Welsh writing in English: Case studies in cultural interaction.

Evans, Gareth Ian

Welsh Writing in English:
Case Studies in Cultural Interaction

Gareth Ian Evans

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

THESIS SUMMARY

Welsh Writing in English: Case Studies in Cultural Interaction

This thesis explores and analyses instances of cultural interaction in the English-language literature of Wales. It explores the encounters that Anglophone Welsh writers have had with non-European territories and cultures, such as the complex textual record of Alun Lewis's experience of 1940s India, Welsh writers' experiences of Australia since the 1960s and Robert Minhinnick's writing about Brazil in the 1990s. It also explores the images and impressions of Llanybri inscribed in the poetry of the Argentine-born modernist poet Lynette Roberts. Using a broad range of theories from the fields of postcolonial studies, travel writing studies and interpretive anthropology, it explores issues such as the construction of cultural difference, the identity politics of cultural assimilation, and the reproduction and subversion of colonial tropes and stereotypes. By examining the diverse ways in which the Welsh have written about their experience of a range of cultures and environments throughout the twentieth century the thesis attempts to uncover hitherto undiscovered territory within the study of Welsh Writing in English.

DECLARATION

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ABBREVIATIONS

CPTHJ	T. Harri Jones, *The Collected Poems of T. Harri Jones* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1977)
CS	Alun Lewis, *Collected Stories*, ed. by Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1990
DLR	Lynette Roberts, *Diaries, Letters and Recollections* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2008)
HF	Robert Minhinnick, *Hey Fatman* (Bridgend: Seren, 1994).
IGT	Alun Lewis, *In the Green Tree* (Cardigan: Parthian books, 2006).
LCP	Alun Lewis, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren, 1994)
RCP	Lynette Roberts, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2005).
TS	Bryn Griffiths, *The Survivors* (London: Dent, 1971).

INTRODUCTION

> I resolved to rinse my mind of preconceptions, to write no more poems about Europe and to speak as I found ... Born and bred in South Wales, I thought I knew the face of poverty, but the poverty of India is like acid in the brain ... The villages surrounding our camp bear the permanent weals of destitution. The camp followers take the swill from our bins; every child is a beggar. The picaresque still survives. The birdcatcher wanders the streets of Poona, a cage of singing birds in each hand; the mongoose will fight the viper for a couple of chips, if sahib please. But the tumbling odour of the villages, the dark hovels of that have neither door nor chimney, the vultures and piedogs about the rotting carcase of a goat, the naked children and verminous old men, the shrivelled women whose faces bear the hard cast of experience and not its enriching gentleness – this is what broke Nehru's heart.[1]

> I had read about Calcutta, seen films, talked to people who had been there, imagined in advance 'the most wicked place in the Universe' as (the spectacularly well-travelled) Robert Clive once described it. But still, on that bus ride, still I gawped and sometimes flinched at the strangeness that assailed me on every side. The neon boast of a towering Hilton consigned to impeccable transience by the plague scene from the middle ages at its foot. Children scratting in rubbish for food and fuel. Water buffalo submerged in foetid green pools alongside huge modern tenement blocks with only candles to light them. A little girl about the age of my three-year-old Branwen weaving a path through roaring traffic with a naked baby in her arms. A man lifting his *longhi* to take a shit in the gutter. Women suckling babies outside rag bivouacs. Walls plastered with dung patties. The overpowering stench of exhaust fumes spiced with smells of burning as pavement dwellers everywhere cooked their evening meal.[2]

Although the publication of these two passages is separated by more than fifty years, they are, in many ways, remarkably uniform in their reaction to and representation of India. The first passage is found in Alun Lewis's article 'Stones for Bread' which was commissioned by the *New Statesman* in 1940 to be a report on his first impressions of India when he arrived there with the South Wales Borderers; such was the British army's reaction to the article that he was subsequently ordered to submit all his material in future to the censor first. The second passage is from Nigel Jenkins' award-winning travelogue *Gwalia in Khasia* (1995) which details his journey to the Khasi Hills in North-East India to investigate the establishment of a Welsh colony (the 'Patagonia of the East' as he calls it) in the nineteenth century by the Welsh missionary, Thomas Jones, and his followers.[3] In both passages, India is presented as a shocking affront to the European senses – Alun Lewis, who announces his

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[1] Alun Lewis, 'Stones for Bread', *New Statesman*, May 1st, 1943 in Alun Lewis, *A Miscellany of his Writings* (ed.) John Pikoulis (Poetry Wales Press: Bridgend, 1982), p.161

[2] Nigel Jenkins, *Gwalia in Khasia: A visit to the site, in India, of the biggest overseas venture ever sustained by the Welsh* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1995), p.40

[3] Ibid, p.15

South Walian credentials in the poverty stakes, finds that poverty in India far exceeds that back home. Indeed, he presents it as pervasive and endemic to the sub-continent (notice he uses the phrase 'poverty *of* India' rather than 'poverty *in* India'). In both passages, the vast country is generally perceived as being abject, in Kristeva's sense of that word: it smells awful, naked children are begging and looking through the refuse, there are rotting carcases in the street and men openly defecating in public. Similarly, both locate their respective Indias in the European past – Lewis likens what he sees to the 'picaresque' and Jenkins finds a 'plague scene from the middle ages' at the bottom of the Hilton hotel – thereby demonstrating a classic case of what Johannes Fabian has called 'the denial of coevalness'.[4] India is located temporally behind the advanced present from which these writers have travelled; it is positioned further down the evolutionary historical queue than Europe, which leads at the front. But what is perhaps more alarming about these passages is that they are each prefaced with assertions of a relativistic approach to India. Lewis states that he resolved to 'rinse [his] mind of all preconceptions' in order to describe what he found and, more disturbingly perhaps, Jenkins outlines a 'new humanist' approach to cultural difference which 'understands and celebrates the huge differences that exist between peoples'.[5] Despite their best efforts to do so both Lewis and Jenkins appear to fall back on the same, rather hackneyed, colonial tropes and stereotypes that secure India firmly behind Europe in terms of history, society and culture.

Although they were written in different places and at different times, the above passages are both describing cultural interactions taking place within what Mary Louise Pratt calls 'the contact zone': that is, the 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.'[6] This thesis is concerned with the ways in which the experience of various 'contact zones' both within and outside of Wales is registered in the work of several Anglophone Welsh writers. To be sure, the thesis does not seek to verify the veracity of writers' depictions of other cultures and places – although 'authenticity' is a value which is

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[4] Fabian examines the ways in which anthropological discourse has constructed other societies as distant not only in space but also in time: 'to belong to the past, to be not yet what *We* are, is what makes *Them* the object of our "explanations" and "generalizations". Everything we ever had to say on the topic, from primitive mentality to mythical consciousness, to pre-rational, preliterate thought, feeds on temporal distancing.' Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Work of Anthropology: Critical Essays, 1971-1991* (Amsterdam, Hardwood Academic Publishing, 2000), p.198

[5] Nigel Jenkins, *Gwalia in Khasia*, p.25

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

clearly important for several of the writers studied in the following pages – nor does it propose to be a comprehensive survey of all cultural interactions in the Anglophone literature of Wales. Rather, it focuses on the work of writers who I believe warrant sustained attention because of the complex ways in which the experience of encountering new territories and cultures is registered in their writing. Exploring a variety of textual forms, including the traditional forms of poetry and short stories that usually fall within the term 'literature', as well as travel writing, journals and letters, the thesis attempts to ask questions such as: how is the experience of being in a foreign environment registered? In what way is cultural difference constructed and represented? To what extent do these texts reproduce or, indeed, challenge the prevailing ideologies of the time? How are they related to colonial structures of power and, in the case of the later writers, the legacy of colonialism?

The term 'contact zone' is used by Pratt in her seminal study of European travel writing, *Imperial Eyes* (1992), which has been highly influential to this present study. Pratt seeks to understand the ways in which travel books and exploration writing by Europeans about non-European parts of the world classified and normalized the indigenous 'other' and territory according to European standards of knowledge and appreciation in order to validate their expansionist projects. She examines the ways in which various literary tropes and stereotypes associated with colonial discourse were adopted and (sometimes) adapted by European travel writers in the non-European world and then traces the ways in which these tropes survived and mutated in the work of contemporary postcolonial travellers. Following a similar model to the one Pratt sets out in her study, this thesis explores the ways in which Anglophone Welsh writers throughout the twentieth century have reproduced, reaffirmed and challenged colonial tropes and stereotypes.

In applying theoretical approaches from postcolonial studies and travel writing studies to instances of cultural interaction within the work of several twentieth-century Anglophone Welsh writers, this thesis builds on recent scholarly attempts to view Welsh writing in English through colonial and postcolonial paradigms. One of the major problems that critics have encountered in trying to apply postcolonial models to Wales is the (often contentious) issue of the country's status as a 'colony' and the extent to which it has and continues to participate in colonialism. Some studies of Welsh writing in English have taken Wales' status as a colony as self-evident. Stephen Knight in *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (2004), for example, states that his work 'sets out to read Welsh fiction in English to understand how the

literature of a colony, in the language of the colonizer, has been affected by its situation.'[7] However, other studies have taken a more nuanced approach to viewing Wales through a postcolonial lens. Kirsti Bohata, in her ground-breaking book *Postcolonialism Revisited* (2004), assesses the extent to which postcolonial paradigms can be usefully applied to Wales and its English-language literature. She points out, for instance, that Wales' complex history of colonization/neo-colonialism makes it difficult to apply a straightforward model of colonialism to the country.[8] Drawing on historical examples, Bohata explains that the Welsh can be viewed as a people who have been both the subject of colonialism and willing participants in Empire, and so points out that Wales 'does not fit neatly into a linear-progressive model of colonization, anti-colonialism and decolonization/independence'.[9] However, she concludes that despite the complex history of colonization/neo-colonialism, postcolonial paradigms can be usefully applied to Wales to 'reveal the ways in which the Welsh have been subjected to a form of imperialism over a long period of time, while also acknowledging the way the Welsh have been complicit in their own subjugation and in the colonization of others.'[10]As Bohata notes, this way of seeing Wales - as both colonized and as colonizing - challenges and complicates the type of simplistic binary view of colonial relations (i.e. West vs. East) that is found in much postcolonial theory.[11] Bohata's introduction is particularly useful because not only does it outline the ways in which postcolonial theory can be productively applied to Wales, it also demonstrates how the case of Wales and its literature can be used to question some of the more universalising features of that theory. She goes on to examine various texts in the light of postcolonial theory, addressing, for instance, the complex ways in which the Welsh have been 'othered' (often by

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[7] Steven Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.xiii

[8] Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.8

[9] Bohata suggests, for example, that it is possible to see 'instances of devastating cultural imperialism' after the Acts of Union, particularly during the nineteenth century in the way in which the Welsh language, Nonconformity and Welsh women were denigrated in the 1847 Report into the State of Education in Wales, better known as the 'Treachery of the Blue Books'. Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p.9

[10] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p.5 Elsewhere Bohata has argued that the validity of a postcolonial discussion of Welsh writing in English is 'not dependent on showing that Wales was once a colony or is now post-colonial' and that 'the long and complex history of the invasion, colonisation and finally the annexation and incorporation of Wales into England, with the ongoing, highly variable, experiences of the cultural imperialism of metropolitan England, not to mention Wales's own imperialist roles is actually a very rich ground for postcolonial analysis, and the literature of this complex and conflicted country even more so.' Kirsti Bohata, '"Psycho-colonialism" Revisited', *New Welsh Review* No.69 (Autumn 2005), 31-39, (p.34)

[11] This binary view is predicated on a homogenized Occident or 'West' set up against an equally homogenized 'East' or 'non-West'. As Caren Kaplan points out, terms such as 'Western' and 'non-Western', are highly problematic because they 'pose pure extremes against each other ... reinforcing the notion that both "West" and "non-West" are unified, consistent categories frozen in configurations of unequal power relations.' Caren Kaplan, '"Getting to know you": Travel, Gender and the Politics of Representation' in *Late Imperial Culture* edited by Roman De La Campa, E. Ann Kaplan, Michael Sprinker (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp.33-52, p.34

themselves) using literary tropes and 'stereotypes of alterity', and the ways in which postcolonial theories of hybridity and cultural authenticity can be applied to Anglophone Welsh texts which feature 'contact zones' (she also uses the term 'cultural exchanges') located *within* and on the borders of Wales. With the exception of Lynette Roberts' writing about Llanybri, which might be considered one example of the ways the Welsh have been represented as 'other' by an 'outsider', this thesis is primarily concerned with those Anglophone Welsh texts that feature contact zones *outside* of Wales in places such as India, Brazil and Australia. Apart from the attention paid to Alun Lewis' writing in India and Welsh writing about America there has been very little work examining Welsh writing about non-European areas of 'contact' such as these. Neither has there been much critical attention to the ways in which Welsh writers have participated in the 'othering' of places and peoples outside of Wales both during colonialism and its aftermath.

This study also seeks to extend the postcolonial approach to Welsh writing in English by exploring some of the ways contemporary Anglophone Welsh writers are addressing the legacy of colonialism, particularly how far their work might be seen to challenge, reaffirm or simply expose enduring colonial myths and the ideologies behind them. Within the burgeoning study of travel writing, itself an off-shoot of postcolonial studies, many critics have been concerned with the ways in which writers deal with the genre's legacy of colonialism in an increasingly cosmopolitan and multicultural world. In *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (2006) Debbie Lisle investigates the continued use of stereotypes of 'foreignness' in travel writing that presents a supposedly cosmopolitan vision of global culture where differences are celebrated.[12] Similarly, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan have examined the ways in which the nostalgia for Empire demonstrated in much contemporary travel writing functions to contest the perception that the genre is obsolete within an increasingly globalised world where the possibility of 'real' travel to 'new' places is no longer possible.[13] They argue that 'Imperialist nostalgia' is very useful to the contemporary travel writer who can 'deploy it to mystify their own economic motives, as well as to yearn for the 'simpler' ways of life – often rural, premodern, preindustrial – that they, and their metropolitan readers, persuade themselves they need.'[14] For them, this nostalgia describes 'a more generalized, pastoral mode of wistful reminiscence that seeks

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[12] Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
[13] Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000)
[14] Ibid, p. 29

control over, but not responsibility for, a mythicized version of the past ... it attempts the restoration of Empire's former (imagined) glories, and the resuscitation of Empire's erstwhile (imaginary) 'subordinate' subjects.[15] Lisle argues that the discourse of nostalgia is important because it allows travel writers to escape complex contemporary issues such as multiculturalism, political pluralism, and ethnic conflict by positing the existence of a world in which geopolitical borders were distinct and firm, separating civilised from primitive, safe from dangerous:

> [Travel writers] long for the territorial distinctions of Empire where everyone understood how the structures and practices of colonial power separated home and away. But as the home is penetrated and re-imagined by foreign subjects and cultures, it becomes a space of ambivalence that is no longer secured by the borders of Empire. But it also becomes a time of ambivalence: globalisation makes it increasingly difficult to locate a sanctified home at the front of the historical queue (and therefore in the present) and everywhere else farther behind in different stages of evolution (and therefore past). Nostalgia, then, becomes the cure for spatiotemporal ambivalence: by looking back to a time when the territorial claims of Empire were sacrosanct, readers and writers are assured of *natural* distinctions between civilised and uncivilised, modern and primitive, evolved and backward.[16]

By looking at the ways in which contemporary Welsh writers continue to adopt, adapt and sometimes challenge colonial tropes and the ways in which they employ a discourse of nostalgia, this thesis seeks to reveal the contemporary politics in their writing.

I begin by exploring the ways in which colonial India and its people are depicted in the poetry, fiction and correspondence of the poet Alun Lewis. Critics such as Tony Brown, M. Wynn Thomas, John Pikoulis and Kirsti Bohata have begun to explore the politics of colonialism in Lewis' writing on India and, more recently, Steve Hendon has applied Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity to Lewis' India fiction.[17] Following on from their work, this chapter employs a broad range of postcolonial theories to examine the ways in which Lewis' writing 'others' India both culturally and historically. Rural India, as depicted in his writing, vacillates between a hostile place of extreme otherness in which the British soldier has no territorial hold over the space which he traverses, and a utopian apolitical 'elsewhere' which

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[15] Ibid, p. 29-30

[16] Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, p. 213-214

[17] See, for example, M. Wynn Thomas and Tony Brown 'Colonial Wales and Fractured Language' and Kirsti Bohata's 'Beyond Authenticity? Hybridity and Assimilation in Welsh Writing in English' which both appeared in *Nations and Relations: Writing Across the British Isles* (ed.) by Tony Brown and Russell Stephens (Cardiff: New Welsh Review, 2000), pp. 71-88/ pp.89-121 and Steven Hendon, '"Everything is Fluid in Me": A Postcolonial Approach to Alun Lewis's *In The Green Tree*' in *Mapping The Territory: Critical Approaches to Welsh Fiction in English* ed. by Katie Gramich (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp.131-161. Using Bhabha's theory of hybridity Steve Hendon examines the ways in which three stories from *In The Green Tree* represent sites of transitional identity and cultural production.

exists outside the violent paradigm of colonial relations in India and contemporary European history in general. I argue that both these visions of India deprive it of any historical agency and then contrast them with Lewis' remarks about the future of India and the influence of American pop-cultural imperialism on its culture. I then move on to examine Lewis's creation of a gypsy-soldier figure in India who has no national affiliation or responsibility and is able to freely traverse contested geopolitical boundaries. I argue that this figure is a response to Lewis's sense of the nomadicism of the modern soldier as debilitating.

The following chapter proceeds to a reading of the work of the Argentine-born poet Lynette Roberts who was not only an acquaintance of Alun Lewis – her most widely anthologised 'Poem from Llanybri' was intended as an invitation for Lewis to visit her after she had met him – but like him encountered a culture and environment that was (at least initially) strange and foreign to her.[18] Roberts was born (of Welsh-Australian ancestry) in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1909 but she spent much of her teenage years being educated in England. In 1940 she married the poet and editor of the influential literary magazine *Wales*, Keidrych Rhys, and moved to the village of Llanybri in West Carmarthenshire where she initially encountered much suspicion and hostility from the local villagers. This experience, and her fascination with the culture of Llanybri, is registered in much of her poetry as well as in the various prose pieces she published about the dialect, architecture and cultural traditions of the villagers.

Until very recently, Roberts's poetry has been largely neglected by critics both within and outside of Wales.[19] In the few articles that have addressed her work, however, the subject of her identity and the nature of her relationship to Wales and its Anglophone literature have exercised those critics interested in her. Nigel Wheale, for example, has suggested that given her South American background Roberts might be considered as 'the one and only Latino-Welsh modernist.'[20] For Tony Conran, Roberts was a member of what he called 'the heroic generation of *Anglo-Welsh* women poets' which also included Brenda Chamberlain and

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[18] Along with R.S Thomas, Dylan Thomas and Brenda Chamberlain, Alun Lewis and Lynette Roberts are generally considered to be part of the first emergence of an English-language literary culture in Wales. These poets featured prominently in Keidrych Rhys' magazine *Wales* during the 1930s and many had published their own collections by the 1940s. In his article exploring the development of the 'first flowering', Peter Lewis notes that this generation of writers corresponds to 'the emergence in Wales, as a result of the educational reforms of the late nineteenth century, of a substantial intelligentsia for whom English was either their only language or their preferred language.' Peter Elfed Lewis, 'Poetry in the Thirties: A view of the "First Flowering"', *Anglo-Welsh Review* No. 71 (1982), pp.50-79, p.65.

[19] The unavailability of her work has been partly to blame for this. The publication of *Collected Poems* (2005) and *Diaries, Letters and Recollections* (2008), both edited by Patrick McGuiness, made her work generally available for the first time and has renewed interest in her poetry. The first Lynette Roberts conference took place in October, 2009 at the Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea.

