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The Scarlet Woman: Lynette Roberts

Lynette Roberts and Keidrych Rhys were married in Llansteffan on October 4, 1939. The very same month her poem ‘To Keidrych Rhys’ was published in *Wales*, the brash harlequinade of a literary journal established and edited (up to this particular number) by Rhys, her colourful, buccaneering, incorrigibly errant new husband. ‘I have seen,’ she there declared with a bardic claim to omnipresence that later, no doubt, she would have recognized made her unconscious kin to the ancient Taliesin, legendary poet-prophet of her adopted country,ⁱ

Light birds sailing
 A ploughed field in wine
 Whose ribs expose grave treasures
 Inca’s gilt-edged mine;...
 I have seen, the mountain of pumas
 Harbour a blue-white horse.
 The tinsel-rain on dogs coat
 Zebra shoes at night.ⁱⁱ

It reads like an ecstatic epithalamium, while its title, ‘To Keidrych Rhys,’ seems also to turn it into a gift-giving ritual; a bride’s ceremonial public display of her lavish dowry. That dowry, as the poem makes clear, is all the exotica of her ‘foreign’ imagination. And it is this largesse, in all its richness, that is again flaunted in the ‘Poem’ she published in the next (Winter) issue of *Wales*:

For my house is clothed in Scarlet,
 Scarlet my household, Scarlet my mind, spiced herbed and cherished,
 all alcoves wine

Laughter in corners, winks on air chasing shadows on ceiling
bruins in
lair.

Plush lacquered incense, open flowers on wall, frothed milk bread and
honey to overcome falls

So come myth children, no longer fear, the winter is impotent under
my care

For my house is clothed in Scarlet.ⁱⁱⁱ

Roberts had already lived an extraordinary life, peripatetic, adventurous and not just international but intercontinental. From the beginning, the solid privileges and comforts that were hers thanks to her Welsh Australian father's career as Manager (and later Director) of Argentina's Western Railways had been offset by his rather louche, freewheeling personal conduct.^{iv} A family life supportive enough but rather rickety and improvisatory had been permanently destabilised by the early death of her mother. Thus partly, perhaps, in self-defence, Roberts early developed a restless, daring, unconventional spirit of her own. Resilience and adaptability had been hard-wired into her. As a girl, she'd survived sleazy boarding houses; as a young woman in Buenos Aires, she'd acted as her father's companion on formal occasions while also holding her own 'soirees' for artists and intellectuals; in London, she'd dabbled in bohemia yet acquired diplomas for Internal Decoration, completed Constance Spry courses in Flower Arranging, and run her own florist business.

There is therefore, in retrospect, something rather poignant about this defiant poem by a gutsy autumn bride about to start her married life at the outbreak of war in a damp, cold, bleakly windy corner of rural Wales, in a tiny stone cottage with an earthen floor. At least she had her 'myth children' to comfort her and to nourish her imagination, and from these she was to draw some of her solace in the challenging

years ahead. But at times it was hard. 'I feel chequered with energy,' she noted in her Journal in the spring of 1940: 'Full of positive red squares and black negative ones. What shall I do?' (*DLR*, 8) And later that March, she recorded 'The wind was cold. I drew my scarlet cape around me and walked leisurely, as village people do.' (*DLR*, 9) It was an early attempt to adapt herself to her locality; to adopt its normalities (that leisurely walk) for camouflage, but without entirely repressing her creative energies – that defiantly scarlet cape which she took to wearing on all her walks became a blazon of her quietly scandalous internal difference, as did the 'scarlet letter' of Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's celebrated novel. The poetry of the next few years was to show her devising strikingly original strategies of adaptation that would guarantee the creative survival of her singular identity.

In the same, October, issue of *Wales* that saw the publication of his new wife's 'study in scarlet,' Keidrych Rhys published a poem of his own, 'The Van Pool, Tichrig.' Which 'Van' he had in mind isn't entirely clear – 'fan' [ban in its original, un-mutated, form] being simply the Welsh for peak. 'A peak' is 'Y Fan' ('F' in Welsh being the 'V' sound in English), and the Brecon Beacon peaks that loom over Keidrych Rhys's native district of the Ceidrych valley are known in Welsh as 'Bannau [plural of 'Ban'] Brycheiniog' – the Breconshire peaks. But there is one 'B/Fan' adjacent to the localities identified in Rhys's poem that stands out in popular imagination as in cultural memory, along with the pool at its base. The latter is known as 'Llyn y Fan Fach' ['the lake of the small peak' – a neighbouring peak being named 'y Fan Fawr' (the Great Fan)]. Attached to the spot is a well-known and greatly loved legend; that of the lady of the Lake. She it is who lived under the pool's waters until she was wooed ashore by the entrancing rhymes of a young shepherd, whom she duly agreed to marry. Together they had several sons, but she had warned her human

husband at the outset of the strange unbreakable conditions on which their unlikely alliance was based, and when, somewhat unthinkingly, he broke each of these in turn over a period of years, she sadly gathered about her all the cattle she had brought out of her native depths as dowry and departed back to the waters from which she had briefly emerged.

Whether Rhys, who wrote several poems about the ‘Van pool’, actually had that specific lake and its legend in mind is immaterial. What is significant is that Lynette Roberts was to become enchanted by it. Noting this, critics and commentators have, unfortunately, been led to suppose that ‘Hal-e-bant, Fan Fach,’ in the poem ‘Plasnewydd’ is an allusion to the tale. It is not. ‘Fan’ (abridgement of ‘Fanny’) was a very common name for a Welsh sheepdog, and in her Carmarthenshire Diary Roberts specifically mentions that her great friend and neighbour, Rosie Davies, had two sheepdogs, ‘Fan and Tips.’ (*LDR*, 64) The phrase in the poem is therefore a record of the everyday instruction to a sheepdog – Fan (‘fach’/ ‘little’ being simply here a form of endearment akin to ‘dear’) – to ‘Hal-e-bant’: i.e. ‘Send [or shoo] him [cow or sheep, or naughty cat –“pussy drwg”] away.’ After all, for the incomer Roberts the mundane minutiae of Llanybri constituted a new *exotica*.

No, the significance of the Llyn y Fan legend probably went much deeper with Roberts than that. Could she have failed to recognize key aspects of herself in the tragic, seductive figure of that fey, faery lady? In that denizen of a strange, alien, beguiling world? Didn’t that instinctive early gesture of presenting herself to her husband and his world at the very moment of her marriage as a ‘scarlet woman’, a visitor from a distant, foreign, scandalously opulent world, come to rhyme eerily in her ears with the story of the ill-fated Lady? Might it therefore not prove prophetic of

a similar fate for herself? And might not her poetry bear witness to her predicament? What follows is a reflection on precisely such possibilities.

