the reality of Welsh life, or at least denigrating the authority recognised and valorised within crime fiction. Ultimately, she rewrites crime fiction from a socialist perspective, since hierarchical authority, represented here by the village police force, is undermined. And while socio-economic power is seen to rest in English, or at the least anglicised, hands, the cohesion of a Welsh community, one which provides for its members during times of deprivation and loss, is a powerful weapon against a capitalist society which seeks to exploit and oppress them.

II

Like Menna Gallie, Raymond Williams (1921-1988) also fictionalised the General Strike of 1926 in his semi-autobiographical novel, *Border Country* (1960). Nonetheless, this is a social realist novel rather than crime fiction. Williams's later thriller, *The Volunteers* (1978), takes a different subject matter, one to be discussed shortly. Born and raised in Pandy, between the Black Mountains and the Wales-England border, the academic and novelist Raymond Williams is known for his socialist-inflected intellectual examinations of culture. At his funeral, Stephen Heath, a student and later colleague of Williams, had this to say:

[t]o remember Raymond Williams here today is to pay tribute to a major figure in a socialist tradition that he continued, questioned and renewed; to pay tribute to a thinker whose work transformed our understanding of society and culture, of the realities those terms offer to describe.³⁴

It is not surprising, then, that the reissue of his political thriller *The Volunteers* by the Library of Wales in 2011 should include a preface by Kim Howells, a Welsh Labour Party politician and erstwhile MP for Pontypridd. In his preface to the 1987 edition of *Culture and Society* (1958), Williams points out how his analysis of society and culture's mutual interdependence was aligned with works such as Richard Hoggart's examination of working-class popular

³⁴ Cited in Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (London and New York: 1995), p. 7.

culture.³⁵ However, on the initial publication of *The Volunteers*, Williams claimed to be ‘surprised’ on seeing it described as a political thriller on the book-jacket but was reminded by his publisher how Williams had once remarked that ‘it would be perfectly possible to take a popular format like the thriller and put it to good use’.³⁶ Albeit unconsciously, then, Williams, like Gallie, uses a popular genre in an egalitarian and political move. Nonetheless, Williams’s need to put the thriller to ‘good use’ hints at an aesthetic uneasiness with the genre. Despite Williams’s criticism of a Leavisite literary elitism as ‘at worst [...] a pseudo-aristocratic authoritarianism’,³⁷ such criticism seems to have left its faint traces notwithstanding Williams’s egalitarian approach.

Williams’s sole crime fiction novel, *The Volunteers* (1978), is set some ten years in the future in a devolved Wales and investigates ‘the first shooting of a political leader, on the British mainland, in this century’.³⁸ It has sometimes been described as science fiction by some commentators due to its futuristic, dystopian setting.³⁹ Certainly, the portrayal of rolling, global news and police surveillance seem particularly prescient. Nonetheless, this has been dismissed by Stephen Knight who, in his definition of *The Volunteers* as crime fiction, points out the novel’s similarities with the American P.I. novel, mostly because it centres on ‘a lengthy active quest by the single investigating figure’⁴⁰ who provides a narrative focal point. This central, initially solitary, detective figure is Lewis Redfern, a ‘consultant analyst,

³⁵ Raymond Williams, ‘Preface’, *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell* (1958, Hogarth: London, 1987), pp. v-viii (p. vii).

³⁶ Raymond Williams, ‘The Welsh Trilogy and The Volunteers’ in *Who Speaks for Wales?: Nation, Culture, Identity*, ed. Daniel Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 112-142 (p. 137).

³⁷ Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 263.

³⁸ Raymond Williams, *The Volunteers* (1978, Cardigan: Parthian, 2011), p. 15.

³⁹ John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 162.

⁴⁰ Stephen Knight, “‘A Local Moment’: Raymond Williams’s *The Volunteers* as Crime Fiction”, in *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays* Volume 2 (1996), 126-137 (p. 127). For a more detailed discussion of PI fiction as a genre, see the following chapter.

on the political underground'⁴¹ with the global news corporation Insatel. Redfern is sent from London to report on the shooting of Edmund Buxton, Secretary of State for Wales.

The shotgun attack on Buxton takes place during an official visit to the real St. Fagans, an open-air folk museum in the Welsh capital Cardiff which displays historic vernacular buildings which have been re-erected in its grounds. Again, Welsh national and cultural identity is foregrounded, yet the novel questions certain notions of tradition and their portrayal. Walking through the grounds the next day, Redfern muses on a museum that offers 'a version of the life of a people: a version, characteristically, that attracted official visits'.⁴² Specifically, this is a version:

only of *rural* Wales...All the later history, of the majority of Welsh people, is simply not seen: the mining townships, the quarrymen's villages, the iron and steel works settlements; the pitcage, the picks and shovels, the slate-saws, the chisels, the masks of the blast furnacemen, the wrenches, the hoses, the grease-guns'.⁴³

It seems that Williams imagines a devolved Wales that has absorbed and reproduced colonial representations of a bucolic Welsh idyll. This is further marked by the simulation of rural Wales at the folk museum; although the original material objects of the people of Wales are displayed, '[t]here are no marks of use – the crumpled sheets, the stained knives...this is a cleaned-up history'.⁴⁴ Not only are the marks of use absent, but people are missing from the museum. Having been cleared first for the official visit and then shut down for the police investigation, the folk museum is unpopulated. This has similarities to much English crime fiction set in Wales, such as the previously discussed English imperial thrillers. Their sparsely-populated rural settings only offer a tourist version of Wales within their pages, while the reality of industrialised urban Wales is negated. Raymond Williams's novel reacts against this portrayal and containment of a replicated Welsh culture and questions its reality. By placing the violent attack upon Buxton in the serene setting of the folk museum, the novel

⁴¹ Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

disrupts the depiction of Wales in fiction as a space of rural tranquillity. Today, St Fagans includes some of those buildings that Williams felt were missing: the row of miners' cottages, the working men's institute and a projected future installation of a Victorian working-class pub present a more rounded picture of Welsh life.⁴⁵

Redfern's wanderings take him to the castle in the grounds, the site of the 'real history of this folk museum'.⁴⁶ Owned through the generations by first a Norman family, then passing onto English aristocracy, it is a 'gross building: a fortress that has been turned, through the centuries, into a country house' and one under which the inhabitants of those transposed cottages and farmhouses lived as 'under a definite shadow'.⁴⁷ In reality, St Fagans is situated in the grounds of a country house rather than in a castle's environs. Yet Williams's emphasis on the fictional colonial castle overshadowing the working-class homes speaks volumes about the political state of Wales within the novel. The novel, written shortly before the first, unsuccessful, referendum on Welsh devolution in 1979, envisages a future in a devolved Wales that is not an optimistic one. Redfern summarises the situation as 'you can govern yourselves, on this range of issues, within the limits of the money we are prepared to allocate to you'.⁴⁸ Welsh devolution was not attained until 1997, almost ten years after the fictional Wales of *The Volunteers*, yet the novel is surprisingly prophetic about the restricted powers initially granted to the Welsh Assembly government. It also appears that Buxton is not Welsh himself and fulfils his function as Secretary of State for Wales at a distance in Westminster. While devolution brings a degree of autonomy for Wales in *The Volunteers*, it seems that the nation still lives in the long shadow of the castle.

The pivotal event of the novel, one which happens off-page and is prior to the opening scenes of *The Volunteers*, is the fatal shooting of a young man by the armed forces who are

⁴⁵ A mid-Victorian pub in Cardiff, 'The Vulcan', has been recently dismantled and is being stored prior to rebuilding at St Fagans.

⁴⁶ Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

brought in to break strike action at a coal depot at Pontyrhiw. Unfortunately, while nationalisation of the coal industry may have brought better living conditions for the working man, as predicted by the revolutionary striker in Gallie's *Strike for a Kingdom*, nonetheless, in *The Volunteers* the struggle continues. It is this act that drives the narrative, the real 'crime' of the text which Redfern investigates in order to reveal the consequent cover-up by the state. This killing is the motive behind the retaliatory attack on Buxton, who authorised the army's presence. Buxton is deliberately shot in the legs, an act reminiscent of Irish Republican punishment shootings, or 'kneecappings'. Coupled with Redfern's reference to the earlier shooting in Pontyrhiw as 'that bloody Thursday',⁴⁹ this echoes the Bloody Sunday of 1972 when the British army opened fire on unarmed civilians in Derry. Parallels are thus drawn with Ireland's struggles for independence from British rule on the mainland. State authority, even in an imagined devolved Wales, is oppressive. This presents a different perspective for crime fiction. As suggested by Bran Nicol in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, political crime fiction can shape modern notions of criminality rather than simply reflecting them. Strike action and demonstrations, viewed by those in authority as potentially illegal and anarchic, are instead portrayed as necessary tools for the disempowered. Rather than act as containment for subversive acts, like its more conservative sibling, left-wing crime fiction such as *The Volunteers* shows a different perspective, one which views the act of containment itself as oppressive and questionable. In drawing parallels between Irish republicans and Welsh activists it perhaps confirms the fears of earlier English authors, discussed in the first chapter. However, Williams, rather than contain these fears, seeks to expose the reasons for such violent attacks on authority.

The novel also warns of the dangers of trying to operate within recognised systems. Redfern soon uncovers an eponymous group, The Volunteers, which consists of those with

⁴⁹ Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 11.

radical views who infiltrate capitalist agencies - government and global corporations, for example - to alter them fundamentally from within. A *Volunteers* sponsor, Mark Evans, explains that it is 'a variant, really, of the old Fabian permeation'.⁵⁰ Evans too has a radical past, but now seems part of the system. He now heads a 'Community Politics Trust', 'supporting social projects and experiments',⁵¹ but which is revealed to have received funding from a counter-revolutionary right-wing group. Recognised systems of power are seen as corruptible and pose a threat to personal integrity. Rather than changing the system from within, the system instead absorbs the individual. The same could also be said of Redfern, once a radical but now employed by a news corporation that relies on 'advertising, from the big para-national companies, who push round the oil and the fibres and the metals'.⁵² Despite Redfern's assertion that he will 'wear their uniform but fight [his] own war',⁵³ he is still part of a global neo-colonial capitalism.

Redfern's research into the shooting at Pontyrihw leads him to a pamphlet, *Death of a Loader* by the Gwent Writers' group, which describes that day's events.⁵⁴ At the time of *The Volunteers*' publication, Britain was approaching the so-called 'winter of discontent' when the struggle between government and workers over pay and working conditions was coming to a head. However, this was also a fight over the means of production and many were hopeful that the workers were gaining power in the workplace. The fictional strike at Pontyrihw is in response to and in solidarity with other unions withdrawing their labour, as did many union members at this time. But this collaboration between working men – and, unfortunately, it does seem to be mostly a man's role in the workplace, rather than a woman's, that is discussed here – is not confined to the strikers. After the shooting, the scene becomes one of cooperation. Union men and the police travel together to inform the families

⁵⁰ Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 147.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

of the wounded, while the striking depot workers restore the barricades. This is a spontaneous coming together as '[n]obody ordered this; it was a collective, almost an instinctive decision'.⁵⁵ *Death of a Loader* is later revealed to be the work of one man, Mark Evans's son, David. By publishing as a group, he acts as the voice of a community, one which works under the mutually understood principle of collaboration. Likewise, the inclusion of the text within the novel speaks of the communality of Welsh literary voices, while highlighting the need for those voices to remain rooted in political activism.

Similarly, the central investigative figure, Redfern, is also drawn into a community. Initially, as Stephen Knight has suggested, there are many comparisons between Redfern and the alienated and isolated figure of the American Private Investigator. At first, he works to his own agenda and treads a blurred line between his role as employee of a global news corporation and the pull of underground radical political activism, a blurring that has parallels in the American PI's tentative journey between criminality and legality. For, as Raymond Chandler stated in his dictum on crime fiction:

[...] down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it.⁵⁶

Chandler suggested that for crime fiction to attain an appearance of reality, it had to acknowledge that the PI would be in contact with the seedier side of society, while, for its readers, the investigative figure must simultaneously maintain a semblance of honour. Williams's detective indeed conforms to Chandler's command, for Redfern does reveal himself as a man of honour, but his role as detective radically diverges from the American model. Redfern's discovery of the identity of Buxton's assailant leads not to an arrest or a

⁵⁵ Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 50.

⁵⁶ Raymond Chandler, 'The Art of Murder' in *Pearls are a Nuisance* (London: Penguin, 1964), pp. 181-199, (p. 198).

news story but a decision by him to cover up the matter and instead focus on government corruption. Like Hammett's *Continental Op*, this is a crime Redfern takes upon himself to investigate. This signifies a cutting loose from capitalism as Redfern will not be financially reimbursed for this task. Rather, the exposure of corruption is seen as necessary to heal the damage inflicted at Pontyrhiw by the orders of a distant Westminster State Secretary.

Redfern's choice of political sides not only indicates a return to his radical roots – a radical past signposted by the first part of his surname – it also coincides with the unveiling of Redfern's Welshness. In this text, politics and cultural identity are closely intertwined. Eventually, Redfern resigns from Insatel and goes underground in Wales and, in doing so, becomes politically active again. This home-coming, to a working-class terraced home, answers the need for 'the cement that keeps so many lives together: the experience of belonging to something, of confirming an identity in the identification with others'.⁵⁷ The novel, which opened at a folk museum that encapsulated a bourgeois, idealised, sterile rural Wales, closes in an industrial south Wales valley populated by politically active working-class Welsh: figures which were previously absent from the landscape. Welsh identity is a communal experience and, in this respect, the Welsh detective figure differs from the individualised, isolated American model. Redfern's rejection of global capitalism in favour of a localised community and grassroots activism also points to a possible autonomy for the nation. Like the Volunteers' Fabian permeation of power systems, Williams's choice of private eye fiction in which to discuss political issues speaks of a Fabian permeation of a populist genre, one which is nominally conservative. And, in a similar vein to Gallie's *Strike for a Kingdom*, Williams's text exhibits a politicisation that is tied to cultural specificity. Although there is little noticeable Welsh identity here – the Welsh language is markedly absent, for instance – the socialism depicted is a specifically Welsh socialism, tied as it is to

⁵⁷ Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 192.

radicalism of an industrialised south Wales. It is no coincidence that Redfern reconnects with his political activism when he reconnects with his Welsh roots, once submerged but now pivotal to his identity.

III

Despite a long, continuous history of Welsh socialism, there is little overtly political crime fiction that appears after *The Volunteers*. Surprisingly, the Miners' Strike of 1984 has not yet been fictionalised by Welsh crime writers. The role of the police in the strike, where animosity ran high between striking miners and the police force, meant that they were seen as agents of the Conservative government. This would, presumably, make a Welsh police procedural set during the period problematic. However, other British crime writers have written fiction which takes the dispute as its central narrative focus, notably David Peace's *GB84* (2004) and Val McDermid's *A Darker Domain* (2008). Much has been written by Welsh non-crime writers about south Wales and the traumatic post-industrial heritage left after the closing of Welsh coal pits, but the actual strike itself is rarely made the centre of a narrative.⁵⁸ Similarly, there appears to be little Welsh crime fiction which makes mention of Margaret Thatcher's conservative government, a government whose policies many hold responsible for the economic decline of Wales, specifically the industrial valleys. Bill James's Harpur and Iles police procedurals (1985 – present day) occasionally touch on the materialism and breakdown of communities during the 1980s, believed by those on the left to be a result of an increasingly individualised society created by a free market economy, but other political examples are rare, least of all, any crime fiction which explicitly critiques Thatcherism.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, despite his crime fiction not engaging with these major political

⁵⁸ Roger Granelli's *Dark Edge* (1997), while not crime fiction, does portray tensions between two brothers, one a miner, the other a police officer, during the miners' strike. Richard John Evans's *Entertainment* (2000) and Rachel Tresize's *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000) both depict difficult and brutalised childhoods in the post-industrial south Wales valleys which, in their turn, have been brutalised by the death of industry and consequent lack of opportunities.

⁵⁹ Bill James, a pseudonym of James Tucker, will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

events, one recent Welsh crime novelist does write fiction which could be seen as implicitly socialist in its aims. Robert Lewis was born in Abergavenny, a market town close to Raymond Williams's Pandy, and is the author of a trilogy based on a hapless, alcoholic PI, Robin Llywelyn. As the first of the series, *The Last Llanelli Train* was written as a stand-alone novel, and it is this text that I will mostly focus upon.⁶⁰

The Last Llanelli Train is set outside Wales, in Bristol, during the early 1990s, a period after Margaret Thatcher had stood down but while a Conservative government was still in power. Its socialist intentions are hinted at by the prefatory quotation from the Gwyn Thomas short story, 'O Brother Man' (1936). Thomas was a self-proclaimed socialist and the use of the quotation, '[b]ehind every piece of virtue on this earth there is a legion of aching hearts and empty pockets. Somebody has paid, I know', presages Lewis's blackly comic examination of market forces in *The Last Llanelli Train*. As is typical of the PI, Llywelyn treads a dangerous line between a criminal netherworld and legality. However, while the early PI blurred this binary in order to obtain information or to bypass the sometimes corrupt police, in this instance it is money alone that dictates the PI's actions, legal or otherwise. Money and morals are not easy companions in Lewis's crime novels. In the first of the trilogy, Llywelyn is hired to entrap a client's husband, despite his belief that the husband is innocent of infidelity. Unlike the Chandler detective, it appears that integrity has little place in a modern PI's world. Rather than being employed to investigate a crime, Llywelyn is paid to create a crime. But there are traces of a past integrity and the reader is soon told that he was once a witness in a corruption trial against the local police. So, despite his current unethical behaviour, and in accordance with Chandler's dictum, Llywelyn, though a common man, was once a man of honour. However, he is not a complete man. Unlike Chandler's and

⁶⁰ Although it was initially intended as a stand-alone novel, Robert Lewis was encouraged to continue the series by his publishers, so produced a further two novels, *Swansea Terminal* (2007) and *Bank of the Black Sheep* (2010) [in a private email to myself 10 September 2012].

Hammett's hard-drinking heroes, who were nevertheless clean-cut and well-dressed, Llywelyn is distinctly shop-soiled, a man whose life is in chaos.

So it seems that in this text, while Lewis writes in the tradition of Chandler and Hammett, the appropriation of the American PI is problematic. Giving the name of the last Welsh Prince to a debauched alcoholic also hints at a degradation of Welsh identity. His client, Mrs Dixon, consistently mispronounces his name as Lou-ellen which, with its American overtones, suggests that Welsh identity can be submerged through American appropriation. Moreover, the corruption of a once noble name reflects a widespread cultural loss of identity brought about by globalisation and the materialism which feeds that globalisation. On a night out in Clifton, one of the more expensive areas of Bristol, Llywelyn visits a pub sandwiched between 'an upmarket Mexican burger house and a shop that sold Japanese sofas'.⁶¹ Later, at an Indian restaurant, he drinks 'Lal Toofan, named after the red dust storms that whirl through the arid plains of Rajasthan. That's what the label said. It also said it was brewed in Trowbridge, probably by men with names like Colin and Nigel and Baz'.⁶² Here, localised culture has been commodified and broken down for consumption by a global market.

Llywelyn's entrapment of Mr Dixon is a shady affair that requires the services of a prostitute, Delia. Like culture, bodies can be commodified and bought. Later, scouring the brothels for a suitable girl to work as a honey-trap, he comments how 'some get what they pay for, I think. Maybe'.⁶³ Llywelyn's hesitancy here suggests some doubt in free-market forces. Llywelyn has worked as a bailiff in the past, seizing goods for a debt collection agency, and mentions a job in St Pauls, one of the poorest districts of Bristol. But this is not a simple anecdote of an oppressed working-class. Instead, Llywelyn notes how, despite the presence of four children and little money, 'the only furniture in the whole house was this

⁶¹ Robert Lewis, *The Last Llanelli Train* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2005), p. 42.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

spanking-new full-leather three-piece and matching recliner'.⁶⁴ In order to avoid it being repossessed, the woman offers sex for payment. The materialism of the nineties encourages the fetishism of luxury goods, even if they have to be paid for through prostitution, creating an endless cycle in the market of luxury goods and human flesh.