[20] Nigel Wheale, 'Lynette Roberts: Legend and Form in the 1940s', *Critical Quarterly*, 36.3 (1994), 4-20 (p.5)

Margiad Evans.[21] James A. Davies, however, has shown scepticism towards claims that Roberts is an 'Anglo-Welsh writer'.[22] Davies argues that the perspective shown in her poetry is 'that of a foreigner' and claims that the presence of Welsh places, people and history in her work only 'offers tenuous support for [her] claim to Anglo-Welsh status.'[23] The degree to which Roberts can or cannot be viewed as an 'Anglo-Welsh' or, indeed, 'Latino-Welsh' poet is not the concern of this thesis and is, perhaps, only important to those trying to define her place within a particular canon. Tony Conran's description of her as someone who was positioned 'between cultures' would seem to bypass such pigeon-holing and offer a far more productive way of viewing her cultural status.[24] Linda Adams has argued that the liminal cultural position of the Anglophone Welsh writers of the 1920s and 30s can be viewed as analogous to that of the anthropologist who travels to and temporarily resides in a culture that is not his/her own.[25] In a fascinating article, Adams reads Alun Lewis's "Caseg Broadsheet" project, to which Lynette Roberts contributed her poem 'Circle of C', as an early point of contact between the English-language artists of Wales and the Welsh school of Anthropology.[26] Being 'between cultures', Roberts' cultural position was perhaps closer still to that of the ethnographer compared with her Anglo-Welsh contemporaries. Whilst Patrick McGuiness has suggested that her work may have been influenced by the Mass Observation movement, which began in 1936, and was intended to create 'a living anthropology' of ordinary British life, the links between her work and Welsh anthropology have not been explored.[27] Roberts was aware of the research into Welsh 'folk' culture being conducted at the time by the geographer-turned-anthropologist Iorwerth Peate, who, along with other significant anthropologists working in Wales, published articles in the literary magazine

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[21] Anthony Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p.165

[22] James A. Davies, 'Dylan Thomas and his Welsh Contemporaries', in *Welsh Writing in English,* ed. by M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 120-164, p.153

[23] Ibid. Davies's reluctance to give her 'Anglo-Welsh' status also appears to stem from his sense that as a 'fully-paid up' modernist she produced poetry which was closer to the high-modernism of David Jones rather than her Anglo-Welsh contemporaries.

[24] Tony Conran, *Frontiers*, p.32. Conran's description recalls Homi Bhabha's use of the phrase 'interstitial perspective' to describe one who is in-between cultures.

[25] Adams argues that the sense that Welsh culture was under threat at the outset of the twentieth century provided an impetus for both Anglophone writers and Welsh anthropologists: 'Both anthropologists and the creative artists were seeking a continuity in the relationship to the natural world which they detected deep within the strata of Welsh culture, a continuity that was inscribed in the landscape and in the secret codes of its language.' She suggests that because writers of the First Flowering were excluded from the 'primitive sources of creative energy' which they saw in Welsh language culture, they essentially adopted an 'anthropological relationship to Welsh culture, that of the I-witnessing participant observer.' Linda Adams, 'Fieldwork: The Caseg Broadsheets and the Welsh Anthropologist', *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays* 5 (1999), 51-85 (p.83)

[26] Ibid.

[27] Patrick McGuiness, Introduction to *Diaries, Letters and Recollections* ed. by Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), p.xv

Wales. I argue that Roberts was not only in a position of cultural liminality similar to that of the ethnographer but that she approached Llanybri as an anthropological site rich in endangered cultural practices that were in need of preserving. I suggest that her more conservative writing demonstrates a variety of what the anthropologist James Clifford has termed 'salvage ethnography', the process whereby a culture is deemed incapable of self-preservation and is in need of an outsider to represent it and to serve as 'custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity.'[28]

In the second half of the thesis I examine what might be called 'post-colonial' Anglophone Welsh writing; specifically, travel writing and poetry about non-European places from the 1960s onwards. In this section I explore the ways in which writers such as Harri Webb, Bryn Griffiths, Robert Minhinnick, Nigel Jenkins and Niall Griffiths engage with cultural difference and the legacy of colonialism in their writing about places such as Australia, Brazil and India. Despite their professed liberal, cosmopolitan approach to cultural difference, several of these writers continue to employ colonial stereotypes in their work. In the third chapter the outward looking perspective of the thesis is resumed by exploring the images and impressions of Australia inscribed in the work of several Welsh poets and writers since the 1960s. Whilst there has been much critical interest in the literary correspondences between Wales and America there has been relatively little written about Anglophone Welsh literature that deals with Australia, which, though undoubtedly rarer by comparison, has arguably been just as multifarious and complex. In the Welsh poetry of the 1960s and 70s alone, Australia features, for example, as a place of exile from Wales (T. Harri Jones and Bryn Griffiths), a model on which Wales's future as a nation could be based (Harri Webb), as well as a place where Welsh identity is, or can be, radically altered or renewed. This part of the discussion begins by looking at the perceived cultural and historical differences between Wales and Australia encoded in Harri Webb's poem 'The Boomerang in the Parlour' and its reproduction of the colonial myth of Australia as a land that is physically and historically empty. I then move on to explore the relationship between the Australian landscape and its inhabitants, both immigrant and aborigine, as it is depicted in Bryn Griffiths' poetry before

[28] James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* ed. by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California and England: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 98-121, p. 113

looking at the ways in which Niall Griffiths engages with the myth of Australia as *terra nullius* in his recent Australian travelogue *Ten Pound Pom* (2011).[29]

The final chapter is devoted to the exploration of the forms of nostalgia demonstrated in Robert Minhinnick's writing about his travels in the Amazon rainforest and Rio de Janeiro in the early 1990s.[30] Minhinnick has been a significant figure in the Welsh literary scene as both a former, long-term editor of *Poetry Wales* and as an accomplished, award-winning poet and essayist. So far critics have primarily been concerned with his poetry and prose dealing with particular Welsh localities, yet as the product of a long-term environmental and humanitarian activist who has travelled extensively with an interest in the intersections between local and global politics, Minhinnick's work also provides a rich and largely untapped source of material about the Welsh experience abroad and the interactions between Wales and the wider world in general. By comparing the depictions of the culture and environment(s) of Wales found in his poetry and prose with his depiction of the Amazon rainforest in his Brazilian travel essay, I show how, although it is ostensibly motivated by his environmental concerns over the preservation of the Amazon rainforest, Minhinnick's essay effectively amounts to a search for cultural and environmental authenticities that are deemed to have been lost at home in Wales and elsewhere in the world. I then move on to explore the ways in which the travel essay demonstrates an ironic nostalgia for forms of travel, identity and cultural interaction associated with the era of colonial expansion in the tropics and how this nostalgia works to distance the traveller from the political implications of the discourse whilst simultaneously allowing him indulge in primitivist rhetoric and fantasies of colonial travel. I end the chapter by discussing the ways in which Minhinnick's poetry about Rio in the collection *Hey Fatman* (1994) can be read as a reaction to the politics of travel in the (non-European) post-colonial world.

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[29] Although Niall Griffiths was born in Liverpool he has lived in Aberystwyth for nearly two decades and it has often been the central setting in his novels. I have included him in this study because he frequently refers to Wales as 'home' and compares it to Australia in interesting ways in his travelogue.

[30] As a result of his travels in Brazil, Minhinnick produced the travel essay 'Watching the Fire Eater', collected in *Watching The Fire Eater* (Bridgend: Seren, 1992) and several poems which feature in his collection *Hey Fatman* (Bridgend: Seren, 1994)

CHAPTER ONE

Alun Lewis and the politics of colonial India

In the winter of 1943 Alun Lewis wrote two particularly interesting letters from India. One was to become celebrated as a promise of return to the culture of Wales: 'When I come back', he told his parents, 'I shall always tackle my writing through Welsh life and ways of thought: it's my only way'.[31] The second letter, however, remains comparatively unknown but is suggestive of a markedly different cultural interaction:

> I know I'm miles & miles outside [India], not as far as an ICS [Indian Civil Service officer], but hopelessly far for a poet to be. My chief salvation is the awareness of this, and the strange feeling that comes sometimes, & swings me into an immediate and brief communion with this country. I think the spade work of learning the language, & reading books on the tribes & districts & the clarity to use your eyes all the time & see, see, see – all of them help: & reading the Upanishads ...[32]

In both letters Lewis appears to view the establishment of an indigenous perspective as key to his writing. But whilst 'knowing' India was very much a priority for the poet it was also a source of continual frustration. Making an effort to commit to India meant that Lewis was often confronted with epistemological questions – how does one come to know a culture? What forms of education, or 'spade work' as he calls it, are required to complete a 'communion' with a foreign people and their way of life? The approach that Lewis took to India was in fact surprisingly varied. He researched the indigenous peoples of India through contemporary anthropological studies and developed an interest in Hinduism and Hindu scripture, the influence of which can be seen in the prominent use of the Upanishads in one of his stories.[33] Despite their seemingly antithetical philosophies, he considered these approaches to the indigenous culture of India as part of his 'salvation' - a term that highlights the enormous sense of faith he placed in India to mediate his increasingly alienated sense of self.

In November 1943 Lewis made regular trips to a bookshop in Pune (formerly known as Poona) to read the diary of Elwin Verrier, a British missionary-turned-anthropologist

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[31] Alun Lewis, *In the Green Tree: The Letters and Short Stories of Alun Lewis* (Cardigan: Parthian books, 2006), p. 56. Further references to this edition will be included in the text as *IGT*

[32] Alun Lewis, *A Cypress Walk* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2007), p.176

[33] 'The Earth is a Syllable' (*IGT*, 107-114) takes its title from the short Upanishad, the Mandukya; within the story there are also references to the older Upanishad, the Brihad Aranyaka. For a reading of the significance of the Upanishads within that story see John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987)

living with the Gond tribe of Indians in Northern India.[34] From there his interest in tribal India grew and he obtained a subscription to *Man in India*, an anthropological journal edited by Elwin and his assistant Bill Archer, a civil servant who collected tribal folk songs. Lewis was understandably reluctant to write directly to Elwin who was a close friend of Ghandi and Nehru; he felt him to be 'too august and intense a figure just to write to as an outsider' (*IGT*, 56). However, he wrote to Archer instead and received an invitation to stay with the two anthropologists who were then observing a people whom Lewis describes as 'the aboriginal hill tribes of Bengal.'(*IGT*, 56) In a letter to his wife, Gweno, he describes *Leaves from the Jungle* (1936), Elwin's diary, as a 'brilliant laconic diary of the most primitive life and [Elwin's] own wit and bravery and faith' and the possibility of meeting Elwin as 'a profound experience – like seeing a bit of God and being unable to commit myself to his service.' (*IGT*, 56) In Elwin the possibility of a greater 'communion' with an otherwise impenetrably foreign and mysterious India seemed tenable: 'How attractive', he told Freda Aykroyd, is 'the thought is of committing oneself to such a wild and austere field of study and roughing it out till the crack of doom among those simple primitives.'[35] Although Elwin was not a trained anthropologist, by the time Lewis had heard of him he had published several books in this 'wild field of study' and had devoted himself to the Functionalist school of British Anthropology developed by Bronislaw Malinowski.[36] Unlike the 'arm-chair' anthropologists of the late nineteenth century who relied on information from missionaries and colonial officers, followers of Malinowski's Functionalism were to *reside* in the 'primitive' cultures. This kind of imbedded position was in fact very similar to that which Alun Lewis adopted when in contact with Indian peasant and tribal communities. We can see this in a letter to

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[34] Verrier Elwin, *Leaves from the Jungle: Life in a Gond village* (London: John Murray, 1936). Lewis's interest in Verrier Elwin and in the anthropology conducted in India has gone completely unnoticed by his critics. Indeed, Lewis's correspondence with Elwin and his assistant is not mentioned in John Pikoulis's authoritative biography *Alun Lewis: A Life* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991). Elwin was a highly controversial figure in India during the thirties and forties. He originally travelled there as a Christian missionary but he became disenchanted and converted to Hinduism in 1935 after living with Mohandas Ghandi. As an advocate of Indian independence, Elwin was a valuable asset to the Indian Congress and was considered by the British government as someone who had 'gone native' and joined the other side. Elwin then split with the nationalists and self trained as an anthropologist. *Leaves from the Jungle* is a diary of his experience of studying the Gond tribe of central India. Unperturbed by the ethnographic imperative to maintain an objective distance from the object of one's study, Elwin married a young member of the tribe. He was the first Englishman to be granted Indian citizenship after independence. See Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals, and India* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999)

[35] Alun Lewis, *A Cypress Walk* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2007), p.176

[36] In his biography of Verrier Elwin, Ramachandra Guha highlights a letter in which Elwin remarks 'in ethnography I am a quite definite and almost bigoted adherent of the Functional School of which [Bronislaw] Malinowski is the proponent.' Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized,* p.101

John Petts and Brenda Chamberlain when he describes a time spent among the Indians of a small village:

> One morning I woke up in a green valley among the foothills. There was a hamlet nearby. ... A group of villagers filed past me in complete silence, with turbans and white dotis, the women silently carrying their gleaming brass pitchers on their heads, barefooted and in red and blue saris. And the sky grey and translucent with the first clarity of morning. Utter silence, and me lying there seeing these silent people going about their pastoral and eternal work, accepting me as a newcomer lying there waking. And I really felt that I had wakened up in Heaven. And I think that's how Heaven would be, most nice.[37]

The self image that Lewis forges here has clear affinities with the anthropologist adventurer who explores strange new worlds and 'native' ways of life.[38] As a stealthy near invisible insider within the indigenous community Lewis's behaviour in the 'contact zone' is very much like that required in what an anthropologist of Malinowski's period and persuasion called Participant-Observation. In fact, the desire to get inside the 'native' mind was an ethnographic imperative that Bronislaw Malinowski laid out in his seminal work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). The ethnographer was urged 'to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world'[39].

In this chapter we explore some of the ways in which contact between the British soldiers and the Indian people is depicted in Lewis's writing about India. Lewis frequently locates India in the European past but his portrayal of the place vacillates between an a-historical, utopian 'elsewhere' which exists outside contemporary European history and a hostile, transgressive place of violence where both the Indians and the British soldiers have no territorial purchase. One of the most significant poems featuring the former version of India is 'The Peasants'.[40] It begins with a description of the life of the rural Indians:

> The dwarf barefooted, chanting
> Behind the oxen by the lake,
> Stepping lightly and lazily among the thorntrees

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[37] John Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), p.158

[38] This sense of him as actively pursuing the 'primitive' is also evident in a letter to his wife Gweno; describing his time in the Nigrili Hills he writes: 'I swam in the bitter cold lakes and went into the wild areas among the hills hunting for a sight of the lost tribe of Israel, the biblical Todas with their queer rush temples and their huts like gnomes [sic] houses, beautifully thatched and finished, tiny little bowls under the trees.' Alun Lewis, *Letters to my Wife*, ed. by Gweno Lewis (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1989), p. 387

[39] Bronislaw Malinowski *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), p.25

[40] Alun Lewis, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren, 1994), p.144. Henceforth known in the body of the text as *CP*

Dusky and dazed with sunlight, half awake; (*CP*, 144)

The opening verse portrays the Indians as a people who live in a peaceful, dream-like state; their lackadaisical movements and their 'dazed', 'half-awake' consciousness convey a near-transcendent state of being that never fully reaches or comes to terms with present reality. In the last verse, the perspective changes towards the British soldiers who pass them by:

Across scorched hills and trampled crops
The soldiers straggle by.
History staggers in their wake.
The peasants watch them die. (*CP*, 144)

As M. Wynn Thomas perceptively points out in his discussion of the poem, the opening word of this verse changes the 'physical and cultural perspective of the poem' and 'signif[ies] the migrant soldiers' exclusion from the inner life of the country they are condemned, by war, to traverse.'[41] It is important for us to recognise, however, that if the soldiers are excluded from the rural Indians and the timeless existence that they represent then the reverse is also true: India and the rural Indians are excluded from the British soldiers and, more importantly, the history that 'staggers in their wake.' (*CP*, 144) The central idea expressed in the last verse is that history itself walks, albeit unsteadily, with the British soldiers, rather than with the Indian peasant. It implies that the war essentially marches past rural India without affecting the peasants (although it does appear to affect their crops). The Indians themselves remain, reduced to the role of passive spectators, watching the destructive narrative of European history play out.

Vision and Narrative

Towards the end of his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argues that there are two conflicting forms of representation that are frequently renewed in colonial discourse.[42] He describes these forms as *vision* and *narrative*.[43] Said asserts that in order to achieve the former form of representation the Orientalist 'surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him – culture, religion, mind, history,

[41] M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference: Twentieth-Century Writing in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p.65
[42] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.239
[43] Ibid.

society' and reduces every detail of it to a set of reductive categories. There is, according to Said, no recourse against these categories; they are 'final terminals holding every variety of Oriental behaviour within a general view of the whole field.'[44] Vision is thus a form of essentialism which functions to suppress the human reality of the 'other'. In constant conflict with this vision, however, is historical narrative:

> Against this static system of 'synchronic essentialism' I have called vision because it presumes that the whole Orient can be seen panoptically, there is constant pressure. The source of the pressure is narrative, in that if any Oriental detail can be shown to move, or to develop, diachrony is introduced into the system. What seemed stable – and the Orient is synonymous with stability and unchanging stability – now appears unstable. Instability suggests that history, with its disruptive detail, its currents of change, its tendency towards growth, decline, or dramatic movement, is possible in the Orient and for the Orient.[45]

The two forms of conflicting representation that Said identifies can be used as a means of characterising the way Lewis depicts the rural Indians and the British soldiers in his writing. In 'The Peasants', the British soldiers are conceptualised in terms of a historical *narrative*: they walk with history, although it is implied that they do so to their deaths. European history is figured here as wholly unstable and apparently in decline. The Indian peasants, however, are conceived of in the kind of static 'synchronic' terms that we find in Said's concept of 'vision': they are timeless beings who are not subject to the disruptive European history taking place around them. The figure of the peasant, static and timeless, functions in the poem, therefore, as a correlative through which the soldier's predicament is measured: the Indians' permanence is set against the transience of the British, the fixed peasant against the homeless itinerant soldier. It is important to recognise, however, that this representation effectively consigns the Indians to an unchanging existence and therefore denies them any historical agency. By implication, they, like India itself, cannot change and have no potential to do so.

This view is often repeated in Lewis' descriptions of the peasants in his letters. He declares, in one letter, for example that the villages he encounters in the jungle are 'simple and solitary in clearings isolated completely and it seems eternally from all our obligations and distractions.'[46] The difference between the existence of the soldiers and the peasants is emphasised in the following passage:

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid, p.240
[46] Alun Lewis, *A Cypress Walk: Letters to Frieda* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2006), p.199

> I've got very interested in the war in the East, not only as a purely military problem, but also because these countries and peoples are a constant source of wonderment to me: so strange and individual and unlike our closed swift little Western world are they. Every time I look at an Indian peasant, I feel tranquil, especially when we are on some fantastically strenuous exercise, for the peasant is so utterly different and settled and calm and eternal that I know that my little passing excitement and worries doesn't exist in his world and are therefore not universal and will disappear.[47]

Lewis conveys here what Said describes as 'a sense of the irreducible distance separating white from colored [sic], or Occidental from Oriental'.[48] In comparison to the 'swift' and unsettled Europeans, the peasants are both spatially and temporally static: 'settled' and 'eternal'. At times, Lewis' desire to make the Indians conform to this simplistic binary dichotomy is rather conspicuous. In the following passage, for example, he contemplates the degree to which the culture within the villages that he has encountered has remained unchanged given the recent availability of modern forms of transport:

> The villagers out in these wilds must have stayed here for generations - they just *couldn't* leave - it was too far to walk. Now they've got buses and electric trains and I suppose some of them go. But I believe 99% of them are faithful to their forebears and live as they did, and do not go away; not like us will-o-the-wisps of the West who never stay long anywhere.[49]

India is set against the West in familiar ways in this passage. The majority of Indians are spatially fixed in villages possessing an unchanged culture whereas the people of the 'West' are characterised by their inability to fix themselves in place for any meaningful amount of time. Lewis values those Indians who have been 'faithful' to their forebears by remaining within a definitively circumscribed locus - the village. Those Indians who have followed the new routes made possible by modern technologies of travel are deemed to have abandoned their cultural roots. By surmising that only a small percentage of the villagers have moved beyond the locality, Lewis conveniently makes the village conform to the romantic ideal of a pristine, isolated culture. But this depiction is, of course, problematic because it effectively erases all but one per cent of the village's connections with the outside world. James Clifford has discussed the way in which the anthropologist's tendency to 'localize' their objects of study within a given spatial practise – the 'field' – tends to 'marginalize or erase several

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[47] Alun Lewis, *Letters To My Wife*, (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1989), p.394
[48] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p.228
[49] Alun Lewis, *Letters To My Wife*, p.364 (his emphasis)

blurred boundary areas, historical realities that slip out of the ethnographic frame.' [50] As a result, things such as transport technologies (i.e. boats, cars, airplanes) which suggest 'systematic prior and ongoing contacts and commerce with exterior places and forces which are not part of the field/object' are frequently erased from ethnographic accounts.[51] Lewis' depiction of the Indian villages as completely cut off from the rest of the world similarly erases their participation in a complex historical reality, including, of course, the national context in which they are located.