* * * *

The poem with which Lynette Roberts announced her mature arrival as ‘Welsh’ poet to the world could scarcely have been more different than ‘To Keidrych Rhys.’ Her first collection, *Poems* (1944), opens with ‘Poem from Llanybri,’ a title that designedly and deservedly represents Roberts as grounded in her adopted village. In it, she – who had lived in the village for less than two years – confidently presents herself as an insider, a native well versed in local customs and thoroughly (even nonchalantly) au fait with the patois; indeed as someone already ‘authorised’ to act as the confident voice of her community and to speak on its behalf. Hers is an impressive impersonation – for such it surely is – of cultural authority. But fully to appreciate its performative aspects and to value its complex, hard-earned, achievement one needs to acquaint oneself with writings by Roberts of an entirely different kind and place: those related to her earliest years in Argentina. It is, after all, no coincidence that the collection that opens with ‘Poem from Llanybri’ draws to a conclusion with a suite of poems about South America, before ending with a return to Cwmcelyn. As she noted in July, 1941, ‘I have a backward glance at the Argentine[, my father and Mechita [where she was born]. I start a series of poems which were written here in Tygwyn but they are a South American group.’ (*DLR*, 218)

‘Here are cucumbers in flower, tomatoes and sweet-corn,’ she noted in her journal on July 13, 1941, ‘but in my home – the South American home – we have bee-like humming-birds, flamingos wandering in the paddock, white peacocks, and the sun’s resilient rays.’ (*DLR*, 37) No doubt sensitised anew by such nostalgic recollection, her eye was caught just two days later by the scarlet that seemed always

to take her back in imagination to Argentina, prompting her to plan a ‘Poem on Moorhen and its scarlet garters.’ (*DLR*, 8) ^v She had nevertheless settled into her Welsh village with impressive resolution, had already grown to love aspects of life there, had started to master, through hard physical labor, some of the important skills and crafts of subsistence country living, and had begun to investigate her physical surroundings with a formidably ‘scientific’ analytic and forensic thoroughness even while appreciating its aesthetic and compositional aspects, brilliantly registering its characteristic forms, colours and textures with an artist’s subtlety and sensitivity.

With the passing of time, she obviously came to feel real solidarity with the locals, and in particular to value the ‘sisterhood’ of women, strengthened by wartime conditions when, as she discovered through her own experience, they were left to survive traumas from childbirth to bombing, while struggling to keep body and soul together not only for themselves but their whole families. It was this practical experience of tough woman-power that led her, on VJ day, to declare angrily that ‘War will continue until women become freed from slavery...it will exist until they become no longer the slaves of men but their leaders towards a preservation of life.’ (*DLR*, 69) And her campaigning identification with her subjugated gender, implicit in many of the poems in her 1944 collection, strengthened her inclination to identify with the Welsh as a subjugated people (*DLR*, 69). Her poetry was designed to promote liberation on both fronts.

Yet the value of Llanybri lay for her in its abiding, irreducible ‘foreignness.’ To the last, she remained what sociologists would label ‘a participating observer.’ To the very end she had to work hard to ‘read’ the locality– indeed omnivorous reading became an indispensable means, alongside constantly heightened observation, of gaining a clarity of understanding. And clarity was, for her, not just a passion but a

consuming craving. She demanded of herself exactness of verbal and perceptual definition – her writing was underpinned by an obsession with classification and categorisation that led to her autodidact’s love-affair with all the ‘ologies’ – anthropology, mythology, etymology, entomology, geology, mineralogy, ornithology, lepidopterology and several more. Her appetite for clarity understandably made her impatient of the vague Celtic Twilight maunderings of Ernest Rhys, that irrepressible veteran of the 90s (as well as unlikely friend of Whitman, Yeats and Pound) who turned up on her doorstep like a cheerful, irresponsible tramp.^{vi}

Her taste for dispassionate precision was no doubt in part inherited from her engineer father – she inclined to treat poems not as organic secretions but as complex functional assemblages, rather no doubt as he viewed railways. But it may also have owed something to her early exposure to the clarity of Argentinean light, particularly in the region of the Andes. She commented with characteristic exactitude on the contrasting light of Wales, when mist and soft rain suddenly lifted and creatures, things and objects, caught in a ‘magnesium light’, stood out as if elementalised, washed clean of all superfluities :

The rain, the continual downpour of rain, may also compensate us indirectly, by giving us that pure day which precedes it... During those intervals the rain water is reflected back to us through a magnetic prism of light....Here, then, in Wales, we frequently get three concentrations of light, where normally most countries only have two. This third eye, or shaft of light, gives us the same privilege as many of our scattered islands hold, which are devoted to the Saints. That light magnifies, radiates truth, and cleanses our dusty spirits.

(*DLR*, 130)

She also valued the way the slow tempo and leisurely rhythm of life in a rural community enhanced awareness of every detail of ordinary living. (*DLR*, 64) And then there was the contrast with the ‘rich, mellow tones of English farmhouses,’ that meant she, like other English visitors, felt ‘estranged and left singularly apart.’ (*DLR*, 128) She even felt that, in its clear-cut geometrical forms and simple colours, the village of Llanybri resembled a Cubist painting:

the sharp outline of the whitewashed farms and houses as they stand against the skyline; the way in which the walls project geometrical planes of light that resemble the still life-life models of squares and cubes. (*DLR*, 127)

Like Hopkins, Roberts revered the sacred quiddity and inscape of bird, stone, leaf and flower and, again like him, she came to believe that the strict-metre poetry of traditional Welsh *barddas* was perfectly consonant in its ‘hardness’ and disciplined exactitudes of sound and metre with the society and landscape to which it was truly ‘native.’ She came to view traditional Welsh rural crafts and architecture in the same ‘light.’ There was percipience in her early comment that the poetic form of the Welsh *englyn* – which she proceeded to approximate in English – was ‘itself like the village, like a piece of quartz.’ (*DLR*, 5)

The foreignness of Llanybri was, then, indispensable to her creativity. While empathising strongly with a village community in which ‘every home [is] a separate unit of the nation’s culture’ (130), she was aware of the secretiveness and peasant tricksiness of her neighbours. ‘The continual subjugation of the Welsh by conquerors has made them distrustful of strangers,’ she noted sympathetically: ‘They have grown accustomed to using their wits.’ (*DLR*, 69) Even as the village genuinely became a deeply loved home, it was not entirely ‘my home,’ which was still ‘the South American home.’ In the summer of 1941 she could still feel ‘lonely and homesick for

the Argentine,' (*DLR*, 37) recalling the pampas, the Incas' mountain grave, her railway-engineer father, the great River Platte region, the convent where she was educated, and Mechita where she was born. 'I had the strong desire,' she frankly admitted, 'to leave the village and go to South America.' A year earlier, she had confessed to feeling 'cramped and barred from life,' 'tired of reading *The Western Mail* every day. The only news from the outside world. I'm tired of reading the poems of puny poets and want to do something. Something. I don't know what.' (*DLR*, 9)