Eventually, this free market in human bodies affects entire communities. In *The Last Llanelli Train*, as in *The Volunteers*, the PI is again isolated. Llywelyn is part of a community of sorts: of drinkers and drifters, the violent and the dispossessed only bound together by alcohol or money. Even Bristol, a busy urban sprawl, contains a society made up of alienated individuals. Watching office workers making their way home, Llywelyn remarks '[y]ou wouldn't know to look at them that we were all just squatters in an oblivious city that was much too big to care about any of us. Groups divided and subdivided, individuals emerged'.⁶⁵ This is a world where human interaction can only be bought with cash, one in which can be heard Margaret Thatcher's words, 'who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women'.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, there are hints within Lewis's bleak nihilistic text of something left behind, the loss of which has led to this point. Llywelyn has abandoned a girl and their son back home, leaving a 'space where she had been, a hole roughly her shape'.⁶⁷ But it is not just family he misses. Passing an empty church, he muses:

[f]or all the stick the Christian set gets, however small the dwindling flock, they have something. Not all of us believe we can be saved: don't knock it. I had my share of it when I was a boy. It's all rubbed off now, though, like the tooth fairy and Father Christmas, but they laid it on. Whether the gossiping pews were quiet now, whether the dirge-like hymns still rolled down the hillsides like boulders, I couldn't say. I couldn't see that kind of solidarity anywhere any more.⁶⁸

This is clearly a childhood memory of Wales, with the sometimes clichéd tropes of religiosity, mountains and native loquacity. However, despite his atheism, Llywelyn misses

⁶⁴ Lewis, *The Last Llanelli Train*, p. 122.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶⁶ Douglas Keay, 'Aids, education and the Year 2000!', in *Woman's Own* 23 September 1987. Available at <http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/106689> [accessed 19 July 2012]

⁶⁷ Lewis, *The Last Llanelli Train*, p. 216.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

the communality of his childhood religion. In the modern secular world, money is now god and consequently communities are dispersed and fractured.

However, state authority, in the form of the police cannot be relied upon either. It soon transpires that, rather than wishing to catch an errant husband, Mrs Dixon is a police officer intending to set up a city councillor who is seeking to uncover police corruption. This heralds the return of the police that Llywelyn testified against and who threaten to kill him if he does not carry out the entrapment. Like Hammett's Personville police, the Bristol police are a law unto themselves, seeking to make money out of extortion, though bootlegging alcohol has now given way to drug-dealing. Llywelyn makes a final move to prevent the entrapment and to recover some moral integrity, albeit by knocking the councillor unconscious with a bottle of lager. The novel concludes with Llywelyn's escape from Bristol and the police corruption inherent in that city to return to his hometown, Llanelli. It may seem that this marks a return to a place of safety and the community he left. However, this text ends on a cautious note. The damage to his health has been done and Llywelyn is aware that he may be only returning to a 'cramped bedsit somewhere and the bottle'.⁶⁹ It is not made clear whether he intends to carry on as a PI and this concluding note of ambiguity suggests that perhaps the role of the Welsh PI is one that has now been exhausted. Lewis instead seems to suggest that such an isolated figure is as irreparably damaged as the globalised culture that surrounds him and while the reader may hope that a return to his home community may heal him, it is uncertain.

Even so, Lewis did go on to write a further two novels featuring Robin Llywelyn: *Swansea Terminal* (2007) and *Bank of the Black Sheep* (2010), the latter of which deserves a brief analysis. It is soon revealed in the trilogy that returning to Wales does not heal Llywelyn. In *Swansea Terminal*, he is homeless and his alcoholism has advanced; Llywelyn

⁶⁹ Lewis, *The Last Llanelli Train*, p. 213.

has also been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. This is not a return to a familial home in Wales as *Swansea Terminal* sees him living in a hostel, while *Bank of the Black Sheep* opens with Llywelyn waking up in a hospice, once a country house, in Llandovery. As with the other novels in the trilogy, *Bank of the Black Sheep* is rich in mordant humour; here it parodies an element of the country house mystery of the Golden Age: this is a country house where the residents are fully aware of their impending death, rather than being picked off one by one by an unknown murderer.⁷⁰ The journey in search of a community and safe haven has seen Llywelyn travel further west each time, into a more traditional, rural Wales. As Llywelyn has woken up with amnesia, it could be argued that this PI's last case is a literal search for identity.

Like its two predecessors, *Bank of the Black Sheep* contains prefatory quotations that hint at the novel's engagement with socio-economic issues: a quotation from Bertolt Brecht's critique of capitalism, *The Threepenny Opera*, and another from John Maynard Keynes. The Keynes' quotation suggests the ending of a particular era:

Some day we may return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue – that avarice is a vice, that the extraction of usury is a misdemeanour, and the love of money is detestable... But beware! The time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still.

Bank of the Black Sheep is set during the financial crisis and the resultant bank runs of the recent past, the downfall of the 'avarice and usury' of Keynesian discourse. Llywelyn becomes involved in a scheme to counterfeit money and the parallels between this and free markets are clear, specifically the act of quantitative easing.⁷¹ In this text, both are a free

⁷⁰ My thanks to Tomos Owen for this observation.

⁷¹ Quantitative easing is an economic practice that arises from the quantity theory of money. Put simply, this is '[t]he theory that the level of prices in an economic system is directly proportional to the quantity of its money supply'. *The McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Modern Economic Terms*, eds. Greenwood et al (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983), pp. 376-7 (p. 376). In an attempt to boost interest rates in the current recession, the Bank of England lent cash to large institutions in exchange for collateral. However, the detractors of this practice, or quantitative easing as it is known, have accused the government of simply printing extra money.

licence to print money and, though one is sanctioned by governments while the other is illegal, in Llywelyn's eyes both are criminal. It seems that the PI no longer treads a fine line between criminality and legality, but the world surrounding the PI is now entirely corrupt, with little to separate the criminals and recognised, once respectable, authority figures, be they bankers or the police. At a Merthyr bank, Llywelyn is seen by a bank manager with the look and manner of a 'nightclub bouncer' and he goes on to empathise with the elderly cashier saying to her, '[t]hat was a good job once, being a bank manager'.⁷² Thuggish bankers, whether lowly managers or higher up the financial chain, are the descendants of the City 'wide boys' of the 1980s. Financial deregulation, rather than leading to prosperity, has resulted in criminality and economic crisis. Reflecting this, the shape of this particular PI novel adapts to the surrounding economic and cultural climate as Llywelyn's search for identity becomes bound up in a heist plot.

Llywelyn's harking back to a more upright and decent past could indicate a reactionary nostalgia for the old hierarchies of the past. However, if *Bank of the Black Sheep* is hankering for a nostalgic past, it is for the anarchy of an Ealing comedy in which the underdog triumphs: *Whiskey Galore!* (1949) or *The Ladykillers* (1955), for instance.⁷³ In *Bank of the Black Sheep*, a handful of Llandovery locals stumble across the counterfeiting operation and are cut into the deal. Unfortunately, the criminals and corrupt police that Llywelyn fled from in the previous two novels track him down, but are eventually bested by the locals. Yet this homage to anarchic comedy is one that also has its roots in Welsh culture as well as English cinema. Llandovery is overlooked by a giant statue of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd Fychan, a supporter of Owain Glyndŵr, who was executed by Henry IV for supposedly leading the English army in the wrong direction. Robin Llywelyn fails to regain the nobility of his other namesake, the last Prince of Wales, but, like the Llandovery

⁷² Robert Lewis, *Bank of the Black Sheep* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2010), p. 173.

⁷³ Both *Whiskey Galore!* and *The Ladykillers* were directed by Alexander Mackendrick for Ealing Studios, in 1949 and 1955 respectively.

Llywelyn, he leads the criminals and corrupt police who find him in a merry dance. With the help of a Llandovery resident, an ex-army man with eyes that have seen ‘the Falklands and Belfast and the Gulf’,⁷⁴ criminals are warned off, corrupt police executed and the people of Llandovery, whose businesses were threatened by the financial crisis, again find financial security through laundering counterfeit money. It must be assumed that the Welsh economy, one neglected in the past through British governance, is boosted by this illegal cash flow. In this respect, the final text functions more as a Robin Hood tale rather than as a paean to materialism, and Robin Llywelyn, although he does not regain the nobility of his surname, finally lives up to the promise of his first. And, in common with so much other Welsh crime fiction, especially socialist Welsh crime fiction, order is restored to a community not at the hands of authority but by the removal or marginalisation of authority. Similarly, the text ends with the isolated PI Llywelyn waiting for death in the Costa del Sol, retirement home for criminals from across the world.

This ends the novel on a note of ambiguity as it seems that Llywelyn has once again failed to find a permanent community. And, while Llywelyn has finally provided for his abandoned son and family, and his coming death may allude to the death of a highly individualised, materialistic world, nonetheless, he is dying in relative comfort provided by ill-gotten financial gains. Waiting for death in Spain, with an eastern European carer at his side, does not signal a return to collectivism but instead reinforces the trilogy’s underlying theme: that globalism can only benefit the rich. Nonetheless, as hinted at by the preface from Keynes, the death of Llywelyn, a man who was locked into a cycle of chasing money to feed his excessive desires for alcohol and who never quite regained his identity as part of a community, allegorically puts the excesses of the materialistic 1990s to rest.

⁷⁴ Lewis, *Bank of the Black Sheep*, p 270.

Perhaps the trauma of recent political events felt by socialist writers is too recent to discuss in crime fiction. Alternatively, as Deborah Orr suggested in the article which opened this chapter, a more pertinent dialogue is needed between the liberal left and the socialist left. But, to be more culturally and geographically specific, perhaps the failure of political crime fiction that explains traumatic events like the miners' strike is due to the decline of a once radical socialism that defined much of south Welsh identity, a decline that, ironically, matches the deterioration of the industries that fuelled that radicalism. While some of the hardboiled novels that are to be discussed in the following chapter certainly contain socialist political elements, these themes are less overt. However, this is not to suggest that Welsh crime writers have been overtaken by a political apathy. I would like to add a further suggestion: with devolution came the possibility of an independent Welsh state, a single entity that was not defining itself against an English authority. And in Wales, at least, some of the concerns of socialist writers, crime writers and non-crime writers alike, have been dissipated. Until recently, Plaid Cymru and Labour have held power in a coalition Assembly, while the promotion of Leanne Wood to the Plaid Cymru leadership, a second-language Welsh speaker from the south Wales valleys who brings strongly-held socialist beliefs to the Welsh nationalist party, blurs the lines between socialism and nationalism. Rather than debating the differences between liberalism and regulation, as in Scandinavian crime fiction, Welsh crime writers may now be more interested in portraying the new identities that have emerged from political redefinitions.

Nonetheless, socialist Welsh writers have left a legacy, or tradition, in Anthony Brockway's earlier words, but this is one that can extend beyond Wales. I would like to conclude by briefly drawing attention to a novel written outside Wales. Andrew Pepper is an academic whose work examines the relationship between crime fiction and the state, and who is also the author of the Detective Pyke series (2006-2011). These are historical crime fictions

set during the first years of the official police force and featuring the eponymous Pyke. Generally they are set in London, but the most recent, *Bloody Winter* (2011), takes place, in part, in Merthyr. *Bloody Winter* does perpetuate earlier tropes of English-authored crime fiction; the Welsh characters occupy a marginal position in the text, though this is attributed to Merthyr's mostly monoglot status, and those that do speak English seem overly eager to answer the English detective's questions, so carry on in their role as native guide to the English visitor. Nonetheless, the text contains a sympathetic portrayal of working-class struggle. Set in 1846, the year the Blue Books were commissioned, the novel seeks to readdress its notions of a lazy feckless Welsh. Merthyr is overshadowed by 'Caedraw Castle', a thinly veiled allusion to Cyfartha Castle that still stands today.⁷⁵ *Bloody Winter*, though an historical crime novel, has much in common with Hammett's *Red Harvest* in that a wealthy industrialist is responsible for the degradation of a town and its people in his striving for financial gain. Pepper reveals the tensions between the native Welsh and cheap immigrant labour, tensions that were often covertly instigated by industrialists to their own advantage. The novel makes much of the inequality between landowners, industrialists and their workforce and tenants. The dirt and poverty amongst the working-classes is shown to be a condition not of idleness but of oppression. Despite their marginalisation in the text, the Welsh are no longer picturesque figures in a landscape but are part of an inclusive working-class struggle. Wales is no longer seen by English authors as a picturesque stage set but is recognised as a politically active force, expressed through a strong support for Chartism and revolutionary action as demonstrated by the Rebecca Rioters. Recognition of a radical past leads crime writers, Welsh and English alike, to reconsider, in Nicol's words, the crime *in* fiction when using Wales as a setting.

⁷⁵ Andrew Pepper, *Bloody Winter* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2011), p. 41.

Chapter IV: Men and Crime

The Oxford English Dictionary informs us that the word ‘hardboiled’, meaning ‘[h]ardened, callous; hard-headed, shrewd’,¹ was first used by Mark Twain in 1886 and, from its inception, the word has been associated with a certain type of tough American cynicism. It is a term that has also been linked with a particular sub-genre of crime fiction, one which deals in gritty realism, urban settings, and terse prose. Most often, these feature a solitary detective who works outside accepted state authority as a Private Investigator (also variously referred to as a PI or private eye). I have drawn attention to the appropriation of a Chandleresque PI by Welsh authors Raymond Williams and Robert Lewis in the previous chapter; however, I now wish to undertake a more detailed examination of the appropriation of hardboiled fiction, as described by Chandler, and its accompanying PI. And this appears to be a genre that has been readily adopted by Welsh male crime writers. Some women crime authors, Katherine John, for instance, do occasionally set crime in the urban space. However, unlike their male counterparts, they rarely adopt hardboiled models.² Male-authored, urban crime novels seem to be written in accordance to the dicta laid out by Chandler. ‘The Simple Art of Murder’ tells of a new, realist crime fiction and describes how it has arisen out of opposition to the more cerebral Golden Age fiction, where the unravelling of clues takes precedence over plausible plots and characterisation. Chandler uses Dashiell Hammett’s crime fiction as a paradigm for a more realistic version as Hammett’s prose is ‘spare, frugal, hardboiled’.³ According to Chandler, this prose style is necessary to speak to an American readership which consisted of ‘people with a sharp, aggressive attitude to life. They were not afraid of the seamy side of

¹ ‘hard-boiled’, *Oxford English Dictionary*. Available at <http://www.oed.com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/Entry/84135?redirectedFrom=hardboiled#eid> [accessed 21 May 2012]

² For more on Welsh women crime writers and their use of settings, see the following chapter.

³ Raymond Chandler, ‘The Art of Murder’, in *Pearls are a Nuisance* (London: Penguin, 1964), pp. 181-199, p. 195.

things; they lived there. Violence did not dismay them; it was right down their street'.⁴ Here, Chandler not only redefines crime fiction but points out some of the cultural differences between British and American readers.

Literary critics have since labelled this type of fiction in a variety of ways. I have mentioned Richard Hoggart's term 'gangster fiction' but later crime commentators have applied different labels. Julian Symons calls it simply 'the American crime story',⁵ while Dennis Porter, wishing to bring a sharper focus to the term 'hardboiled', refers to it as 'private eye' crime fiction, as it suggests a 'solitary eye'⁶ and is therefore indicative of the isolated and individualised investigative figure who provides the narrative focalisation point. Lee Horsley goes on to point out that the recent evolution of this sub-genre has encompassed some police procedural fiction, as typified by the work of the American writer, Ed McBain. Horsley argues that:

although the police procedural does place the detective more firmly within the context of bureaucratic state control, these two types of investigative novel overlap in many respects. The individual investigator often retains considerable autonomy in the police procedural, particularly in narratives that move towards an exposure of the injustices and failures of the official machinery of law and order.⁷

As the foci of this chapter, Bill James's *You'd Better Believe It* (1985), John Williams's *Cardiff Dead* (2000), and Malcolm Pryce's *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* (2001), feature both private and police investigators, Lee Horsley's developed description of hardboiled fiction will also be used in the analysis, in conjunction with Chandler's classification.

Despite some variations in their definitions, these critics agree that hardboiled crime fiction first emerged in America during the Depression of the 1920s and '30s. They posit that American readers could no longer support intellectually elite detectives, as exemplified by

⁴ Chandler, 'The Art of Murder', p. 194-5.

⁵ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder* (1972, London: Pan, 1992), p.153.

⁶ Dennis Porter, 'The Private Eye', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 95-114.

⁷ Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 101-2.

S.S. Van Dine's Philo Vance;⁸ hence, the growth of hardboiled realist novels. The Depression was a time of widespread government and police corruption which unsettled the authority of those in control of society. Lee Horsley cites various 'political and economic changes' of which 'Prohibition and its attendant gangsterism; the growing evidence of illicit connections between crime, business, and politics',⁹ played a part in the birth of hardboiled fiction. This in turn led to the development of a fictional detective who now operated on the margins of that society, rather than at its centre. From this position, the detective could remain relatively uncorrupted. Arguably, the first PI story in print was Carroll John Daley's 'Three Gun Terry', which was published in the American magazine, *The Black Mask* in May 1923. This is earlier than similar contributions from the more famous Chandler and Hammett, though Daley's story appeared only a few weeks prior to Hammett's first Continental Op story. The opening lines of 'Three Gun Terry' go some way to establishing the tone of hardboiled PI fiction or, as it was originally called, tough-guy or tough-private eye stories: 'My life is my own, and the opinions of others don't interest me, so don't form any, or if you do, keep them to yourself. If you want to sneer at my tactics, why go ahead, but do it behind the pages—you'll find that healthier'.¹⁰ Already some of the tropes of the PI are present: his tough masculinity (and it is mostly a masculine world at this juncture), his individualised and solitary nature, while his quickness with his fists or gun suggest that he is a man of action rather than one who solves a case from the safety of his study using only cool logic.

American culture, specifically hardboiled prose, has had a strong and enduring influence on Welsh writing in English generally. Dylan Thomas's short story, 'Old Garbo' (1939),¹¹ for instance, describes a night spent in the seedy underbelly of Swansea pubs; his narrator apes the stance of an American tough guy and uses the sparse prose of hardboiled

⁸ Philo Vance was a detective in the tradition of the gifted amateur whose elitist erudition helps him solve his cases. He first appeared in *The Benson Murder Case* (1926).

⁹ Horsley, *Twentieth-century Crime Fiction*, p. 69-70.

¹⁰ Carroll John Daley, 'Three Gun Terry', *The Black Mask*, 15 May 1923, pp. 5-30 (p. 5).

¹¹ Dylan Thomas, 'Old Garbo', in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (London: Dent, 1940), pp. 183-210.

fiction for comic effect. Seven years later, Gwyn Thomas employed a hardboiled style to a differing end in his novella, *Oscar* (1946).¹² Victor Golightly suggests that ‘some sense of affinity with American life had gripped [Thomas’s] imagination’ but the American fiction ‘that attracted him stayed close to the speech of common people’.¹³ This borrowed style gave a sense of verisimilitude to the grim realities of life in the industrialised South Wales valleys. The borrowing of American hardboiled prose implies that the working-classes of Depression America and industrialised Wales share some common experiences which reach across the geographical and cultural divide.

While hardboiled prose quickly appeared in Anglophone Welsh fiction, the PI seems less visible in British crime fiction of the same period. As discussed previously, English crime fiction of the 1920s and ’30s was much more class-bound, epitomised by such popular genres as the imperial thriller or the clue-puzzle. So, if the PI appears to have no set place in English crime fiction, what of the possibilities of a Welsh PI, or at least one who is Welsh-authored? One author who introduced such a figure into his work was Gwyn Evans, a crime writer whose work is examined in Chapter II. In 1926, Evans wrote a Sexton Blake story called ‘Guns is Guns’ for *Union Jack* magazine which introduced Ruff Hanson, an American investigator. The first part of the story centres on Ruff, who is hired to retrieve some indiscreet love letters which have become the source of blackmail. Initially, Hanson is depicted as a binary opposite to Blake’s Holmesian rationality. Unlike Blake, who can solve a crime without leaving his armchair, Ruff is a man of action. The *Union Jack* cover made this clearer still as it depicted Ruff standing over Blake, gun in hand, ready to take action, whilst Blake sits passively, clad in smoking jacket, with his pipe at hand. The accompanying caption reads ‘guns is guns and brains is brains and never the twain shall meet’, further enhancing the

¹² Gwyn Thomas, ‘Oscar’ in *The Dark Philosophers* (1946, Cardigan: Parthian, 2006), pp. 3-101.

¹³ Victor Golightly, ‘Gwyn Thomas’s American “Oscar”’, *New Welsh Review*, 22 (Autumn 1993), 26-31 (p. 27).

division between the two types of detective.¹⁴ ‘Guns is Guns’ does see them at odds for a while; however, they part as firm friends on a handshake and Ruff reappeared in other Sexton Blake stories written by Evans. Evans can thus imagine fiction where the rational Holmesian detective and the hardboiled PI can co-exist and solve crime together.