These depictions, of course, serve a particular ideological purpose. The aura of apartness surrounding the rural Indians may have relieved Lewis's personal suspicions that the experience of war is universal but it also relieves the British of any responsibility for their actions in India. Indeed, in 'The Peasants' it is almost as if the soldiers are not even in India but are merely hovering just above its surface. As Kirsti Bohata has noted, however, this romantic view of the peasants serves to 'obscure the humanity of the Indian population and their rootedness in the history and politics of colonial India, however far removed they appear to be'. [52] If the peasant is outside history then he/she cannot be affected by the present tumultuous reality. The culpability of the common soldier for interfering with the lives of the Indians need not be brought into question since India, represented as timeless and static, is not subject to the influences of European history, whether they be destructive or not. The representational strategy that Lewis adopted to address the difference between the Indians and the British is similar to the way in which T.E Lawrence (the infamous 'Lawrence of Arabia') depicts the Arab world as 'other' in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), his account of his role as a British agent in the Arab rebellion against the Turks.[53] Edward Said reads Lawrence's text as a prime example of the conflict between narrative history and vision. Said argues that, as a servant of 'a bureaucratic institution based on a certain conservative vision of the Orient', Lawrence was an 'imperial agent' who attempted to 'prod the Orient into active life, to press the Orient into service, to turn the Orient from unchanging "Oriental" passivity into militant modern life', thereby enlisting the Arabs to help in what was a struggle between European powers.[54] Whilst Lewis' presentation of India as static and passive recalls

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[50] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.23. Clifford is highly sceptical of the idea that cultures have ever been completely isolated; hence his use of the homophone roots/routes.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Kirsti Bohata, 'Beyond Authenticity? Hybridity and Assimilation in Welsh Writing in English', in *Nations and Relations: Writing Across the British Isles*, ed. by Tony Brown and Russell Stephens (Cardiff: New Welsh Review, 2000), pp. 89-121, p. 107

[53] Lewis did in fact seek out and re-read Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* whilst in India.

[54] Said, *Orientalism*, p.240

Lawrence's depiction of the 'Orient', there are significant and important differences between them. Unlike Lawrence, Lewis's portrayal of India does not attempt to 'stimulate the Orient (lifeless, timeless, forceless) into movement'.[55] Indeed, we might say that his aim was to do the opposite. Lewis does not attempt to enlist the peasants in the war effort but portrays them as sealed off from it.

Where India does not conform to this static vision and appears to be moving of its own accord it is depicted in a very different way in Lewis's writing. The protagonist of the short story 'The Earth is a Syllable' portrays the Quit India campaign for independence as a movement that interferes with the attempts of the British to save India and the world from Fascism.[56] Towards the end of the story he discusses the hostile atmosphere created by the campaign:

> He'd been more nervous in India than he was here. It was lonely in India, no friendship there, nor any active hostility to brace you. Just loneliness and strangeness. It wasn't dangerous there: just nerves, that's all. You couldn't walk into a native village and have a good time there like you wanted to. QUIT INDIA they painted on the walls. Quit India, the silly fools. How can we? India is part of the world. It's the world we can't quit. No it was just nerves in India. (*CS*, 193)

This is not the peaceful, ahistorical India that we see the soldiers walk past in 'The Peasants' (*CP*, 131). Indeed, the soldier regards the Quit India movement with disdain precisely because he believes that the Indians are acting as if they are not 'part of the world' – which is, of course, the way they are depicted elsewhere in Lewis' writing. The soldier regards the Quit India campaign as foolish and reckless because it jeopardises the war, which he believes to be a fight for the entire 'world' (i.e. not just the British Empire). Of course, by implying that India has responsibilities to conduct itself in a proper manner as a member of this 'world', the soldier effectively invalidates any claim the Independence campaign has to legitimacy whilst co-opting the country into the war effort at the same time. This co-option enacts something akin to the process that the postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has described as 'worlding'.[57] The term refers to the way in which colonized space is made to exist in the 'world' of the colonizer. This process can be seen, for instance, in the act of mapping, where a particular colonial space is inscribed onto a map of the world and hence made an object of

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[55] Ibid, p.241

[56] Alun Lewis, *Collected Stories*, ed. by Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1990), p.190-205. Henceforth referenced in the body of the text as *CS*

[57] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, 24.3 (1985), 247-272

knowledge that can be controlled. However, it can also occur in more subtle ways. Spivak uses the example of a British soldier walking across the landscape in early nineteenth century India to describe the manner in which imperialism can work to 'overwrite' the colonized space by simply being there:

> [The soldier] is actually engaged in consolidating the self of Europe by obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground. He is worlding *their own world*, which is far from mere uninscribed earth, anew, by obliging *them* to domesticate the alien as Master.[58]

What Spivak is saying here is that the presence of the soldier makes the indigenous people see themselves as 'other'.[59] As an agent of imperialism, the soldier enacts a 'cartographic transformation' where what is perceived to be uninscribed earth is incorporated into the world (of the British Empire).[60] Following this logic, the solider in Lewis's story enacts a kind of cartographic hold on India by asserting that it is part of the world and therefore subject to certain responsibilities.

Lewis is often presented by critics as being supportive of the Indian Independence movement. In his recent biographical introduction to *Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose* (1996), Ian Hamilton, for example, describes Lewis as being 'excited by his "India of ferment and massive stirrings" into the conviction that with one last generous act from England the continent could be free, rich and dignified.'[61] However, the representation of the Quit India campaign as illegitimate in his fiction is some ways reflects the logic of an argument that Lewis advanced prior to the war. In an article entitled 'If War Comes – Will I fight?' he questions the morality of entering the war purely to maintain the foreign and domestic interests of the British Empire. Here Lewis outlines what he believes to be a more altruistic cause for engaging in the war effort.[62] He argues that the British government should put the colonies under a 'supra-national mandate' that would give all the nations facing the threat of war 'access to [the Empire's] untapped wealth of raw materials.'[63] This would avoid engaging in war for the 'purely selfish reasons of British Imperialism' and reassure the public

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[58] Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur', p.253

[59] Spivak suggests that just by seeing and hearing the soldier 'rumour is being replaced by information, the figure of the European on the hills is being reinscribed from stranger to Master, to the sovereign as Subject with a capital S, ... The truth value of the stranger is being established as the reference point for the true (insertion into) history of these wild regions.' Ibid, p.254

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ian Hamilton, 'Introduction' to *Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p.50

[62] Alun Lewis, *A Miscellany,* p.67

[63] Ibid.

that they were 'fighting for the preservation of something worthy [sic] defending.'[64] What is interesting about this argument is that the supposedly altruistic form of war that Lewis thought worthy of committing his life to defend is wholly reliant on the continued exploitation of the British colonies and the lives of those within those colonies who are the 'subjects' of the Empire. Although his argument is ostensibly an anti-imperialist one, the version of a just war that he proposes does not allow (at least in the short term) for the kind of decolonisation that the Indian nationalists depicted in his later India writing were seeking.

In his study of the Second World War and the British Empire, Ashley Jackson uses the term 'War Imperialism' to describe Britain's approach to the colonies during the war.[65] Jackson explains that in order to mobilize the resources of those colonies which were less than fully cooperative, particularly where they encountered resistance from the indigenous political elites, Britain was prepared to 'take the gloves off and assume direct and firm control when normal circumstances did not prevail and [its] back was to the wall.'[66] The British felt justified in their actions in the colonies to achieve control by whatever means because the alternatives – German or Japanese colonial rule – were thought to be far worse than British rule:

> Though this might rupture of the fabric of Empire based on cooperation and consent, and stir the muddy pools of nationalism, victory was to be achieved at any cost. There was much indignation amongst some Britons who thought it thoroughly bad form that nationalists should push for concessions when Britain was in such a position, because, whatever one's stance on the future, there was little doubt that the alternatives of German or Japanese occupation and colonial rule were not to be relished, no matter how anti-British their subjects might be. This was why many who otherwise might have baulked at such 'old-fashioned' imperial action were prepared to support the firm repression that the Indian National Congress encountered after the 'Quit India' campaign was launched.[67]

This approach to the colonies is arguably reflected in the attitude of the soldier towards the Quit India campaign in 'The Earth as a Syllable' and perhaps in Lewis' own appropriation of the colonies in the argument he made for a 'selfless' war. He may have been a supporter of Indian independence but his writing, both prior and during the war, does not seem to allow India to possess a narrative of its own. The view of India as a participant in the global fight

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), p.531
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

against Fascism appears to contradict the view of the country presented in 'The Peasants', where history passes the rural Indians by without having any effect on them whatsoever. In one depiction, India is regarded as a nation which must not avoid its responsibilities and is co-opted into the fight. In the other depiction, it possesses no historical agency whatsoever and is therefore incapable of being part of the war. Both representations of India arguably benefit the British view of the situation. If India asserts itself through its pro-independence movements then it can be accused of detrimentally affecting the 'world' effort against fascism; it is childishly selfish for wishing to gain independence at such a time. If, however, it is deprived of any historical agency then it provides the British with a reassuring world that isn't touched by the ravages of the war and will carry on intact. Either way, these representational strategies do not allow a vision of India that accommodates any kind of future for the country on its own terms.

Transgressive Environments

Whilst these contradicting versions of India appear to deprive it of any authority it is also apparent that the British soldiers depicted in Lewis' Indian poetry and prose have very little power of their own. Whilst India is frequently painted as a *utopian* atemporal 'elsewhere' in much of Lewis's writing, it also appears as a place of extreme hostility and danger which the soldiers are condemned to traverse. It is this hostile India that we will consider in the following section of this chapter.

In 'The Mahratta Ghats' (*CP*, 131) the Indian landscape is depicted as an active and malevolent entity that scuppers all human endeavour:

> The valleys crack and burn, the exhausted plains
> Sink their black teeth into the horny veins
> Straggling the hills' red thighs, the bleating goats –
> Dry bents and bitter thistles in their throats –
> Thread the loose rocks by immemorial tracks.
> Dark peasants drag the sun upon their backs. (*CP*, 131)

Life, in all its aspects, is a perversion in this place. The people live a harsh life on a barren landscape/ bodyscape that penetrates and consumes itself in ways that suggest both cannibalistic ('sink their black teeth') and incestuous ('horny veins', 'red thighs') forms of transgression. The landscape here is 'othered' not only temporally but also spatially.

The trope of a hostile landscape is frequently found in early twentieth-century modernist accounts of colonial travel. Analysing Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902),

Rebecca Stott finds that Africa, 'initially fantasised as passive virgin', is replaced by a 'terrifying and threatening experience of Africa as an active and malevolent monster'.[68] Stott asserts that the narrative of a nature which is 'expected to be benign and maternal but is revealed to be monstrous, barbaric, a multiple transgressor (incestuous and cannibalistic)' is frequently played out in colonial discourse.[69] Stott suggests that these descriptions of colonial space draw on a post-Darwinian conception of Nature which, according to Adam Eli, led to reconfigurations of femininity as monstrous and unnatural.[70] In his study of the relationship between femininity and nature in the Victorian era, Eli argues that the monstrous version of Mother Nature that is captured in Tennyson's phrase 'Nature, red in tooth and claw', for instance, unsettled the traditionally benign figure of Mother Nature, turning her character into a 'mocking, savage oxymoron.' [71] It is possible that Lewis had Tennyson's phrase in mind when he described the Indian plains 'sink[ing] their black teeth [into] red thighs' (*CP*, 131) yet this monstrous nature is also found in Lewis' early poetry dealing with Welsh industrial environments. In 'The Rhondda' (*CP*, 89), the coal mine – a Welsh 'heart of darkness' – is envisioned as a dangerously voracious *femme fatale* who seduces men into her pit/womb before seizing their body parts:

> She gives men what they know.
> Daily to her pitch-black shaft
> Her whirring wheels suck husbands out of sleep.
> She for profit takes their hands and eyes. (*CP*, 89)

This is not a passive land producing goods for human consumption but a place where the consumers themselves are consumed. In both the Welsh and Indian landscapes the workers are reduced to objects that either feed the environment or are assimilated into it.[72] Another example can be found in the poem 'Indian Day', in which a solitary peasant works in 'fields of pain' where the sun is 'ploughing [him] under with his crop' (*CP*, 142). This is, of course, reminiscent of the effect the landscape has on Kurtz in Conrad's modernist fable. Stott

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[68] Rebecca Stott, 'Of Cannibal Mothers and Colonial Landscapes', in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-siècle Feminisms* ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp.150-166, p.153-4.
[69] Ibid, p.157-158
[70] Ibid, p.158
[71] James Eli Adams, 'Women Red in Tooth and Claw: Nature and the Feminine in Tennyson and Darwin', *Victorian Studies*, 33, No.1 (1989), 7-27 (p.7)
[72] Although I do not have space to pursue the idea here, the similarities between modernist writers' depictions of colonial environments and the depictions of the industrial environments of the South Wales coalfield by writers like Alun Lewis and Glyn Jones might be enlisted to advance an argument for viewing Wales as an 'internal colony' within the British Empire.

describes him as a 'potential consumer ... [who] is assimilated into an African wilderness that caresses, seduces and finally cannibalizes him.'[73]

In 'The Mahratta Ghats' the Indian peasants are also depicted as the victims of the environment. In the third verse the speaker focuses on the predicament of a solitary female peasant and wonders if 'she who burns and withers on the plain' will be able to emancipate herself from this environment. He finds that she is unable to do so:

> But no! She cannot move. Each arid patch
> Owns the lean folk who plough and scythe and thatch
> Its grudging yield and scratch its stubborn stones.
> The small gods suck the marrow from their bones. (*CP*, 131)

The Indian in this landscape is not like the sleepy, half-awake figures that the British soldiers encounter in 'The Peasants' but someone who is downtrodden, exploited by the environment itself. In a description that seems the opposite of traditional notions of property and ownership, the 'lean folk' are owned by the land they work on; they are in fact the property of the 'arid patch' which grudgingly releases its yield. This presentation of the peasant economy as inverted – land owning the people – is of great significance as a symbol which not only functions within the confines of Alun Lewis's poetry but resonates far beyond. Antonio Callari has investigated the ways in which the discourse of economics has been used in representations of the (non-Western) *other*. [74] He points out that the principle of property was used in the 'West's determination of the deficiencies of the other'. [75] Examining Marx's views of economic development in India, Callari shows how the perceived lack of economic development was believed to be due to arrested forms of property and 'the persistence of the communal "village" as a basic unit of social organization, a situation which only British rule could change'.[76] The inversion of the principle of property in Lewis's poem echoes the 'operation[s] of alterity' that Callari finds apparent in Western representations of economic development. Paralysed both temporally and spatially, the Indians do not exist independent of the land but are a part of it, constituted by the very conditions of a landscape that, whilst supporting life, appears intent on deliberately foiling all human endeavour. However, whilst the poem presents the peasant community as culturally and economically retrograde, it also

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[73] Rebecca Stott, 'Of Cannibal Mothers and Colonial Landscapes', p.156
[74] Antonio Callari, 'Economics and the Postcolonial other', in *Postcolonialism meets Economics* ed. by Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela (London: Routledge, 2004), p.121
[75] Ibid
[76] Ibid, p.120.

hints at an alarming proximity between the Indians and the British soldiers, who seem to fare no better in this environment. Indeed, the last verse, in particular, appears to suggest that the British and Indians are just as powerless as each other:

> Who is it climbs the summit of the road?
> Only the beggar bumming his dark load.
> Who was it cried to see the falling star?
> Only the landless soldier lost in a war.
>
> And did another thousand years go by in vain?
> And does another thousand start again? (*CP*, 131)

The series of rhetorical questions point towards the general sense of unease and uncertainty that manifests throughout the poem. Neither the British soldier nor the Indians are shown to possess any kind of conventional relationship to the place in which they find themselves. Indeed, whilst their apparent mobility ostensibly distinguishes the soldiers from the literally land-locked peasant, they are, in some sense, just as paralysed as each other. If the peasant is unable to move, the wandering soldier is unable to stay, unable to form any connection with the land and its people. Paradoxically then, he is paralysed in mobility; reduced to a mechanism of war that is trapped in a state of deterritorialisation.[77]

The central questions that the poem asks at its close are whether or not any progress can be made in India for both the peasant and the soldier. Will the seemingly cyclical process of destruction and reproduction, encapsulated in India's cannibalistic and incestuous topography, continue? The immense historical scope of the last couplet makes the solitary figures of the peasant and the soldier seem insignificant participants in a historical cycle that is beyond their control. In this alien and hostile landscape through which the soldier moves, he is relieved of his land-possessing capabilities. It is worth recalling Rupert Brooke's famous World War I poem 'The Soldier', in which the foreign territory where the soldier dies is identified with and becomes part of his nation: 'there is some corner of a foreign field/ That is forever England'. Whereas Brooke's speaker imperialistically asserts a claim on the 'foreign field', thereby extending, even in death, the territory of the English nation, Lewis's speaker depicts the solitary British soldier in India as completely lacking a connection to the alien and malevolent landscape that he traverses.

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[77] Lewis's solitary soldier is similar in this respect to Wordsworth's 'Discharged Soldier', another perpetual 'wanderer'. William Wordsworth, *Selected Poetry and Prose* ed. by Philip Hobsbaum (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp.117-121

John Pikoulis has pointed out that the mountain-top position from which the speaker gazes at the Indian landscape in 'The Mahratta Ghats' appears to be very similar to the one found in Lewis' important early poem, 'The Mountain over Aberdare'.[78] In the latter poem the speaker's spatial detachment is made apparent at the outset before he goes on to describe the society below him:

> From this high quarried ledge I see,
> The place for which the Quakers once
> Collected clothes, my fathers' home,
> Our stubborn bankrupt village sprawled
> In jaded dusk beneath its nameless hills;
> The drab streets strung across the cwm,
> Derelict workings, tips of slag ... (*CP*, 87).