The fall of France in the summer of 1940 had prompted a revealingly impassioned response:

I felt like running off to France and selling my British status. And I could do this, since I held an Argentinean Passport and could demand protection from the Argentine Embassy. If it were not for the understanding and knowledge of most of the people here in Llanybri, there and everywhere, I would REBEL and mightily. The villagers are superb in thought and action, and strangely enough there is considerable unity in their thoughts and approach to the war. They are far more intelligent and efficient than most of the ways and means of Parliament. (*DLR*, 17)

A prison Llanybri could seem at times for her spirit –some of the locals even briefly suspected her of spying – even as it was becoming a refuge and a place of sanity in a mad world, and a catalyst of creativity. Even in Llanybri, the New World was ever present at the deepest levels of her being, although it was not until war's end that she explicitly began to address the formative significance of her native South America in her writings.

* * * *

Her sensuous memories of Argentina retained an almost hallucinatory intensity for Roberts ('Memory widens your senses,' she was later suggestively to write of her New World recollections), partly perhaps because her periods of living there were ephemerally brief and partly because they marked emotionally charged experiences in her family life. Her heightened powers of sensuous attention and recall were in any case always the most stunningly impressive aspect of both her personal life and her creative imagination. 'One of my earliest memories,' she wrote in her bewitching radio talk on the origins of her South American poems, 'was to wander out of the gate and stare at the South American pampas.' 'The New World,' she hauntingly admitted, 'with its strange subtlety absorbed me with its vivid impressions, the spinning windmills irrigating the *quintas*, and as the corrugated containers filled with water, I bathed in them within shadow of the peach trees.' (*DLR*, 107)

But these impressions were not simply filed away in memory to be retrieved as nostalgia, they actively informed her responses even to *Llanybri*, eventually finding issue in her creative work. The suite of powerful poems included in her 1944 collection offer overt evidence of this. But more intriguing, if less arresting, are the examples available in the same collection, as in her *Journal*, of more covert forms of indebtedness to her South American past. Later, in her radio talk, she was to place on public record her indignation at what was happening to the traditional life style of the 'peasants/ peons' of her native land.

The small *pueta* where people lived with their horses tethered to the wooden posts outside their shacks, their songs, knife-fights, guitars, the dark shadows of the peons cast as they gamble behind clouds of dust as the horse race took place. These were and still are at the root culture of the Argentine soil. So when the thatched roof were torn down and corrugated roofs placed in their

stead and values were placed on the wrong issues, I rebelled and wrote to establish belief in these people in my poem called ‘The New World.’ (*DLR*, 108)

That poem, published in her 1944 collection, opens by evoking the original life of the peons, before they were forced first to flee ‘unwanted further on into the land.’ There, where ‘Spiders lifted the lids of their homes and slammed them back’ – the detail is taken directly from her own earliest memories of the dusty end-of-the-line township of Mechita where she was born – ‘they strove, the harder not to be seen.’ But to no avail. Modernity, in the form of a rapacious capitalism, caught ruthlessly up with them:

Lost now. No sound or care can revive their ways:
 La Plata gambles on their courage, spends too flippantly,
 Mocks beauty from the shading tree, mounts a corrugated roof
 over their cultured hut. (*CP*, 29)

The anger in these lines was magnified when her uncomprehending London editor asked her to alter the phrase about the corrugated roof, because ‘it was so ugly. He did not see that that was the purpose of the whole poem. The *estancias* were being sold or mortgaged and the money drifted into the Casinos at La Plata. The peon or gaucho and the land were left in despair.’ (*DLR*, 109)

In 1872 the gaucho’s colourful, violent style of living had been famously glorified by José Hernandez in *Martín Fierro* (1872/1879), the ‘national epic’ that came to be regarded as epitomising ‘the root culture of the Argentinean soil. And Roberts’ memories of both gauchos and peons were themselves clearly rooted, as her radio talk shows, in a very small child’s frustration at having been debarred from

knowing more about their tantalisingly close but mysteriously ‘other,’ seemingly ‘authentic’ and ‘indigenous’ world.

In fact, as we can now see, her ‘instinctive’ sense of that world’s ‘otherness’ had a cultural provenance. She grew up within the extensive immigrant, settler, community of an ‘Anglo’^{vii} professional class and was thus very largely isolated not only from the indigenous cultures but from the dominant Hispanic culture of the country. Her response to the countryside, even, was mediated by the works of enormously influential ‘Anglo-Argentinean’ writers like W. H. Hudson, to whose books Hispanic as well as British children were routinely introduced at school. In this respect, her positioning within Argentina was, like her situation in Llanybri, largely that of a participating outsider.^{viii} And the Eurocentricity of her outlook is everywhere marked.

It had, of course, been a common practice of European artists and intellectuals for two centuries to attribute sterling, precious, even redemptive qualities to a ‘peasant’ existence, valued for its supposed ‘authenticities.’^{ix} But in Roberts’ case such an ideology had a distinctive individual relevance and a corresponding intensity that made it a valuable creative asset. As we shall see, her sympathy with the dispossessed peons and gauchos fed into her gradual awareness that the Welsh – particularly the ‘peasant’ Welsh-speakers of Llanybri and the rest of rural Wales -- were a long subjugated people, their traditions variously threatened by mummification, barbaric modernisation and obliteration.^x Her empathy with their plight also fed into her poetics, central to which was the attempt at a sympathetic melding of old and new.