Nonetheless, Gwyn Evans’s PI is an American working outside his native country. It is not until many decades later that either English or Welsh writers create a native PI: there is P. D. James’s Cordelia Gray, first seen in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* in 1972, or Julian Barnes, writing as Dan Kavanagh, and his 1980s series featuring Duffy, a bisexual ex-cop turned private eye.¹⁵ English writers appropriated and adapted the PI figure to reflect their own cultural specificity. *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* owes more to Christie’s rural settings than L. A.’s mean streets, for instance. However, there is one instance of a Welsh private investigator prior to the emergence of English PI fiction. Bernard Knight, a forensic pathologist now better known for his Crowner John medieval murder mysteries set in the West of England, wrote several early crime novels set in his native Wales, under the pseudonym Bernard Picton. The first of his novels, *Thread of Evidence* (1965), was set in Cardigan Bay but *Tiger at Bay* (1970) is a return to Knight’s home town, Cardiff, explicitly its infamous Tiger Bay. This particular novel is set after most of the area had been demolished in the first of several redevelopment schemes and many of its original residents re-housed in council estates outside the city. The old, Victorian, three-storey buildings and terraced houses of Tiger Bay had since been replaced by Butetown housing estate, complete with 1960s high-rise tower blocks. As suits the PI’s liminality, *Tiger at Bay*’s own private eye, Iago Price, has an office on Hayes Bridge Road, an area sandwiched between Tiger Bay

¹⁴ Gwyn Evans, ‘Guns is Guns’, *Union Jack*, 3 April 1926. Available at http://www.sextonblake.co.uk/blakebibliography_1926.html [accessed 30 June 2012].

¹⁵ The first of these was *Duffy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980).

and the city. This is:

something of a “no-man’s land”, where the modern brightness of the city centre clashed with the seedy legacy of the world’s greatest coal port. At present, the down-at-heel element was winning, though its victory was going to be short-lived. The area was going to be vaporized by the City Council and rebuilt into hygienic anonymity.¹⁶

Hayes Bridge Road, as Knight prophesies, was demolished shortly after the publication of *Tiger at Bay*. Yet in the past, it had always acted as an unofficial boundary between multicultural Tiger Bay and the white city centre. During the 1919 race riots, Tiger Bay residents built a defensive barricade at the bridge. Here, the mapping of actual city streets, common to PI fiction from its inception – a device common both to the work of Chandler and Hammett, acts as a sort of tourist guide, one which delineates the mean streets from the ‘bright’ city centre.

The first appearance of a Welsh PI is as an unprepossessing figure: ‘a thin, weedy young man with a slight stoop. His head was too big for his neck and was topped by fair hair that matched his feeble moustache. With his perpetually mournful expression, he looked just what he was—one of nature’s born losers’.¹⁷ Here, there are elements of comedy suggesting, perhaps, that the American-style PI has no place in Wales. Nonetheless, Iago Price does help the police get their man, bumbling and comical though his efforts are. It must be remembered that Iago is not part of a state-sanctioned authority and enjoys some autonomy. After all, the first Devolution vote was just nine years away. And, despite his pathetic appearance, the siting of a PI, a figure normally associated with an American cultural specificity, in Cardiff hints at the possibility of a Welsh independence from state authority. Equally, this re-siting of the PI says much about the changing nature of the capital, for Cardiff is a city which remains in a state of redevelopment and, hence, redefinition, to this day.

¹⁶ Bernard Picton, *Tiger at Bay* (London: Robert Hale & Co., 1970), p. 13.

¹⁷ Picton, *Tiger at Bay*, p. 1.

Knight's unfortunate Iago is clearly not the traditional tough-guy of hardboiled fiction. In later Welsh crime fiction, the solitary investigative figure is a more fleshed-out character and less of a comic figure. This initially takes place during the industrial and economic decline of the 1980s and continues through to a redeveloped, devolved and more prosperous Wales. The development of a Welsh PI could be seen as indicative of the homogenising power of American culture. However, the appropriation of American crime fiction and its tropes by Welsh writers might alternatively be considered as a useful method of resisting English paradigms rather than representing the submersion of Welsh culture. It would be possible to see this borrowing in postcolonial terms as an act of 'abrogation', which Bill Ashcroft *et al* define as the moment when postcolonial writing defines itself 'by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonial place'.¹⁸ Hence, appropriation of dominant cultures signifies abrogation rather than assimilation, an act that moves towards the destabilising of global cultural imperialism in order to construct a new creative space for Welsh crime fiction.

Therefore, what at first appears to be a form of mimesis takes on a more subversive function. I have explained how early crime writers had an ambivalence, in Bhabha's terms, that displays 'a difference that is almost total but not quite'.¹⁹ Furthermore, Bhabha goes on to argue that the colonised subject which embodies the coloniser's fears, myths and stereotypes, is also terrifying in its mimicked resemblance. It could be argued that Welsh writing in English as a whole is a mimetic performance in its resemblance to and difference from a dominant English culture, in that it is '*almost the same but not quite*'.²⁰ In this instance, mimicry is further complicated as two globally dominant cultures, American and English, are appropriated by the colonised subject. Historically, both have been viewed as a

¹⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 38.

¹⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 91.

²⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 89. Emphasis in the original.

threat to Welsh culture. Rob Humphries has related how post-war reconstruction in Wales was not necessarily viewed as progress by some ‘nationalist writers and intellectuals’, such as Saunders Lewis, but was felt to ‘entail [...] the destruction of a set of values and way of life which were distinctly Welsh, to be replaced by an Anglo-American materialism.’²¹ Nonetheless, such thinkers were referring to a Welsh-language culture and were ‘imagin[ing] a Wales in which the Welsh language was the key.’²² For the English-speaking Welsh, no longer able to converse in their mother-tongue, appropriation and mimicry provide an alternative.

As hinted at in *Tiger at Bay*, hardboiled crime fiction is invariably married to a specific place; Chandler set his novels in Los Angeles, for instance, a tradition carried on today by James Ellroy.²³ Some commentators, such as Eva Erdman, have argued that place, and the cultural specificity associated with that setting, rather than the act of crime has become the focal point of much late twentieth-century crime fiction. Citing Henning Mankell’s Wallander series and the work of German writer Jakob Arjouni as examples, Erdman explains that:

[t]he reading of crime novels becomes an ethnographic reading; the scene of the crime becomes the *locus genius* of the cultural tragedy[...]gradually at first, and then increasingly, as the boom in crime fiction took off, the pursuit of the criminal was displaced by the search for cultural identity.²⁴

As suggested by their titles, both Williams’s *Cardiff Dead* and Pryce’s *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, also explore the cultural specificity of their crime sites. Initially, James’s *You’d Better Believe It*, with its anonymous ‘anytown’ setting, appears not to conform to this model. Nevertheless, like the two other texts under discussion, it features a small town which is self-

²¹ Rob Humphries, ‘Images of Wales’, in *Post-War Wales*, eds. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp. 133-159 (p. 140-1).

²² Humphries, ‘Images of Wales’, (p. 141).

²³ Ellroy is best-known for his L. A. Quartet series (1987-1992) which are set in early 1950s L. A. Ellroy often references actual crime in this series, the so-called Black Dahlia murder, for instance, so his use of L. A. streets and sites emphasises the ‘reality’ of the texts.

²⁴ Eva Erdman, ‘Nationality International: Detective Fiction in the Late Twentieth Century’, in *Investigating Identities: Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction*, eds. Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate M. Quinn (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 11-26 (p. 19).

contained, hermetic. Beneath its anonymous veneer of anglicisation, clues can be found to its local cultural specificity. The placing of the PI in Wales and the application of the paradigms and motifs of hardboiled fiction, the product of a globally dominant culture, to discuss the local and specific is a complex act of mimesis and one which destabilizes the idea of homogenous cultural imperialism. It is this act of destabilization that I wish to explore in this chapter.

I

Cardiff-born James Tucker is a retired academic and prolific crime writer who initially wrote espionage thrillers in the 1960s under the pseudonym David Craig, but is better known for his Harpur and Iles series under another *nom de plume*, Bill James. The first of this series, *You'd Better Believe It*, centres on a local police force and its hunt for a gang of London-based bank robbers who target Detective Chief Superintendent Colin Harpur's hometown. Leads are mostly provided by informants and Harpur's role within the police force is compromised by his close relationship with the powerful and wealthy 'grass', Jack Lamb. The gangleader, Rex Holly, is eventually found and executed by Lamb, to the relief of the police and with their approval.

Generically, this novel, like the rest of the series, can be described as a police procedural, for Harpur works as part of a police team, often in the face of public hostility.²⁵ However, his central role has parallels with the detective figure of hardboiled fiction. Unlike his representation in the later novels of the series, Deputy Chief Constable Iles is still a minor figure in this early novel, leaving Harpur as the central but isolated focal point of the narrative. In keeping with Lee Horsley's description of the overlap between detective and police procedural fiction, Harpur retains considerable autonomy within the police force.

Frequently out of radio contact, he rarely works to his superior's guidelines. This method of

²⁵ For a detailed examination of the police procedural, see George N. Dove's *The Police Procedural* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982). This remains a definitive text; however, it was written prior to the latest developments in technology and forensics and its effect on policing in literature.

working cuts off Harpur from the police team. Information is not garnered through the usual police methods of forensics and the painstaking trawl through public records, or by questioning the public. Instead, Harpur relies on the knowledge passed on by criminals like Jack Lamb.

Moreover, the law-abiding public are marginal figures in this narrative, which instead focuses on the supposedly dichotomous relationship between police and criminals, legality and criminality. Nevertheless, this is an ill-defined line that is frequently blurred, creating what Bhabha may define as an ‘in-between’ space, a place where both legality and illegality co-exist. These spaces, or interstices, ‘provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity’.²⁶ Bhabha is talking here of marginalised identities such as those positioned outside the margins by race or class, for instance. While criminals inhabit the margins, it is questionable that the same can be true of the police. However, James is renegotiating the supposed authority of the Welsh detective figure, a figure which I have already shown, has had their power diminished in Welsh crime fiction. Harpur and Lamb’s collaboration is ‘a partnership, risky, secret, close, that ancient replica of a marriage of convenience, a cop and his tipster’.²⁷ Hardboiled fiction has featured such interactions before, but with the grass often of a lower status and reliant upon the police for financial reward or protection. In this instance, Harpur and Lamb’s partnership is more a marriage of equals. And, as mentioned earlier, it is Lamb who completes the narrative by bringing a rough justice to Holly. Although undeniably following the patterns of the hardboiled genre, Welsh hardboiled fiction portrays detectives who, though they work on the margins, may not be as isolated as they first appear. Like the American PI, the investigative figures in these texts, including Harpur, work to their own agenda rather than to restore order to a state-sanctioned authority.

²⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 1.

²⁷ Bill James, *You’d Better Believe It* (London: Constable and Robinson, 1985), p. 12.

Like Chandler's fictional private eye, Philip Marlowe, Harpur also uses illegal means in his search for the truth and to restore order to the community. He frequently enters homes illegally using a 'small bunch of keys...given to him by a Housing Department girl on long loan when she and Harpur were close a few years ago'.²⁸ The end often justifies the means; sidestepping bureaucratic procedures such as applying for search warrants produces instant results. This occasional stepping outside of the law marks Harpur as metaphorically and literally an outlaw. His frequent crossings between the two spheres of criminal activity and law indicate a liminal figure, whose movement between worlds creates a no-man's land, an 'interstitial'²⁹ moral space between the strict boundaries of right and wrong. But it seems that the ability to negotiate previous demarcated binaries is a necessary quality in a corrupt world. The detective, rather than acting with malicious intent, transgresses and undermines the accepted authorities of a morally uncertain and corrupt society for the greater good.

The uncertain nature of Harpur's world is reflected in its urban setting as the town is never named or placed. Unusual in hardboiled fiction, this does have a precedent in Ed McBain's series set in a fictional 87th Precinct. It was originally set in New York but McBain has said that he 'premised my geography only loosely on the real city' but created a 'mythical city'.³⁰ James Tucker has said of his Harpur and Iles series of novels that they are set in 'a nowhere place, about a nowhere situation: you haven't got police and crooks living at two extremes; you have everybody living in the middle, and it's a kind of unspecific area where crime and policing operates'.³¹ Stephen Knight has suggested that the use of this 'zero-setting' by Welsh authors may also be an economic ploy designed to broaden the market appeal of their work, especially to publishers who have proved unwilling to print crime novels with a Welsh setting. As I detailed in the Introduction, this is borne out by the

²⁸ James, *You'd Better Believe It*, p. 42.

²⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 3.

³⁰ Ed McBain, 'Introduction', to *Cop Hater* (1956, London: Orion, 2003), pp. vii-xi (p. x).

³¹ Julian Earwaker and Kathleen Becker, *Scene of the Crime: A Guide to the Landscapes of British Detective Fiction* (London: Aurum Press, 2002), p. 80.

experience of many Welsh writers. Knight also goes on to propose that ‘there may be, as in the fiction of Raymond Williams and Emyr Humphreys, a wish to avoid the stage-Welsh effect of much south Welsh writing (including Dylan Thomas’s prose) which is felt to be a cringingly colonial performance’.³² Harpur describes his town as ‘an artistically null English town’.³³ Undeniably, it reveals little that is recognisable as Welsh and in its mimicry of an English town, it does avoid what Knight terms a ‘cringingly colonial performance’. The usual motifs of Welsh culture, language or a shared cultural past, seem absent in this town and its people.

Nonetheless, the anonymous setting shares many features with Tucker’s home town, Cardiff. A motorway journey away from London, this is a town that borders the sea and has a once ‘prosperous and handsome’ docklands that are now decaying, home to drunks, prostitutes and pimps.³⁴ There are further hidden clues to the ‘real’ identity of Harpur’s home town. While working undercover, a police officer hums Rudyard Kipling’s ‘The Children’s Song’ (1906) of which Harpur says, he ‘[d]id that at school’.³⁵ The song was used as the official school song of a Cardiff girls’ school until the mid-1980s and Harpur’s statement hints at its origins.³⁶ At a later failed bank raid, the criminal mastermind, Rex Holly, takes shelter in the city museum. The Edwardian building, with a large display hall overlooked by a balcony and containing a statue of a nude couple locked in an embrace, replicates the

³² Stephen Knight, ‘Crimes Domestic and Crimes Colonial: The Role of Crime Fiction in Developing Postcolonial Consciousness’, in *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective*, eds. Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 17-34 (p. 31).

³³ James, *You’d Better Believe It*, p. 77.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36. This was also true of Cardiff’s Docklands at the time of publication. The Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was later formed in 1987 with the aim of regenerating the area.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁶ Specifically, Howell’s School, Llandaff, located close to the university campus at which James Tucker lectured for many years. The song would be sung at the annual Speech Day.

National Museum of Wales with its bronze cast of Auguste Rodin's *The Kiss*.³⁷ Despite authorial intent, then, the novel is replete with allusions to and traces of Cardiff; the city reveals itself to the reader with knowledge of the Welsh capital. It can be argued that Tucker also privileges the Welsh reader and covertly creates an exclusive group who are able to see the capital in all its layers.

While there may appear to be an absence of Welsh culture in this novel, a closer reading can detect traces of a specific cultural identity that is deeply submerged beneath a generic English identity, possibly as Stephen Knight suggests, to increase the novel's marketability. But there are hints of a another Welsh culture which may not be immediately recognisable to those readers more used to homogenous 'stage-Welsh' representations, but which will reveal itself to a more informed audience. For instance, the novel features a Reverend Bart Anstruther, a black evangelical gospel minister. Anstruther freely quotes from the New Testament, but his selection of biblical passages has a vengeful Old Testament flavour; on its reverse, his business card bears the words of Hebrews 9.22, 'without shedding of blood is no remission'.³⁸ Reverend Anstruther presides over a funeral that ends with a 'procession to the cemetery [and which] included a jazz band, like Harpur had seen of New Orleans long ago'.³⁹ The New Orleans-style funeral procession is common to Cardiff's black Docklands' community, but the minister's oratorical style has its roots in Welsh Non-conformity. As a child, James Tucker attended the Bethel Baptist Chapel which was once situated near to the now gentrified Cardiff Docks. He has acknowledged how his chapel-going childhood has influenced his writing; speaking of the distinctive dialogue of his novels,

³⁷ The National Museum of Wales also made an appearance in BBC Wales's recent television series *Sherlock* (2010), but as a substitute for a fictional London 'Museum of Antiquities'. Although Cardiff is more frequently named within the pages of crime fiction, televised crime fiction often uses the city as a blank stage setting and does not yet appear to have the confidence to use it as a primary setting. Despite this, other genres, such as the science fiction series, *Torchwood*, has named Cardiff as its setting.

³⁸ James, *You'd Better Believe It*, p. 131.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Tucker has said that they are ‘a kind of elevated, pompous, pulpit language’.⁴⁰ The Bethel Baptist Chapel has since appeared in later Tucker crime novels as a converted night club, also the fate of the original.⁴¹ Tucker’s childhood Nonconformist religion is given a specific Cardiff twist that celebrates the multicultural nature of its Docklands. This marriage between the two cultures is one that resists colonial cultural domination as it presents a different identity, one, in Bhabha’s words, are ‘elaborating strategies of selfhood’⁴² in the interstitial space created between Welsh and black culture.

Notwithstanding the town’s anonymity, Harpur and his fellow police officers have a strong sense of civic pride and ownership. Harpur declares that ‘it was a fair town to have in your care, and he would use all the ways he knew, clean or dirty, to guard it’.⁴³ This echoes the work of Raymond Chandler in which the law has a role in protecting place and the identity rooted in that place. On wrapping up a crime in *The Big Sleep* (1939), for example, Captain Gregory says to Marlowe, ‘[b]eing a copper I like to see the law win... You and me both lived too long to think I’m likely to see it happen. Not in this town, not in any town half this size, in any part of this wide, green and beautiful USA’.⁴⁴ Despite Gregory’s cynicism, this short speech still reveals a native pride in his country. Harpur’s self-imposed isolation from his police team does not extend to place; like Gregory, this is a town to which he and his fellow police officers feel a strong sense of attachment. Using Erdman’s analysis mentioned earlier, the sense of pride and need for protection can be interpreted as a need to protect an urbanised Welsh culture, like Cardiff’s, which has been anglicised so that it resembles an English town yet, to those who can read the clues to its identity, reveals itself as ‘not quite’.

⁴⁰ Earwaker and Becker, *Scene of the Crime*, p. 81.

⁴¹ The chapel became a nightclub, The Casablanca, for many years before being demolished as part of the Cardiff Bay redevelopment.

⁴² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 1.

⁴³ James, *You’d Better Believe It*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939, London: Penguin, 2005), p. 222.

It is soon revealed that the town is in need of Harpur's protection as it is vulnerable to outsiders, especially those from London who are described by Harpur as 'those big-time London bastards popping down the motorway to clean up in one of our towns [...] [d]irtying our ground, these sods from the Smoke'.⁴⁵ In a reversal of the literature of Chapter I, in which English detectives visited Wales, it is English criminals who are now the tourists.⁴⁶ The city's accessibility encourages visits from London gangsters, while minor local criminals act as native guides for them. One local petty crook, Michael Martin Allen, is transformed from a 'dog-end nobody [to one who] had found a new, cocky, gleaming style'⁴⁷ through his contact with the metropolitan gangsters. Consequently, Harpur asks how someone like the metamorphosed Allen could 'make him feel the days of easy winning, any winning, had gone? There were times when he saw this town slipping from him'.⁴⁸ Outside influences upset the working hierarchy of the town, one in which criminals and the police had existed, albeit uneasily, side by side.

While this could be construed as another aspect of the struggle between legality and criminality, threats to the town also come from London-based state authority. Frequently, '[b]loody MPs and farts from the Homo [sic] Office'⁴⁹ - the House of Commons and Whitehall - all conspire to constrain the local police through bureaucracy. London-based government is frequently depicted as contradictory, autocratic and out of touch with local police forces, who in turn struggle for autonomy in order to protect their towns. Harpur's frustration with metropolitan authority echoes the contemporary political debate about a devolved Welsh government. This is not to say that the novel has overtly nationalist

⁴⁵ James, *You'd Better Believe It*, p. 26.

⁴⁶ This has precedents in earlier Welsh literature. Anne Beale's *Traits and Stories of the Welsh Peasantry* (1849) despairs '[t]hat our sister England should send her most depraved children into Wales to teach them the art of populous cities, as yet but little cultivated in this Principality, where robberies are few and far between', p. 111. Published two years after the Blue Books, Beale's text perpetuates the notion that crime does not happen in Wales but rather than attribute this lack to laziness, Beale instead suggests, in a Romantic sense, that it is due to rural isolation and innocence. (My thanks to Katie Gramich for bringing this to my attention).