In both poems it would appear that the poet's own role manifests itself as a suspension of involvement with the society being examined and in both there is particular attention paid not just to the landscape but also to the material poverty and exploitation of the people who inhabit it. Indeed, Jeremy Hooker's description of the poem as a 'diagnostic overview of social ills' might also be used to characterise the approach the speaker adopts in the Indian poem.[79]

It is of course possible then that Lewis' experience of India forced him to turn back to that 'social diagnostic' mode of poetry that emerged in his formative years as a means of coming to terms with and mediating the reality of the poverty and exploitation of the working-class culture which he grew up around. However, whilst Lewis may simply be replicating that poetic in 'The Mahratta Ghats', it is surely complicated by the fact that the survey conducted in the poem is of a foreign *colonial* landscape rather than a familiar domestic one. John Pikoulis has described the speaker's detachment in the Aberdare poem as a 'characteristically Welsh way of seeing'[80], a reading which of course corresponds to Lewis's ambiguous relationship to Welsh culture.[81] Reading 'The Mahratta Ghats', however, we might look to Edward Said's assertion that the panoramic view was a prerequisite for the

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[78] John Pikoulis, '"East and East and East": Alun Lewis and the Vocation of Poetry', *Anglo-Welsh Review*, No.63 (1978), 39-65 (p.39)

[79] Jeremy Hooker, *Imaging Wales: A Modern view of Welsh writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 85

[80] John Pikoulis, '"East and East and East"', p.39

[81] The mediatory role that the poet assumes might also been seen within the wider context of attempts by moderate writers on the Left to educate the middle-classes in the realities of British working class life during the thirties. Anthropologically inflected projects such as the Left Book Club, which published such works as Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, attempted to revitalise and educate the British Left by publishing works which took a documentary approach to contemporary (working-class) British life.

static visions of the Orient produced by nineteenth-century European travellers.[82] Mary Louise Pratt has analysed several Victorian exploration accounts containing mountain-top surveys of colonial landscapes.[83] According to Pratt, a 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' trope, whose origins can be traced to the accounts of British explorers searching for the Nile in 1860s, is frequently employed in colonial discourse: 'As the Linnaeans had their labelling system, and the Humboldtians their poetics of science, the Victorians opted for a brand of verbal painting whose highest calling was to produce for the home audience the peak moments at which geographical "discoveries" were "won" for England.'[84] Key to this trope was the high vantage point; from there Western explorers presented the landscapes they discovered as a virgin-to-be-taken or unveiled. The monarch-of-all-I-survey scene involved an interaction between aesthetics and ideology that culminated in what she terms a 'rhetoric of presence'.[85] So, for example, in her analysis of Richard Burton's *Lake Regions of Central Africa* (1860), Pratt finds that the aesthetic qualities of the landscape constituted the 'social and material value of the discovery to the explorers' home culture' whilst, at the same time, its aesthetic deficiencies suggested 'a need for social and material intervention by the home culture.'[86] Pratt goes on to suggest that this 'rhetoric of presence' tends to be complicated, if not wholly abandoned, by white male writers who possess 'hyphenated' identities – men such as Anglo-Pole Joseph Conrad and the 'Anglo-American' Henry Morton Stanley whose 'national and civic identifications were multiple and conflicted.'[87] Because of their hyphenated or split origins and identities these men were able to see and represent the 'contact zone' with a kind of double perspective that functioned as a form of critique. Many were able to challenge the 'literary decorum of the British gentlemen travellers and their

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[82] According to Said, the Orientalist achieves 'vision' by 'survey[ing] the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him – culture, religion, mind, history, society.' Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p.239

[83] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.201

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid, p.205

[87] Ibid, p.213. Henry Morton Stanley's identity is perhaps more hyphenated than Pratt is aware. Although she repeatedly describes him as an 'Anglo-American' he was in fact Welsh. He was born John Rowlands of Denbigh but changed his name after he fled to America. Stanley denied his Welsh origins for most of his life, claiming instead to be an American citizen. He became famous by finding the Scottish explorer David Livingstone in an expedition in 1872. Although he was considered to be a hero in his day, he is now thought of as a villain for his exploits in Africa, particularly in the Congo. When he returned to Europe he married Dorothy Tennant who hailed from the same Swansea industrial family as Winifred Coombe Tennant. In the 1880s Stanley played a key role in setting up the Congo Training Institute in Colwyn Bay with the Reverend William Hughes. The Institute brought young Congolese boys to Colwyn Bay for a Christian education before returning them to the Congo to act as self-supporting missionaries. Stanley was instrumental in obtaining a patronage for the Institute from Leopold II, King of the Belgians. See Lucy M. Jones, *H.M. Stanley and Wales* (St. Asaph: H.M. Stanley Exhibition Committee, 1972)

legitimating rhetoric of presence' by substituting it with what she calls the 'rhetoric of illegitimate presence'.[88] Pratt stresses, however, that, although these writers were able to critique the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' convention by essentially inverting it, they did not necessarily question the imperial project itself; they were 'the principal architects of the often imperialist *internal* critique of empire'.[89]

Like Conrad, Alun Lewis was a complicatedly hyphenated figure in terms of both his 'Anglo-Welsh' cultural background and also in terms of his attitude towards the British army in India. Whilst he felt compelled to join in order to combat what he saw as a threat to democracy, he was also an avowed anti-imperialist and therefore uneasy in his role within a colonial force that was an arm of British imperialism. As Kirsti Bohata has perceptively observed, Lewis' response to colonialism in India is highly ambivalent. She argues that his 'dual-nationality or hybridity' provides him with 'a perspective from which he can criticize the imperial army of which he is a part, and to sympathize with the Indians, if not, perhaps with nationalism *per se*.'[90] In this sense, Lewis seems to be very much like the 'hyphenated' men whom Pratt suggests performed a kind of internal critique of colonialism. Although the representation of the Indian landscape and people in 'The Mahratta Ghats' seems to accord in significant ways with colonial discourse, presenting India as economically and culturally backward, the poem does not evidence a colonial sensibility; there are, for instance, no explicit expansionist imperatives or justifications of British intervention and clearly nothing is 'won' in the survey that is carried out in Lewis's poem. Like the British soldiers in 'The Peasants', the soldier in 'The Mahratta Ghats' is simply moving over India, unable to ground himself or to achieve a sense of territorial purchase.

The Mobile Soldier

During the Second World War, the poet Keith Douglas was asked to identify the difference between the current war and the one that had preceded it. He responded that he found 'nothing new, from a soldier's point of view, about this war except its mobile character'.[91] Douglas was referring to the new mass mobility of troops that marked the war out, for him at least, as distinct from all others. As we have seen, Alun Lewis's India poetry makes a neurosis out of the mobile character of war and its opposite: immobility. Because they are

[88] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.213
[89] Ibid, p.213
[90] Kirsti Bohata, 'Hybridity and Assimilation', p.108. There was also a strong socialist and class dimension to his unease. Lewis' sense of nationalism was connected with his socialist background; his sympathy with the working-class is evident in his sense of solidarity with the Welsh soldiers who filled the lower ranks.
[91] Keith Douglas, *Keith Douglas: The Letters*, ed. by Desmond Graham (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000), p. 352

constantly on the move the British soldiers are 'paralysed' in no-where; they are in fact immobile because of their relentless movement. Lewis's exploration of this new 'mobile character' of war and the substantial effects it had on the soldier is evident in his writing from an early stage in his army career. The short story 'Lance-Jack' (*CS*, 64) is essentially a kind of psychological case study of this 'new way of life' that the contemporary soldier faces. The army recruit, as the narrator sees him, is 'a migrant, an Arab taking his belongings with him, needing surprisingly little of the world's goods.' (*CS*, 64) Later the soldier imagines himself to be 'an itinerant preacher' from his 'own country, Wales' who can 'see only the distance' between himself and his home (*CS*, 70). As the narrator explains in some detail, these soldiers 'prefer what is casual, rough, hazardous and incomplete':

> Christ had no home. Women dislike, even hate this quality in their men. It is the overturning of all that was so hard and slow to win, the gradual building up of friendships, love, mutual knowledge, home, children, the rooted beauty of flowers, budding and opening in petal and colour and curve *in one place*. But it is a fine quality, in the best men. (*CS*, 65, his emphasis)

But whilst this itinerancy is regarded as a liberating force amongst the 'best men' it is, for other soldiers, the very thing that makes them unhealthily detached from the home life that they knew and cared about:

> The soldier doesn't bother ... He leaves his violin and his Cézanne and his garden behind. His wife, too, and his children, as time passes. Hitler's soldiers have been taught two simple things: Obey Commands, Forget Home. In the long run these two rules are easier to learn than to resist. That is the danger ... Certainly the soldier's heart leaps for leave. But when I go home on leave I feel vaguely "out of it". The new carpet doesn't thrill me as it should; the trouble and little quarrels with neighbours are no longer my troubles; they are the preoccupations of strangers. I feel sympathetic, I listen and suggest. But I don't interfere, I don't trespass on them. (*CS*, 65)

The spatial unfixity of life as a soldier is a theme understandably manifest almost everywhere in Lewis's writing in India. Indeed, at a glance one finds evidence of the degree to which the 'mobile character' of war became a central part of his writing: the subtitle of his second collection, *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets* (1945), for example, is 'poems in transit'.[92] At the same time, throughout his work there is an evident desire to overcome or come to terms with the soldier's experience of disconnection – an estrangement between self and the world, self and other. Like Lewis himself, the soldiers in his poetry and prose are always strangers,

[92] Alun Lewis, *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets: Poems in Transit* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945)

moving with a feeling of not being at home anywhere. Whilst these territorial uncertainties are figured as debilitating to the individual soldier in the poems they become, in several of his short stories, an enabling opportunity for cultural and physical transcendence. In 'The Earth is a Syllable', the dying soldier, lost in the jungle, is able to re-establish a sense of connection with the world in the final moments of his life. Named after an important Upanishad, the story incorporates elements of Hindu philosophy, which appear to enable the re-connection that the soldier seeks. In the final passage, the Upanishads are invoked to alleviate the fear of death in the last moments of a soldier's life:

> Now he was left alone and whatever he had he was alone with it. It was all right, as long as he was alone. Whatever he had he could manage it now. His lamp still burned calmly and it might last an hour yet. He didn't want the dark to come any nearer. He could see exactly where it started, just this side of his feet. And then it went on and on. The dawn is the head of the horse. He lay quietly among the crickets and the darkness and the moths came suddenly tilting his head on against his lamp and righted themselves on his face, and flew on again. It was very still except for the pain. There was a translucent golden influence at the core of his being. (CS, 195)

Critics often note that the title of the story takes its name from a popular Upanishad but the presence and implication of one particular line, 'The dawn is the head of the horse', taken nearly verbatim from the older *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad,* is often missed. The *Brihadaranyaka* is a ritualistic form of Hindu scripture that provides the technique through which an individual can relate to the universe and it functions in much the same way for Lewis's dying soldier: he consciously initialises the meditative state and proceeds, following the protocol of the *Brihadaranyaka*, to connect the self to the details of the Universe outside that self. Thus the soldier is able to see his wife 'besides himself' (CS, 195) because she exists in the universal realm, the 'common ground of humanity' (CS, 195) as he puts it.

When Lewis frames the possibility of an extensive reality outside the phenomenal world as a triumphant revelation he explicitly endorses what E.M Foster encoded in *A Passage to India* (1924) as a frightening and demonic visitation upon rational Western sensibilities. Although Forster, in that text, suggests there is need for that 'unattainable Friend ... the eternal promise, the never-withdrawn suggestion that haunts our consciousness', the experience of such hyperconsciousness in the Marabar Caves is shown to be a perilously dislocating one.[93] For Lewis, by contrast, such transcendentalism could be made to offset the paradoxical elements of soldiering, the sense of being always away from home yet never able

[93] E.M Forster, *A Passage to India* (Edward Arnold: London, 1978), p.106

to get back, a kind of static Diaspora. A significant passage in Lewis' journal reveals a hallucinogenic experience that seems to resonate with the 'common ground' that the dying soldier in 'The Earth is a Syllable' desires to enter:

> Long cold fields, uncharted, difficult to navigate – a very brilliant and uniform white light. This light has its counter in an enveloping darkness that surged up wholly and irresistibly like a sweet oil from the interstices underneath me as I lay on the operating table. It was about two seconds in completely annihilating me – I surrendered to what Edward Thomas foresaw – the land he must enter and leave alone. The light though – the sun and blue over it, the spiritual light that was very profound; somewhere there was a massive line of poetry … and I was very tranquil and I pretended that Gweno might travel spiritually towards me through the light.[94]

These forms of disconnected consciousness are translations of the physical reality of soldiering, metaphysical versions of the 'mobile character' of war that Keith Douglas recognised.

In Lewis's well-known story 'The Orange Grove' (*IGT*, 143-164) we find an interesting depiction of contact between two different cultures of mobility: the British soldiers and the Indian gypsies. The story is about the journey of Staff-Captain Beale and his driver, both of whom have been on a reconnaissance mission for several weeks in a remote part of central India. When they stop to rest for the night Beale finds his driver, who had left to find food to cook, has been killed yards down the road from where they had set up camp. While trying to transport the body back to base Beale gets lost, loses his map, compass and, eventually, his truck washes away in a great flood. Beale and the driver's body are rescued by a tribe of gypsies who Beale then follows. As he accompanies them on their journey Beale begins thinking about who exactly these gypsies are:

> He was thinking of a page near the beginning of a history book he had studied in the Sixth at school in 1939. About the barbarian migrations in pre-history; the Celts and Iberians, Goths and Vandals and Huns. Once Life had been nothing worth recording beyond the movements of people like these, camels and asses piled with the poor property of their days, panniers, rags, rope, gram and dahl, lambs and kids too new to walk, barefooted, long-haired people rank with sweat, animals shivering with ticks, old women striving to keep up with the rest of the family. (*CS*, 224)

The story ends with Beale wondering where the gypsies he is travelling with are heading:

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[94] Lewis quoted in John Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life*, p.183

> He wished, though, that he knew where they were going. They only smiled and nodded when he asked. Maybe they weren't going anywhere much, except perhaps to some pasture, to some well. (*CS*, 225)

M. Wynn Thomas has noted that the 'natives' that rescue Beale are not the sedentary, other-worldly peasants that Lewis believed could provide him with a refuge from the war but itinerant gypsies.[95] This may seem somewhat curious given that in his letters Lewis repeatedly imagines himself living peacefully among the rural Indians whom he believes are isolated from war. However, as I have already noted, Lewis's poetry underlines the impossibility of the peasant and the soldier meeting on the same ground in the same time; they are spatially and temporally incompatible with each other. So it is highly significant that this story presents a solitary British soldier, a figure repeatedly seen in his work, entering into a relationship, however cursory, with a 'native' community that is not his own. It is the spatially mobile gypsies who provide the kind of refuge for the lost and landless soldier that Lewis saw the peasants as offering. The gypsies are not the passive and immobile rural Indian seen in Lewis' poetry but members of a nomadic culture who, significantly, dwell-in-travelling; more fitting companions, perhaps, for the itinerant soldier. These are the accessible, acceptable 'other' because, like the soldier, they too are landless; only, for them, being 'landless' is not the debilitating, estranging condition that it is for the British.

Michael Cronin has pointed out that in conventional notions of culture, 'primitive' is usually characterised as being sedentary whereas 'modern' cultures are characterised as possessing a high degree of mobility.[96] The gypsies that Beale encounters are, Beale believes, primitive yet also migratory. Thus, they arguably possess qualities of both the 'modern' and 'primitive' cultures described by Cronin. They are, in some sense, a half-way house: apparently primitive in appearance yet near modern in terms of their nomadic movements. Nomadic gypsies of this sort also featured in Lewis' poem 'The Journey' (*CP*, 133), in which the soldiers, 'the fore-runners of army', describe a 'caravanserai' that they see as they move through the jungle. Like those described in 'The Orange Grove', these gypsies are nomads, a people 'following the ancient routes of the vast migrations/ When history was the flight of a million birds' (*CP*, 133). They are descendants of an aboriginal society that existed at a time when 'history' was composed of purely natural phenomena such as the seasonal migration of

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[95] M. Wynn Thomas and Tony Brown, 'Colonial Wales and Fractured Language', in *Nations and Relations: Writing Across the British Isles*, ed. by Tony Brown and Russell Stephens (Cardiff: New Welsh Review, 2000), pp. 71-88, p.80

[96] Michael Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language and Translation* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), p.104

birds. Engaged in their own 'vast migrations', the British soldiers have a very different experience of travel:

> We had no other urge but to compel
> Tomorrow in the image of today,
> Which was motion and mileage and tinkering
> When cylinders misfired and the gasket leaked.
> Distance exhausted us each night ... (CP, 133)

Whereas the gypsies follow 'ancient routes', thereby enacting and continuing the cultural traditions of their ancestors, the soldiers live in the immediate. Their technologies of movement are dysfunctional and the very act of travelling leaves them exhausted. Moreover, they find themselves in a frequent battle with the very same natural environment that the gypsies are in harmony with: 'Sometimes there were rivers that refused us/ Sweeping away the rafts, the oxen ... The jungle let us through with compass and machets.' (*CP*, 133). The British seek to make their own pathways through the jungle environment by using their own tools – although the power to permit them to do so still resides with the jungle. Though they both reside in cultures of mobility, the gypsies and the soldiers are significantly different from each other and it is perhaps for this reason that they do not 'meet' in this poem as they do in Lewis' story. It is possible that Lewis could not conceive of such a meeting happening until, as happens in 'The Orange Grove', the British are divested of their technology and made reliant on the older, 'natural' ways of the gypsies. The nomadic gypsies who adopt the lost British officer provide a community based on spatial mobility; a community, in other words, in which deterritorialisation is the norm. The gypsies thus offer a form of human migration that is a benign alternative to the mass military mobilisations that Beale, as a British soldier, takes part in. Moreover, they possess a history that Beale believes to be continuous and intact. They thus represent a continuous tradition between the past and the present. Thus, theirs is a very different historical narrative to that of the British soldiers in India whose history, as Lewis writes in 'The Peasant', 'straggles in their wake'. Like the soldiers in that poem, British history is on its last unsteady legs, presumably marching towards its end. By contrast, the gypsies have a long and intact history that seems without an end, a narrative of history that is in some sense static. Indeed, they are the direct descendants of 'ancient migrations'.

Drawing parallels between Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Lewis' story, Kirsti Bohata has argued that it is possible to see Beale's journey into the jungle as a 'version of

"going native" in which 'some kind of ideal, essential primitive man' is found rather than, as Conrad's Kurtz finds, a barbarous savage.[97] On the face of it, however, Beale does not actually become a gypsy; he hesitatingly accompanies them and does so, initially at least, more out of necessity than desire. Thus, if there is a version of the going native trope here it is a seemingly paradoxical one since what we are left with is a vaguely realised version of *non-nativeness*: Beale is no longer wholly British but neither is he a gypsy. A literary precedent for this kind of non-nativeness had already been articulated in a similar sense by T.E Lawrence, whose life and work greatly influenced Lewis. In the introduction to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* Lawrence describes how his attempt to 'imitate' the Arab peoples had relieved him of his English identity and left him in a state of a cultural limbo:

> The efforts for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made an infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith. I had dropped one form and not taken on the other, and was become like Mohammed's coffin in our legend, with a resultant feeling of intense loneliness in life, and a contempt, not for other men, but for all they do. Such detachment came at times to a man exhausted by prolonged physical effort and isolation. His body plodded on mechanically, while his reasonable mind left him, and from without looked down critically on him, wondering what that futile lumber did and why. Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believe it would be near the man who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments.[98]

Lawrence's sense of having 'dropped one form and not taken on the other' could be used to describe the transformation of Beale at the climax of Lewis' story. In the same way that Lawrence believes himself to have become neither Arab nor English, officer Beale, divested of his vehicle, map and notebook – possessions that mark him out as a British soldier – has been 'quitted' of his 'English self' yet has not become a gypsy (though after wading through the 'brown' river with them he may superficially resemble them).[99] In his letters Lewis also

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[97] Kirsti Bohata, 'Beyond Authenticity? Hybridity and Assimilation in Welsh Writing in English', p.105

[98] T.E Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited 1997 [1935]), p. 14. Simon Featherstone has described this passage as crucial to the later war writing that came from the East. Simon Featherstone, *War Poetry: An Introductory Reader* (New York, Routledge: 1995), p.88

[99] There are some suggestive similarities between Beale's encounter with the Indian gypsies in Lewis' story and the tale of gypsy romance in D.H Lawrence's *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (1930). In Lawrence's novella Yvette, the daughter of a dour Anglican vicar, is enthralled by her encounters with a gypsy who lives in a wild, secluded area near the local quarry. At the novella's climax Yvette is rescued by the gypsy after a local dam breaks causing a great flood to wash away the rectory and all the possessions of the bourgeois family who live there. The critic John Turner has suggested that the flood allows Yvette and the gypsy to 'meet upon new terms, as man and woman free temporarily from personality and the everyday taboos of moral and social hygiene'. The

made similar statements implying that the experience of India caused such an enlargement of his cultural horizons that the identities which he held were no longer adequate: 'I'll never be just English or Welsh again' he famously told his parents (*IGT*, ix). Whereas Lawrence found the experience a disruptive and disturbing one, Lewis appears to celebrate the fact that India unsettled the traditional boundaries of his identity. As M. Wynn Thomas has pointed out, the end of the story *hints* at the possibility of the Indians and British 'meet[ing] on some sort of historically and culturally transcendent common ground.'[100]

The enigmatic end of 'The Orange Grove', the last story Lewis wrote before his death, returns to the unanswered questions posed in the last verse of 'The Mahratta Ghats': who is the soldier in this place? What relationship to land does he possess? By joining the itinerant gypsies Beale escapes the violent paradigm of relations between the colonised Indians and the colonial British as well as the warring nations. He escapes the pull of nationalism and the war-time anxiety over territorial gains - like the 'landless' soldier the gypsies do not own the territory they traverse but simply utilise it and move on. Beale's accompanying of the gypsies at the end of the story becomes, for him at least, a journey to a vaguely pastoral place – 'some pasture, some well' — in which he might safely belong for a while. It is the pastoral 'elsewhere' of the Western subject's imagining. Crucially, however, the soldier never arrives at this place. As readers, our last glimpse of Beale is of him travelling towards it. The establishment of a homeland akin to that represented by the Palestinian orange groves that are repeatedly referred to in the story is not realised. The climax of 'The Orange Grove' is powerful precisely because it does not come to a conventional close - the reader, along with officer Beale himself, does not know what is in store for him. Beale leaves the narrative in transit and so the physical as well as cultural journey that he appears to embark on is never completed. He is, as far as the reader knows, still out there, a non-native accompanying the gypsies on their 'endless migrations'.