But it was not only the peons and gauchos of Argentina with which she imaginatively identified. An interest in the native peoples is manifest in an interesting

poem she wrote for radio about a notable incident in the early history of the Welsh Colony in Patagonia. In 1863, eighteen years after the first landing in Puerto Madryn, four young men from what was still at that point an exclusively coastal settlement ventured prospecting along the Chubut river. Two of them penetrated inland some four hundred miles, as far as the Andean foothills, where a couple of Araucans (members of the indigenous ethno-cultural group nowadays known as the Mapuche) alarmed them with an invitation to visit their encampment. Rapidly retracing their steps, they had almost reached the safety of the settled region when they were ambushed. One of them was killed, but the other, John Evans, managed a Douglas Fairbanks escape by frantically spurring his horse into a prodigious leap across a canyon and then making his solitary way back through desert storms to the Colony. Glyn Williams, a modern authority on the Welsh in Patagonia, has set the incident in context:

This was the first sign of hostility by the native people against any member of the Welsh Colony in eighteen years of contact. There had been several occasions when they had expressed dissatisfaction with the Welsh occupance of their territory, but the evidence suggests that any threat of hostility by one of the groups against the Colony resulted in discussion by one of the other groups. The probable reason for this lies in the cruel genocidal campaign carried on against the native people independently by both the Argentine and Chilean armies between 1879 and 1885. It has been suggested that the Indians were a group of Northern Araucans who were driven south by the military and took the opportunity of strengthening the Argentinean harassment.^{xi}

It was to this episode, relayed to her by Cadvan Hughes, the son-in-law of John Evans, that Roberts turned when, at the end of the war, she began to consider ways in

which she might put her childhood experiences in Argentina to creative advantage. Rejecting as too hackneyed the idea of a book of memoirs, she resolved instead to write a Ballad about the Patagonian story, but ‘in it of course [to use] many of my own memories, as a background, or reconstruction of the event.’ (CP, 112) She itemised some of the sensuous recollections of the pampas she particularly wanted to record:

The quality of the thistles which they used for fuel and making rennet, their hollowness and crack, seeing iguanas as they flashed past from before the horses’ hoofs, the legends, the racoon that I found on my dressing table, and who later was found curled up in sleep on my bed, the nutrias in hundreds, and flight, colour and song of the myriad birds, these I wanted to recreate. (CP, 112-113)^{xii}

As for the ballad form for which she opted, she undoubtedly appreciated its origins as a ‘peasant’, ‘folk’ form and its long history of local story-telling. But, given her enthusiasm at this time for the old ‘Welsh penillion’ (simple stanzas of folk experience and wisdom to be sung to harp accompaniment) she may also have felt the ballad provided a rough but acceptable English cultural equivalent. ‘I still have an ardent PASSION for *penillion*,’ she wrote to Graves in 1947, ‘I want to write *penillion*. ...I believe it is the most authentic and most wholesome material from which to build up any rural poetry. It is never sentimental in its original state.’ (DLR, 185)^{xiii} And, since the poem makes explicit mention of Hernandez’s *Martín Fierro* (‘O ghost of Martín Fierro save us’ [CP, 122]), it is further possible she may have felt the ballad form had a ‘folk’ pedigree and popular authority corresponding to the *payados* of the ‘*gauchesco*.’^{xiv} Indeed, the most adept because best adapted of the four Welsh adventurers whose story she tells is specifically commended for having

learnt gaucho skills: ‘He looked the gaucho in “wide awake” hat,’/ And lived that life as a guide.’ (CP, 119) In her Autobiography, she specifically associated her ballad with the Gaucho figure. Noting that a friend had sent her a record of native music for use in the radio broadcast of ‘El Dorado’, she added ‘He also sent a very large book of national Gaucho implements which has been very useful.’ (CP, 203) Given this mixture of sources, then, she may have viewed her ballad as a fruitful cultural hybrid; a mix of Welsh, English and Argentinean cultural forms; a creative blend of old world and new.

That the poem connected Lynette Roberts to her earliest childhood in a particular intimate way is underlined by its concluding with an old Spanish lullaby ‘which my mother in Mechita sang to me.’ (CP, 113) She likewise identified strongly with the first Welsh settlers of Patagonia – although her personal wish to ‘identify’ as Welsh (if only partially) was a recent phenomenon, the product of her stay in Llanybri. It was evidently important for her to establish that the friendly relations the Welsh enjoyed with the native tribes marked them apart from the Spanish, and for that matter the English. The band that attacked the four Welsh prospectors are clearly identified as a maverick group of avengers, outraged by the wholesale slaughter of natives by General Julio Argetino Roca and his forces during the infamous genocidal ‘Conquest of the Desert.’ In pointed contrast, Roberts gives pride of place to one of the Colonists’ key ‘myths of origin,’ as related by Davies:

‘Not long ago when we lived in caves,

And Indians stood bare...

From nowhere... My father spoke:

The Chief stood back with care.

*Suddenly the Indian's wife bent down,
 And with thorn and thread as sinew,
 Without a word Father's trousers tacked
 And repaired the tear as new.'* (CP, 121)

The Patagonian equivalent of the Pocahontas story, this episode serves much the same purpose: it suggests that in welcoming the Welsh, the native tribes implicitly bestowed a blessing on their invasion of the land. And in highlighting this 'myth',^{xv} it is as if Roberts is claiming that same blessing for herself, in the name of the 'Welshness' she supposedly shared with those first settlers. Hers, thus, becomes an authentic, primal relation to the land, 'innocent' of the stigma of violent misappropriation that marks the relationship to it of colonists like the Anglos and the Hispanics. In this way, the Welsh connection helped assuage the guilt she felt at the possibility of having been, if only by virtue of the white skin that bespoke her Europeanness, complicit in the seizure of the land from its original populations. Had she not read as a girl 'that the Incas if they shot a white man buried him upside down'? (DLR, 195)

Not that Roberts' interest in Patagonia was entirely nostalgic. On the contrary. She concluded her radio broadcast on the Welsh connection with an impassioned plea for contemporary Wales to pay attention to what had been achieved in the face of substantial odds in 'Y Wladfa,' because there was so much to learn from the courage, adventure, resources and enterprise of the early settlers. Broadcast in 1945, her comments therefore applied in part to the immediate post-war period. But by then her six-year stay in Llanybri had made her aware of a far older, indeed seemingly chronic, malaise of the Welsh psyche, a lack of self-confidence that was the consequence of 'continual subjugation...by conquerors,' as she perceptively put it

in a diary entry that same year. (*DLR*, 69) As a result, she remarked in her broadcast, ‘Wales seems oppressed partly through her own misdirection, and partly through outside jurisdiction’ (*DLR*, 133) A concentration on Welsh Patagonia ‘would help to extend [the country’s] vision, which at the moment, through suffering, has become too parochial. An exchange, I believe, on all matters, such as agriculture, political and cultural, would stimulate and help both countries to develop.’

This (liberating) concern to bring out the international dimensions and connections of Welsh life both past and present finds interesting creative issue in Roberts’ poetry. The grandiose pseudo-scholarship paraded by Robert Graves as he constructed his own ingenious personal poetic mythography in a series of articles that culminated in *The White Goddess* appealed greatly to her, as the sustained correspondence between Graves and herself confirms. His fanciful narrative seemed to ‘prove’ that ancient Wales had been firmly linked in to a mythic pathway that had extended along the seaways and trade routes all the way through the Mediterranean to the Aegean and onwards to India, the source of all Indo-European cultures. Ancient Welsh legend and poetry everywhere bore covert testimony, he claimed, to this esoteric international ‘song line,’ in which was encoded the primal secret religion of the ‘White Goddess,’ whose priests were the Druids and whose initiates were the bards.