⁴⁷ James, *You'd Better Believe It*, p. 41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

overtone, for the town's identity, as previously suggested, is too coded and obscure and lacks a strongly marked national culture. Yet the novel's discussion of local identity and autonomy in the face of overwhelming UK state authority has clear parallels with the devolution debate. The Harpur and Iles series remain in their 'anytown' setting to this day. Nevertheless, one year after devolution, Tucker revitalised his old pseudonym, David Craig, to publish the first of his crime novels overtly set in Cardiff Bay, *The Tattooed Detective* (1998), which follows the regeneration of the area. Tucker has said of eventually setting his crime fiction in the Bay area, 'I thought once the Bay got going, with the huge sums of money involved, then organised crime became a possibility'.⁵⁰ Some critics, such as Jane Aaron, have drawn parallels between devolution and a growth in Welsh cultural confidence, encouraging writers now to set their work in their native country. Aaron has said of the opening night of the Welsh Assembly in 1999:

[i]mages associated with that evening's concert – of the red dragon in flames over Cardiff Bay, for example, or draped over Shirley Bassey as she sang in her birthplace – appeared to many as symbols of a regenerated Wales, embarked on a new mode of existence promising greater national self-determination in spheres not restricted to the political.⁵¹

Tucker's statement cites entrepreneurial expansion, started prior to Welsh devolution, as a reason for re-siting his crime fiction. However, both events, regeneration and devolution, are responsible for the changing face of Cardiff Bay which has resulted in re-engaging contemporary crime writers, like Tucker, with their native cities and culture. For Tucker at least, this is a change that has enabled him to put aside the mask of mimicry to make use of his native culture in his most recent work.

⁵⁰ Anthony Brockway, 'An Interview with Bill James'. Available at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/elizabeth.ercocklly/bill.htm>. [accessed 2 June 2010].

⁵¹ Jane Aaron and Chris Williams, 'Preface', in *Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. xv-xix (p. xv-i).

II

Born in Cardiff, John Williams moved to and lived in London for much of his adult life. He has spoken about how, ‘after a while, Welshness started creeping up on me’⁵² and how this led to a move back to Cardiff, which then became the setting for much of his work. Despite this, he has been reluctant to recognise Welsh identity, arguing that ‘[y]ou see the flimsiness of it when you take people out of Wales’.⁵³ In his Introduction to the short story anthology, *Wales, Half Welsh* (2004), he goes on to say that the English-speaking Welsh can lack the coherent cultural vision of many of their Welsh-speaking counterparts. Still, he does point to some common ground:

The themes – displacement, rootlessness, belonging, not belonging, hidden history, coming of age, chips with vinegar – are the themes of the way we live now throughout the Western world, not simply in Wales. But they are, I think, seen here from a distinctive angle, set in a particular place, refracted through a particular history, and so possessed of a particular viewpoint, one that’s just a little bit, if you look at the map of Britain, left of centre.⁵⁴

Williams describes a cultural identity that is, on the surface, that of the dominant Western culture but which views it at a slant. Clearly, this is an identity that is geographically detailed, existing as it does to the ‘left’, or west of England. He could also be paying homage here to a shared socialist heritage in his native south Wales, one that is ‘left of centre’. More importantly, Williams gestures towards Bhabha’s words, in that the English-speaking Welsh are almost the same ‘but not quite’ as their English counterparts. Williams defines Welsh identity as one that voices a Western culture but from the margins, a space that has been traditionally occupied by a silenced people. Rather than denouncing the Welsh for a lack of common identity, he offers a definition, whether intended or subconsciously implied, that is

⁵² John Williams, ‘Introduction’, in *Wales, Half Welsh*, ed. John Williams (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, (p. 1). At an Institute of Welsh Affairs ‘Coffee Shop debate’ on 6 July 2010 in Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Peter Finch spoke about Williams’s suggestion that Welsh writing should stand on its own merits and should not be pigeonholed or marketed through its Welshness. Finch went on to speak about Williams’s irritation with speciality sections for Welsh literature in local bookshops.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, (p. 12).

much more diffuse and often intangible and which recognises the difference in its mimicry of a dominant culture.

Themes of ‘displacement, rootlessness, belonging, not belonging, hidden history’ are all present in *Cardiff Dead*, the second novel in Williams’s *The Cardiff Trilogy* (2006). Unlike Tucker’s Harpur and Iles series, they are clearly rooted in place. The trilogy uses the geography of the author’s hometown, tracking it through regeneration and devolution, a theme also used by Ian Rankin in his Edinburgh-set Rebus novels. Like Bernard Knight and James Tucker, Williams writes the buildings of the Cardiff docklands into his fiction, buildings which are going through yet another stage of regeneration and renewal at the time of the novel’s setting. Tucker’s childhood chapel reappears in Williams’s trilogy in its later reincarnation as a nightclub, for instance. *Cardiff Dead* sees Mazz, a session musician, travel back to Cardiff for Charlie Unger’s funeral in Cardiff Docklands, once known as Tiger Bay and now renamed Cardiff Bay. Mazz tries to track down the former members of a 1980s local ska band, The Wurriyas, of which he and Charlie, who was also a past world lightweight champion boxer, were members. The narrative alternates between the early 1980s and the present day as the members of the band try to discover the truth behind Charlie’s death.

John Williams has a keen interest in noir and hardboiled fiction; a frequent commentator, reviewer and editor of crime fiction, he is also the author of *Into the Badlands* (1991) and *Back to the Badlands* (2007) which record his travels across America to interview crime writers. American influences are apparent in this novel; Mazz’s ‘favourite road book’⁵⁵ is Chandler’s *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) and *Cardiff Dead* contains many hardboiled tropes, with its downbeat characters and terse journalistic prose. Although not a PI in name, Mazz, the main narrator, shares many of the PI’s features and, like Colin Harpur, is typical of the hardboiled detective. Unable to form lasting relationships, especially with women, he is

⁵⁵ John Williams, *Cardiff Dead* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 58

isolated and alienated from his community.⁵⁶ Moreover, Mazz's initial appearance also points to one of hardboiled fiction's progenitors, the western. Dennis Porter reminds us that the PI first emerges in California, the last American frontier and site of the western.⁵⁷ Describing himself as a 'guitar for hire',⁵⁸ a linguistic echo of the Western's 'gun for hire', Mazz travels back on 'the ghost train. The 125 from Paddington to Cardiff'.⁵⁹ Like the western hero and hardboiled detective, Mazz is down-at-heel yet possesses '[o]utlaw charisma'.⁶⁰ Mazz is a rootless drifter who lacks direction in his life and the search for the truth behind Charlie's death does provide him 'with a sense of purpose he hadn't felt in... [*sic*] years'.⁶¹ Despite this, once the mystery has been solved, like the gun for hire, he leaves town, but in this instance, to embark on a tour as a session guitarist.

The role of detective as one who provides the answers which others often fail to see or comprehend is undermined in this novel. The group of friends on whom the novel centres also uncover clues which are shared to flesh out the full story. Mazz, too, is aware of the redundancy of his role; on proudly imparting newly-discovered knowledge to Charlie's daughter, Tyra, knowledge of which she is already aware, he ruefully remarks, 'so much for my career as a private detective'.⁶² The western hero and hardboiled detective are loners but, once re-sited in Wales, find they can no longer work in isolation. In this novel, it is communal detection which reveals the truth and brings the narrative to a satisfactory conclusion, a theme which weaves throughout Welsh crime fiction. The trilogy as a whole contains a multiplicity of narratives as each book centres on the same cast of characters but

⁵⁶ Mazz sleeps with a remarkable number of women in this novel, including friends' and employers' wives and girlfriends despite his borderline alcoholism and unwashed appearance. However, there must be some authorial irony present as Williams has said, '[t]he private eye is conventionally some kind of wish-fulfilment alter ego for an author, younger, stronger, better looking, sexually irresistible, etc.' (*Back to the Badlands*, London: Serpent's Tail, 2007), p. 66.

⁵⁷ Dennis Porter, 'The Private Eye', (p. 95).

⁵⁸ Williams, *Cardiff Dead*, p. 2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

with a differing focus in each novel. The effect is that of a community's voice rather than one individual narrative.

In common with many of the American authors that he interviews, Williams places crime at the heart of the city's 'badland', the Butetown area of Cardiff Bay. Described by Williams as 'the black-sheep neighbourhood of my home town',⁶³ Butetown acts as a trope for what W. H. Auden deprecatingly referred to as 'the Great Wrong Place'.⁶⁴ Built in the 1960s to re-house the inhabitants of the demolished Tiger Bay, this housing estate coexists with the regenerated Cardiff Bay in a dichotomous relationship. In its past incarnation as Tiger Bay, the area has appeared in crime fiction throughout the twentieth century in novels, like the previously discussed *Once to Tiger Bay* by W. Townend, where fears surrounding its multicultural population were played out and resolved within the strict confines of crime fiction. Local characters are generally cast as criminals in this type of crime fiction, while detectives are brought in from outside the area to restore order. In *Cardiff Dead*, though, the majority of the characters: police, villains, property developers and single mothers, are all born and live in Butetown. By focusing on characters who live in the Bay, Williams gives a voice to those who normally inhabit the margins of Welsh fiction.

Famous for its multicultural mix, Butetown is, however, a place that does not necessarily identify itself as Welsh. The 2001 census recorded that only 8.71% of residents registered themselves as Welsh.⁶⁵ Unlike *You'd Better Believe It*, the text does include some motifs of Welsh culture but these are not always depicted in a flattering light. *Cardiff Dead* includes a depiction of the Welsh Assembly's opening ceremony in 1999, one which differs dramatically in viewpoint from that of Aaron mentioned above. Rather than a depiction of a

⁶³ William Leith, 'John Williams: Spare a Thought for the Pimp of Tiger Bay', *The Independent on Sunday*, 1 June 2003, p. 18.

⁶⁴ W.H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 147-158 (p. 151).

⁶⁵ 'Butetown Electoral Division'. Available at http://www.cardiff.gov.uk/content.asp?nav=2872,3256,3299&parent_directory_id=2865&id=1963 [accessed 21 August 2010].

resurgence of Welsh cultural confidence, the ceremony instead reduces Mazz and his companion to helpless laughter while:

watching this absurdist panoply of Welsh cultural life unfolding in front of him. Tom Jones of course. Well, at least big Tom knows he's funny these days... And the rest of the stuff – well, it was hard to choose between the ghastly reading of *Under Milk Wood* by some terrible old ham and the bunch of, ahem, hip Welsh actors making complete tits of themselves doing some kind of rock poetry until the outright winner came along in the shape of the bloke with the big hair from the Alarm doing some kind of cod folk song with a male-voice choir backing him. And then came the grand finale, the whole bloody lot of them singing 'Every day I Thank the Lord I'm Welsh', which Mazz had kind of assumed was meant to be funny more or less but was here being done in deadly earnest.⁶⁶

The official presentation of Welsh culture is a tired recycling of stereotypes, one which is rejected by the docklands community. Nevertheless, Mazz's dismissive description of 'The Bells of Rhymney' (1957), a song which set to music part of Idris Davies's 'Gwalia Deserta' (1938),⁶⁷ as a 'cod folk song' is a surprising assertion from a musician. The poem is Davies's response to the devastating effects of the coal industry on the South Wales valleys and devotes a section to the General Strike of 1926. As such, it is firmly rooted in the tradition of folk music as working-class protest. Perhaps its appropriation by Pete Seeger, the American folk singer, has blinded Mazz to its Welsh origins. For someone like Mazz, rootless and alienated from his native culture, a Welsh performance of 'The Bells of Rhymney' sounds like mimicry, and a poor mimicry at that, of a dominant American culture.

In *Cardiff Dead*, it is place, rather than nationality, that informs identity. Mazz, on seeing Tyra for the first time in over a decade, muses that it 'seemed to him she was different, like she was – well not exactly blacker 'cause that sounded terrible – more docks he supposed'.⁶⁸ While the mystery behind Charlie's death is explained in fairly muted terms, a climactic scene in the novel is the discovery of his hoard of street and pub signs from the demolished Tiger Bay. It is this discovery that causes Tyra to start 'bawling her heart out,

⁶⁶ Williams, *Cardiff Dead*, p. 56-7.

⁶⁷ Davies's poem 'Gwalia Deserta' [Wasteland of Wales] is a series of polemical poems of which 'The Bells of Rhymney' is one piece; this takes as its source the nursery-rhyme, 'Oranges and Lemons'.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

crying for Charlie, crying for herself, crying for Tiger Bay, crying for all the places and people who were lost and gone'.⁶⁹ It has been said of Williams's work that 'the impetus of the books is not towards solving the crime',⁷⁰ a belief borne out by the manner in which interest in Charlie's death and bringing his killer to justice, wanes and becomes secondary to the discovery of a disappearing Tiger Bay. This has similarities with Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1931) and Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), where the crimes which commence the narrative become secondary to later events in the novels. In *Cardiff Dead* the murder of an individual is secondary to another type of crime, the destruction of place through demolition and redevelopment. This exact yet narrow geographical space provides an identity for those marginalised through race or poverty. With the destruction of place comes the threat to a localised identity as this interstitial space, squeezed between the regenerated Bay and the rest of Cardiff, gave the marginalised a safe place in which to belong. With destruction comes the threat of dispersal and the erosion of a unique identity.

Traditional notions of Welsh masculine identity are also questioned and rejected in this novel. Boxing has been traditionally viewed as one of the few escape routes from poverty for young black men, as it has been for many South Welsh working-class men. However, Charlie Unger's journey from lightweight champion to musician to alcoholic, '[j]ust another old geezer goes down the bookie's, goes down the pub, choping on about the old days',⁷¹ is central to the novel. Fathers fade into alcoholism before finally disappearing from the text. Failed or missing fathers haunt *Cardiff Dead*; their failure is not confined to their lack of paternal care, since often they fail to fulfil other traditional roles which shape their national and individual identities. Mazz's father, also an alcoholic and who makes a brief appearance

⁶⁹ Williams, *Cardiff Dead*, p. 240.

⁷⁰ Leith, 'John Williams', p. 18.

⁷¹ Williams, *Cardiff Dead*, p. 49.

at the commencement of the novel,⁷² is an ex-miner who has not worked since the 1970s, ‘not because of the pit closures or the strikes – he’d been gone before all that got going, he’d been on permanent sick’.⁷³ This illness is revealed later in Mazz’s childhood as ‘nerves [...] [c]laustrophobia or sheer bloody terror’ rather than ‘[b]lack lung’.⁷⁴ Mazz’s father has been unmanned through working underground. The novel recognises the effects of Thatcherism on South Welsh industry, yet it is the lack of a positive masculine role model that keeps Mazz out of the mines and his native Newbridge rather than government closures. The steady decline of both Mazz and Tyra’s fathers shares similarities with the histories of their home towns, histories that are linked through an industrial rise and fall. Tiger Bay grew as a direct result of a booming coal industry in the mid-nineteenth century; the increase in coal exports encouraged the Second Marquis of Bute to expand and build upon the existent Cardiff port.⁷⁵ The growth in the valley towns and Tiger Bay mirrored each other during industrial expansion as each area benefited from the booming coal industry and its export, but they then paralleled each other in decline and descent into poverty. In this respect, Charlie and Mazz’s fathers act as tropes for their respective area’s history – once proud but now decayed and degenerate.

The lack of identification with national culture and the degradation of traditional role models can also be seen as accounting for the band formed by Mazz and his companions adopting ska, music that originated in 1960s Jamaica, which in turn was inspired by black American music of the 1940s and ’50s. Ska enjoyed a resurgence in 1980s Britain among first and second generation Black British musicians and their white contemporaries.

⁷² This scene is strongly reminiscent of the meeting between Begbie and his alcoholic father in *Trainspotting* (1993). However, while Begbie’s father fails to recognise his son, Mazz and his father have a drink together which is either a touching comment on how their familial bond endures, or indicates Mazz’s own future as an alcoholic.

⁷³ Williams, *Cardiff Dead*, p. 8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Dennis Morgan, ‘Butetown and Cardiff Docks’ in *The Cardiff Story: A History of the City from its Earliest Times to the Present* (Cowbridge: D. Brown & Sons, 1991), pp. 135-155.

Nevertheless, their band name, the Wurriyas, which is derived from a Somali greeting, hints at Cardiff Bay's much older and unique multi-cultural heritage.⁷⁶ While Black British identity is commonly taken to be shaped by the West Indian immigration of the 1950s, the so-called Windrush generation, Cardiff has had a Somali population that dates from the late-nineteenth century. Like much of Cardiff's early immigrant population, Cardiff's Somali community arrived either as sailors or to work in its expanding docklands. The third novel of the trilogy, *The Prince of Wales* (2003), explains the popularity of American music in Cardiff because "[p]eople been hearing that in Cardiff since for ever...Sailors brought the music in".⁷⁷ Previously the speaker had stated that 'Cardiff's really like an American city',⁷⁸ and had drawn comparisons between Chicago and Cardiff. Williams recognises that traditional cultural motifs of Welsh culture, such as the Welsh language, may not be apparent in Butetown, or play such a strong part in the locality's identity. However, rather than accept that this is symptomatic of the anglicisation of the capital, Williams points to other cultural borrowings which form a specific Cardiff identity, one which incorporates its industrial and maritime past. Thus, Williams presents new, alternative identities developed in an interstitial space that is both threatened and shaped by development and regeneration.

III

Born near the Welsh border in Shrewsbury, Malcolm Pryce moved to Aberystwyth at an early age. The town became the setting for his series of darkly comic crime novels featuring Louie Knight, PI, most of which were written whilst Pryce lived abroad.⁷⁹ In the first of the series, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, Louie investigates a plot by Lovespoon, the Grand Wizard

⁷⁶ Williams, *Cardiff Dead*, pp. 23-4.

⁷⁷ John Williams, *The Prince of Wales* in *The Cardiff Trilogy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003) p. 661.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Whilst most volumes in the series are set solely in Aberystwyth, the novel written on Pryce's return to Britain, *From Aberystwyth with Love* (2009), sends Louie and his sidekick, Calamity, out of Wales to Hughesovka in the Ukraine.

of the Druids and ‘messianic Welsh teacher’,⁸⁰ to return the town to the mythical Cantref-y-Gwaelod⁸¹ by breaching the defences of Nant-y-Moch reservoir and flooding the town. Initially, the novels in the series seem to move from mimicry to minstrelsy as they marry the seemingly opposing tropes of American hardboiled fiction, in an act of mimicry, to an exaggerated Welsh culture, a performance of minstrelsy. There has been a tradition of Welsh minstrels who entertained with music and the spoken word⁸² but it is *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*’s definition that I will be using in this chapter. In that, it defines minstrelsy as a ‘[m]usical and humorous entertainment style...The entertainers blacked up, a grotesque parody of black Americans in the Southern slave states’.⁸³ Early minstrel or blackface performance took elements of black culture - speech, songs, and dance - and amplified them, usually to ridicule or infantilise black culture. Like the early minstrel shows of the American South in the mid-nineteenth century which lampooned black Americans through caricature, the Aberystwyth novels also appear to portray a ‘grotesque parody’⁸⁴ of Welsh culture. The opening paragraph is indicative of the style throughout the series:

The thing I remember most about it was walking the entire length of the Prom that morning and not seeing a Druid. Normally when I made my stroll shortly before 9am I would see a few hanging around at Sospan’s ice-cream stall, preening themselves in their sharp Swansea suits and teardrop aviator shades. Or they would be standing outside Dai the Custard Pie’s joke shop, waiting for him to open so they could buy some more of that soap that makes a person’s face go black.⁸⁵

The conceit of a town run by Druids, who have formed a mafia-style gang, sets a tone of absurdity which continues throughout the narrative. Unlike Tucker and Williams’s crime fiction, the Aberystwyth series, whilst retaining the motifs of hardboiled fiction – the Private

⁸⁰ Malcolm Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001) p. 21.

⁸¹ Louie explains how the ‘folk tale version told how the kingdom lying in the lowland to the west had been protected from the sea by dykes and during a feast one night someone had left the sluice gates open. Similar stories were found all round the coast of Britain and seemed to be a folk memory of the land that was lost with the rising seas following the last ice age.’ (p. 85)

⁸² For more on this subject, see *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500-1850* ed. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

⁸³ Jeffrey Green, ‘Minstrelsy’ in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, eds. David Dabydeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 299-301 (p. 299).

⁸⁴ Jeffrey Green, ‘Minstrelsy’, (p. 299).

⁸⁵ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 3.

Eye and the femme fatale, for instance – moves from its usual urban realism to the actual geography of the seaside town of Aberystwyth, albeit a fantastical Aberystwyth that is dark and menacing, and peopled by grotesques.

Aberystwyth Mon Amour may initially appear to be crime fiction's return to Stephen Knight's 'cringingly colonial performance'; the farcical juxtaposition of the tropes of the hardboiled novel against a cartoonish Welsh culture provides the comedy in the series. Ludic in its representation of Welsh images, the text is similarly playful in its appropriation of hardboiled tropes. The insertion of Aberystwyth into canonical titles such as *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) alerts the reader to the parodic nature of the series, as do the publisher's covers, which feature *noir*-style representations of Louie against an Aberystwyth backdrop. Crime parodies had been in existence for some time prior to Pryce's creation. James Anderson, who settled in Wales, wrote a series of Golden Age pastiches, the first of which was *The Affair of the Blood-stained Egg Cosy* (1975). As Anderson's tongue-in-cheek title suggests, these parodies point out the narrowness and limitations of some crime fiction genres. Recently, there has been a rash of postmodern parodies featuring Wales as an independent state; Jasper Fforde's Thursday Next series, which commenced with *The Eyre Affair* (2001), and Gaynor Madoc Leonard's *The Carmarthen Underground* (2009) share similarities with Pryce's fiction as they all imagine an anachronistic Welsh state while employing Welsh tropes and culture for comic effect. All published post-devolution, each uses the marriage of Wales and crime fiction to differing ends.