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flood is also a device that enables the meeting of the gypsies and the soldiers in Lewis' story. It is also interesting that Lawrence's gypsy was once a soldier, having been forcefully conscripted into the army. Beale's movement from a reluctant soldier to a gypsy-like nomadic figure parallels the movement of Lawrence's gypsy, who moves from being a soldier to a figure who is free of the constraints of the soldiering life he was forced into. John Turner, 'Purity and Danger in D.H Lawrence's The Virgin and the Gipsy' in *D.H Lawrence: Centenary Essays* ed. by Mara Kalnins (Bristol: Bristol Classic Press, 1986), pp.139-172, p.116. *D.H Lawrence, The Short Novels of D.H Lawrence*, vol.2 (London and Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1956)

[100] M. Wynn Thomas and Tony Brown, 'Colonial Wales and Fractured Language', p.77

The Future of India

In the last section of this chapter we turn to explore the ways in which Lewis contemplated a future for India and the future relations between the British and Indians. Conceding that India could have a future at all would of course violate the quality of ahistoricity which Lewis ascribes to it elsewhere in his writing. In Said's terms, it is to introduce diachrony to synchrony, narrative to vision. Writing to his wife, Gweno, about his impressions of the Indians and Anglo-Indians at the Bombay Cricket Club, Lewis briefly contemplates his continued existence in India:

> I *could* be happy in India but only if Britain and India were good friends. If we were out here as, say, Aunt Connie and Uncle Ernie had been, and India was really growing into a maturity such as we have at home, then I'd enjoy all that *is* enjoyable here. (*IGT*, 34)

Lewis comes tantalisingly close to being happy in India but there still remains a substantial distance between India and himself; a distance which can only be resolved once India fulfils certain developmental requirements. Implicit in this suggestion, of course, is the familiar notion that Britain is already in a state of 'maturity', one which India should seek to emulate. India, as it stands, is not quite there yet; it needs to grow up (along the same developmental line as Britain) before they can be 'friends'. Lewis may have had in mind here the discussion that takes place between Fielding and Aziz in the conclusion of Forster's *A Passage to India*:

> "Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want."
> But the horses didn't want it – they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said "No, not there."[101]

The novel's conclusion is highly pessimistic towards any kind of immediate reconciliation between the British people in India and the Indians themselves. Yet it does admit to the possibility that a union could take place at some point in the future (although clearly the conditions for such a union were still not right when Lewis considered the possibility in the early 1940s). Forster's representation of a British/Indian reconciliation as eventually

[101] E.M Forster, *A Passage to India*, p.218

attainable but not just yet is repeated by Lewis. Both writers defer the forecast time of reconciliation; they push it forward to some undetermined point in the future.

The majority of Lewis' prose and poetry conceives of India in this static way and of the British/Indian relationship as temporally incompatible. There are some instances in Lewis' correspondence, however, where he appears to admit that change in India is possible. Writing to Brenda Chamberlain late in 1943, Lewis confessed that his attitude towards India and its people had changed:

> It's a world I wouldn't have believed in if I'd stayed at home. It's infinitely more wasteful, vaster, fundamental, and tragic than the closed and highly organised world I left. Its poverty is deeper and more imperviable, its people more various and simple, its extremes more extreme, its perfidies and selfishness more obvious and blatant. I no longer think the Indians guiltless. I think they're getting what they deserve, and I feel no compunction about being here as a soldier, for I am sure that it's in India's interest that the Japs should be repelled. There is a vast field for human effort here, unlimited possibilities of improvement in the simple necessities of life – food, health, schooling, housing, clothing, hygiene, medicine. It's fascinating to see these possibilities. They presented themselves to the Russians in 1917 and they were enthralled. If I were a young Indian I should wish for nothing except to serve my country. As I am not a young Indian I observe in a detached but warm way the flux and reflux of it all and it profoundly affects the way I think and the things I write. I think you'll understand what I'm trying to say if you read The Orange Grove.[102]

Lewis constructs an India here that is characteristically in excess of European society: it is 'more imperviable', 'more various and simple', 'more extreme' and 'more obvious and blatant'.[103] The Indians, whom he once thought guiltless, are now guilty of their excessive nature and are therefore deserving of their current predicament. The presence of the British, on the other hand, is justified: by repelling the Japanese they allow India's 'unlimited possibilities of improvement' to be realised.[104] This then is a somewhat different depiction of the British/Indian relationship than appears elsewhere in Lewis's poetry and letters. He appears to reconcile his own misgivings over the colonial situation in India by suggesting that the British soldiers are far more engaged in, indeed integral to, the potential development of the country. As a 'vast field for human effort', India, with a little help from its British guardians, could be actively engaged in its own betterment. But crucially, it is the British who, by repelling the Japanese, bequeath this narrative of progress to India. What is also

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[102] Alun Lewis quoted in Roland Mathias, 'The Caseg Letters: A Commentary', in *A Ride Through the Wood: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Literature* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1985), pp. 158-85, p.168
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

significant about this passage is that, having justified the presence of the British, Lewis shies away from any personal involvement in the 'improvement' of the country. Development comes from within India, from the new generation of patriotic Indians, rather than from without. Lewis rejects the idea of becoming an Indian and directing the country's development from within; he realises that the only way he can insert himself into India and contribute to its improvement is hypothetically: 'If I were a young Indian ...'.[105] Lewis concedes that he is not an Indian and that he can only observe the change in India from a detached distance.[106]

India's contact with other cultures, America in particular, was also regarded by Lewis as a sign of (detrimental) change. In the following letter to his wife, Lewis discusses his surprise at the rate at which Western culture was affecting Indian culture:

> I have a feeling that India will wake to find far more Western things pouring into its flat and featureless philosophical voids than have done so yet, and it will play havoc with the balance of their lives, too. For instance, we passed an American construction company building a road out in the wilds and we halted nearby. The little beggar urchins came up singing "Oh Johnnie, Oh Johnnie, how you can lerve." It's like influenza, this tinpot civilization that is so easy to export by radio and gramophone and film. And it's so demoralising too: it devalues everything ...[107]

Lewis portrays this incident as an example of the way in which India is highly susceptible to and defenceless against Western culture. The 'little urchin beggars' who mimic phrases from popular American songs are regarded as having been infected with the American strain of 'influenza'. Lewis sees their appropriation of these songs not as an instance of an advantageous hybridisation but as an impurity symptomatic of India's corruption by the 'West'. We might view it, however, as an example of what Mary Louise Pratt calls *transculturation*, a term she borrows from cultural anthropology to describe how 'subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.'[108] Pratt asserts that '[w]hile subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.'[109] Whilst Lewis may not have been fond of American culture itself - it is, in his words, a 'tin-pot civilization' - he may

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[105] Alun Lewis quoted in Mathias, 'The Caseg Latters', p.168
[106] Ibid.
[107] Alun Lewis, *Letters To My Wife*, p.422-433
[108] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.6
[109] Ibid.

have also been dismayed by the fact that he was witnessing a change in the 'dominant' culture to which India was supposedly subordinate to. It is a moment that anticipates, in many important respects, the post-war spread of American cultural products and the formation of culturally hybrid, global societies.[110]

Whilst Lewis seems to be sympathetic to India and, to a certain extent, the Independence movement he encountered there, his writing frequently employs colonial tropes and stereotypes that deny India the possibility of a future on its own terms. As I have shown in this chapter, India is depicted in a variety of ways in Lewis's writing. It can be an a-temporal 'elsewhere' that exists outside European history, a nightmarish land that is hostile to its inhabitants, both indigenous and non-indigenous, or, as in the above passage, a 'void' that is susceptible to the degrading influences of Western culture. Even when India is bestowed the kind of diachronic narrative that Said discusses, it is frequently disparaged or reprimanded for going the wrong way, so to speak. With multiple and, indeed, contradicting versions of India evident in his writing, Alun Lewis offers an instructive example of one of the more limiting aspects of Said's theorisation of Orientalism. Peter Hulme, amongst others, has questioned Said's representation of Orientalism as a supposedly homogenous discourse that is *internally* uniform and consistent. Hulme has shown that, far from being unified and consistent (as Said presents it), Orientalism is heterogeneous and marked by inconsistencies and contradictions.[111] Following the work of Hulme and Dennis Porter, Sarah Mills has observed that 'the very nature of writing about another culture entails a heterogeneous discourse, marked by gaps and inconsistencies' and that Orientalism is 'not ... the unified discourse that Said describes, but is rather made up of diverse elements which both contest and affirm the dominant discourses and other discourses of which it is composed.'[112] India, as it is depicted in Lewis's writing, is not uniform and consistent but heterogeneous, and marked by competing and sometimes contradicting visions. This aspect of his writing is of course

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[110] In their survey of contemporary travel writing, Holland and Huggan examine a more recent example of this process as it is documented in Pico Iyer's postcolonial travel narrative *Video Night in Kathmandu* (1988). In the book Iyer documents examples of indigenous responses to and adaptations of Western cultural products whilst travelling around Asia. According to Holland and Huggan, the products that Iyer identifies - Rambo in China, fast food in Nepal, Hank Williams in the Phillipines, baseball in Japan – 'demonstrate that the East's exposure to American popular culture has resulted in the emergence of new, exotically hybrid cultural forms.' They argue that these hybrid products arise not so much out of 'an imperialist imposition' but out of a 'process of symbolic exchange involving the reindigenization of imported forms.' Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, p.61

[111] In *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the native Carribean, 1492-1797*, Peter Hulme discusses the ways in which colonial discourse about Africans vacillated between a vision of them as noble savages and barbarous cannibals depending on the colonial situation. (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).

[112] Sarah Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p.54-55

indicative of the profound ambivalence Lewis felt towards the country and his role there. At the same time, however, the presence of literary stereotypes and tropes associated with colonial discourse used in his early poetry about Welsh industrial environments, also suggests that he was highly ambivalent about Wales and his relationship to its landscape. It is possible that his cultural and social background in the South Wales valleys provided Lewis with an awareness of the asymmetrical relations of power that existed internally within Britain and that he carried this awareness with him to India. At times in his India writing it seems like he is trying to reproduce the diagnostic mode of poetry he had developed to address the social poverty at home in Wales. At the same time, however, Lewis frequently reproduces familiar colonial stereotypes which deny India any historical agency or any power to move of its own accord.

CHAPTER 2

'Always observant and slightly obscure': Lynette Roberts and Ethnographic Practice

In the poem 'Lamentation' (*CP*, 8), Lynette Roberts begins by likening her own social position to that of the evacuees that had recently been sent to the village of Llanybri: 'To the village of lace and stone/ Came strangers. I was one of these/ Always observant and slightly obscure.' (*CP*, 8) As a member of the geographically and culturally uprooted, Roberts acknowledges herself, in quite plain terms, to be in a condition of estrangement from the village community, a position that is as painful as it is productive; she is, as she says, both 'observant' and 'obscure'. Possessing the perspective of an outsider as well as a keen eye for sociological observation, Roberts edges close to the figure of the fieldwork ethnographer, conducting anthropological research into a culture which is not her own. Whilst this culturally ambiguous position allows for such an analogy to be made, however, her own interests in the local folk culture, as evidenced in her diary and several articles she published during her time in Carmarthenshire, suggest that in some important ways Roberts was engaged in research work similar to that conducted by anthropologists working under the auspices of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth and the National Museum in Cardiff. In the first section of this chapter we begin to explore the anthropological dimension of Roberts' imagining of Wales. We then move on to examine the similarities between Roberts' approach to poetry and forms of early twentieth-century ethnographic collection methods. I suggest that this approach can be used to explore one of the ways in which Roberts co-opts or appropriates the local indigenous culture into her modernist vision.

In the article, 'Simplicity of the Welsh village', published in 1945, Roberts makes a claim for the uniqueness of the village community in Llanybri and draws upon the work of the anthropologist Iorwerth Peate. Roberts was familiar with Peate's involvement in the reconstruction of representative, traditional Welsh household rooms at the National Museum in Cardiff and an advocate of his ideas for an Open Air folk Museum that would serve to recover traditional Welsh culture for the nation. But Peate also wrote Welsh-language poetry based on his research at the Museum. His work on reconstructing a traditional Welsh kitchen inspired one of his most popular sonnets, 'Y Gegin Gynt yn yr Amgueddfa Genedlaethol' (1957):

Araf y tipia' r cloc yr oriau meithion,
distaw yw' r droell wedi'r nyddu'n awr,
tawell yw' r baban dan ei gwrlid weithion,
nid oes a blygo tros y Beibil mawr.
Mae' r dresal loyw yn llawn o lestri gleision,
a'r tsieni yn y cwpwrdd bach i gyd,
ffiolau ar ford yn disgwyl cwmni' r gweision,
a' r tecell bach, er hynny, yn hollol fud.
A ddowch chwi i mewn, hen bobol, eto i 'ch cegin,
o' r ffald a' r beudy llawn, o drin y cnwd?

[Slowly the clock is ticking the long hours,
Silent is the wheel, its spinning done,
Quiet the baby beneath its coverlet,
No one bends over the Great Bible now.
The gleaming dresser full of bright blue dishes,
And all the china in the little cupboard,
Bowls on the board await the servants' company,
The kettle, nonetheless, completely mute.
Will you come again, old people, to your kitchen
From fold and cowshed, from tending to the crops?][113]

In its invitation to the 'old people' to 'come again' to a kitchen that has been so carefully reproduced, Peate's highly popular poem echoes Lynette Roberts' most widely anthologized 'Poem from Llanybri' (1944), in which the speaker collects the produce of the surrounding land before offering them up as tradition reclaimed:

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

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

In the old way you'll understand. [114]

[113] Iorwerth Peate, *Canu Chwarter Canrif (*Dinbych : Gwasg Gee, 1957), p.62. The English translation is from Joseph Clancy, *Twentieth Century Welsh Poems* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1982), p.107.
[114] Lynette Roberts, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2005), p.3.Further references to this text will be included in the body of the thesis as *RCP*.

At its most basic level the poem presents us with a veritable storehouse of cultural artefacts and customs. 'Traditional' Welsh objects - the bowl of cawl, the lover's spoon, the 'savori fach' – are sourced from the land to be consumed within the community, a process which testifies to the living harmony between the villagers and the environment. Tony Conran describes the poem as a 'gift', one which goes out of its way to meet the reader and offer tokens of itself and of the life in Llanybri, but it is also a poem in which the reader is invited to participate in a collective effort to retrieve 'local' tradition. We are implored in the last lines of the poem, for example, to enact what seem like rituals of historical salvage, to 'send an ode or elegy/ In the old way and raise our heritage' (*RCP*, 3). The poem is sent out with the very purpose of recycling itself, or at least its promotion of a kind of historical archaeology, amongst a specific literary community.

The 'invitational' formula employed in the poem is remarkably similar to that found in the tradition of British pastoral poetry dating back to the Renaissance period. Christopher Marlowe's well-known love poem 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love', which opens with the famous invitation 'Come live with me and be my love', likely provided the stylistic template through which Roberts makes an 'offer' to her poem's intended recipient, Alun Lewis.[115] Roberts' poem appears to adopt some of the thematic and structural cadences of Marlowe's poem. Like Marlowe, Roberts predominantly uses four line stanzas, each of which catalogue a series of pastoral delights. What is perhaps more significant, however, are the ways in which Roberts modifies Marlowe's original template. The luxurious material culture on display in Marlowe's poem – 'A gown made of the finest wool', 'buckles of the purest gold', 'coral clasps and amber studs' – are replaced by domestic Welsh objects; the speaker's tone in her poem is humble and reverent, unlike the superlative-laden exhortations in Marlowe's poem. Indeed, there is a deliberate subtlety in much of her descriptive language here: we are invited to have a 'choice' bowl of soup and a 'good' supper. Transformations have also been made at the level of language by Roberts. The famous opening lines of Marlowe's poem – 'Come live with me and be my love/ And we will all the pleasures prove' – are 'localised' in Roberts' poem through the use of Welsh speech-patterns: '*If you come my way that is ... /* Between now and then, I will offer you ...' (*RCP*, 3). The language and format of the 'invitational' formula employed by Marlowe becomes a template on which to mount a distinctly Welsh pastoral vision.

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[115] Christopher Marlowe, *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe* ed. by Patrick Cheney and Brain J. Striar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.158

In his analysis of the Western pastoral tradition in *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams asserts that where one finds a writer looking back in time for a lost 'organic' relationship between the social and the natural, there will likely be another writer of that earlier period lamenting the loss of a similar, previous condition. James Clifford has neatly described this as 'the continual re-emergence of a conventionalized pattern of retrospection that laments the loss of the "good" country, a place where authentic social and natural contacts were once possible.'[116] Roberts' most anthologised poem, 'Poem from Llanybri', would seem to be an appropriate example of the 'regressive' pattern that Williams detects within the pastoral, particularly since it looks to rescue a Welsh tradition not long past by *re*-writing an 'invitational' formula that, since its inception in the Renaissance period, has been based on the romantic evocation of an original 'organic' moment. In other words, the traditional 'old way' that the poem invokes is essentially salvaged through 'older' stylistic means. For John Wilkinson, the poem is a 'manifesto of [Roberts'] localism'[117], a description that touches on the ideological motivations that might underpin such a transformation of conventional form. In terms of its adaptation of an English poetic tradition for the purpose of re-igniting a distinctly Welsh pastoral tradition, 'Poem from Llanybri' is a distinctly hybrid text that works by subtly indigenising the English convention that it relies on.

As a rallying call to rescue a lost tradition, 'Poem from Llanybri' displays an ethos akin to the 'salvage' principle that the historical anthropologist James Clifford finds deeply ingrained in modern ethnography.[118] In his key article 'On Ethnographic Allegory', Clifford explores the notion of 'salvage' as an ideological pattern that has directed 'many, if not most' instances of cross-cultural representation in the twentieth century.[119] For Clifford, the representation of 'primitive' culture as an entity in the process of collapse – and therefore in need of saving - is so pervasive and persistent that it is evident throughout the discipline of anthropology throughout the twentieth century. In what he terms 'ethnographic pastoral', the culture of the 'other' is repeatedly addressed with an elegiac mode:

> The theme of the vanishing primitive, of the end of traditional society (the very act of naming it "traditional" implies a rupture), is pervasive in ethnographic writing. It is, in Raymond William's phrase, a "structure of feeling" ... Undeniably, ways of life can,

[116] James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory' in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* ed. by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 98-121, p.113
[117] John Wilkinson, *The Lyric Touch* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2007), p.190
[118] James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', p.111
[119] Ibid, p.112

> in a meaningful sense, "die"; populations are regularly violently disrupted, sometimes exterminated. Traditions are constantly being lost. But the persistent and repetitious "disappearance" of social forms and traditions at the precise moment of their ethnographic representation demands analysis as a narrative structure.[120]

Clifford goes on to argue that ethnography's disappearing object is, to a significant degree, a textual construct that essentially legitimises the anthropologists' representational practice. Salvage ethnography essentially works on the principle that 'the other is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but saved in the text'.[121] More worryingly, perhaps, salvage ethnography *demands* that the other must be lost in order for it to occasion being found or saved again by the writer. For Clifford, '*every* description or interpretation' that attempts to bring a culture and its values into writing, perpetuates the notion of ethnography as 'a last-chance rescue-operation' and of the ethnographer, the 'recorder and interpreter of fragile custom', as a 'custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity'.[122] Clifford makes clear that it is important to question the political implications of this allegory since it places 'others' in a 'present-becoming-past' and freezes them in that position, forever on the brink of oblivion.