Roberts’ poem ‘The Circle of C’ is one in which she connects herself as Llanybri poet to this supposed tradition, since her consciously ‘bardic’ imagination, having been initiated into Graves’ secret lore, perceives the ‘C’ of ‘Cwmcelyn’ (and of ‘cinder’ and ‘curlew,’ both words that play a key role in the poem) to be a letter from the sacred ‘tree alphabet’ of the Celts.^{xvi} Cwmcelyn bay thus reveals its hidden druidic aspects to her. Accordingly, she assumes the role of a devotee and petitions

the powers instinct in the sacred landscape to grant her prophetic insight so that she might foresee the fate of her lover (Keidrych Rhys, then away on war duty guarding the east coast of England). The delphic answer she receives is, of course, full of dark foreboding and delivered against the background of the baying of ‘the Dogs of Annwn’ (the Celtic Underworld). The ‘C’ of the title seems also to refer to the belief she shared with Graves that the travels of the magical ‘White Cow’ (emblem and emissary, so to speak, of the White Goddess) traced a ‘circular route.’ (168) And her belief in the sacred significance of the letter surfaces again when, in her essay on Village Dialect, she mentions ‘a reference by Giraldus to the circular dance of the Welsh and this is from his *Itinerium Kambriae*, 1188 AD.’ (120)

The estuarine situation of Llanybri, which features so prominently not only in ‘Cwmcelyn’ but in her major poem ‘Gods with Stainless Ears,’ fitted in perfectly with Graves’ theories, since the myths that were the carriers of the White Goddess religion travelled along the ancient sea routes. Roberts homed in on *Finnegans Wake* because it made mention of the ‘Celtic’ link between the Liffey and the Towy: ‘Joyce...linked up the close mythology and dialect between the peoples of Eire and Wales – the Liffey – “Towy too”.’ (*DLR*, 119) All this accorded well with Lynette Roberts’s own deep respect for the sea, dating from her early experiences of ten transatlantic journeys between Britain and South America. ‘For the British born in the Argentine,’ she wrote, ‘there are many voyages,’ and in ‘Seagulls’ she captured the nexus of experiences that was, for her, the essence of these trips. Describing a typical stop-over en route at a port in the Canaries, the poem artfully encapsulates the ambivalences of feeling about land and sea. While the former offers the stability of ties, those ties take the form of the greedy locals who come alongside in their rowing boats only to fleece the voyagers by selling them shoddy ‘bargains.’ As for the sea, that is wistfully

associated with the 'seagulls' easy glide' but also viewed queasily as 'an ocean of uncertainty.' (*CP*,17)

Elsewhere, as if seeking for a magical sea-route that would connect Argentina to Llanybri through a transatlantic extension of the White Goddess trail, she makes an interesting suggestion in a letter to Graves about the possible meaning of a phrase from a famous boast by the legendary poet, magician, priest and shape-changer

Taliesin:

What puzzles me is what does he mean by I was born 'Under the region of the summer stars.' As the legend carries the tale in various versions that he was shipwrecked & found in a coracle, or like Moses cradled in reeds, I have often wondered if it may have meant under the Southern Hemisphere or tropical stars. (*DLR*, 173)

Partly motivated by stories like this, Roberts thoroughly researched the history of the Welsh coracle. Fascinated by its continuing use in the Llanybri vicinity during her period there, she campaigned strongly for the modest 'industry' it served to be publicly supported. She also wanted it to take advantage of modern synthetic textiles and for coracles to be 'machine-sprayed with ICI plastics' (*DLR*, 136). But at the same time her passion for the coracle was steeped in her poet's sensitivity to the numinous aura by which the little 'primitive' craft had, over many centuries if not millennia, come to be invisibly haloed:

The coracle men working on the rivers, the play of magic, ritual, superstition, prophets of the sky and foretellers of the ocean bed, these attributes remained a force in their trade, both for their gain and their protection. (*DLR*, 69)

Her deep wish to connect Argentina to the Celtic world of ancient Wales is again manifest in her Patagonian ballad 'El Dorado,' when Parry, one of the four

young Welsh adventurers, imagines he sees a ‘Welsh’ horse in the wild herd that descends on them, almost trampling them underfoot as it sweeps madly past:

And that white

Horse with the black mane

Ears, fetlock, muzzle and tail,

Is surely a Dynevor strain.

The white cattle (with red ears) of Dynevor Park, Llandeilo are reputed to date back to the ninth century and the period of Rhodri Fawr. Associated with them are various legends, such as their use in Druidic sacrificial rituals, and the special protection accorded the breed in the tenth-century Laws of Hywel Dda – supposedly confirming the sacred status the cattle had enjoyed in Celtic culture, as evidenced by mentions in old Irish saga. Lynette Roberts’ letters to Graves include meditations on the significance of white creatures in Celtic legend and literature, particularly when combined with red (or russet) ears, as in the story of Pwyll, Pendefig Dyfed in the *Mabinogion* (LDR, 168).

* * * *

Lynette Roberts, then, partly ‘read’ Llanybri through Argentina, just as she came retrospectively to ‘read’ Argentina (for example the settlement of Patagonia) partly through Llanybri. Hers was a hybrid imagination – no wonder she was so taken with the universal village practice of making ‘pele’ (Welsh for ‘balls’) for burning on the fire. A mixture of coal dust, clay and water (Roberts provides the ‘recipe’ in great detail [DLR, 7]) the ‘pele’ seemed to her perfect for burning in a homely hearth. And she was similarly attracted to the mixed, or hybrid, in her own poetics. A simple, striking example of her ambition to fuse the New World with the Old is provided by one of her early poems, ‘Rhode Island Red.’ Not only does the very breed of the

chicken advertise its (North) American origins, in using the phrase ‘Song of joy I sing’ to render the crowing of the cockerel, Roberts deliberately invokes the Poet Laureate of both North and South America, Walt Whitman. But rather than use a ‘New World’ poetic form, Roberts turned to what she (wrongly) thought of as an English equivalent to the Welsh ‘englyn’, a form she admired for its brevity, pithiness and intricate system of internal alliteration and assonance.