Set in the 1980s, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* also shares a sense of anachronistic slippage. Mobile phones co-exist with witches and sedan chairs. The *décor* of Louie's office, 'a pre-war fan with bakelite knobs; a desk lamp from the Fifties; a modern phone and an answering machine',⁸⁶ mirrors the narrative's juxtaposition of early hardboiled tropes with

⁸⁶ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 6.

contemporary motifs. Louie assures the reader that the styling is not ‘deliberate and ironic’.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, this is not true of the narrative. The view from Louie’s office looks out ‘across the slate roofs of downtown Aberystwyth towards the iron-age hill fort in Pen Dinas: and beyond that to the four chimneys of the rock factory, now belching out pink smoke’.⁸⁸ The landscape encompasses a hardboiled ‘downtown’; a physical reminder of Wales’s pre-historic mythic past – a landscape often used in Welsh tourist merchandise – and a surreal depiction of industrialisation more reminiscent of a scene by Welsh-born writer, Roald Dahl. Combining the true geography of Aberystwyth, such as Pen Dinas, with the imagined rock factory, and the text’s appropriation of the hardboiled, meshed with the absurd, unsettles the traditional images of Wales.

Initial reviews of the novel were quick to make similar comparisons. Clare Morgan, in *The Times Literary Supplement*, described the novel as mixing ‘satire, farce, fantasy and comic strip in a world where the Famous Five meet Raymond Chandler’.⁸⁹ Although not the intent in this particular review, Welsh culture has routinely been marginalised and belittled by discourses that draw on such infantilising images, both in the past and the present. *Sunday Times* columnist A. A. Gill has acquired notoriety through his vituperative pieces on Wales, for example. Famously, he once referred to Meibion Glyndŵr, or in Gill’s translation, the Sons Of Glendower, as ‘the Postmen Pat of the international brotherhood of terrorists’,⁹⁰ an image that reduces the threat posed by Welsh nationalism to that of a cartoon. Pryce addresses such discourses by taking the stereotypes and magnifying them until they become excessive. Bhabha argues that ‘the *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in

⁸⁷ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Clare Morgan, ‘Aberystwyth Mon Amour by Malcolm Pryce’, in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 22 June 2001, p. 23.

⁹⁰ A. A. Gill, ‘A Rare Bite Worth Going to Wales for’, *Sunday Times* 31 October 1993. Available at <http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis/search/newssubmitForm.do> [accessed 11 August 2010].

disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority'.⁹¹ The same could also be said of Pryce's use of minstrelsy. Rather than merely internalising and repeating the coloniser's caricature of Welsh culture, Pryce appropriates and exaggerates the colonialist's cartoon images of Wales, and this increase in scale restores the diminished subject and imbues it with power. For instance, the old women of Aberystwyth play a central role in the series. Like Agatha Christie's village spinsters, they are the repository of local history and gossip. Initially depicted as foolish old gossips, nevertheless, the Aberystwyth spinsters and widows have a large degree of agency; they are witches, tea-cosy experts, members of an elite commando force drawn from the ranks of the 'Sweet Jesus League'.⁹² Louie's cleaning woman, Mrs Llantrisant, is eventually revealed to be the fearless freedom fighter, Gwenno Guevara. This has similarities with the appropriations of minstrelsy by African-American artists. Betye Saar's 'The Liberation of Aunt Jemima' (1972), for example, depicts the traditional mammy figure with a gun.⁹³ Saar shifts Aunt Jemima, originally a stock figure from nineteenth-century minstrel shows, from obedient mammy to one who threatens the white imagination. This disrupts the coloniser's infantilising and belittling images and endows them with a retaliatory power. Behind the blackface performance of the mammy or foolish old Welsh woman lies a potential killer. Like the Aberystwyth tea-cosy shops in the harbour which act as a front for brothels, so the town and its inhabitants display a layered identity; beneath the familiar, palatable surface lurks a threatening presence.

Despite aspects of the PI being mocked, Louie Knight himself is not a caricature, but an honourable Chandleresque detective. Louie also follows the pattern of other Welsh detectives in that he is not the individualised figure of American hardboiled crime, but works with others to solve the crime. Louie later joins forces with the ousted Detective Inspector Llunos. Together, in a moment of 'telepathy' and 'shared vision' they allow a criminal act

⁹¹ Bhabha, p. 88. Emphasis in the original.

⁹² Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 129.

⁹³ Betye Saar, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), Berkeley Art Museum, California.

which decides the fate of Aberystwyth, one which leads to rebirth and new prosperity for the town.⁹⁴ Louie's father also lives nearby and Louie frequently seeks his advice. This is no lone PI, but a man with roots and a community of sorts. He is partnered in his investigations by Calamity Jane, a school girl who dreams of becoming a 'gumshoe'.⁹⁵ By naming Louie's sidekick Calamity, Pryce, as does Williams, alludes to the PI's Western beginnings. This is further compounded by descriptions of Aberystwyth as a frontier land, one that is inhospitable and rain-swept. On considering the inhabitants of a caravan park, Louie wonders:

[h]ow many other people had made the same journey as the rain swept in from the sea and pounded on the plywood roof of their shoebox on wheels? Families who had driven for two or three hours, stopping occasionally for puking children, to this world of gorse and marram grass, dunes and bingo and fish and chips.⁹⁶

Like the wagon trains that travelled to the West coast of America, the tourists in their caravans travel to mid-West Wales and show true grit in their determination to holiday in a place which, in Pryce's novels, is an uncongenial spot.

The partnership of female sidekick with male PI is not unusual. Interestingly, this is a relationship that also occurs in Scottish crime fiction. Ian Rankin's Rebus was, in early novels, partnered by the younger, lower-ranking Siobhan Clarke, while Kate Atkinson's *When Will There Be Good News?* (2009) sees her PI, Jackson Brodie, team up with Reggie, an orphaned friendless teenager like Calamity. These relationships between older male PI and younger female sidekick clearly allude to a familial relationship. Moreover, Gill Plain has also pointed out how Siobhan's post-devolution relationship with Rebus has developed from sidekick to a natural inheritor. In devolved crime fiction, the reins of power are slowly being passed from the older, weary traditional male figures to young women.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 244.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁹⁷ Gill Plain, 'The Map that Engenders the Territory', in *Crime Fiction in the City: Capital Crimes*, eds. Lucy Andrew and Catherine Phelps (Cardiff: University Wales Press, 2013).

Still, it is uncertain who wields the state authority in Pryce's novel. Set in a pre-devolution Wales, yet written after the inauguration of the Welsh Assembly, this novel's Aberystwyth appears to be part of an independent, self-contained nation state. Like other Welsh appropriations of a hardboiled model, most of this series centres on a local, hermetic setting. Swansea is its cosmopolitan centre, Llanelli Technical college provides cutting-edge technology such as the 'micro-dot photo booth',⁹⁸ Blaenau Ffestiniog is noted for its vineyards,⁹⁹ and Gwent is home to Wales's perfumiers. Those fleeing Aberystwyth travel to Shrewsbury, situated on the border with England, a reversal of the author's own journey from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth. The Ghost Train displays a sign asking '[w]hat is the purpose of your journey to England?',¹⁰⁰ a question presumably asked at the Wales-England passport control. Nevertheless, this is a 'once-lovely'¹⁰¹ town that has experienced a 'sad, slow fall from grace'.¹⁰² There are many references to a past Victorian or Edwardian splendour, a past that was outward-looking, almost imperialist in tone; Louie's 'great-great-uncle Noel Bartholomew'¹⁰³ had travelled to Borneo's heart of darkness to rescue an Englishwoman but, most significantly, the nation-state wages war in a far-flung outpost of its Empire, Patagonia. This hints at the loss of Welsh servicemen in Britain's Falklands Wars, a dispute over a similarly inhospitable and distant territory. Like that at the time of the Falklands conflict, the patriotic and jingoistic mood surrounding the Patagonia Wars changed from 'initial euphoria. And then the disillusionment. The body bags and policy U-turns; the sobering discovery that the boys weren't the men in white hats as everybody had supposed'.¹⁰⁴ The fictional

⁹⁸ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 136.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161. This is further proof of the text's subversive humour as Blaenau Ffestiniog was better known for its slate industry which has since fallen into decline.

¹⁰⁰ Comically, this is a real ghost train haunted by the unquiet spirits of tourists killed in an accident during the ghost train's previous incarnation as an educational theme ride. Rather than depicting a Wales haunted by its past as suggested in R. S. Thomas's poem, 'A Welsh Landscape' (1955), Pryce suggests that Aberystwyth is haunted by its role as a holiday seaside town.

¹⁰¹ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 237.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Patagonian Wars, 'the Welsh Vietnam'¹⁰⁵ featured in *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, point to a Wales with a strong imperial past. While Wales did not possess in fact a great Empire, its inhabitants did establish Welsh communities elsewhere. Settled by Welsh immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century as an effort to preserve Welsh identity from the corrosive influence of the English language, Y Wladfa [The Colony] in Patagonia has a hybrid identity which expresses itself through Welsh and Spanish. Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* describes how Welsh settlers were:

poor people in search of a New Wales, refugees from cramped coal-mining valleys, from a failed independence movement, and from Parliament's ban on Welsh in schools. Their leaders had combed the earth for a stretch of open country uncontaminated by Englishmen.¹⁰⁶

As Pryce has avoided the use of English paradigms through his marriage of American hardboiled and Welsh tradition, so the Patagonian settlers effectively avoided English cultural imperialism.

Pryce's Aberystwyth still retains elements of English colonialism found across Wales today. Despite the occasional greeting of '*Bore da*'¹⁰⁷ [good morning] and '*Prynhawn da*'¹⁰⁸ [good afternoon] there is little mention of the Welsh language in an area where it is predominantly the mother tongue.¹⁰⁹ Beyond the real Aberystwyth, in its 'mountainous hinterland',¹¹⁰ lies the Forestry Commission plantation and Nant-y-Moch reservoir. Similarly, Pryce's Aberystwyth has a forest on its outskirts which is a gloomy Gothic site made up of 'sad unenchanted forests of conifers planted in uniform rows by the forestry commission'.¹¹¹

In reality, both forest and reservoir are felt by some to be symbolic of the power a distant

¹⁰⁵ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Bruce Chatwin, *In Patagonia* (London: Picador, 1979), p. 23-4.

¹⁰⁷ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁰⁹ It could be argued that the many references to the runic alphabet which predates the Roman alphabet still in use today, parallel the fate of the Welsh language. Although part of the school curriculum in *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, few now understand it. As one of the few who can translate it, Mrs Evans, is a witch, and as it is also used by Dai Brainbocs to disguise his proposal for returning Aberystwyth to Cantref-y-Gwaelod, it is more likely that the use of runes is a device to remind us of Wales's prehistoric and pagan past.

¹¹⁰ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 101.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

government had over the people of Wales. Formed in 1919, the Forestry Commission was established in order to break Britain's reliance on timber imports.¹¹² In later years it was given the power of compulsory purchase of Welsh farmland. Nant-y-Moch reservoir was constructed a year prior to the flooding of another village, Tryweryn. Although the flooding of Nant-y-Moch village does not seem to have incurred the protest that the flooding of Tryweryn did, today there is objection to the imposition of a wind farm by a Scottish power company.¹¹³ In this case the imposition does not entail the relocation of residents of a Welsh village against their will, but it certainly continues the lack of consideration of a local voice by an outside agency. Matthew Jarvis recognises the role that forests and reservoirs, or in his words, 'wood and water', play in 'the destruction of communities and of the material structures on which those communities depended'.¹¹⁴ Also that:

[o]n another level, it is to be exposed to the politics of environmental disenfranchisement: because this is most importantly a vision of Welsh space under threat from the decisions of political bodies dominated by non-Welsh interests.¹¹⁵

Lovespoon's plot to breach the dam's defences is pivotal to the narrative of *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*. Rather than reading his actions as a deluded and deadly attempt to return the people of Aberystwyth to Cantref-y-Gwaelod by flooding the town in a biblical deluge, Lovespoon's actions can be interpreted as returning the land to the people of Aberystwyth, a metaphorical return of the villages and farmlands which were taken from the people of Wales by the Forestry Commission and water companies. Louie and Llunos's complicity in letting this happen, despite having the power to avert the bombing of the reservoir, seems to suggest this.

¹¹² 'The Forestry Commission', in *The Encyclopaedia of Wales* eds John Davies, Nigel Jenkins, Menna Baines, Peredur Lynch (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 298.

¹¹³ A group calling themselves The Cambrian Mountains Society are spearheading the campaign. Though not widely reported in the media, the details of their objections to the current proposals can be found on their website available at <http://www.cambrian-mountains.co.uk/issues-wind-nantymoch.php> [accessed 23 April 2013]

¹¹⁴ Matthew Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 30. This has also been a subject for Welsh poets, famously R. S. Thomas's 'Reservoirs' and Gwenallt's 'Rhydcymerau' which look at the destruction of Welsh villages to make reservoirs with which to supply English towns, and the Forestry Commission's plantation schemes on Welsh land respectively.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The reborn and regenerated Aberystwyth at the close of the text looks to Europe rather than hardboiled America and indicates a slippage in mimicry of Anglo-American culture. Unlike the nostalgia for the lost Tiger Bay in *Cardiff Dead*, the subsequently regenerated Aberystwyth is seen as an improvement for, as Louie remarks, '[p]rogress isn't always a bad thing'.¹¹⁶ This is a new and prosperous Aberystwyth which has emerged phoenix-like, not from fire, but from water. Sospan's ice-cream kiosk is now a pavement café, while Sospan himself runs a chain of bistros and receives European Union funding. Rather than this being an indication of Wales's further loss of identity, it mirrors pre-recession independent Ireland's economic growth through the aid of European funding and points to an alternative to the Westminster government. The final chapter sees Louie and Calamity emerge from a showing of a film depicting the flooding of the old Aberystwyth, possibly a reference to the 1949 film, *The Last Days of Dolwyn*,¹¹⁷ a melodrama directed by and featuring Emllyn Williams as a villain who plans to flood his home village as an act of revenge. Despite Calamity's description of it as 'rubbish', Louie knows that secretly they both 'loved it'.¹¹⁸ Louie and Calamity's ambivalence about the film surely replicates the 'colonised's double vision'¹¹⁹ whereby the pleasure derived from a depiction of one's culture competes with the knowledge that this is a blackface performance of that culture. Despite the film's melodrama and triumphalism, it is a story which continues to be shared with the people of fictional Aberystwyth. Also swept away by the flood is the figure of Noddy that had graced Sospan's ice-cream stand; this regenerated Aberystwyth no longer performs a minstrel version of itself as '[c]artoon characters had no place illuminating the espressos and ristrettos of Sospan's terrace café'.¹²⁰ The regenerated town is one which no longer needs to replicate itself through the colonising gaze but now looks outwards, secure in its own devolved

¹¹⁶ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 240.

¹¹⁷ *The Last Days of Dolwyn*, dir. Russell Lloyd, Emllyn Williams (British Lion Films, 1949)

¹¹⁸ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 239-40.

¹¹⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 88.

¹²⁰ Pryce, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, p. 240.

identity, towards Europe rather than America. Unfortunately, the following novels in the Louie Knight series return to the old stereotypes rather than the regenerated Aberystwyth washed clean by a flood. For Malcolm Pryce, it appears that the market in perpetuating old tropes is a more powerful force than subversion through minstrelsy.

The three texts discussed in this chapter span a period which saw economic recession followed by urban regeneration, a period which commences not long after devolution is rejected, but which then sees the birth of a devolved Welsh Assembly a mere decade and a half later. This movement from economic dependency to regeneration through urban redevelopment to political autonomy is reflected in these texts. An emerging Welsh identity in crime fiction can be traced from the covert representations in Tucker's work to Pryce's baroque characterisation. Their use of mimicry also changes. Initially it acts as a blind under which Welsh identity is performed, then, as in *Cardiff Dead*, mimicry creates an interstitial space to produce and discuss new identities until it finally mutates in *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* into a mocking minstrelsy, one which is turned upon the coloniser. However, while acknowledging traditional Welsh culture, all three texts weave heterogenic, contemporary identities and avoid that 'cringingly colonial performance' that is 'stage-Welsh'.¹²¹

¹²¹ Knight, 'Crimes Domestic and Crimes Colonial', (p. 31).

Chapter V: Women and Crime

In 2009, Honno Press, the Welsh feminist publishing house, published *Written in Blood*, a collection of short crime fiction stories by women from Wales. The editors' intention was to bring together 'a group of voices from Wales that shows there are still new stories to be told [which] hint at a rich future for the genre and the women who love to both write and read about the rogues and misfits that stalk our streets and our imaginations'.¹ During the previous decade, feminist literary critics and historians, such as Jane Aaron,² Moira Dearnley³ and Katie Gramich,⁴ had already brought to attention a wide range of women's writing from Wales, spanning almost four hundred years from the eighteenth century to the late-twentieth century. All had done much to reclaim and rediscover forgotten and marginalised texts. However, the more populist genres authored by women, crime fiction for instance, have been overlooked. This is understandable when one considers the role of such recuperative literary criticism in building a canon for Welsh writing in English since, as suggested in a previous chapter, populist texts can often lack the required literary standards for inclusion in that canon. Nonetheless, I wish to argue that despite the occasional lack of literary merit, crime fiction by women from Wales has much to reveal about women's perspectives on cultural identity.

The previous chapter looked at male crime writers and their appropriation of hardboiled fiction's tropes and its investigative figure, the PI; an appropriation, one could argue, that is indicative of a performative masculinity. The PI is a tough guy who survives beatings, onslaughts from femmes fatales and is, initially, a solitary,

¹ Caroline Oakley, 'Introduction', in *Written in Blood: Crime Short Stories by women from Wales* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2009), pp. ix-x (p. x).

² Jane Aaron, *Nineteenth-century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

³ Moira Dearnley, *Distant Fields: Eighteenth-century Fictions of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001).

⁴ Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

independent figure. As is suited to his tough-guy status, the PI has been mostly situated amongst 'mean streets'. In contrast, female-authored crime fiction from Wales shares common thematic concerns with many other British female crime writing: a focus on the domestic space, maternity, and a woman's role in the patriarchal world of detection. Furthermore, as many of these themes are second-wave feminist concerns, the influence of the feminist refrain, 'the personal is political', can be glimpsed in such crime fiction and may go some way to explain why, unlike their male counterparts, Welsh women crime writers eschew the public 'mean streets' for private domestic concerns. Nonetheless, these writers not only return to private, domestic spaces in their fiction but, by placing crime there, they go on to question past depictions of the same space by male writers. While the private sphere has long been associated with women, the cultural geographer Doreen Massey suggests that it was industrialisation in south Wales which led to the workplace being refigured as a masculine place, and so the home became more feminised, which in turn led to an idealisation of feminised domestic spaces by male authors. Massey cites Raymond Williams's *Border Country* as an example⁵ but one could also point to Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley*, which represented the archetypal 'Welsh mam' ensconced in her kitchen.⁶

Of particular interest to many women writers is crime perpetrated against children. Taking Honno's *Written in Blood* as an exemplar, a third of the stories centre on child abuse. Crime fiction often reflects contemporaneous anxieties; the earlier-discussed *Deadman's Bay* contained imperial anxieties about the threat to English purity by a foreign 'other' at its centre, while Welsh socialist writers explored

⁵ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 180.

⁶ The Welsh mam is a figure that appears in fiction from the nineteenth century onwards. She is often set up as an opposition to the industrial landscape that surrounds her; a reductive definition would be that she is a Welsh working-class version of the Angel in the House. Though the matriarch of the domestic space, she is defined by her piety, domesticity and maternity.

the role of the state in their crime fiction. Likewise, many modern crime writers articulate contemporary media fears surrounding paedophilia by placing child abuse and murder at their centre. In doing so, these texts examine and counter idealised representations of gender-inflected spaces like the domestic sphere.