Evidence that Roberts saw Llanybri as a 'present-becoming-past' abounds in her writing. In her diary entry for May 2nd, 1947, for example, she seems to share not only the ethnographer's desire to salvage the culture of the 'other' but tellingly displays one of the other key assumptions that Clifford finds evident in ethnography: the belief that a society 'needs' to be represented by an outsider because it cannot and will not do it itself:

> The trouble with the Welsh is the old trouble, that of jealousy. It infects all the young shoots of its generation and is steadily getting worse ... I have wasted precious time, in trying to collect authentic facts about various sources, before I could proceed with the material I had gathered for my own writing... When I wrote my article on the Coracle for *The Field* I was quite prepared to find out first hand and watch the crafts of today being made. I visited the coracle men, wives and children on several occasions in their homes and on the river, and still do ... With woollen factories it is equally depressing. They enjoy the idea if you tell them that you have written 200 or 300 words about their Mills; but they *cannot* and *will* not take the initiative and have photographs taken. In fact, some of them have never had photographs taken of their factory. ... There is then this deplorable *reticence* to retain knowledge among themselves, and withhold facts which are really public property. Such material should be available to the world today. And I refer here, as well, to the extraordinary muddle

[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid, 113.

> in the literary field where no research worker can get at the *fundamental* and *original* documents of his own Country. [123]

Roberts saw her role within the community as someone who painstakingly tried to 'capture' the 'fragile custom' (Clifford's term) around her in both print and image. She set out to rectify the 'trouble with the Welsh' by making the material 'available to the world', a process which involved visiting the homes of locals and watching them work, as well as preserving the 'material' culture visually in photographs. This desperate need to preserve the lifestyle of the community was clearly a source of frustration to her and it did in fact have the seemingly paradoxical effect of alienating her from that culture. Upon her arrival to the village in 1939 she was accused of being a spy and faced harsh treatment from many of the locals. Roberts' constant observation of the people marked her out as a highly suspicious character; hardly surprising perhaps given the invitation to an intimate, insider's knowledge of the village that she claims to offer in her poetry. 'Plasnewydd', for example, begins with a speaker teasing the reader with her 'insider' knowledge of the village; the implication being that the reader does not know the village like she does:

> You want to know my village.
> You should want to know even if you
> Don't want to know about my village.
> My village is very small. You could
> Pass it with a winning gait. Smile.
> They stand in corners plain talking,
> Flick the cows passing down our way. (*RCP*, 4)

Knowledge of the village, the speaker suggests, is important; so important in fact that even those 'outsiders' who do not want to know 'should' – the place demands your inquisitiveness.

The I-witness

Linda Adams has argued that as a result of being excluded from the 'primitive sources of creative energy' which they saw in Welsh-language culture the writers of the First Flowering of Welsh writing in English essentially adopted 'an anthropological relationship to Welsh

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[123] Lynette Roberts, *Diaries, Letters and Recollections* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2008), p.78-79 Further references to this edition will be included in the text as *DLR*

culture, that of the I-witnessing participant observer'.[124] The term 'I-witnessing' was coined by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz to refer to the recurrent textual strategy within ethnographic writing of projecting authority by emphasising the experience of actually 'being there'. In other words, 'I-witnessing' is about convincing the reader that one has and speaks the truth – or as Geertz puts it: 'To become a convincing "I-witness" one must first become a convincing "I"'. Whilst Lynette Roberts was clearly not in need of the type of 'I-witness' authority that the professional ethnographers sought after, I would suggest that Adams's formulation of the Welsh writer as a participant-observer might be a useful tool through which to examine her poetry. Critics of her work have highlighted the various strategies she employs in her work to recreate a strong sense of *being* there and of the human relations that were part of her experience in Llanybri. Patrick McGuinness, for example, draws our attention to Roberts' use of speech in one of her more experimental pieces, 'Swansea Raid' (*DLR*, 103). What he perceptively notices is that unlike in much modernist poetry, direct speech fragments in Roberts work often function to reinforce identity rather than disrupt it; they are, to use his terms, "'identity-emphatic' not 'identity-scrambling'.[125] As a technique through which identity is emphasised we might also highlight her habit of employing the personal pronoun to begin her poems, as if to anchor them with an experiential authority similar to that which served to legitimise the ethnographer. Her poem 'Earthbound' (*CP*, 10) describes the death of a local man and the making of a wreath for his funeral. It serves as a good example of her tendency to put an identifiable textual presence immediately into the foreground:

> I, in my dressing gown,
> At the dressing table with mirror in hand
> Suggest my lips with accustomed air, see
> The reflected van like lipstick enter the village
> When Laura came, and asked me if I knew.
>
> We had known him a little, yet long enough:
> Drinking in all rooms, mild and bitter,
> Laughing and careless under the washing-line tree. (*RCP*, 10)

From the emphatic 'I' of the opening line there is a centrifugal movement that reveals a nexus of social relations built around the speaker. In much the same way Roberts' friend Rosie

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[124] Linda Adams, 'Fieldwork: The Caseg Broadsheets and the Welsh Anthropologist', in *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays* 5 (1999), pp. 51-85, p.83
[125] Patrick McGuinness 'Introduction' in Lynette Roberts, *Collected Poems*, p.xx

appears in her diary and prose[126], the figure of Laura functions in the poem to communicate important social information to the poet just as we might expect a native informant to do for the fieldwork ethnographer. Initially a solitary figure, the 'I-witnessing' poet begins to participate in a wider social role, becoming part of the collective 'we' by the second verse. In this respect, the poem's ever widening social perspective serves as an appropriate analogy of what Adam Kuper, describing the practice of participant-observation, calls 'psychological transference': the process where '"they" had to [eventually] become "we"'.[127] This subtle change in social relations is an aspect of the poem which has been remarked upon by one of Roberts' earliest commentators, Tony Conran. 'The theme of the poem', he tells us, 'is not so much the dead man himself as the precarious contact established between the villagers and the poet as a result of his death.'[128] Conran considers the poem to be one of Roberts' more attractive pieces precisely because it contains 'real occasions, real inter-personal motivations [in which she] is no longer a total outsider but capable of behaviour which has social significance.'[129]

Roberts was undeniably a culturally mobile figure with an uncanny ability to empathise with the indigenous people wherever she found herself. In her unpublished article, 'Federico Garcia Lorca', she details her visit to the home of the Spanish poet in the summer of 1953. Having arrived too early for a lesson in traditional Spanish dance, Roberts, in typical adventurer fashion, goes off the beaten track, so to speak, and enthusiastically takes up the opportunity to make contact with a culture unfamiliar to her:

> I had almost reached the 'moment of truth', when a gypsy came out of her cave entrance as I passed. 'Come in', she said. I shook my head. '*No puedo senora.*' I said this, though I had intended not to only go in but to sleep in one of these caves. I then told her that I had no money on me, which was true. She said she did not want any, and repeated the offer and was very persuasive. '*Pero entra*'. I spoke to her with Spanish I could remember from my native South American country, Argentine. This she understood. And anyway her own idiom was not purely Spanish. After a long time of mutual liking, a deep sympathy developed between us. She asked me if I would like her to dance, then and there. I said no, that I would dance for her. She liked this inverted twist and laughed so freely that she would have enjoyed anything that I did .... And so I spent that last three hours until the time had come for my lesson when I felt, that though I had deprived myself of learning another Sevillian dance - I learnt so quickly - I had instead a deeper and more natural understanding of Lorca's

[126] Rosie features in 'Swansea Raid' (*DLR*, 103).
[127] Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The Modern British School* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.69
[128] Anthony Conran, 'Lynette Roberts: The Lyrical Pieces', *Poetry Wales*, 19, No.2, (1983), 125-133 (p.130)
[129] Ibid, p.128-129

> work ... I realised, as I had not realised before, that *Blood Wedding* was not an intensified highly symbolic play, but just a natural event, one out of so many, recorded with absolute truth and perception, naked as the knife which flashed through the play. Having the same stark quality that Synge's plays have. His work, as I see it, has nothing to do with politics, but everything to do with the sense of justice and rich environment of the native people. (*DLR*, 160-163)

The 'deep sympathy' developed between Roberts and the gypsy results in a 'deeper understanding' of Lorca's rural tragedy as a natural event, a play that captures reality with 'absolute truth'. Importantly, as Roberts continues her article, the format of that meeting becomes recognized as a method of exchange through which inter-cultural understanding might be achieved:

> And just as we might advise a Spanish friend who wants to assimilate Hardy, to live in his forest village, walk about the fields, see his stone house, the diver bird in its streams, hear the dialect, legends still spoken with a modern slant, and see those same men covered in the red soil as they wind down from the quarry hills; so equally more satisfying by using this method can we understand Lorca. (*DLR*, 163)

At the heart of a moment that seems to exemplify Roberts' internationalist bent – a bent which is often accorded to practitioners of modernism – is the crucial attainment of a sense of rootedness. To 'assimilate' Hardy – a term that suggests the need to absorb the foreign culture – one must be a participant exposed to the language, cultural practices and environment of the other culture. In other words, a folk tradition is understood using methods analogous to those employed in anthropology and ethnography. To some extent, she is describing her own methods in this passage. The Spanish context alerts us to the ease with which she could apply that methodology and slip into that liminal cultural position wherever she found herself.

The Loss of Culture

The focus on the loss of an 'original' culture is glimpsed in several poems throughout her first collection *Poems* (1944). In her South American poem 'The New World', written during her stay in Llanybri, Roberts remembers the architecture and customs of the rural gaucho peasantry before lamenting the changes to their culture:

> Memory widens our senses, folds them open:
> Ancient seas slip back like iguanas and reveal

Plains of space, free, sky-free, lifting a green tree
On to a great plain.

Heard legend whistling through the waiting jabiru,
Knew the two-fold saying spinning before their eyes
Breaking life like superstition, they too
Might become half-crazed.

.....

Lost now. No sound or care 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. (*RCP*, 28-29)

Salvage is also the theme of the unpublished poem 'Chapel Wrath' (*RCP*, 93), inspired by Roberts' encounter with a local engraver who was being forced to abandon the traditional method of cutting on natural slate:

The now sad plighted machine-lettered century
Leaving no culture of their own, but a
Metallic copy of their earlier neighbours
Whose deep set letters on shoulders of slate
Announced their death with the pride
Of a spirited horse. (*RCP*, 93)

In both poems, the material 'culture' of the indigenous peoples, as it is figured in craft work and architecture, is in the process of being overwritten and erased by modernity. Indeed, the very invocation of 'culture' in these poems is premised on its decline. Marc Manganaro has recently talked of the ways in which 'culture', defined as 'elite' or 'common', becomes posited as desirable and even indispensable through the very argument that it was in the process of collapse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[130] Similarly, Bruce Robbins has argued that in the same period there existed a 'professional logic' that legitimated the humanities as a discipline: a 'narrative of "culture" dying in a modern wasteland where only a few select misfits still recall and preserve its fast-fading glories'.[131]

In 'Chapel Wrath' and 'The New World' it is the culture of the *pre*-modern peasantry that possesses an organicism that the modern world has lost. As in the Arnoldian concept of Culture, it is the modern world that comes to embody the urgent opposite to Culture:

[130] Marc Manganaro, *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), p.2
[131] Bruce Robbins in Manganaro, *Culture, 1922*, p.2

Anarchy. There are in fact subtle conceptual differences in Roberts' use of the word 'culture' as it appears in these two poems. In 'Chapel Wrath', for example, the concept of culture broadly corresponds to a 'way of life'; the modernisation of the grave writers' craft is a predicament that epitomises the century itself: the 'now sad plighted machine-lettered century/ leaves no culture' but metallic replacements of earlier incarnations. Thus, the plight of the engraver becomes a synecdochical lament for the entire cultural heritage of the century. 'Culture' in 'The New World', however, is used in a slightly different manner. The *pre*-modern hut, prior to its assimilation into the modern world – signalled by the erection of a corrugated roof – is 'cultured'. In this instance, the term is being used to denote the best of human creativity in much the same way as it was employed by Matthew Arnold and F.R Leavis. For Roberts the pre-modern building of the Argentine peasants would likely have been an example of architecture in harmony with its surroundings, thereby filling the 'organic' criteria that she saw as crucial in producing cultural integrity. Her diary entry for June 25th, 1943 is a typical example of this championing of the 'organic' over a mechanism bred by war:

> This fight for existence ... must be extended and exposed by the writer. It must be made known and publicised in all columns wherever space arises. ... It does not matter so long as these rural hardships are realized and understood. ... We have, as a life on this land, an offering of peace and security for the soul. A pastoral root which is wholesome and cannot but stimulate anything but the mind's conditioning: and this is of a more vital significance than anything else since the pulse of humanity has been obliterated by the machines of monstrous war. (*DLR*, 51)

There are significant parallels between Roberts' championing of the rural over the industrial and the contemporaneous 'Back to the Land' movement started by Welsh-language nationalists who advocated a return to agricultural work and the wholesale abandonment of the heavy industries such as those found in the coalfields of South Wales. Saunders Lewis, the leader of Plaid Cymru during the thirties, argued for the resettlement of former industrial workers in farming colonies and Plaid Cymru's agricultural spokesman argued that the policy was 'essential if the Welsh nation is to live. The Welsh nation is a nation with its roots in the country and the soil'.[132] For Roberts, the organic integration of human and rural environment 'conditions' the mind, making it 'wholesome'. The play on the use of the word 'root' in the phrase 'pastoral root' associates the way in which an identity might be rooted to a specific

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[132] Cited in Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Remaking Wales: nation-building and the geographical imagination, 1925-50', *Political Geography* 14, No. 3 (1995), 219-239 (p.224)

locality and specific way of life with the arboreal root. In this sense, perhaps the 'cultured hut', the central image in her poem 'The New World', could be read not only as a comment on the qualities of that culture but also on the organic nature of gaucho architecture itself since, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, the very word *culture* has its own genealogical roots in organic activity: it is a metaphor that denotes the 'tending of natural growth'.[133] The phrase 'cultured hut' suggests that the indigenous culture, like the mud huts that house that culture, has autochthonously sprung up from the ground, been constructed out of the raw materials of the earth itself.

The uses of the word 'culture' as a metaphor of organic growth and as a quality possessed corresponds with Roberts' view of rural peoples in general. For her they are near the apex of both European and South American cultures (a version of Arnold's hierarchical sense of *Culture*) precisely because they possess an organic relationship with their environment (as in the original arboreal sense of the term *culture*). According to John Pikoulis, Roberts was very much like Yeats in her admiration for rural 'peasants' and in her belief in the 'cultivation of cultured taste'; for it was only through this taste that she thought one could unite with the peasant 'other'.[134] Likes Yeats, and other members of the Celtic Revival, Roberts regarded the rural life of the Welsh peasant as a primitive antidote to the ravages of modernity and she did in fact compare her own research into the local dialect with that of John Synge's in the West of Ireland. As in the work of the Revivalists, the primitive for Roberts is given a value over and against decadent, hyper-civilized Europeans – a value linked to Rousseauean and Wordsworthian notions of the "noble savage".

That a writer in Wales during the 1930's and 40's should romanticize the rural Welsh as 'noble savages' is not entirely surprising given that such notions were being popularized at the very same time by geographers and anthropologists, and communicated to the artists and writers of Wales via Keidrych Rhys' influential magazine *Wales*. As Linda Adams has documented, the magazine was the focal point of an inter-disciplinary convergence, with articles from the preeminent anthropologist H.J Fleure placed alongside the poetry of significant English-language Welsh writers, including Roberts, Alun Lewis and John Cowper Powys.[135] Conducive to the magazine's cultural nationalist aspirations, Fleure's articles

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[133] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fonatana, 1976 [1983]), p.87
[134] John Pikoulis, 'Lynette Roberts and Alun Lewis', *Poetry Wales* 19 No.2 (1983), 9-29 (p.19)
[135] In his fascinating article, 'The Welsh People', which appeared in the tenth edition of *Wales*, Fleure outlines a history of immigration into Wales from Europe and suggests that there are descendants of pre-Roman peoples still living. Fleure identifies and explains the characteristics of different 'types of Welsh people' which he had identified after five years of measuring their features. Carmarthenshire, according to Fleure, contained type 'B' in abundance: the 'little dark Welshmen' who were short in height with oval faces and long heads, and who had

identified the Welsh people as a unique race that were able to resist assimilation into the rest of Europe because of the country's mountainous geography. M Wynn Thomas has suggested that the early poetry of R.S Thomas may have been influenced by the contemporary belief among anthropologists in Wales that the inhabitants of parts of upland Wales belonged to an entirely different race from those found in the lower valleys.[136] Thomas's first book *The Stones of the Field* (1946), published by Keidrych Rees' Druid Press, features depictions of 'noble' hill farmers, some of whom were likely to have been the prototype for Iago Prytherch, the complex primitive figure that was to appear in his later work. Like Thomas, it is highly likely that Lynette Roberts was familiar with this idea given that she followed the work of Iorwerth Peate who also published several articles in *Wales*. The 'Welsh race' thesis seems to have persisted in Peate's work in particular, making fleeting appearances even in the folk-orientated studies he published during the 1940's. Peate's seminal folk study *The Welsh House: A Study in Folk Culture* (1940), parts of which are discussed by Roberts in her article for *The Field*, devotes a small passage in its introduction to the 'unique' quality of the Welsh people:

> [Wales] may be looked upon as an upland fortress on the edge of a lowland extending from the English Plain to the Ural Mountains .... An upland, too, that has become the 'refuge' of ancient rural types, of bygone customs and forgotten things.[137]

Pyrs Gruffudd has argued that Iorwerth Peate's interests in the folk culture of rural West Wales echo those in other European countries where geographically marginal areas and the folk were imagined as being culturally central. A similar connection might also be made in relation to Robert's efforts to represent the folk culture in Llanybri. Indeed, in her incorporation of John Synge's research into the Aran Islands into her article 'Introduction to Village Dialect', in which she makes the outlandish claim to have 'arrived at the essence of

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sometimes lost any pigment in their eyes: 'These types are especially abundant around the open moorlands of Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire suggesting their ancient homes above the forested valleys: they no doubt also lived along the coasts but subsequent immigrations have complicated relations there. One may interpret the widespread importance of this type in Wales to some extent to the fact that its early waves were coming into an almost empty land ... They may well provide the substratum for a number of the Welsh folk tales, and one cannot but recall the frequent mention of the dark and rather wizened changeling baby.' H.J Fleure, 'The Welsh People', *Wales* No. 10 (1939), 265-269 (p.267)

[136] For an extensive discussion of the importance of anthropological ideas of race in the poetry of R.S Thomas, see M Wynn Thomas, '"The Stones of the Field" and the Power of the Sword', in *Wales at War: Critical Essays on Literature and Art* ed. by Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), pp.142-165

[137] Iorwerth Peate, *The Welsh House: A Study in Folk Culture* (Liverpool: Hugh Evans & Sons, 1944 (rpr. Felinfach: Llanerch, 2000)), p.9

all languages of the soil' (*DLR*, 119), Roberts makes a direct connection between rural Carmarthenshire and the West of Ireland.