One of the deepest of the interests that were consonant with her hybrid imagination – the question of how paradoxically to respect traditional cultures by modernising them, thus changing in order to ‘conserve’ – seems to have been born of her childhood anger at the way the traditional life of the peons was being crassly disfigured and thus effectively erased through the *wrong* kind of modernisation inflicted on them as the River Plate conurbation rapidly expanded. But her anger was brought into sharp focus by her Llanybri experience, because within months of settling in the village it became clear to her she was confronting an unacknowledged crisis: ‘the imposition of a bourgeois and shallow town culture forced on their wholesome ways. That is why I have such an interest in the village of Llanybri. I see that in the future it will be forced to change for the worse.’ (*DLR*, 17) This remained her unwavering opinion throughout the years she lived and worked there, and still vibrating through her (increasingly nuanced and sophisticated) concerns may be felt the anger of the child recoiling from the horror of what River Plate was doing to the peons.

Also from the very beginning, she was very clear that protecting Llanybri did *not* mean fighting to preserve the status quo of the ‘traditional.’ Adaptation to the modern was not only inevitable it was highly desirable. But first it was necessary to identify and evaluate that which was distinctive and invaluable about not only the

village but the whole locality and culture of which it was a part. The thoroughness and industry with which Roberts applied herself to the task of educating herself in this matter, even while raising three children virtually alone in a tiny cottage with minimum facilities is as humbling as it is impressive. She had no water on tap and lived off the produce of back-breaking labour in her small, simple kitchen garden. That hers were the researches of an undirected autodidact and led her to rely on nineteenth-, and even eighteenth-, century sources that were unreliable when not wildly wayward was not her fault. And in any case such sources may have in some ways served her very well, since what a poet needs in order to assemble enabling fictions and effective operating systems is very different from the aims and purposes of a scholar.

Not only did she familiarise herself with the traditional architecture, crafts, dialect, and literary culture of Llanybri and its environs, she also studied its natural habitat, becoming versed in local flora, fauna, bird, butterfly and animal life. And she went much further, exploring anthropology in order to understand the prehistory of human settlement in Wales, and further seeking to map the village and its environs in deep time by understanding its geology and mineralogy. In an aside to Robert Graves that throws interesting light on *Gods with Stainless Ears* and highlights the committed hybridity of her imagination she comments ‘Today [1944] we need myth more than ever: *but not blindly*, only in relation to its scientific handling: in relation to today. You will help us here – just as David Jones is helping us with his paintings.’^{xvii} (*DLR*, 169) And in a crucial passage from her Carmarthenshire diary she makes clear her wish to produce, through a creative fusion of different forms of knowledge, a psychically healing, holistic, reintegrative vision of the world:

The entomologists may learn the names of hundreds of insects entirely through their study of larva breeding and imago feeding. The ornithologist may notice the shape and leaf of trees; and when studying water birds in particular, the names of shells cast on the shores, the small fish rippling on the water-scales of the tide. And so, whether we are conscious of it or not, the intense and penetrating study of any of these branches in the field of a naturalist will in the end grow, until it covers an area of the whole field. Sky, plant, tree, animal and soil strata included. And in this way a natural conclusion and unity is reached, which politics, industrial problems and scientific research cannot achieve. (62-63)

Gods with Stainless Ears can perhaps be read as a war requiem for the death, by grotesque distortion, of some such aspirational vision as this; as a terrible miscarriage of her lovingly conceived hybrid imagination. In a letter to Graves she explained she'd 'purposely set out...to use words in relation to today – both with regard to sound (i.e. discords ugly grating words) & meaning.' (*DLR*, 181)^{xviii}

The following single brilliant detail, not from the poem but from a prose fragment vividly describing the terrible 1941 raids on Swansea as seen from Llanybri, must suffice to illustrate the process at work:

A collyrium sky, chemically washed Cu.DH₂. A blasting flash impels Swansea to riot! Higher, absurdly higher, the sulphuric clouds roll with their stench of ore, we breathe naphthalene air, the pillars of smoke writhe, and the astringent sky lies pale at her sides....Alarmed, we stand puce beneath another flare, our blood distilled, cylindricals of glass. The raiders scatter, then return and form a piratic ring within our shores. High explosives splash up, blue, white, and

green. We know all copper compounds are poisonous, we know also where they are. (*DLR*, 103)

The active interest Roberts had developed in mineralogy as part of her holistic surveying of Llanybri and its peninsula heightened her awareness that, for more than a century, Swansea had been one of the world's greatest metallurgical centres, and consequently dubbed 'Copperopolis.' The poisonous fumes emanating from the maze of great works had already blighted the landscape of the lower Tawe valley by the time a new Petro-Chemical plant at Llandarcy was added to the deadly mix, and it's this new component that Roberts probably had in mind when referring to naphthalene (organic compound with formula $C_{10}H_8$) produced by the petroleum refining process. Specific reference is twice made ($Cu.DH_2$, copper compounds) to the copper industry for which the town was most famous. Particularly powerful is the envisaging of a malign 'collyrium' (normally a harmless eye-wash) that consists of a 'chemically washed' copper. The metallurgical theme is continued through reference to the blue crystal cyanite – an aluminium silicate. And of course following the three-night blitz of 1941 the area is smothered in the poisonous clouds of sulphur dioxide released. A response to the violent disintegration of a whole landscape, the whole passage is therefore a darkly parodic version of the holistic, integrative vision Roberts was so hopeful her hybrid imagination might achieve in Llanybri.

One interesting question that will have to be postponed to some other occasion is how far hers was, in spite of all its good intentions, essentially a 'colonial' incomer's relationship with the village. As has already been noted, hers had after all been a 'settler' consciousness, virtually from her birth. One prominent aspect of Roberts' otherwise conscientiously thorough self-education in the cultural mores of Llanybri was her seeming lack of interest even in attempting to learn Welsh at a time

when most of the villagers struggled with English as a decidedly ‘second’ language. But that Roberts came to value what she somewhat perversely, and perhaps tellingly, persisted in calling the ‘Kymric’ language is unquestionable. She not only scolded the English for routinely excluding Welsh-language literature when purportedly surveying the history of literature in the British Isles^{xix} but implicitly rebuked the Welsh themselves for needing to travel to distant Patagonia before they could muster up the courage to treat their language as vigorously living rather than moribund and dying. And she certainly made attempts to familiarise herself with Welsh-language poetry from the very beginning of the great strict-metre tradition of *barddas* (in the process actively experimenting with the *englyn* form, for example [CP, 83]) to significant contemporary poets such as R. Williams Parry. And, acknowledging the work of W. J. Gruffydd, Dyfnallt and others in her notes to *Gods With Stainless Ears*, she adds that ‘I have intentionally used Welsh quotations as this helps to give the conscious compact and culture of another nation’ (CP, 76). Yet she seems not to have been particularly concerned to learn the Welsh language by which she was daily surrounded.