Moreover, women writing Welsh crime fiction often go on to place crime in rural spaces. Another examination of Honno's short story collection reveals that eight are set in the countryside or a small seaside town. Of the remainder, three employ small-town zero-settings while only four use recognisable urban 'mean streets'. This preferred choice of rural setting is not restricted to the short story but can also be found in many female-authored Welsh crime novels. I suggest that the placing and solving of crime in the countryside does not reflect a desire to contain colonial anxieties and, hence, to restore Wales to an innocent bucolic past, but rather to contest previous pastoral representations of Wales. The rural spaces represented in these texts are no pastoral safe havens but, like the masculine urban spaces, are also dangerous. Since land and landscape have long been associated with femininity, an association pointed out by Jane Aaron in her analysis of 'wild zones', the placing of crime in the rural landscape reflects a wish by women writers not only to return to a rural anarchy but also to imbue the countryside with a dangerous power. Aaron explains how Romantic women writers often chose a Welsh rural space as a setting since 'wild Wales was a Romantic zone in which women could enjoy a more natural lifestyle and greater freedom than was permitted to them in an England represented as more hidebound by artificial social proprieties'.⁷ Rather than using the countryside as a Rousseauesque idyll, then, placing crime in the countryside speaks of a female desire to transgress further.

⁷ Aaron, *Nineteenth-century Women's Writing in Wales*, pp. 12-3.

Another noticeable feature of the Honno anthology is the dearth of Welsh-born women writing crime from Wales. The author biographies of *Written in Blood* indicate that at least nine of the contributors were born outside Wales, though some have a Welsh heritage, but then settled here as adults. This is also paralleled in full-length crime fiction. Many of the texts to be examined here are by women who have a Welsh family background but were born elsewhere, or are by English women who have settled in Wales and who engage with Welsh culture in some form, either obliquely or directly, in their crime fiction. It may be that the choice of rural settings means that these writers have absorbed Romantic ideologies, like the earlier male writers discussed in Chapter I. Even so, while there is an element of this type of ideology in their fiction, there is also a sense of engagement with Welsh culture and so these writers can be viewed as writing *from* Wales, seeking to explain the culture by which they are surrounded, rather than writing *about* Wales and attempting to fix a culture through their own perspective.

Conversely, there are Welsh women who have had commercial success writing crime but, arguably, this success is due to having submerged their national identity beneath a performed Englishness. Two such examples are Anglesey-born Barbara Margaret Trimble (1921-1995), who, under the pseudonyms B. M. Gill and Margaret Blake, wrote a series of English-set police procedurals,⁸ and Linda Davies, born in Glasgow of Welsh heritage and later raised in Pontyclun, who writes global economic thrillers set mostly in London and New York.⁹ But, like their male counterparts who also suppressed their nationality when writing crime, for example Ken Follett and Dick Francis, Trimble and Davies will not be examined here as they produce anglicised crime fiction that shows no trace of their cultural heritage.

⁸ These featured an Inspector Maybridge and the first of the series was *Victims* (1980).

⁹ *Nest of Vipers* (1995) was the first of Davies's thrillers. She now writes the Djinn series of fantasy novels for children, which commenced with *Sea Djinn* (2009).

As discussed earlier, many authors have been discouraged from using Welsh settings in their work because of their publishers' perception of market forces. While these authors were writing some decades before those represented in *Written in Blood*, the lack of Welsh settings in contemporary crime fiction by women can no longer be seen as the result of a lack of opportunities. Honno Press has published crime fiction; two of the texts referred to in this chapter, Lindsay Ashford's *Death Studies* (2006) and the short-story anthology, *Written in Blood* (2009), come from that imprint. The Welsh Books Council has also funded crime writing from Wales, such as Belinda Bauer's *Blacklands* (2010). Yet there appear to be fewer women writing crime in Wales than there are men. I suggest that this may be a consequence of the perceived masculine nature of crime writing. Male Welsh writers' crime fiction can be visceral; murders are carried out with guns, beatings, hit and runs. Female-authored Welsh crime novels tend towards the bloodless; murders are generally committed off-page, and death occurs through suffocation, starvation or drowning. This is not to say that female crime writers generally are reluctant to depict violent crime – Patricia Cornwell and Kathy Reichs are both renowned for their unflinching portrayal of the result of brutal murders – but this is not yet the case for Welsh women's crime fiction. However, I contend that the seeming invisibility of women's crime is in part due to their subversion of the genre, a subversion not unlike Rhys Davies's manipulation of crime fiction, as previously discussed. Huw Edwin Osborne has argued that Davies's homosexuality shaped what he calls a mix of 'suburban Gothic and crime fiction'.¹⁰ In a similar fashion, women's concerns about gender roles, maternity and domesticity have also played a part in their re-figuring of crime genres.

¹⁰ Huw Edwin Osborne, *Rhys Davies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 104.

Aside from Amy Dillwyn, there is little known crime fiction from Wales by women before the so-called Golden Age. This lack of a literary heritage may account in part for the dearth of later female crime writers. Like their male contemporaries, those women who did write from Wales often followed English paradigms. One of the earliest exponents was Kathleen Freeman (1897-1959). Born in Birmingham, she moved to Cardiff with her family as a child: the 1911 census shows the Freeman family living in the Canton area of Cardiff.¹¹ Freeman studied Classics at Cardiff University where she later went on to teach throughout her life. She wrote many academic texts, and short stories and novels with literary pretensions under her own name before writing most of her crime fiction under the pseudonym Mary Fitt. Freeman's short story collection, *The Intruder and Other Stories* (1926), contains many references to Welsh settings, characters and cultural tropes, but these same Welsh themes are largely absent from her novels. Her Mary Fitt crime fiction is further anglicised by her strict adherence to English Golden Age paradigms, as defined in W. H. Auden's 'The Guilty Vicarage' (1963). These novels usually employ the 'closed society'¹² described in that essay. Her first Fitt novel, *Murder Mars the Tour* (1936), follows a group who go on a European walking tour, initially travelling there by train, thus fulfilling the dual function of Auden's 'occupational group' and the 'group isolated by the neutral place'.¹³ Freeman went on to adhere to these strict patterns as many of her later novels are set in a fictional 'old world village'.¹⁴ All of these place her characters in rural settings and, while *Murder Mars the Tour* may start

¹¹ *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales* states that Freeman was born in Cardiff. However, the Birth, Marriage, Death Index shows that Freeman was born in the Solihull area. Available at Ancestry.co.uk [accessed 7 January 2012]

¹² W. H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 147-158, (pp. 149-50).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

in urban London, the cast of characters are soon sent to a picturesque, Alpine landscape.

Like Gwyn Evans and C. E. Vulliamy before her, Freeman's choice of conservative English paradigms is unsettled by the use of masquerade. For instance, the gender of the narrator and detective is not made clear until some way into *Murder Mars the Tour*, when he is finally named as Hugh Tarrant. The plot and capture of the murderer involves Hugh being mistaken for, and later masquerading as, his errant brother. This is a device that Freeman employed throughout her novels, especially in her use of settings where glimpses can be seen of a south Wales performing as an English town. One such is *Gown and Shroud* (1947), set near a river that has a spring 'river-bore',¹⁵ not unlike the River Severn which opens into the Bristol Channel near Freeman's home in St. Mellons, to the east of Cardiff. This use of masquerade is not confined to her crime fiction. Her first novel, *Martin Hanner* (1926), describes a train journey that 'crossed the flats along the shores of the Channel'¹⁶ before turning north to Shropshire - the journey taken by anyone wishing to travel from Cardiff towards the north of Wales and England. The title too could contain an oblique hint about the author's national identity, for *hanner* is Welsh for half; perhaps a reflection that Freeman, born in England but raised in Wales felt herself to be half Welsh. Thus, like C. E. Vulliamy's crime fiction, Freeman's novels contain occasional veiled references to Welsh identity. This is not restricted to hidden geographical clues, but is hinted at elsewhere in other contexts. In *Murder Mars the Tour*, for instance, eyes are described as 'Celtic blue'¹⁷ and a girl from Abergavenny called Gwenllian appears towards the close of the novel but has little effect on the narrative or plot. This is a name that has

¹⁵ Kathleen Freeman, *Gown and Shroud* (London: MacDonald & Co., 1947), p. 6.

¹⁶ Kathleen Freeman, *Martin Hanner* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1926), p. 34.

¹⁷ Kathleen Freeman writing as Mary Fitt, *Murder Mars the Tour* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson Ltd., 1936), p. 32.

been historically associated with rebellion in Wales – an eleventh-century Gwennllian led an army against Norman invasion¹⁸ while the last Prince of Wales's only child was also named Gwennllian,¹⁹ details of which a scholar such as Freeman, residing in and teaching at Cardiff, would surely have been aware. But there is little to hint at such cultural rebellion within *Murder Mars the Tour*. For, unlike Vulliamy, these hints of Welsh culture in the pages of Freeman's crime fiction remain isolated, undeveloped, and her writing remains culturally oblique.

Freeman's private life was similarly hidden; the Penguin editions of her novels provide her reasons for refusing to supply autobiographical details because 'it is, I think, the writer of fiction who is of interest to the public, not the person of whom the writer is a part. Therefore I do not propose to give details of where I was born, where educated, and so forth'.²⁰ For Kathleen Freeman, her national identity is not of relevance and should be of no importance to her readers. But there is another probable reason for Freeman's suppression of authorial identity in her work and her avoidance of publicity. Freeman shared her home in Cardiff with a female companion, Dr Liliane Clopet,²¹ to whom she dedicated many of her books, although these were sometimes coded as 'For L.M.C.C.', and the pair collaborated on a number of short stories and plays which are now held in the University of Bristol Theatre collection. *Murder Mars the Tour* also hints at unconventional views on feminine identity, with a sympathetic portrayal of a 'bluestocking' fleeing marriage and presentation at court. A non-crime novel, *The Huge Shipwreck* (1934), sees the narrator greatly influenced

¹⁸ Peter Newton, *Gwennllian: The Welsh Warrior Princess* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2002).

¹⁹ John Davies, *The History of Wales* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), p. 158.

²⁰ Mary Fitt, *Death and Mary Dazill* (1941; London: Penguin, 1948), back cover.

²¹ Eleanor Irwin, 'Kathleen Freeman: An Apostle and Evangelist for Classical Greek', in *British Classics Outside England: The Academy and Beyond*, eds Judith P. Hallett and Christopher Stray (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009), p. 54.

by a young female neighbour who works and 'who believed in women's rights'.²²

While it would be presumptuous to make inferences about Freeman's sexuality from these tenuous threads, there is certainly a marked difference between Freeman's lifestyle, that of a spinster-academic who shared her domestic life with another woman, and what was generally expected of women at this time. Perhaps the submergence of personal identity under the anonymous title of 'Author'²³ is not merely a desire to conceal national identity but is a mask under which Freeman can hide other differences from her contemporaries' gaze.

Shortly after Freeman's death in 1959, Menna Gallie experiments with detective fiction to engender a hybrid form. But aside from Gallie, there appears to be scant crime fiction by women during this period until Gwen Moffat's *Lady with a Cool Eye* (1973). Moffat was a renowned mountaineer and was the first woman to qualify as a British Mountain Guide before turning to a career as a writer of detective fiction. Her autobiography, *Space Below my Feet* (1961), describes how Brighton-born Moffat first took up residence in Wales when she deserted the Auxiliary Territorial Services shortly after the Second World War. It was while living in Nant Ffrancon that Moffat first learned to climb. Wales was only a part of her well-travelled life, but it is significant that her autobiography opens with the chapter title, 'The Beginning – Wales',²⁴ which surely hints at a re-birth or, at least, the discarding of an old way of life once in Wales. Her Melinda Pink detective novels are sometimes set in Wales, though the series is feature a variety of mountainous areas in Britain.

Lady with a Cool Eye, the first of the series, takes place in Plas Mawr Adventure Centre in Snowdonia, where Miss Pink is a Director. Initially published by

²² Kathleen Freeman, *The Huge Shipwreck* (London: J. M. Dent, 1934).

²³ Freeman, *Death and Mary Dazill*, back cover.

²⁴ Gwen Moffat, *Space Below my Feet* (1961; London: Penguin, 1976), p. 13.

Gollancz, the left-leaning London publishing company who had earlier published Gallie's *Strike for a Kingdom*, its dust-jacket describes how Moffat has 'shown the Welsh countryside, the disused mines, the sea cliffs and the life of the local people in a way that is rarely found in detective fiction'.²⁵ In the Introduction I drew attention to how publishers dissuaded writers from setting crime in Wales in the belief that it would not find a market. Gollancz, instead, acknowledges the absence of Wales in crime fiction. In this respect, Gwen Moffat's work has much in common with that of the aforementioned fellow mountaineer, Showell Styles, whose work applies Romantic ideologies sympathetically to the Welsh countryside. Like Styles's *Tryfan*, the mountains of *Lady with a Cool Eye* also seem to have curative properties; Miss Pink and co-Director Ted Roberts, magistrate and lawyer respectively, have an interest in reforming 'delinquents',²⁶ and believe that rock-climbing is character-forming. The plot involves the theft of explosives from where they have been stored in disused mines in the mountains. The narrative voice expresses an element of sympathy for an area that has gone into decline, and concern for the safety of the surrounding area and its inhabitants who are threatened by the storage of those explosives. The sole Welsh Director, Ted Roberts, has 'come up the hard way. His father had been a solicitor, but his father was a quarryman'.²⁷ However, this is a paternalistic concern which is exacerbated by the novel's class consciousness. As Gillian Clarke pointed out in a review, this is 'an Englishwoman's novel' for '[t]he only Welsh people are servants and policemen'.²⁸ There is an element of truth in this assertion, as many of the main protagonists are English and of relatively high social status, including the eventually unmasked villains. Meanwhile, other than Ted

²⁵ Gwen Moffat, *Lady With a Cool Eye* (London: Gollancz, 1973).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Gillian Clarke, 'Lady with a Cool Eye by Gwen Moffat', in *Anglo-Welsh Review*, 23 (1974), 168-170 (p. 169).

Roberts, all the Welsh are working-class: kitchen staff, taxi drivers or pub landlords. Despite ‘a certain intimacy’²⁹ between Miss Pink and some of the Welsh characters, the class divide is apparent, from the ancient waitress at the local hotel addressing her as ‘mum’,³⁰ to Miss Pink’s easy questioning of the locals, something seen in earlier English-authored crime narratives. In spite of her sympathy for the area, Moffat imagines a world where the English visitor can demand answers from the natives at will.

Eventually, it is revealed that the explosives have been stolen by some of the younger guides at the Centre who are involved in an unnamed revolutionary group with links to Ireland. Again, English fears about the terrorist potential of Wales resurface and its mountains and coastline, once places of natural, restorative beauty, are tainted by their close proximity to troubled Ireland. The guides who are involved in terrorist activity are portrayed as revolutionaries, but their interests are in environmental issues rather than nationalism. Nonetheless, they do occupy the middle-ground between the lower-class Welsh and the board Directors. This ambiguous middle-ground position typifies much of the ambiguity of the text: sympathetic yet colonial, admiring of the countryside while the climbing of its peaks reverberates with a metaphorical conquest. The text ends on a suitably uncertain note. A Director, Sir Thomas, elderly and conventional, querulously asks the terrorists’ motivation:

‘What’s wrong?’ he begged, ‘why do they do it? What do they want?’
 ‘They want to change the system.’
 ‘Change the system? There’s nothing wrong with the system; I’m happy with it as it is.’³¹

²⁹ Moffat, *Lady with a Cool Eye*, p. 43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

Though the text ends with the detection and capture of the young revolutionaries, this note of uncertainty undermines the usual resolution in crime fiction. Sir Thomas is part of an old establishment that is passing, and his questioning of the modern world of the 1970s, coming as it does from a conservative viewpoint, makes him appear out of touch. Nonetheless, by concluding the novel on Sir Thomas's words, it seems that Moffatt's affection for Wales and its mountains is framed through Anglicised hierarchical structures designed to keep the Welsh in their place.

It could be argued that this latent colonialism is partly the result of Moffat's use of English crime fiction conventions in which to frame her crime fiction. *Lady with a Cool Eye* has a clue-puzzle plot, and its use to contain crime in Wales to restore the English characters to a former status quo is problematic. But, as I have discussed earlier, the use of a clue-puzzle plot need not be confined to those of English heritage and has sometimes been used to subversive ends. One example of an author who re-shapes the clue-puzzle, albeit in minor ways, is Lesley Grant-Adamson. Born in London, she was evacuated to her Welsh grandparents' home in Trealaw during the Second World War and it is there that she subsequently spent most of her childhood. Like the novels of Moffat, her crime fiction features a female detective figure. Grant-Adamson is mostly known for her Rain Morgan series; Rain is a gossip-columnist for a national paper who often finds herself investigating murder. While Rain is an independent, intelligent figure, it must be noted that the occupation of gossip-columnist has an air of feminine frivolity attached to it. Even with a precursor such as Miss Pink, a mountain-climbing member of the board, female detectives are still contained within feminine stereotypes.

The first of the Rain Morgan series is *Patterns in the Dust* (1985), in which the protagonist travels to Nether Hampton in the West Country for a holiday. The usual

clue-puzzle characters are to be found there: lord of a decaying manor, a retired General, a rich and vulgar widow and her chihuahua, and a variety of minor working-class characters who play lesser roles. The plot conforms to accepted generic structures too. In accordance with the parameters described by Stephen Knight, the social setting is exclusive and the victim is wealthy. A certain amount of class anxiety is displayed when it is later revealed that the *nouveau riche* widow has been blackmailing the lord of the manor, Sir James Alcombe. Order is restored after the murder of the rich widow and when Sir James is arrested for her murder and that of his missing wife. So far, Grant-Adamson follows the clue-puzzle's paradigms, but there are some concessions to a more modern, less class-bound perspective. The working classes, though not involved with the crime or detective process, are more vocal and less subservient. The sergeant who makes the concluding arrest says, with some satisfaction, 'I've never arrested a lord of the manor before',³² thereby displaying less respect for those further up the social hierarchy than shown in the original clue-puzzles. Nevertheless, *Patterns in the Dust* is generally conservative in its use of English forms of crime fiction.

What does differentiate Grant-Adamson's fiction from Moffat's detective series is the use of Welsh tropes. Moffat, like her earlier English counterparts, might be said to use the Welsh countryside as a stage setting. In *Patterns in the Dust*, Welsh identity is glimpsed from a distance, so it becomes slightly out of focus, or mutated. Rain reveals early on that her name is a 'childish misspelling'³³ of Rhian. Welsh names are clearly difficult and so must be mutated to more recognisable English words. In doing so, what once may have been an exotic name for an English writer, useful as shorthand for difference, now becomes submerged yet still retains its

³² Lesley Grant-Adamson, *Patterns in the Dust* (1985; London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 188.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

exoticism. The plot necessitates Rain standing on a West Country beach staring across the Bristol Channel at the south Welsh coast in the distance where '[t]he stack of the Welsh steelworks was no more significant than a wispily smoking cigarette'.³⁴ It is tempting to describe these glimpses of Wales as eruptions of a suppressed cultural identity, an industrialised identity at that, which impose themselves on the middle-class rural space. However, the mass of steelworks has been reduced, by geographical distance, to no more than cigarette-sized. Grant-Adamson's fiction continues to place Welsh tropes in the background where, especially for the Welsh reader, they are noticeable yet diminished.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Grant-Adamson was discouraged by her publisher from using Welsh influences and settings. It may therefore be supposed that it is the economic imperative that places any Welsh tropes at a manageable distance. Nonetheless, they continue to appear throughout her work. Usually, the more overt the reference to Welshness in a text, the less that novel becomes recognisable as crime fiction. For Grant-Adamson, the use of explicit cultural tropes affects the generic structures of her texts. A common feature of Welsh crime written by women, this can sometimes make their crime writing hard to define and may account for its lack of recognition.³⁵ Still, as a previous chapter about emergent Welsh crime fiction showed, contemporary women crime writers may be said to be following another tradition, that of blending genres, as in the crime narratives of Amy Dillwyn and Menna Gallie. Like their literary predecessors, late-twentieth century women writing crime ultimately unsettle and destabilise genres.

³⁴ Grant-Adamson, *Patterns in the Dust*, p. 38.

³⁵ Another example would be Sally Spedding's crime fiction which often interweaves fantasy and crime. On her website, Spedding identifies herself as a 'Crime Mystery Author'. Available at <http://www.sallyspedding.com/> [accessed 30 August 2012].

One such novel is Grant-Adamson's *Wish You Were Here* (1995). Unlike the Rain Morgan series, this novel does not follow the author's usual clue-puzzle format, but is more a mystery story with a crime at its centre. Its narrator, Linda, a woman whose life has been a series of disappointments, takes a spontaneous holiday without letting friends and family know of her whereabouts. On the trip, she takes up with a man who calls himself Tom who, unbeknownst to her, is a serial kidnapper of women. The novel opens in Gloucester, close to the Wales-England border, during the early weeks of the discovery of the notorious serial murders of Fred and Rose West.³⁶ Serial killers, especially those who keep their victims prisoner over a period of time, have been at the centre of much crime fiction. Surprisingly, given their potential for misogyny, these fictions often play with their chosen format to subvert and undermine patriarchal depictions of women in crime. For instance, in Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) it is a female FBI agent, Clarice Starling, who tracks down and kills the male serial killer, Buffalo Bill. Val McDermid goes further in questioning gender roles in her 1995 novel, *The Mermaids Singing*. This also features a serial kidnapper, one who tortures before killing but, in this instance, the killer is a transsexual while her victims are male. Grant-Adamson's *Wish You Were Here* maintains the original gender pattern of male villain and female victim, but the story is narrated by the victim. While this still presents the female victim as passive, it does at least give her a voice.