That Roberts should turn to Synge's turn of the century study upon her arrival in Llanybri in 1939 is perhaps unsurprising given that groundbreaking modern anthropological studies of communities in the West of Ireland were being published at the very time same time. *The Irish Countryman: An Anthropological Study* (1937) and *Family and Community in Ireland* (1940) are generally accepted as the earliest anthropological studies of rural communities in the British Islands. The authors, Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, doctoral students from Harvard University, conducted their fieldwork in the area during the two-year period 1932-34 in an attempt to analyse the significance of custom in the contemporary life of two small villages in County Clare. Writing in the 1968 edition of *The Irish Countryman*, Arensberg himself emphasized the distinctiveness of that work and also of *Family and Community in Ireland*, stating that the texts were 'the first of the cultural-anthropological studies, now so widely distributed, to cross the ocean to the Old World of Europe and high civilisation'.[138] Underlining the innovative character of their work, anthropologist Ronald Frankenberg notes that theirs was the very first instance to examine a Western culture 'as others had done in the South Seas and in Africa.'[139]

There was, however, another pioneering piece of domestic anthropology underway that was far closer to where Roberts lived. Between 1939 and 1940, the Welsh anthropologist Alwyn D. Rees, who had been, like Iorwerth Peate, a member of the first flowering of anthropologists taught by H.J Fleure at Aberystwyth University, conducted a detailed study of Welsh community life using participant-observation as his main method. *Life in a Welsh Countryside: A Social Study of Llanfihangel yng Ngwynfa* (1950), the product of that fieldwork, was not published until 1950 because of the war but it is highly significant that Rees' study was carried out during the same period as Roberts' own research. In the foreword to the 1996 edition of Rees' study, Harold Carter notes that, as an anthropologist conducting research into his own culture, Rees was very aware of his own 'engaged' cultural position and believed that it could be used to his advantage. 'His method was participant-observation', writes Carter, 'but, more than that, he was convinced that to understand a community and appreciate the way in which it functioned one had to live in it, be a part of it and fully empathize with it. Otherwise work was superficial in the proper meaning of that word, of the

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[138] Conrad M. Arensberg & Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940 (repr. County Clare: Clasp Press, 2000)), p.lviii

[139] Ronald Frankenberg, *Communities in Britain: Social Life in Town and Country.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p.43

surface only.'[140] As an outsider to Wales who, upon arrival, took up a position similar to that of participant-observation, it is rather ironic that Lynette Roberts would have possessed an objectivity that was, initially at least, closer to the paradigm of ethnographic subjectivity than that of a Welsh anthropologist like Rees who was fully aware he was breaking one of the discipline's highest taboos. But, conducting her research outside 'official' anthropological circles, Roberts was not constrained by the professional rules of the discipline and was thus under no obligation to cultivate or maintain an objectivity of the kind that legitimised the anthropologists' enquiries. Nevertheless, despite her 'amateur' status, Roberts conducted research at the same time as a newly emerging convention of professional domestic anthropological enquiry into Welsh culture.

The notion that one's culture is under threat is perhaps another reason why Roberts was attracted to the work of Synge, whose research into the so-called 'primitive' culture on the Aran Islands was part of a wider Revivalist movement that saw potential for the renewal of cultural and national identities in the peasantry. Synge's writing, the product of long periods of intensive fieldwork on the islands, has been seen as conforming in significant ways to the protocols of the then emerging discipline of ethnography. Gregory Castle has recently shown how the key figures of the Irish Revival (he examines the work of Yeats and Joyce) employed textual and rhetorical strategies first developed in anthropology in order to translate, reassemble and edit oral and folk-cultural material. Castle argues that in their complicity with anthropological theories and methods, the Revivalists confronted and undermined inherited notions of identity which Ireland, often a site of ethnographic curiosity throughout the nineteenth century, had been subject to. Ireland's history of subjection to anthropology provided members of the Revival with an 'historical opportunity to create (through strategies of appropriation and re-signification) new representations of Irish culture and to resist the *mis*representations generated by British colonialists and anthropologists and Irish-Ireland nationalists.'[141]

It is tempting to see Robert's anthropologically-inflected efforts to salvage Welsh folk life as a strategy of resistance similar to the type that Castle finds evidence of in the work of the Revivalists. Indeed, anti-imperial sentiments are evident not only in her work but also in the magazine *Wales*, which was openly suspicious of the Second World War during the

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[140] Harold Carter, 'Foreword' in Alwyn D. Rees *Life in a Welsh Countryside: A Social Study of Llanfihangel yng Ngwynfa* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996 (rpr.1950)), p. 4

[141] Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.11

opening years of the conflict, seeing it as an imperial re-run.[142] Roberts also wrote about the need for Welsh writers to resist being 'submerged in an Anglicised culture' in an effort to maintain the 'peculiarities of the Celtic imagination' and she was particularly vocal about the need to preserve the 'indigenous' architecture of Wales (*DLR*, 142). It was through her interest in architecture that she became familiar with Iorwerth Peate and his idea for an Open Air Museum, an idea that would come to fruition in 1946 as Saint Fagans National History Museum. As Pyrs Gruffudd has documented, for Peate, the museum was to be part of a recovery of what he considered to be an 'authentic' national past. A fervent cultural nationalist, Peate sought to define both the history and the future of the Welsh nation by reuniting the 'folk' with its tradition – expressed through building, crafts, costume and folklore – and also with its identity in a revitalized Wales.[143] Peate intended the folk museum to play a major part in post-war reconstruction and published an article in *Wales* outlining his proposal. It is likely that Roberts encountered the idea for the museum in her husband's magazine although she also seems to have been aware of Peate's work on Welsh architecture. She addresses the issue in her article 'Simplicity of the Welsh Village':

> The plan for a cottage, farmhouse or mansion has varied so little over the many centuries that all Dr Iorwerth Peate describes in *The Welsh House* can be found today, not only in my own village, but over the whole of Wales.
>
> What we need, then, is not so much to preserve the rural architecture of Wales in a museum behind glass, nor to build an exact model of a Welsh village retaining all its craft and folklore, such as Hazelius founded in Sweden, and was later developed in Denmark and Norway, etc. This is good if it is kept to Dr Iorwerth Peate's original purpose and not misinterpreted to mean a pseudo Hollywood village, part modernised with concrete bathing-pool and cinema ... But what is far more urgent, is to have the support of valuable persons like Dr Peate to help preserve and repair the numerous farms and cottages, no different from those which he wishes to represent in his Open Air Museum. Here, in whole villages, or on isolated farms, exist the very buildings of the peasantry, together with the natural mode of life and craft which goes with it. (*DLR*, 128)

For Roberts, the exhibits that were to be on display in the museum as artifacts rescued from obscurity were still standing in parts of Wales. What Peate documented as the *past*, as a long gone 'indigenous' Welsh culture, was a *present* reality for the 'peasantry' that Roberts knew

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[142] The magazine portrayed the Second World War as a repeat of the previous war and as an imperialistic endeavour that would only benefit profiteers. An advert from the tenth edition in 1939 declared: 'Now running: Repeat Performance of the Stupendous Success "The War to End War" or "MAKING the WORLD SAFE for DEMOCRACY' which had previously run 'for over four years, 1914-1918'. Advert in *Wales*, No. 10 (1939), p.29

[143] Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Heritage as National Identity: Histories and Prospects of the National Pasts' *Heritage, Tourism and Society* ed. by David T. Herbert (London: Mansell Publishing, 1995), pp.49-68, p.62

of. For her, a museum that merely replicates the reality of these villages must be secondary to the 'urgent' job of fixing the actual buildings that exist there already. In a moment that seems to anticipate Jean Baudrillard's theorization of the simulacra, Roberts recognized that as a reflection of reality, the museum was vulnerable to misinterpretation and falsification.[144] The pseudo Hollywood village with its 'concrete bathing pool and cinema' was an example of this misrepresentation.

Roberts' concerns regarding the composition of the museum broadly anticipate some of the recent criticism that the museum has faced. The historian Peter Lord has criticized Iorwerth Peate for the historically narrow version of Wales that he, as the first curator of the museum, produced at Sain Ffagan. The original definition of the National Museum of Wales' role was one that emphasized a holistic approach to Welsh culture, incorporating both folk culture and industry at the same time. However, as Lord points out, the museum at Sain Ffagan initially chose not to include the industrial culture of Wales and instead opted for a version of folk culture that put exclusive emphasis on rural communities and craft.[145] For Lord, the museum effectively 'locks Wales into a perpetual rural past': 'Wales has come to an end at some indeterminate point in the nineteenth century, a passive nation existing in a time warp. It is a concluded story.'[146]

Despite her misgivings about the museum, Roberts' notion that the past that Peate sought to reproduce was a present reality in Llanybri highlights the degree to which she saw her new home as existing in a time-warp analogous to that which Lord finds the museum guilty of producing. Indeed, the extent to which Roberts saw Llanybri as being a thing of or out of the past is evident throughout her correspondence with her editor and friend Robert Graves. The word 'medieval' is frequently employed to describe the local area and it alerts us to her habit of portraying the local culture to (metropolitan) outsiders as fundamentally different. [147] Indeed, it might be interesting to note here that during the same decade the word 'medieval' was often employed in British representations of India in order to reinforce the

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[144] See Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', *Simulations* trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext, 1983), pp 1-75

[145] Peter Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), p. 40. Lord does note, however, that the recent addition of terrace houses suggests that the 'history' of Wales, as it is told by the museum, now looks likely to include Wales' industrial past.

[146] Ibid.

[147] The word is used in a letter to Graves when she discusses her unpublished novel *Nesta*. She explains that the period of the novel was chosen because, firstly, she was brought up in a French and Spanish convent and, secondly, because 'rural villages in Wales are still so medieval in craft and manner: it was observations that I had made on thatching etc: lining – I do my own for the cottage that enabled me to write of these again and probably correctly (since the custom has not changed...)'. Roberts quoted in Joanna Lloyd, 'Correspondence between Lynette Roberts and Robert Graves', *Poetry Wales*, 19 No. 2 (1983), pp.51-124, p.60

idea of the Indian people as 'culturally retrograde'.[148] Such a view of Wales is also in keeping with her designation of the people of Llanybri as 'peasants'. Of course, conditions in Llanybri *were* extremely hard and relatively basic compared to the metropolitan centres where the recipients of her letters often lived and where Roberts lived herself prior to the village. She faced a situation in Llanybri in which the modernization of domestic life (electricity, sewage systems) had yet to take place; it was to Dylan Thomas's house across the estuary that Roberts and her husband travelled to benefit from the warmth and light electricity provided. Llanybri had yet to be put on the grid and as such was perceived by the scientifically minded Roberts as a vision of the past in stasis. Her remarks however were not that far detached from the view of Wales as it was represented in popular travelogues. In their travel book, *The Land of Wales* (1939) which was advertised in *Wales*, Welsh brother and sister Peter and Eiluned Lewis cautioned the metropolitan reader that the 'traveller who buys a ticket at Paddington or Euston should be warned that he is about to travel backwards as well as westwards, for Wales is a storehouse of the past.'[149]

Whilst conditions were relatively poor in Llanybri, the apparent medievalism of the locale clearly provided Roberts with precisely the same kind of subject matter – a mysterious and foreign culture – that proved so attractive to those anthropologists conducting intensive fieldwork in the colonies and that, perhaps more importantly, she alone could rescue from obscurity and degradation. Her 'epic' modernist poem, *Gods with Stainless Ears* signals its 'salvage' ethic from the outset, suggesting to the reader that what follows is as much an anthropological project as it is a literary one:

> The background is similar to any rural village: only the surface culture is superimposed or altogether distinct. The sentences at the end of the book are to pierce any obscurity owing to the isolation of localised folklore; or to make known the legends which belong to this particular part of the world. (*RCP*, 43)

Despite its similarity to other rural villages, the 'surface culture' is an 'isolated' and therefore highly distinct entity.[150] In fact it is distinct or 'other' to such an extent that its artistic

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[148] Sudeshna Banerjee, 'Reading the poverty of India: A Critical engagement with the Saidian interpretation of Orientalism' in *Reorienting Orientalism*, ed. by Chandreyee Niyogi (New Delhi: Sage, 2006), pp.168-203, p.171

[149] Eiluned and Peter Lewis quoted in Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Heritage as National Identity: Histories and Prospects of the National Pasts', p.55. The book was advertised in the 9th edition of Keidrych Rhys' magazine *Wales* as a 'review of Welsh scenery and life'. See 'The Land of Wales' advertisement, *Wales*, No.9 (1939), p.25

[150] Roberts' intention to explicate this isolated yet distinct culture resonates with the work of the anthropologist Franz Boas. For Boas, 'culture' was a discrete, geographically bounded system and therefore open to analysis. George Stocking has suggested that Boas' revolutionary ideas, particularly his interest in the 'genius of a

rendering needs to be accompanied by the kind of explanatory notes that one would normally expect to find placed alongside a glassed-off museum exhibit. Moreover, it would appear these notes are intended to function as a series of 'salvage' efforts in themselves: they are designed to 'pierce any obscurity' (*RCP*, 43) caused by the 'isolation' of the culture.[151] In other words, they are engineered to rescue that culture from 'obscurity' and, in addition, to render it transparent to the unfamiliar eye. Like Peate's museum, the poem was an attempt at salvaging a piece of the nation's culture, something made explicit in note to Part IV: 'I have intentionally used Welsh quotations as this helps give the conscious compact and culture of another nation' (*RCP*, 76).

James Clifford has recently argued that modern anthropological methods of collection and exhibition produce authenticity by extracting cultural objects from their current historical situation. In relativist anthropology, Clifford notes, cultural artefacts were displayed in a string of 'synchronous "ethnographic presents"' that represented 'the "authentic" context of the collected objects, often just prior to their collection or display. Both collector and salvage ethnographer could claim to be the [very] last to rescue "the real thing"'.[152] These contextualised artefacts served as 'objective "witnesses" to the total multidimensional life of a culture'.[153] For Clifford, these objects gain their authenticity as 'witnesses' when they are taken from their original historical context and placed in a modern exhibition setting.[154] There is a certain museum-like quality to Roberts' poetry in terms of its use of cultural objects that are removed from their 'original' context and inserted into and exhibited as, verse. Indeed, in a review of Roberts' *Collected Poems* (2005), the art critic Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan asserted that '[r]eading Lynette Roberts is like visiting St Fagan's or Ironbridge – the poems are relics of a material culture which I shared with at least two generations and whose artifacts [sic]

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people', led to the emergence of culture area studies during the 1920s and the study of culture and personality during in the 1930s. George Stocking, *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974 (rprn.1982)), p.18

[151] Roberts' attempt to put this 'isolated' village on display through the poem might be compared to the way in which native villages were displayed complete with live inhabitants in the great world fairs that took place in St. Louis, Chicago, Paris, San Francisco during late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In his discussion of the anthropological methods employed to study 'culture', James Clifford notes that the village, which provided early ethnographer's with a bounded site that served as a 'habitable, mappable centre for the community', was a 'portable unit' so it could be used in different anthropological contexts, including the great fairs. According to Clifford the village site 'offered a way to centralize a research practice, and at the same time it served as synecdoche, as point of focus, or part, through which one could represent the cultural "whole".' James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures' in *Cultural Studies* ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Triechler (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp.96-116, p98.

[152] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.228

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid, 228

museum curators seem no longer to expect anyone outside their profession to recognize.'[155] In a general sense, a poetic text such as 'Poem from Llanybri' collocates a series of objects – the bowl of cawl, the lover's spoon, the clog shoes – to be cultural 'witnesses' to 'everyday' village life and consequently amounts to a kind of synecdoche of traditional local culture. Of course, it is possible to argue that these objects hold a certain aesthetic value prior to their appearance in the poem as we might consider them as 'traditional' Welsh cultural artefacts. And if we recognise them as such, as 'artistic' artefacts represented within an artistic context – the poem itself – then it would seem that her work closely approximates the context-dependent paradigm of early twentieth-century exhibition practices. For the cultural objects displayed within the poem are effectively seen in their authentic context, in their 'ethnographic presents'. Assigning different levels of 'cultural status' or authenticity to cultural objects is perhaps not the most fruitful way to approach any poetry but what is surprising is the degree to which Robert's more experimental verse manages to play with these categories. *Gods With Stainless Ears* contains instances where typically non-aesthetic objects are given an 'artistic' value as 'witnesses' to culture and, as a result, observations of local customs and traditions become components of, and so partial producers of, aesthetic value. As we shall see, the texture of the poem owes much to such startling acts of re-inscription.

Part 1 of *Gods* opens with a panoramic view of the estuary through a series of quick snap shots of the inhabitants of the local village; specific people are singled out and cultural practices are highlighted. John Roberts, a local fisherman whose craft Roberts had previously documented in a folk magazine article entitled 'Coracles of Towy' (*DLR*, 133-138), appears several times throughout Part 1. In the following passage he appears as a mythical boatman practising his folk craft:

> And small affiliated tares. – So walk swiftly by,
> For today, *pridian*, tears ravens wings to grate
> The bay, and John Roberts covered with ligustrum,
> Always sanitary and discreet, rows to and fro from
> Bell house to fennel, floating quietly on the tide. (*RCP*, 45)

Towards the end of Part 1 he is mentioned again in a series of disorientating excerpts of speech which appear to question the whereabouts of several people from the village:

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[155] Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Insights from an Outsider', *Planet*, 176 (2006), 87-88 (p.88)

Under the washing line of blue. 'Who's
Speaking now?' 'Who's there in the Chapel Yard
Who bends?' 'Mari Ann is cleaning the graves.'
'Where's the "professor" he should know?' 'If the tide
Swept back for the Saint Cadoc where was God

To smooth their corrugated mouths: strike a path
To the Laugharne Pubs?' 'Where's John Roberts,
Old Charon and his Coracle?' 'Who's there low
At tide who blends?' .... (*RCP*, 49)

In addition to such 'real' people as John Roberts, Part 1 also alludes to the war-time practice of making 'pele', a substitute for coal, (*RCP*, 47) and stone engraving ('Fine gentle ways fill time's Grave Stone/ From Stonehenge Blue to Granite's sharp Black.' (*RCP*, 48)), both of which are documented in Roberts' diary. For her, it seems, adding 'local colour', as it were, is an important poetic practice. From the examples above it is clear that she is utilising her observations of the folk culture in Llanybri and exhibiting the product of that research as various forms of cultural 'witnesses'. In other words, the anthropological data becomes a form of aesthetic currency to be deposited in the text.

In his examination of museum practices of exhibition, James Clifford has observed that appropriated cultural artefacts can hold different kinds of value or status when placed in other 'cultural' contexts.[156] Coeval with the contextual ethnographic turn in twentieth-century anthropology were developments in art and literature which accorded tribal objects with a 'non-ethnographic admiration'. Thus, the 'proper-place' of non-Western objects was called into question because, as Marc Manganaro puts it, '[a]n object that had value in an early twentieth-century ethnographic museum as a "cultural witness" – a tribal mask, say – would in the same period become valued in an art museum as "an authentic masterpiece".[157] Clifford notes that since the 1920s the boundaries between these two values, the ethnographic and the aesthetic, were not fixed; instead, a 'controlled migration' occurred between the institutions of anthropology and art.[158]

Given Roberts' habit of directly transposing the various forms of raw ethnographic data she has accumulated from her observations of village life to poetry, it is tempting to see a version of the 'controlled migration' that Clifford detects within early twentieth-century practices of museum exhibition, as integral to the construction of her modernist aesthetic. As a result of this transposition Roberts was able to produce artistic texts within which objects

[156] Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p.228
[157] Manganaro, *Culture, 1922*, p.41
[158] Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p.228

not conventionally recognized as "aesthetic" are given the same value as those that are. The figure of John Roberts in Part 1 of *Gods*, exemplifies the anthropological to aesthetic migration that Clifford talks of since he appears in a folk study that Roberts wrote for the magazine *The Field* and in the artistic context of the poem itself. Thus, like a museum curator, able to affect the placement of artefacts and ultimately their art/anthropological value, Roberts essentially moves the figure through genres (the anthropological and the aesthetic). Indeed, she even informs the reader that she is doing so: a note accompanying the first appearance of John Roberts in Part 1 directs us back to the research essay in *The Field* for further information on the subject.[159] Evidence for this 'migration' between the anthropological and aesthetic can also be found when we look at her use of the local dialect in her poetry. The peculiar use of the English language in Llanybri fascinated Roberts and it did so to such an extent that she wrote several essays on the subject. In an article entitled 'An Introduction to Welsh dialect', she tries to illustrate the continuity between the living speech of Llanybri and the ancient forms of Welsh and more generally what Roberts' conceives as the common root between all 'languages of the soil'. In much the same way as an anthropologist would collect a cultural artefact to be inserted as a 'witness' to culture within a museum context, Roberts collects the speech of Llanybri and inserts it into new 'artistic' contexts.