Instead, her passionate concern (fuelled by her memories of the River Plate peons) for the kind of innovation and adaptation that alone could ensure that what was valuable in ‘tradition’ was made meaningfully available to the present and, in suitably modified form, transmitted to the future, concentrated on a host of other signature cultural practices, customs, products and artefacts of her immediate locality. The dynamic figure leading the rural conservationist movement in the Wales of the period was the prominent ethnographer Dr Iorwerth Peate, at that time working towards establishing an open air Folk Museum at St Fagans on the progressive Scandinavian model (DLR, 128).^{xx} While significantly influenced by his classic study of *The Welsh*

House (1940), Roberts was concerned his conservationism might be misunderstood either to licence the wrong kind of modernisation, or to promote resistance to every form of adaptation for contemporary use. She herself clearly and repeatedly argued for the courage to ‘experiment and to build with the most up-to-date materials...provided it harmonises with the surrounding rural architecture.’ (*DLR*, 129) Hence her attack on the reactionary ruralism of the likes of ‘Professors, who seem to live backwards anyway’ (51). ‘Tradition can be evil,’ she insisted, ‘when the root of its repetition is associated, as it is so much today, with FEAR.’ (*DLR*, 52) She wanted small holdings to have fresh water on tap, electricity, spacious kitchens, dry walls and solid floors. The fruits of ‘modern research and scientific knowledge’ should be used for ‘the good purpose of humanity,’ and not used – as in the bombing of Swansea – for evil, destructive ends.

Her ‘Argentinean’ instinct to associate creativity with hybridity and to understand tradition as harmonious change is thus apparent in her attitude towards both the practical affairs of rural life and her poetics. Indeed, by 1952 she was urging Welsh writers in both languages to find new forms of creative synthesis ‘before the particularities of the Celtic imagination are once again submerged in an Anglicised culture.’ (*DLR*, 142) In retrospect, it can be seen that her own poetry had constituted exactly such an enterprise – the prefacing of the different sections of *Gods with Stainless Ears* with epigraphs from Welsh-language poetry both old and new was calculated both to instance and to emblematised the kind of creative synthesis she already had in mind in the early 1940s.

‘I grow [vegetables in wartime] for Llanybri, for Llanybri that I love and that has given me so much.’ (*DLR*, 21) Touchingly, Lynette Roberts was ‘putting down roots’ in the village as early as June, 1940, just eight months after her arrival there.

Yet she was fated ever to be as much ‘scarlet woman’ as ‘native.’ Significant aspects of her consciousness had, after all, been formed by Argentina. Her passion for ‘deep time’ and its human equivalent – Tradition – obviously owed much to an unconscious awareness that, although she herself was indeed ‘native’ to Argentina, her parents had only very recently migrated there, a late example of the great waves of European migration of peoples to the country during the nineteenth century. She had no claim on the ‘aboriginal past,’ such as she came to feel in Llanybri. Likewise, her understanding of ‘Tradition’ as itself always, at any given point, ‘hybrid’ in character – the moment when the past meets the future and is modified by it – obviously owed much to her own peripatetic life, and the experience of searching for some meaningful form of continuity in the face of constant, restless change.

Her situation as ‘Llanybri’ poet is thus symbolically captured in an observation she recorded in her diary on May 18th, 1942:

I noticed a large splash of brilliant scarlet, a secretive flight from tree to tree until whatever it was hid deeper and thicker among the leaves. This sudden sensation of flight in colour disturbed me considerably...I had no idea what this could have been. It was so large. The Scarlet Cardinal in Buenos Aires, yes I had seen many of those, and flights of wild emerald green paraquets, but this vivid flash... (*DLR*, 44)

It turned out to be a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Lynette Roberts’ attachment to scarlet, always bringing with it memories of her South American ‘home’ – she entitled one of her most evocative poems about the vast plains of the pampas ‘Blood and Scarlet Thorns’ – had once more creatively sharpened her eye for her immediate surroundings in her new Welsh ‘home’ of Llanybri. ‘While she was dying, in rural

Wales,' her daughter Angharad Rhys has movingly written, 'she kept reverting to Spanish – though not her first language it was the language of her childhood.' (*CP*, x)

ⁱ In her essay 'An Introduction to Village Dialect', she quotes one of Taliesin's famed boasts: 'I have been in the ark,/ With Noah and Alpha,/ I have seen the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra,/ I was in Africa' etc. Patrick McGuinness, ed., Lynette Roberts, *Diaries, Letters and Recollections* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), 108. Hereafter *DLR*.

ⁱⁱ First published in *Wales* 10 (October, 1939), 278-279. It is reprinted, but under the title 'Song of Praise', in Patrick McGuinness, ed., Lynette Roberts, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), 81-82, where it is mistakenly identified as first appearing in *The Welsh Review* in October, 1939. Hereafter the *Collected Poems* will be cited as *CP*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Wales* 11 (Winter, 1939-40), 302. Reprinted in *CP*, 82.

^{iv} From the very beginning of the construction of the extensive Argentinean rail network British engineers and shareholders had played a dominant role in its development. Rails, locomotives and rolling stock were likewise usually of British manufacture. And when the Western Railway Company was formed in 1855, its Vice-President, David Gowland, was a Briton. Roberts therefore grew up largely within an expatriate, 'Anglo' community.

^v Duly written, the poem was included in her first published collection, *Poems* (1944). (*CP*, 16) In it, she rejoiced that 'shocking the air/ With scarlet bill and garter' – the word 'shocking' is there surely charged with the village experience of the scarlet-caped Roberts herself – the water-bird could 'draw a wreath of joy/ From our pale receded hearts'.

^{vi} At first she found the vivacity of the 'old, old, man' who had turned up unannounced 'bubbling over with joy,' invigorating and entertaining (*DLR*, 12). But she quickly grew annoyed at 'the mock Celtic Twilight' era at the turn of the century of which he was by then the lone survivor, because 'he was still caught up in its aura when he met us, and, frankly, this nauseated me.' (*DLR*, 13)

^{vii} 'Anglo,' but by no means exclusively English. As well as representatives of all the nations of the British Isles, it also included 'colonials' such as Roberts' Cambro-Australian parents.

^{viii} Although she, along with a friend, briefly held salons for writers, artists and intellectuals in Buenos Aires around 1930 – 'No English just Argentines were invited – philosophers, psychologists, journalists' (*DLR*, 202) – there is no evidence she was aware of the exciting new developments in contemporary Argentinean literature. At that time, *Modernismo* was being replaced by a new wave of writing perhaps most strikingly instanced in the work of the writers (who included the young Bórges) associated with the *Ultraísmo* movement. She makes clear her indebtedness to European (and specifically English) writers when writing of Patagonia in her essay on that region, where she singles out not only W. H. Hudson for praise but also A.F.Tschiffely's *This Way Southward* (*CP*, 130).