Unlike Harris's and McDermid's serial killers, who stalk their victims on urban streets, Grant-Adamson's Tom picks up Linda in a country hotel. Places of entrapment favoured by Tom include an empty castle and an abandoned holiday

³⁶ Fred and Rose West committed a series of horrific murders for a period that spanned over twenty years. Victims were tortured and raped before being killed and included members of their own family as well as young women who were picked up hitch-hiking. By starting her novel with a mention of the Wests, Grant-Adamson is hinting at the future main theme of her crime novel: the abduction and murder of vulnerable women.

cottage. Thus, the countryside in this novel is dangerous even Gothic. As shown in previous chapters, Gothic appropriations are not unknown amongst crime writers. Edgar Allan Poe is often pinpointed as one of the originators of detective fiction, but he was also celebrated for his Gothic tales, strands of which permeate his C. Auguste Dupin stories. However, it is a particular strain of Gothic that, like Rhys Davies's crime fiction before, informs women's Welsh crime fiction, namely, that of the Female Gothic. In coining the term, Ellen Moers argued for a specific sub-genre in which 'woman is examined with a woman's eye'.³⁷ This means that, while the usual Gothic motifs of entrapment, transgression and horror are still present, domesticity, gender roles and maternity become central to the narrative. These are common themes amongst women writing crime, so perhaps it is not surprising that Female Gothic tropes also find their way into these texts: the patriarchal, crumbling castle, for example, once more finds itself part of crime fiction's narrative. Women writers who engage with Gothic themes in their writing, even those who choose to write within strict generic confines, such as Alison Taylor's police procedural, *Simeon's Bride*, which will be examined in detail later, do so in order to explore the darker aspects of human nature and defamiliarise the domestic and pastoral landscape. Gothic fictions can also be said to counter pastoral idylls with depictions of an excessive Nature, in order to inspire awe and terror in the reader. Moreover, the use of the Gothic, a genre concerned with transgression, can appear contradictory when placed in a genre that attempts to bring order to the anarchic and chaotic and so can also destabilise crime fiction structures to some extent.

Though the rural setting of Grant-Adamson's *Wish You Were Here* is not the Welsh countryside, for Linda and Tom's journey takes them through the north of

³⁷ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976, London: The Women's Press, 1978), p. 109.

England and on to Scotland, the landscape contains Welsh traces, sometimes in the shape of memories. A visit to a tourist site reminds Linda of earlier holidays with her ex-husband, inspecting ‘the ruined past of Wales’.³⁸ The landscapes of England and Scotland invoke cultural associations but, unusually, of Welsh culture. Travelling near the Wales-England border, Linda is reminded of the words of Dorothy Edwards, a Welsh writer, who referred to this particular border country as ‘that land of unstable identity’.³⁹ It could be argued that it is the English and Scottish rural areas which are unstable here, as Welsh culture is imposed upon them. Linda’s eventual incarceration in a basement of a holiday cottage, a space that is reminiscent of a castle dungeon with its barred window set high up in the wall, sees her looking out and comparing her fate to those of the women in the *Mabinogion*:

She imagined herself a princess in a fairytale, polishing a ring so that she could signal her distress to a passing knight [...] She thought of Bran [*sic*] who taught a starling to speak and sent it across the Irish Sea to plead for her rescue; of white flowers that sprang from the earth wherever Olwen left a footprint; of Blodeuwedd whose punishment was to be transformed into an owl made of flowers.⁴⁰

Not only is this a comment on her current plight, it also affords the writer a cultural and historically-inflected means of analysing the injustice of her character’s entrapment. Both Branwen and Blodeuwedd had been trapped in some form or other as punishment by a male authority: Branwen in a castle kitchen; and Blodeuwedd in the shape of an owl, forever to be shunned by human company. Arguably, neither of these legendary women deserved her punishment. Branwen is ill-treated as an act of revenge by her Irish husband, while Blodeuwedd, being an unearthly creature, could

³⁸ Lesley Grant-Adamson, *Wish You Were Here* (1995; Bath: Chivers Press, 1996), p. 35.

³⁹ Cited in *Wish You Were Here*, p. 32. Dorothy Edwards (1903-1934) published only two works in her short lifetime: the short story collection *Rhapsody* (1927) and *Winter Sonata* (1928). There is the distinct possibility that Dorothy Edwards was taught by Kathleen Freeman, the crime writer discussed earlier in this chapter, at what was then known as the University College of South Wales. Freeman became a lecturer in Greek and philosophy in 1919, one year prior to Edward’s enrolment as an undergraduate in the same subject.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

be said not to be responsible for her actions. Though Linda's incarceration is due in part to her passivity – for she has had a growing awareness that Tom may be dangerous but lacks the agency to leave – comparing her fate with those of female characters in ancient Welsh legends offers a small glimmer of hope. Branwen teaches a starling to carry a message to her brother who comes to her rescue, while Blodeuwedd finds freedom of sorts as a bird outside the world of men. Fittingly, the novel ends with Linda's rescue. *Wish You Were Here* defies many of crime fiction's expectations: apart from Linda's realisation of Tom's true identity as a serial killer, there is no element of detection, for instance. Yet this does provide hope for women's release from the role of abducted victim. Although Grant-Adamson's countryside is a site of danger, this victim, at least, is set free from her wrongful imprisonment.

I would now like to turn to a work that encapsulates many of the shared themes and tropes of women writing crime fiction from Wales. Alison Taylor has written a series of police procedurals, but it is the first of the series, *Simeon's Bride* (1995), which will be examined here. Born and educated in England, but with a Welsh background, Alison Taylor later settled in North Wales. And it is Bangor and its environs that provide the main settings for her police procedurals. Taylor had formerly been a social worker in Gwynedd but was fired after drawing media attention to the abuse in local children's homes, an episode that has also influenced her crime fiction, particularly her 1996 novel, *In Guilty Night*. Indeed, most of her work contains some exploration of crimes against children. Nevertheless, it is Taylor's counter-pastoral vision of North Wales in *Simeon's Bride* that is of primary interest, a vision created by viewing the rural space through a Gothic lens.

Simeon's Bride principally appears to follow the patterns of a police procedural. A woman's body, with her hands bound behind her back, is found

hanging from a tree in secluded woods near Bangor in North Wales. An all-male team of detectives⁴¹ follows a series of clues to discover both the identity of the victim, later named as Romy Cheney, and of her murderer. In charge of the team is DCI Michael McKenna who, though working as part of a team, exhibits traits of the archetypal solitary detective figure. Having left his wife early in the narrative, he is further set apart by his Catholic faith and Irish heritage. A second murder of a local boy known as Jamie Thief, leads the police nearer to the identity of the murderer, Gwen Stott, whose capture ends the narrative.

However, despite the use of such a conventional genre, Taylor's inclusion of a plethora of Gothic tropes hints at a more complex narrative than a standard police procedural. The fictional village of Salem, in which most of the narrative takes place, is peopled with the monstrous and grotesque. Their cottages, which are overlooked by a castle, are mean hovels while the neighbouring woods, of 'close-grown elm trees rotten with disease, their branches tangled into crippled distortions',⁴² are home to a ghost. The landscape informs personality here, as 'melancholia scaveng[es] a man's soul through long days and nights when rain and wind stalked the mountains, beating against doors and rattling draughty windows, threatening invasion like marauding English'.⁴³ Taylor's engagement with the Gothic speaks of nature gone awry. And while the name of the village hints at a matriarchal Welsh identity, it is also synonymous with witchcraft. A typical Welsh chapel name, it evokes the famous Curnow Vosper painting 'Salem' (1908) in which the central figure is an elderly woman in traditional Welsh dress attending chapel. In this, the piety of the image is undermined by her display of vanity in wearing a handsome shawl. There are also

⁴¹ The following novel, *In Guilty Night* (1998), does see the inclusion of a female detective, Janet Evans. Furthermore, individuals within the police team can disappear off page, only to return later in the series.

⁴² Alison Taylor, *Simeon's Bride* (London: Robert Hale, 1995), p. 14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

echoes of another Salem, in Massachusetts, infamous for its witch-trials of 1692, after which nineteen people were hanged. In *Simeon's Bride*, there truly is something rotten at the heart of Bangor.

Interestingly, while crumbling castles usually act as an allegory for a decaying ancestral line within the Gothic novel, in *Simeon's Bride* Salem's castle is a restored tourist attraction built upon the ruins of an older manor. '(F)ashioned by local skills, local labour, more than a century before for an Englishman gorged on the slave trade, fat with riches and cruelty',⁴⁴ the castle becomes a symbol of colonial oppression and cruelty. Named the richly evocative 'Castell Eborgofiant [*sic*] – the Castle of Oblivion',⁴⁵ the castle motif serves to remind us of how older cultures are overlaid and destroyed by later dominant cultures. This appears to depart from Gothic norms, for castles are generally interpreted as sites of patriarchal imprisonment of women within the domestic space. Castell Eborgofiant is perhaps a veiled allusion to the actual Penrhyn Castle situated in Llandegai, Bangor. Like Castell Eborgofiant, this was rebuilt to its current standard in the late-eighteenth century by the English-born Baron Penrhyn, using the profits accrued from both the family's Jamaican sugar plantations and the local slate quarries and embodies wealth gained through exploitation. *Simeon's Bride* alludes to a similar exploitation of both the Welsh working-class and black slaves when Dewi Prys, a member of the investigation team, prays that the fictional past owner of the castle is haunted by 'the ghosts of all the souls, black and Welsh, from which greed had stripped dignity in life'.⁴⁶ Rather than Dewi metaphorically drawing on congruencies between black slavery and Welsh

⁴⁴ Taylor, *Simeon's Bride*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

oppression, these parallels have some basis in local historical fact.⁴⁷ *Simeon's Bride* suggests that the real crimes committed are the oppression of the Welsh by an outside rule over the generations. In doing so, Taylor suggests that there are different stories permeating the vision of pastoral Wales.

So, Taylor draws upon and re-imagines Gothic symbols to make a political point about the exploitation of Bangor's working classes; one could argue that this is also a postcolonial Gothic text. However, it is her concern with motherhood that most clearly signals her interest in reworking the Female Gothic as a genre. Motherhood was often at the heart of early Female Gothic texts. Ellen Moers explains that high maternal death rates meant that the figure of the absent mother was a key anxiety of literary texts when the Female Gothic first appeared in the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ Using as an exemplar the life and work of Mary Shelley, an author who suffered the loss of her own children and whose own mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died shortly after giving birth, Moers proposes that women's maternal anxieties also lead them to 'give birth' to texts populated by the freakish and monstrous. High maternal death rates meant that the absent mother was also a frequent literary device as typified in many of Ann Radcliffe's novels, such as *A Sicilian Romance* (1790). While there are no absent mothers at the core of Taylor's novel, there is instead an absence of maternal feeling and a focus on the consequences of this deficiency. Much women-authored crime fiction focuses on a predatory male paedophile⁴⁹ but, in this text, it is women who abuse. The complicity of the mother, Gwen Stott, in her daughter's abuse also speaks of a monstrous maternity. The transgressive mother is a figure not often seen

⁴⁷ Charlotte Williams's later memoir, *Sugar and Slate* (2002), also draws connections between the Pennant family's ownership of sugar plantations and slate quarries but hers is a personal exploration as she examines her own mixed-race identity.

⁴⁸ While Ellen Moers first coined the term Female Gothic in 1976, she traces the origins of this particular genre back to the late eighteenth century.

⁴⁹ Belinda Bauer's *Blacklands* (London: Corgi, 2010), for instance.

in the Female Gothic, for frequently these narratives conclude on reconciliation with an absent but loving mother. Taylor's mother-figure is not a feminist creation and her monstrous mother is problematic as it speaks of an unnatural lack of maternal feeling and care. Like the aforementioned trees of Salem's woods, whose branches have grown into 'crippling distortions', modern motherhood has also gone awry. However, it is Romy Cheney, the Englishwoman who settles in Salem, who has encouraged Gwen to abuse her daughter. Once more, the threat comes from outside the Welsh community.

There is a possible alternative reading to these negative depictions of motherhood. Gwen Stott is assessed by a Freudian psychiatrist, whose report positions her as victim, while her daughter, Jennifer, is ascribed 'the dual role of victim and seductress'.⁵⁰ Freudian analysis, or, as DCI McKenna prefers, 'romance',⁵¹ traps women into passive roles while simultaneously encouraging mothers to view their daughters as seductive rivals. Gwen Stott's ready acceptance of this Freudian interpretation suggests that women have also been complicit in creating these negative roles. By absorbing patriarchal discourse, any domestic power women may have becomes corrupted and warped. The misogyny of the text is seemingly reinforced when a male character refers to Bangor's women as the 'monstrous regiment', a reference to John Knox's essay, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558). Knox's essay was a diatribe on the unsuitability of female rule, and the use of the term in *Simeon's Bride* both signifies the Gothic monstrosity of Romy and Gwen and their misuse of feminine power. The psychiatrist goes on to state that Jennifer Stott's abuse was a 'classic scenario...where only the

⁵⁰ Taylor, *Simeon's Bride*, p. 269.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

mother could effect rescue',⁵² a situation which has parallels with the mother's role in the Female Gothic. As mentioned before, Female Gothic texts frequently conclude with reconciliation between the heroine and her absent mother, a reconciliation that sees the heroine metaphorically protected from the dangers of patriarchy within her mother's arms. While *Simon's Bride* suggests that some mothers are unfit, the novel does propose alternative female role models outside the nuclear family. Jennifer is given the hope of redemption as she is placed with her paternal aunt. In contrast to her brother, Jennifer's father, Serena is 'strong and muscular, the oak to his sapling whippiness, her personality more defined, her attitude infinitely more assertive'.⁵³ Her physical strength underlines her brother's weakness in failing to protect his daughter. Maternal care is a communal responsibility and, in this community, women have the capacity for great good and evil, while the men are portrayed as physically, and sometimes morally, weaker.

The women in Taylor's narrative may occasionally play the role of passive victim but this masks their inherent power – a power frequently written on the body. Taylor's villain, Gwen Stott, is unusual in that she uses her physical strength to commit her murderous acts. Her body speaks of Gothic excess, 'dumpy and solid, as if her flesh was constrained from some rampage only by the tightness of the clothes it wore'.⁵⁴ This excessive and transgressive flesh robs her of her femininity as she becomes 'it', but this loss of feminine identity only serves to make her more powerful. Whereas female murderers often favour poison in fiction, or signify their lack of femininity by appropriating the phallic gun to transgress norms,⁵⁵ Gwen Stott

⁵² Taylor, *Simeon's Bride*, p. 269.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵⁵ One only has to think of Agatha Christie's preferred choice of poison in her novels, a bloodless method of murder, while the bestial nature and inhumanity of Raymond Chandler's Carmen Sternwood of *The Big Sleep* (1939) are hinted at by her lover's gift to her of a pistol.

suffocates Jamie Thief by sitting on him, a practice also mentioned in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794). There the eponymous hero is attacked by a 'hag' whose 'vigour was truly Amazonian' and who threatens to 'sit upon (Caleb) and press (him) to hell.'⁵⁶ The reintroduction of this method of murder in *Simeon's Bride* looks to crime fiction's beginnings and reminds us that not all women in Gothic narratives were passive victims but could also take the part of powerful villains.

Juxtaposed with the modern-day narrative in *Simeon's Bride* is the story of Rebekah, the bride of the title. Her husband, Simeon, haunts the woods, seeking vengeance for Rebekah's execution for child murder in 1793, a period when the Female Gothic was in its heyday. However, merely reading Rebekah's death as a symbol of patriarchal injustice towards women would be to miss the significance of her name. It has connections to a Welsh rebellious movement, the Rebecca Riots. Rebekah was also one of the original matriarchs of Judaism,⁵⁷ a religion which is carried through the matrilineal line. It soon becomes apparent that the Welsh village of Salem is also a matriarchal community. Again, like the village and its woods, this is a matriarchy viewed through a Gothic lens. One of the many old women of the village, Beti Gloff, or Lame Beti in English, is 'more grotesque than any gargoyle leering from church walls, as ugly as a gathering of all the sins in the world'.⁵⁸ Unlike Malcolm Pryce's parodic version of Welsh matriarchy in his Aberystwyth series, Taylor's elderly matriarchy, despite the seeming authorial mockery, is generally benevolent. Beti's extravagant ugliness; 'one bulbous muddy eye...looked towards Bethesda, the other to Caernarfon',⁵⁹ also signals her ability to be all-seeing as she runs errands for her community of women. Despite her unprepossessing appearance,

⁵⁶ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (1794, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 231.

⁵⁷ S. H. Hooke, 'Rebekah', in *Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. James Hastings et al (1909; Edinburgh: T and T Clarke, 1963), p. 834.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *Simeon's Bride*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

it is her husband who is named in her image, being known as John Beti or John Gloff. As Dewi Prys, a member of the detective team, explains, '[i]t's a sort of woman's world, if you understand what I mean, and the men don't count for much'.⁶⁰ After Beti is beaten by her husband, she takes refuge in another woman's house, where McKenna spies them 'sat in Mary Ann's uncurtained window, one each side of a small gateleg table, like two geraniums in pots'.⁶¹ The women's world of Salem provides refuge from male brutality. And, in spite of Beti's grotesque appearance, she is symmetrically framed in a domestic space with a sister matriarch.

Eventually, it becomes clear that the entire village has been aware of the murderer's identity for some time, a correlation with the community of Menna Gallie's *Strike for a Kingdom*. There is a sense that the murders were 'allowed' by the community for, as John Beti says of McKenna's ignorance, '[t]he whole fucking village knew, except for his holiness [...] telling folk wouldn't make no difference. Anyway, she were a fucking foreigner'.⁶² The old women set tasks for the male detectives to solve by giving hints and clues for them to piece together. As has been shown in previous chapters, this undermines the role of the detective team as, rather than imposing order upon the community, detection is the result of communal knowledge and co-operation. Rather than a tight-knit police team solving a case in isolation, in *Simeon's Bride* they can only do so as part of a wider community. This also creates a power shift from male individuation to an older matriarchal heritage for, as Dewi Prys says of his own *nain* (grandmother), she 'sort of decides about things [...] decides what's right and what isn't. Because she's old'.⁶³ Grotesque appearance notwithstanding, the women of Bangor hint at a longer rural matriarchal tradition, one

⁶⁰ Taylor, *Simeon's Bride*, p. 25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

which has the wisdom and power to ‘decide [...] things’ for the best of their community.

Naturally, life within matriarchal Salem redefines male identity within the community. Beti addresses both Dewi and McKenna as ‘del’, a Welsh term meaning pretty, neat, or dapper, and which both diminishes the men physically and undermines their male authority. The team of detectives lack the cohesion of the female community and constantly shout and bicker amongst themselves. The male characters often display feminised behaviour, especially McKenna. Unlike the accepted detective figure, who operates in a world of logic and reason, McKenna exhibits signs of hysterical and neurotic behaviour such as his chain-smoking. Excessive or addictive behaviour is not unusual in crime fiction; Sherlock Holmes’ pipe-smoking or Poirot’s addiction to sweet liqueurs are famous examples. Still, McKenna’s addiction acts as more than an interesting quirk, designed to mark his difference from the common herd. The narrative describes how the ‘chief inspector was difficult, too prone to heed his imagination’,⁶⁴ preferring intuition to rational deduction. His excess of emotion is in contrast with his extreme thinness which borders on anorexia - a disease in which the powerless, most often women, attempt to regain power through excessive control. In the manner of an early Gothic heroine, McKenna flees the entrapment of matrimony but it becomes clear that this is not due to a fear of domesticity. The men of Salem engage with and enjoy domestic life on the whole. On moving into a new home, McKenna’s second in command, Jack Tuttle, ‘unpacked clothes and books and records, wired up the stereo system, made the bed, and went shopping for groceries and cigarettes and a bottle of whisky’.⁶⁵ Relationships between

⁶⁴ Taylor, *Simeon’s Bride*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

the genders are difficult, but new male communities are formed which take on feminine qualities such as domesticity and mutual concern for each other.

It is Dewi Prys who acts as a bridge between the Welsh community and the anglicised police, between generations and gender. He is a sympathetic, attractive character who operates within the different worlds. A Welsh-speaker raised on the local council estate, he respects the matriarchy of Salem and, like McKenna, he too displays aspects of femininity. His contemporary, Jamie Thief, fears Dewi as his ‘intuitions and leaps of imagination had coloured their childish play with magic’.⁶⁶ Detection is no longer the masculine steady accumulation of facts, arranged in a logical order but rather the work of what was once called feminine intuition. Dewi can display great tenderness of emotion, crying on Jamie’s death and holding Beti’s hand while murmuring ‘comforts’⁶⁷ when she has been beaten by her husband. Moreover, Dewi’s last appearance in the narrative sees him preparing to take a local girl out in what appears to be a gender reversal of the marriage plot; romance is Dewi’s reward.

Despite its initial appearance of Gothic decay, Taylor’s Bangor upholds traditional Welsh matriarchy, one that also allows for a male domesticity. Shortly after Gwen’s imprisonment, Rebekah’s remains are discovered during a cottage renovation and are finally laid to rest in an official ceremony, with her husband’s ghost in attendance. These events oppose and mirror each other: Rebekah is seen to be pardoned of her crime and the ghost of patriarchal injustice is laid to rest, while the monstrous mother is contained and punished for her crime of neglect and abuse of her daughter. The blending of ghost story and crime fiction may seem fantastical on an initial reading, yet the weaving of the female Gothic with a police procedural allows for a broader exploration of seemingly disparate themes like colonialism and gender

⁶⁶ Taylor, *Simeon’s Bride*, p. 156.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

roles as the conservatism of the police procedural is countered by the fantastic of the Gothic.

Gender roles continue to play a part in women's crime fiction in the 2000s, especially in the work of Lindsay Ashford. A native of Wolverhampton, Ashford lived for some time in Aberystwyth. The majority of texts in her Megan Rhys series are set in or near her home town, but a grant from the Welsh Books Council encouraged her to set one of her crime novels in the area near Aberystwyth. Thirty years on from the discouraging advice given to Lesley Grant-Adamson, it seems that for Honno Press and the Welsh Books Council, Wales does sell. While the majority of Ashford's fiction uses an urban setting, the third in the Rhys series, *Death Studies* (2006), is decidedly rural. Her central protagonist, Megan Rhys, a forensic psychologist of Welsh-Indian heritage, is on holiday in Borth, near Aberystwyth. Megan is staying with her sister, Ceri, at the cottage that was once the home of their paternal grandmother. The plot opens with the discovery of a so-called bog body by Dr Llŷr Abdulla, a lecturer in archaeology at Aberystwyth University.

Death Studies, in common with the other volumes in the Megan Rhys series, is profoundly concerned with many of the ideas of second-wave feminism: women's place in the workspace, violence against women, maternity and a woman's reproductive rights, amongst others. While identity, especially hybrid national identities, plays a part, it appears initially to act as an authorial device to explain Megan's 'otherness'. Her Indian heritage means that she and her sister appear different amongst the Welsh community and, having grown up outside Wales, she is a stranger there. Nonetheless, Megan is part of a community of women who are fighting to take an equal place in a man's world. On seeing surprise in a colleague's

face when she is introduced as part of the investigative team, Megan notes how she was:

used to people making assumptions on the basis that she was a) dark-skinned, b) female and c) had her nose pierced. On visits to police stations around the country she'd been variously taken for an interpreter, a secretary and, on one memorable occasion, the person who cleaned the toilets.⁶⁸

Despite Megan's frequent internal monologues on the lack of women in positions of power, *Death Studies* features a surprising number of women working in what were once male-dominated professions. In such a small area of Wales, she encounters women in such various occupations as a newspaper editor, the head of a university department and a Chief Superintendent. Despite the sexism these women encounter, Ashford seeks to redress old power imbalances by placing women at the centre of influence.

Perhaps it is this placing of women in a man's world that complicates the generic structure of *Death Studies*. Like *Simeon's Bride*, it is ostensibly a police procedural, since Megan works as part of a team with the police, pathologists and a forensic dentist. Though the detection does follow a logical pattern, with clues apparent in the text, Megan's occupation as a forensic psychologist suggests a measure of intuition working alongside rational detection. And, as in *Simeon's Bride*, there are supernatural elements involved, though not to the extent of the earlier text. A mortuary assistant keeps locks of hair from the bodies she autopsies as talismans to prevent their souls from haunting her. The bog body is first believed to be prehistoric and its mutilation, for the male victim has been castrated, is attributed to an arcane ritual. Llŷr, known as Llŷr Bones to the local community, explains the ancient belief that by possessing a 'part of the body of a murder victim you could harness the power

⁶⁸ Lindsay Ashford, *Death Studies* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2006), p. 125.

of his soul'.⁶⁹ He goes on to expound on how '[t]he word 'bog' is very close to the Welsh word "bwgan", meaning a ghost or mischievous spirit. There's a theory that if peat bogs were the site of executions, people came to associate them with evil spirits – hence the word "bogyman"'.⁷⁰ While this has hints of the Romantic interest in a Welsh antiquarianism, it is, at least a past populated by other figures apart from the usual Druids. And this linguistic theorising not only makes strong connections between land, people and language, it also imbues that land with a sense of ancient, if brutal, justice.

The bog body is eventually revealed as a recently murdered paedophile. The text provides clues coded in supernatural terms as the perpetrator and his vice are both referred to as 'evil' by one of his victims. For the victim, the idea of a demonic spirit not only encapsulates the abuse and damage perpetrated and the inhumanity of that abuse but also provides a way of voicing the unspeakable. The murder of the paedophile, like the act inflicted on the bog bodies of the past, is a retributive justice performed by one of his male victims. And it is here that there may be a sense of contemporary Romantic ideology. Borth has been a safe haven for the Rhys sisters and the paedophile's victims, Dai and Janine Powell, one in which they can envisage new lives. However, this sanctuary is threatened by the very remoteness which attracts them. As Megan points out at a conference on child protection: 'think about the geography of the area [...] It's remote, beautiful and Aberystwyth is quite literally the end of the line. If you wanted to escape and you jumped on a train, in say, Birmingham, it's not difficult to imagine fetching up here'.⁷¹ However, Ashford here is not voicing English anxieties about the threat to a romanticised, bucolic Wales, anxieties expressed in past crime fiction. Hers is not a desire to restore an imperial or

⁶⁹ Ashford, *Death Studies*, p. 46.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

colonial order in Wales. The threat, in the shape of an English paedophile, comes from outside Wales, a similarity shared in part with *Simeon's Bride*. Indeed, *Death Studies* appears to point out the danger inherent in Wales acting as a safe haven as it becomes a sanctuary for the unsavoury rather than those just seeking an escape from modernity and the sinful urban centres.

Nonetheless, Wales, especially a small community such as Borth, cannot function as a safe haven for criminals because of its native inhabitants as it seems that it is not a community that can be used to hide in for long. Again, the old women of the village observe and harbour knowledge about village life which ultimately helps to reveal the murderer. It is the old diary belonging to Megan's beloved Granny Rhys which, with its 'pages full of gossip',⁷² helps clarify past histories. This in turn leads to the final necessary clue, solved with the help of Eirlys Evans, a friend of her grandmother's and who is described unflatteringly by Megan as one of the 'curtain-twitching neighbours'.⁷³ So, once more, old women may be denigrated in Welsh crime fiction yet serve a useful purpose in what could be argued is a woman's world. And again, a Welsh matriarchy is given its due place at the centre of the landscape.

I would now like to return to the collection which opened this chapter, *Written in Blood*, in order to make some concluding remarks. I have observed that Welsh crime fiction is difficult to characterise as such due to its fluid nature. The same is true of this collection of short stories. Aside from a single PI story, there is no detection at all in the remainder of these narratives. While this conforms to one of the paradigms of Welsh crime fiction explored in this thesis, that the detective figure is often undermined or diminished, it may be also due to two other factors: genre and gender. The contributors to this collection are not ordinarily crime writers and so

⁷² Ashford, *Death Studies*, p. 66.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

could be uncertain about writing to traditional crime narrative patterns. But this is merely an assumption and a lack of confidence in a genre could suggest the opposite, in fact: that uncertainty may encourage the novice crime writer to adhere more rigidly to generic norms. More likely, gender has its role to play in the banishment of the detective and detection from these stories. Women, like the Welsh, have been isolated from positions of power in the past, and may feel uncomfortable in portraying authority. Lacking a detective figure, the narrative is then told either from the viewpoint of the victim or the criminal in these stories. In this manner, the collection may be more properly labelled *noir*, as it provides a shifting and subjective viewpoint.⁷⁴ And frequently the stories work towards a murder, rather than use murder as a starting point for the narrative, thus playing with crime fiction's usual structures.

As mentioned earlier, the collection explores mostly domestic themes: paedophilia is a common trope, as well as adultery and inheritance – though in this collection, economic inheritance is not the concern; rather, it is questions of parentage that are raised. These anxieties and concerns result in a murder whose perpetrator is often driven by a desire for revenge. The criminal, usually a woman, is therefore given a degree of sympathy as, like Rhys Davies's and Menna Gallie's murderers, they are first shown as victims. The lack of detection, too, means that the element of capture and punishment is omitted from the narrative and the abused victim/villain is allowed literally to get away with murder. Those murdered, often paedophile parents or adulterous husbands, are aberrations in society. Unlike the accepted norms of crime

⁷⁴ Lee Horsley provides a lyrical definition in her work, *The Noir Thriller*, when she describes how its protagonists 'go down small-town Main Streets and country roads as well as down mean streets and dark alleyways. Private eyes play a part, but so do transgressors and victims, strangers and outcasts, tough women and sociable psychopaths. These are characters who *are* [emphasis in the original] tarnished and afraid, and who find it difficult or impossible to escape from the "bleakness, darkness, alienation, disintegration", the "sense of disorientation and nightmare" that are associated with the modernist crisis of culture' (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 1-3.

fiction, where detection and capture bring resolution to the plot, here it is a vengeful murder that restores calm to a disrupted domestic scene.

One could argue that these women writers metaphorically enact vengeance on a patriarchy that constructs women and children as victims. In order to scrutinize this argument further, I will focus on two stories in the anthology which typify the ethos of the collection. Kay Sheard's 'Cherry Pie' and Delphine Richards's 'The Visitor' are both set in Wales. Kay Sheard is of Welsh heritage but was born and raised in England. She has since moved to and settled in North Wales. 'Cherry Pie' is a revenge tale which takes as its foci the abuse and murder of a little girl by her father thirty years before in the fictional tourist spot of Llyn Llwyd. Like Malcolm Pryce's Aberystwyth pine plantations, something is amiss with the lake, which is in reality a reservoir:

[t]hirty years ago [...] [t]he reservoir had been new then, the waters trembling in the sunlight with the novelty of new being, as if aware they should not have been there at all. Some of what remained of the hillside above the water survived as grazing land. Pines had invaded the rest; row upon row of regimented infant trees, as though a child had meticulously painted hundreds of dark green triangles onto the sun-scorched grass.⁷⁵

The unfamiliarity of the father's act is matched by the unfamiliarity of the man-made landscape, one inflicted upon the rural space; these are like the 'wood and water' discussed in the last chapter, a colonial imposition.

In spite of its man-made landscape in this story, Wales is also a site for the mystical and uncanny. Amy, who believes she is the reincarnation of the murdered child, is 'ageless, unreal [...] one of the Tylwyth Teg – the fairy folk – not truly living at all.'⁷⁶ She is partnered by Jay, who is described as a modern-day Druid. It is tempting to read these signifiers of ancient Wales as evidence of Sheard's absorption

⁷⁵ Kay Sheard, 'Cherry Pie', in *Written in Blood*, eds. Lindsay Ashford and Caroline Oakley (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2009), pp. 89-106 (p. 89).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, (p. 91).

of an English ideology concerning the Welsh: they are othered through an other-worldly timelessness, a process used by earlier English writers to contain Wales in a mythical past. However, the narrative soon reveals that Jay had witnessed the murder as a boy and is manipulating a mentally fragile Amy into believing that she is the incarnation of the murdered girl in order to confront the father with his crime. The couple's confrontation of the father in this manner results in his death from a heart attack. So, circuitously, abuse and murder are avenged. But it must be observed that this revenge is enacted by the manipulation of a vulnerable woman, Amy, who is oblivious to that manipulation. Despite Jay's words, which end the text, "[n]ow," he said, "we can live",⁷⁷ the mode of freedom has been decided by him. The roles of victim/murderer/villain may have been reversed here, but it seems that, for Sheard, women still lack complete autonomy in their lives and are still to some extent passive victims.

Nevertheless, this stricture does not apply to all the pieces in the collection as there are stories where women do display autonomy. In the German writer Imogen Rhia Herrad's story, 'Without a Trace', a daughter murders her mother and keeps her father captive in the cellar in revenge for childhood sexual abuse. Delphine Richards's tale, 'The Visitor', also contains the element of manipulation seen in Sheard's 'Cherry Pie' but in this case, the genders are reversed. This story also features revenge; however, the act avenged is marital infidelity rather than paedophilia. Welsh-born Delphine Richards has set her story in a farmhouse in a fictional Pwll y Coed. Not only does Richards, like Sheard, use a Welsh name for her fictional locations, these are names that are taken from the landscape. Sheard's Llyn Llwyd translates as Grey Lake, while the English equivalent of Pwll y Coed means, literally, pool in the wood.

⁷⁷ Sheard, 'Cherry Pie', (p. 106).

'The Visitor' tells of Beth Price, infertile and abandoned by her husband after his indiscretion with her best friend. As with Aaron's 'wild zones', the rural landscape, in this case, an isolated farmhouse, is reclaimed as a feminine space. Initially, however, the domestic space is invaded and made unstable as the narrative commences with the appearance of a strange, mentally unstable man in Beth's kitchen. Rather than this being the starting point of a kidnap narrative with Beth as a victim, the story works towards a murder. Once more, detection is sidestepped and the patterns of crime fiction are subverted.

Furthermore, 'The Visitor' destabilizes generic patterns through the use of black humour. The strange man who appears in Beth's house is an escapee from an asylum, and is suffering delusions about an alien invasion. On hearing her estranged husband call in to collect his belongings, Beth feeds the stranger's delusions, so enraging him and leading him to kill her husband. So, as in 'Cherry Pie', murder is committed through one person's will and another's actions, but in 'The Visitor', the genders are reversed and some autonomy is returned to the woman. Similarly, as 'Cherry Pie' ends on the exhortation to 'live', in 'The Visitor', Beth puts aside her plans for suicide, having been freed from her painful past by the murder of her errant husband. In this collection, at least, the important figure is not the authoritative detective but the murderer, whether that be by direct means or through a malign influence on another. And it is not capture and punishment that bring resolution to the plot but the murder of men who benefit from, and even exceed, the norms of patriarchy. In this manner, Welsh women critique gender imbalanced social norms while re-writing generic ones.

Whether women will continue to write crime from Wales in this vein remains to be seen. A tradition is forming, albeit tentatively. While these writers share tropes

with Welsh crime fiction generally, for communal detection is a noticeable theme, their work is sometimes difficult to categorise. It can seem that elements of fantasy or mystery detract from the brutal business of crime fiction, giving it an air of unreality. Nonetheless, ignoring Raymond Chandler's call for more gritty reality in crime fiction is not a return to socially hierarchical Golden Age novels. In fact, fantasy or mystery has been used to create other genres, such as magic realism where it can be used to voice unimaginable horrors.⁷⁸ These generic departures give women new-found space in which to discuss feminine concerns and, most importantly, to reconfigure the spaces in which they appear.

⁷⁸ One only has to think of *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) where the fantastical is used to make sense of the Spanish Civil War, or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) which voices the trauma of Indian partition.

Conclusion

At the 2013 conference of the Association of Welsh Writing in English, held annually at Gregynog Hall in mid-Wales, I co-presented a paper with Dr Alyce von Rothkirch entitled ‘Welsh Crime Scenes: Mapping Welsh Crime Fiction’. Using findings from my PhD research, we compiled a database which collated such information as the nationality of the author, the various sub-genres employed in Welsh crime fiction, or the nature of the central crime, *et cetera*. We then looked at these findings as statistical data. Our aim was to posit a more objective analysis of literature, to remove what is known in psychology as observer bias, that is, ‘the tendency of an observer to “see what is expected or wanted” rather than what is actually there’.¹ While we were not wholly successful in this aim of achieving objectivity – categorising data was sometimes subject to my own subjectivity, for instance² – it did give us some interesting results to ponder. What was gratifying was that the initial premises put forward in the Introduction of this thesis were supported by subjecting them to a different methodological method, one seen as more objective, ‘scientific’ and less intuitive. Most PhD students are visited at some point by the fear that they are producing research that is tenuous and perhaps inflected by their own observer bias. Here, I had statistical proof that my suppositions had their basis in fact. Firstly, we had a sufficient sample size, sixty two, with which to compile a database. This reflected the number of texts I had read and made notes on prior to writing the thesis and which fell into the parameters I had designated as Welsh crime fiction. If an author had written a long-running series, such as in the case of Bill James’s Harpur and Iles series, the entire list would not be included as this would skew the

¹ ‘Observer bias’, in *A Dictionary of Public Health* ed. John Last (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Available at

<http://www.oxfordreference.com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780195160901.001.0001/acref-9780195160901-e-3159?rskey=LSXe27&result=3162&q=> [accessed 04 June 2013].

² As Alyce pointed out, I showed a tendency to label far too many places as rural which we then had to re-categorise. In all probability, this was due to having lived in a city all of my life which may have led to my inability to recognise smaller urban spaces as such.

data. So though this was a decent sample size, it was only representative of the whole. This was proof that there was a wealth of crime fiction set in Wales, authored by those of a Welsh background, or crime fiction which engaged with a specific Welsh cultural identity. Indeed, it seems that, contrary to the assertion first made by the Blue Books commissioners and perpetuated by modern publishers, great crimes did exist in Wales, albeit in fiction.

However, my main difficulty in compiling the database was in making the material ‘fit’ into our categories. When I came to list the works under the heading ‘sub-genre’, I often found that a great number did not conveniently fit the many labels available. Obviously, the appropriations of the PI novel by male writers, discussed in this thesis, were easily categorised. However, not all works compiled were so immediately recognisable. I have argued that Welsh crime fiction is difficult to recognise as such since it subverts many of the conservative, hierarchical norms of genre. At the heart of this subversion is Welsh crime fiction’s treatment of the detective figure, who is often undermined or marginalised. Authority is frequently sidestepped in favour of a more egalitarian resolution. Hence, a crime fiction is produced that writes against expected paradigms and is difficult to classify. Though inconvenient when compiling a database, at the same time it supported my assertion that the absence of a visible Welsh crime fiction could be because of its egalitarian and plastic nature.

This thesis is not by any means conclusive. At the time of writing, more examples were coming to light. The work of the National Library of Wales in digitalising Welsh newspapers and periodicals and making them available online promises to be a useful resource. As this site collects material from the nineteenth century up to 1910, there is the possibility of revisiting my assertion that Welsh crime fiction only seemed to appear in the 1920s. Though I am not suggesting that there is a Welsh Sherlock Holmes awaiting discovery in *The North Wales Gazette*, for instance, as this thesis has shown, Welsh writers have been

interested in writing crime for many decades. Therefore, it is not inconceivable that earlier crime fiction is available yet remains un-researched.

I would like to conclude with suggestions about a new direction being taken by Welsh crime writers. Naturally, for a culture that writes itself against a dominant anglocentric tradition, many of the works discussed in this thesis used Wales as a setting as their writers seek to re-imagine and re-assert their cultural identity. More recently, however, some writers are also engaging with globalisation, specifically a globalisation that could be described as neo-colonialism, and do so through crime fiction. Though unwilling to be described as Welsh, instead preferring to identify himself as a border writer,³ Monmouth-born Simon Lewis centres on people trafficking in *Bad Traffic* (2008). Set in rural England, it focuses on a global crime. Nevertheless, despite the lack of visible markers of Welsh identity in the text, it shares many of the tropes of Welsh crime fiction. Notably, this text circumvents state authority as the crime is investigated and resolved by a visiting Chinese detective who works alone. As England is seen through the eyes of either the Inspector or the trafficked Chinese, the reader is presented with an unsettled and alien culture. More recently, the Welsh writer Cynan Jones revisited the drug-smuggling plot of the earlier English-authored thrillers in *Everything I Found on the Beach* (2011). But, like *Bad Traffic*, it also considers the victims of globalisation, such as the immigrants who find themselves caught up in such crime. Unlike the earlier English crime writers, who explored the threat to the health and well-being of the English nation, these writers instead are concerned with the threat to the victims of neo-colonialism. Thus, rather than being an inward-looking genre, Welsh crime fiction can be said to be increasingly outward-looking and involved in global, rather than simply national issues, but in a manner that reflects its specific cultural identity.

³ This was in response to my question asking if he would call himself a Welsh crime writer when at the Criminal Intent Conference held in Abergavenny in 2009.

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