^{ix} 'If we do not listen to the rural wisdom of the common man we shall be a lost nation,' she wrote in June, 1940. What was dangerous alike in Capitalism, Socialism and Communism was the 'imposition of a bourgeois and shadow town culture

[which] is forced on their wholesome ways. That is why I have such an interest in the village of Llanybri. I see that in future it will be forced to change for the worse.’ (DLR, 17) In her further belief that ‘the dignity and pride of the craftsmen and farm labourers should be permitted to prevail... I do not mean the retention of arty crafty work of the past,’ she was echoing, as she shortly discovered, the sentiments of respected Welsh ethnographers of the time such as Dr Iowerth Peate (see below). She was also – as again slowly became clear to her – championing the cause of ‘y werin,’ the reputedly devout and naturally cultured ‘folk’ of the rural, Welsh-speaking heartlands, whose way of life had come to be heavily idealised by such influential scholars as Sir O. M. Edwards. His classic *Cartrefi Cymru (The Homes/ Hearths of Wales)* became a huge popular success and contributed to the cult of the Welsh rural village, the ramifications of which are brilliantly analysed by Hywel Teifi Edwards in ‘“Y Pentre Gwyn” and “Manteg”: from Blessed Plot to Hotspot’ (Alyce Rothkirch and Daniel Williams, eds., *Beyond the Difference: Welsh Literature in Comparative Perspectives* [Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014], 8-20). Roberts’ essays ‘An Introduction to Village Dialect’ and ‘Simplicity of the Welsh Village’ fit squarely into this cultural milieu.

^x She believed the ‘peasant’ class to be an international phenomenon, and so easily set Llanybri in the context of her experiences elsewhere, including Argentina and Spain. Similarly, she believed this class of ‘people of the soil’ shared a vocabulary: ‘in certain idioms there can be found relationships between peoples of the soil elsewhere; in Spain, Ireland, Italy, France, Iceland, Brittany.’ (DLR, 123)

^{xi} Glyn Williams, *The Desert and the Dream: A Study of Welsh Colonization in Chubut, 1865-1915* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), 104; also Glyn Williams, *The Welsh in Patagonia: The State and the Ethnic Community* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991). There are several interesting differences of detail between the version of the episode recorded by Roberts and her informant and that offered by modern historians such as Williams.

^{xii} It would be interesting to compare Roberts’ version of Patagonia with that of Eluned Morgan, a Welsh Patagonian born and raised in Gaiman, whose *Dringo’r Andes* (1904) is a classic account of her subsequent journey across the desert to the high mountains.

^{xiii} In the notes to the *Collected Poems*, ‘Penillion’ are mistakenly described as a form of *barddas* (classic traditional strict-metre poetry). Around this time, the ‘penillion’ were attracting much interest from such eminent Welsh-language writers and scholars as T. H. Parry-Williams, who produced an authoritative scholarly collection of them and wrote a poetry influenced by their colloquial rhythms and vocabulary. In addition, they fascinated ‘Anglo-Welsh’ poets such as Glyn Jones, who highly valued them as a ‘people’s poetry’ and eventually translated a body of penillion into sprightly, rhyming English verse.

^{xiv} *Gauchosco* (or ‘gauchesque’) writing, claiming to use the ‘real’ language of the gauchos themselves, flourished roughly between 1870 and 1920. It would therefore probably be very much ‘in the air’ when Roberts was a child.

^{xv} Recent scholarship has expressed considerable scepticism about such Welsh Patagonian claims to ‘exceptionalism.’ An underplayed history has been uncovered of tensions between the native peoples and the Welsh settlers, and emphasis has been placed on the much wider history of colonisation of which the Patagonian venture was demonstrably a part. For instance, the extension of the Welsh settlement as far the foothills of the Andes, that constituted the epic second phase of the venture, was a

multi-national enterprise financed by business interests in Buenos Aires. And this aspect of inland development is unconsciously prefigured in Roberts' ballad as, far from being innocent idealists, the four Welsh adventurers are hard-headed gold prospectors, whose values contrast strikingly with those of the natives on whose territories they trespass. Interestingly, Roberts' *Notes for an Autobiography* records an early personal experience of the difference between immigrant white and native Inca attitudes towards gold (*LDR*, 195).

^{xvi} Graves was drawing upon the theories for the origins of Ogham outlined by R.A.S. MacAlister in *The Secret Languages of Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 1937). MacAlister was later to revise his own theories which, while still predictably popular in Neopagan and New Age circles, have not found support among later serious Celtic scholars. Both Graves and Roberts were also in thrall to the writings of that enthusiastic Druidophile, Edward 'Celtic' Davies (1756-1831).

^{xvii} The affinities between Roberts' poetry and that of Jones remain to be explored thoroughly, as does her obvious respect for his work. She spent much of her time visiting T. S. Eliot in his Faber office in London recommending Jones' work to his attention and urging him to pay a visit to the recluse. (A deeply appreciative review of *In Parenthesis* by Vernon Watkins – 'unique writing' – had appeared in *Wales* 5, Summer 1938, 184.) Both Roberts and Jones shared a passion for reviewing and restructuring present experience in the light of 'deep time' and, in naming their son 'Prydein' (the old Welsh name for Britain – 'Prydain' in modern Welsh -- favoured in medieval chronicles lamenting the loss of much of the Island to foreign invaders), Roberts and Rhys seem to have been signifying their own sympathy for Jones' vision of a modern post-Imperial Britain that, no longer arrogantly Anglocentric, would be a genuine confederacy of all the peoples of the Island.

^{xviii} Given Roberts' own admission that, in structure and texture, her long poem owed something to contemporary film, it might be interesting to compare *Gods With Stainless Ears* to a classic groundbreaking documentary of the period, *Listening to Britain*. Directed for the Crown Film Unit by Humphrey Jennings and Stewart MacAllister, and released in 1942, this is a highly atmospheric montage of the sounds and sights of Britain at war, without any linking voice-over commentary.

^{xix} '[T]here has been practically no acknowledgement of Welsh Literature in the past. This lack of recognition in the History of English [sic] Literature has yet to be adjusted' (*DLR*, 106), Such omission resulted, she added, in a 'tragic deformity.'

^{xx} For a highly informative account of Peate, his vision and his accomplishments, see Catrin Stevens, *Iorwerth C. Peate* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1986).