Critics of Roberts' poetry have frequently commented on the need for contextual information to understand many of the references in her more experimental pieces. James A. Davies, for example, bemoans what he sees as a needless level of obscurity in her work which, for him, frequently suggests 'the draft rather than the finished product.'[160] Discussing her poem 'Crossed and Uncrossed', he writes that '[t]hough the need for context should hardly trouble post-Eliot and post-Pound readers, more open to criticism is its seemingly unnecessary obscurity'.[161] However he concedes that the problems he detects – 'her way with syntax and punctuation [and] her esoteric diction' – 'might be an expression of her modernism.'[162] Responding to such criticisms, Patrick McGuinness has pointed out that 'some of her alleged obscurity, and much of her oblique or inverted syntax' is 'down to her tendency to transcribe, unaltered, the idioms and phrases she hears all around her. While many of her phrases seem cryptic, elliptical or contorted, many are simply unmediated, direct

[159] These references to Roberts' own research into certain cultural practices in Llanybri provide the text with a kind of meta-textual anthropological authority.
[160] James A. Davies, 'Dylan Thomas and his Welsh Contemporaries', in *Welsh Writing in English* ed. by M Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 120-164, (p.155)
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

speech'(*RCP*, xxi). McGuinness asserts that the key to reading Roberts' work is to recognize that it is 'set in a real place, in the midst of a real event, among real people'(*RCP*, xx). We can see in McGuinness's comment that at the root of much of the apparent criticism levelled at Roberts' poetry is this process of re-contextualisation, where various cultural products are removed from their immediate context and re-incorporated into the text often without warning. Thus, the charge of 'obscurity' often leveled at Robert's modernism seems to stem from her habit of transposing the raw ethnographic data she has accumulated from her observations of village life into her poetry. Because this anthropological impulse is incorporated into her poetic method, Roberts produces artistic texts within which objects not conventionally recognized as "aesthetic" are given the same value as those that are. Un-stylised speech, for example, can become a component of, and partial producer of, aesthetic value so that the boundaries between what is typically considered as anthropological and what is considered as purely literary are crossed.

Such a boundary crossing is evident in the story 'Swansea Raid', collected in her study of the language of Llanybri, *An Introduction to Village Dialect, with Seven Stories* (1944). The story captures the bombing of Swansea with a mixture of technical language and the unmediated direct speech of Roberts' friend Rosie:

> I, that is Xebo7011 pass out into the chill-blue air and join Xebn5591162
> Her sack apron greening by the light of the moon. I read around her hips:
> 'BEST CWT: CLARK'S COW-CAKES, H.T.5.' I do not laugh because I love
> my peasant friend. The night is clear, spacious, a himmel blue, and the
> stars minute pinpricks. The elbow-drone of jerries burden the sky and
> our sailing planes tack in and out with their fine metallic hum.
>
> Oh! Look how lovely she is caught in those lights! Oh!
>
> From our high village on the Towy we can see straight down the
> South Wales Coast. Every searchlight goes up, a glade of magnesium
> Waning to a distant hill which we know we know to be Swansea. (*DLR*, 103)

The poem was first published in *Life and Letters To-Day* in 1941 but, significantly, it appeared then with the title 'From a New Perception of Colour', and the subtitle: 'And I shall take as my Example the Raid on Swansea'. As John Pikoulis has commented, read with the original subtitle in mind, the traumatic event of the bombing becomes converted into a technical aesthetic exercise.[163] For Roberts, he suggests, the bombing 'becomes an "example" of a "new perception of colour"'.[164] Throughout the poem Roberts observes the bombing in

[163] John Pikoulis, 'Lynette Roberts and Alun Lewis', p.13
[164] Ibid.

several different ways. Her friend Rosie, referenced as her 'peasant friend', is at first identified by her number, Xebn5591162; she is then 'read' visually through the text fragment 'BEST CWT: CLARK'S COW-CAKES, HT.5.' The event of the bombing is rendered in such photographic detail that the reader is provided with a visual reading of both the immediate and intimate local.[165] The explosion itself is conveyed later through a chemical analysis:

> Swansea's sure to be bad; look at those flares like a swarm of orange bees.
>
> They fade and others return. 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. A Jerry overhead drops two flares; the cows returning to their sheds wear hides of cyanite blue, their eyes GLINTING OPALS! We, alarmed, stand puce beneath another flare, our blood distilled, cylindricals of glass. (*DLR*, 103)

The particularities of the raid are strikingly rendered through what seem like a series of abrupt visual and auditory accounts. The resulting staccato-like prose style has something in common with the fast-paced documentary reports created by participants in the Mass-Observation movement during the late 1930s. Like Roberts' document of the bombing, an historical event witnessed by many, the M-O reports concentrated on significant events and were themselves abound with parataxis, for they employed, perhaps out of necessity, short, sharp fragments of sights and sounds. A typical report on the Coronation Day, 13 May 1937 reads as follows:

> Lancaster Gate. 2.20. Kensington Garden shut, full of soldiers, girls leaning over park railings calling to them, soldiers indicate guards at gate despairingly. Indians arguing in tube about the necessity of the Bakerloo extension to Stanmore, one says, 'People in suburbs are scarcely human, they should be kept as far out of London as possible' ... Traffic Jam at Oxford Circus, takes about 15 minutes to get up escalators. Singing coming from every part of Oxford street. Fruit barrows, sellers of rosettes and newspapers, no motors ... Young man to girls "Hey, have you got to go home

[165] The visual thrust of Roberts' poetry may also have something to do with her position within the village community as a kind of 'participant-observer'. Exploring the significance of visualism in anthropology and ethnography, James Clifford has noted, for example, that '[t]he predominant metaphors in anthropological research have been participant-observation, data collection, and cultural description, all of which presuppose a standpoint outside – looking at, objectifying, or somewhat close, "reading", a given reality'. James Clifford, 'Partial Truths' in *Writing Culture: The poetics and Politics of Ethnography ed.* by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 1-21, p.11.

> tonight?" – This seems to be the most frequent question asked, answer always in negative....[166]

Patrick McGuiness has noted Roberts' connection with the Mass Observation movement[167] through her friendship with Kathleen Raine, wife of the poet Charles Madge, a poet and influential member of the movement but it is also evident that Roberts' style of documentation shared something with that of the 'M-O' Reports. Indeed, there was a significant presence of Modernist writers (including Raine and Madge), visual artists and musicians in the movement itself. Examining the part they played in Mass-Observation, Tyrus Miller has recently called attention to the apparent convergence of documentary and modernist aesthetics in the new prose poem that emerged in the 1930s in the work of modernistically orientated writers such as David Gascoyne, Charles Madge and the film-maker Humphrey Jennings. Surrealist in its inspiration, the prose poem was, he argues, shaped by each writer's 'idiosyncratic reading of the documentary aesthetic, particularly their filtering of it through Marcel Duchamp's use of everyday objects in his "ready-mades". [168] Because of its docu-modernist nature, Miller goes on to argue, the prose poem poses basic difficulties of context and significance, 'of the very status of the text generically and ontologically':[169]

> Jennings' "reports" are puzzling so long as we are seeking to make them "reports of" something and do not see that these are "reports" to be viewed as objects whose referential or functional aspects have been rendered ambiguous, though not fully effaced. These texts, as Kathleen Raine pointed out in her preface to Jennings's posthumous collected poems, can be seen as akin to Marcel Duchamp's appropriation and re-inscription of readymade domestic objects. [170]

Although Roberts does not fully share the surrealist dimension of this 'documentary modernism', her work does counter the received idea of modernism as mode of writing antithetical to documentary and, as I have argued, produces problems of context similar to

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[166] Unnamed report cited in Tyrus Miller, *Time-Images: Alternative Temporalities in Twentieth-Century Theory, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), p.110

[167] The Mass Observation Movement was a research group founded in 1937 by the anthropologist Tom Harrison, poet Charles Madge and the documentary film-maker Humphrey Jennings, with the intention of producing a documentary account of everyday British life – an 'anthropology of ourselves'. The project relied on a large network of volunteers who were tasked to record snippets of overhead conversations, anecdotes and interviews with people in the street.

[168] Tyrus Miller, 'Documentary/Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930's' in *Modernism/Modernity*, 9.2 (2002) pp.226-241, p. 230

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid.

that found in the 'idiosyncratic' texts that Miller has identified. Indeed, the problem of context that arises out of Roberts' practice of re-inscription is an issue that Tony Conran has touched on in his book *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry* (1997). Conran suggests that contextual problems arise in the work of the 'heroic generation of Anglo-Welsh women poets' (composed of Lynette Roberts, Margiad Evans and Brenda Chamberlain):

> All three have this sort of problematic relationship to Wales, all three are visual artists as well as writers, and all three are 'primitives' in the sense that we use the word of painters – poets without a training in literature, whose work therefore involves problems in appreciation. In particular, the clear boundaries most poets with literary training make between private and public worlds are frequently transgressed. This is not simply a matter of using private emotions – all lyrics poets do that – but of using phrases or words which mean precise things to them but which are often not totally intelligible without explanation. As with other primitives (John Clare, Emily Dickinson) these poets' viewpoint is eccentric to their culture's literary norm, though perhaps derivable from it. The primitives' isolation is in a sense a reflection of the isolation of all modernist art. That is perhaps why Henri Rousseau lived happily beside the cubists. But it is not necessarily the same thing as modernism, though most 'primitives' would certainly claim to be modern. Modernists create an environment where 'primitives' can come to the fore; so much so that 'primitive' and modernist can often be regarded as two sides of the same cultural upheaval ... 'Primitives' in our sense seem to arise when cultures are in turmoil. There are new and revolutionary ways of thinking about art; there is also a churning of people in the fathom-rake of the winds of change. The possibility of making significant art seems suddenly available to those who are neither trained as artists nor of the 'correct' social group.[171]

As Patrick McGuiness has recently pointed out, there is a danger that Conran's use of the term 'primitive' may obscure the fact that Roberts was 'educated, well-read and artistically trained' but the general 'primitive-modernist' thesis Conran articulates is accurate, particularly the way in which he characterizes much of Roberts' apparent idiosyncrasy as a product of her cultural liminality (*RCP*, xxxiv). The textualisation of culture by one who is, like Roberts, an 'outsider' to the conventions of that culture, appears, in Conran's words, 'eccentric', although, crucially, as he points out, that viewpoint is, to a degree, 'derivable' from that culture. In other words, what this unique subjectivity – Conran terms it 'isolation' – allows for is an opportunity to appropriate that culture for aesthetic means. For Roberts, poetry was to act as an authentic representation of culture, a theory glimpsed in a remark she made when comparing 'Poem from Llanybri', the poem she had sent to Alun Lewis, with his poem 'Peace': 'My poem is real i.e. true of the everyday things I do. Yours is mythical.'[172]

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[171] Tony Conran, *Frontiers in Anglo-Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p.165-166.
[172] Roberts quoted in Pikoulis, 'Lynette Roberts and Alun Lewis', p. 19

Roberts' remarks suggest reading her poetry as a documentary of her everyday life, a life filled with various cultural artefacts. Indeed, her description of the poem points to the degree to which she viewed her own life as having a part in the upkeep of traditional Welsh culture. In other words, 'authentic' village life was one that purposefully performed custom and 'authentic' village poetry was one that documented or collected that 'reality' on mimetic-ethnographic grounds. In his essay Conran goes on to write that, although Roberts is not a poet who uses poetry as an 'extension of an intimate journal', her work is 'better read in the context of prose – journal or autobiography' and he proceeds to prove this by analyzing several of her poems using her diary.[173] In a note to this section Conran laments the absence of a mixture of prose and poetry in English literature in general, describing it as 'a sort of own goal which our culture is always scoring against itself.'[174] But as I have shown above, Roberts' appropriation of culture involves a kind of contextual 'migration' where an anthropologically inflected documentation of local culture (often exhibited as prose) can appear exhibited as poetry.

Roberts' practice of incorporating both cultural and textual artefacts into her poetic texts does in many ways appear to resonate with T.S. Eliot's own practice of textual bricolage; the shoring up of 'fragments', as it is put in the epigram at the start of *The Waste Land,* against the 'ruins' of both the self and of modernity.[175] In a chapter examining the concept of culture as it appears in the work of T.S Eliot, Marc Manganaro has argued that *The Waste Land* can be profitably read as a museum in terms of its use of cultural artefacts. For Manganaro, these artefacts, which are often 'borrowed, torn, stolen from their "original" or least prior contexts', are a powerful arrangement of 'cultural witnesses', which roll towards a 'synecdoche of *world* culture.'[176] Eliot's practice of cultural 'borrowing' seeks to expose fragmentation on a global cultural scale. However, Roberts' modernism seeks unashamedly to be a force of cultural and national cohesion, gathering elements of Welsh culture and exhibiting them as an anthropologist would in a national museum. Indeed, it is in this sense that a poem like *Gods* is closer to Franz Boas' context-dependent paradigm of museum exhibition than a text like Eliot's *The Waste Land* was. Undoubtedly, Roberts' poetry contains belated echoes of the metropolitan Modernisms of the 1920's and 30's yet it is markedly different because its spatial and temporal boundaries are somewhat limited to the

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[173] Conran, *Frontiers*, p.167
[174] Ibid, p.168.
[175] T.S Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poem* (New York and London: Broadview Press, 2010), p.430
[176] Manganaro, *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), p.41.

region of Wales.

It would, however, be a gross mistake to describe the poem as an exhibition solely concerned with the 'local' culture or, indeed, to describe Robert's Modernism itself as one derived exclusively from that locale. Indeed, in the 'Preface' to *Gods* it is made explicit that the poem works in at least two different contextual directions at the same time: we are informed that whilst the 'surface culture is superimposed or altogether distinct' the 'background is *similar to any* rural village'. In this respect, the preface signals the poem's concurrent tendency towards a highly focused, geographically circumscribed analysis of the locality and the seemingly opposite tendency towards intercultural comparison. In short, the poem is as much about and derived from the inter-local as it is the local.

It was in fact through her research on local dialect that we can see how fundamental a sense of rural internationalism was to her perception of the community she encountered in Llanybri. Formulating her own ideas on the history of the local dialect, what she later came to regard as one of 'the languages of the soil', Roberts notes in her diary in 1945 that:

> The basis of a dialect depends on four main issues: occupation of the community; whether they have been conquered over a long period and how suppressed; weather; and mythology, that is customs, healing cures, superstitions, and religion. In all rural communities there is a similarity of basic rhythm, ritual and sad melodic flavour, contrasted by the festive joyousness of the gatherers of the harvest. And in particular, a similarity of exact syntax can be traced between the idioms of the Irish, Bretons, Provencals, French, Spanish, North Italians, Friesian islanders, Swiss, Flemming through the ancient laws of husbandry. (*DLR*, 66)

The comparative nature of her research finds a correlate in the practice of the Victorian comparative anthropologists – often known as 'arm-chair' anthropologists because they often never left Cambridge – who drew parallels between cultures through the comparison of myth and ritual work. In anthropological terms, what we see in Roberts' research is a combination of the comparative method used by 'arm-chair-anthropologists' such as J.G Frazer and the ethnographic method (of participant-observation) that became popularized in the 1920's and 30's by the likes of Bronislaw Malinowski.[177] We can see the interchange between the two methods in her research article, 'Coracles of the Towy':

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[177] It has been noted however that these two forms of anthropology were not as distinctly separate as their practitioners liked to argue. As George Stocking notes, J.G Frazer, the don of comparative anthropology, wrote the foreword for Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), which is generally considered as seminal in bringing the participant-observation method of ethnographic enquiry to dominance. George Stocking has argued that in both style and substance, Malinowski's work owed much to Frazerian

> As for their instinct in finding new shifts of sand in the river bed, treacherous quicksands, small whirlpools large enough to upset the coracle, strong tidal currents, no scientific training could teach them this. J. G. Frazer in the Golden Bough has noted this: 'Now they tell the depth of river or sea bed by the smell. By the smell of the sea bed found on the lead; or by a strip of seaweed caught in hemp. They will tell you whether the water is shallow or deep. (*DLR*, 137)

In the article Roberts combines both ethnographic material, evidence derived from first hand experience such as conversations, with a diverse and eclectic range of reading that includes Frazer's famous text, *The Golden Bough*; a combination of what we might call the 'experienced' and the purely 'textual'. Moreover, at times Roberts even integrates these research methods so that, as in the passage above, Frazer's elucidation of a 'ritual' is used in turn to explain the ethnographic data that she has accumulated. It is ironic, however, that her quotation from Frazer appears to have a mythic status in itself.[178] The important point, however, is that Roberts was using a book primarily concerned with mythology to explain the 'peasant' culture she was investigating. Such an association points towards the way in which, for Roberts, the people of Llanybri could take on a mythic significance.

Marc Manganaro has highlighted the 1920's and 30's as a time when developments in the discipline of literary criticism bore significant affinities to those occurring in cultural anthropology. Modernist literary critics, he notes, argued for a thorough revamping of the activity of criticism that emphasized 'discipline, equivalence (or analogousness) to scientific research, objectivity (often termed impersonality), and, like modern anthropology's fieldwork method, a careful, close analysis of its object, in this case the literary text.'[179] Roberts' documentary approach to poetry does at times approximate the turn to technicality that characterised a key shift in both literary criticism and anthropology during the 1930's and 40's. A glance at the Notes to her poem *Gods With Stainless Ears* will no doubt confirm the extensive scientific approach Roberts took towards her research in Welsh myth and indeed in the local traditions and people of Llanybri. However, Roberts was also very vocal about the need to 'technicalise' literature in general. In an exchange with Robert Graves concerning the nature of contemporary poetry and prose she argues for the necessity of myth, crucially

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anthropology. See George Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888-1951* (London: Athlone, 1996)

[178] After consulting Frazer's text I cannot find any evidence of the quotation that Roberts uses or any discussion of coracle men or fishermen. J.G Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)

[179] Manganaro, *Culture,* 1922, p.11.

adding that it must 'only be used in relation to its scientific handling'.[180]

When contrasted with the myth-ordered Modernism of Eliot and Joyce, Roberts' 'mythic method', in *Gods* is neither structurally pervasive, in the sense that the poem lacks a grand schematic ordering based on ancient myth, or as geographically or culturally diverse in its sources. Very rarely do we get explicit reference to material that does not originate in Wales or from Roberts' memories of South America. The actual sourcing of myth material in her work is derived almost exclusively out of the rural locality. Whereas the Anglo-European tradition of Modernism, as Gregory Castle has pointed out, abstains from a focus on the 'local' in favour of 'a pan-historical universalism typically marked by an emphasis on non-Western modes of religious transcendence' (Eliot's use of the Upanishads in *The Waste Land* for instance), Roberts sources her ingredients locally, so to speak, and, perhaps more importantly, out of her own experience of that place.[181] When 'mythic' connections are made, for example, they appear to move along a temporal rather than a geographical axis, thereby emphasising the mythic past of the locality as it is embodied in the present circumstance of the immediate living culture: When the troops march into the bay in Part 1 of *Gods*, for example, a local man, whose name is appended to his occupation in the 'traditional' manner, compares the Second World War to a legendary 6th century battle, famous for its near annihilation of the Welsh side: 'Men ... "training/For another Cattraeth" said Evans shop.' (*RCP*, 46) When her sourcing of myth branches out beyond the confines of the locality, as in the description of the hills of the Towy estuary as 'Homeric' (*RCP*, 44), the reader finds in the accompanying notes to the poem that Roberts actually means to elucidate, in her own rather eccentric manner, the historical belief in a direct connection between the ancient Trojan civilization and the people of the Carmarthenshire coastline.[182] After quoting from Giraldus Cambrensis' (Gerald of Wales)1180 text *Itinerary Through Wales*, she informs the reader that '[t]here are historians who believe Trojans came and settled on this coast. In years to come archaeologists may discover both the Temples and City as Sir Arthur Evans and Schliemann discovered both Knossos and Troy – by studying the legends in the locality.' (*RCP*, 71) Here then is an example of not only Roberts' habit of finding oblique ways of repatriating myth for the purpose of enriching the history of the locality but also of her technique of approaching local history in terms of cultural diffusion. Indeed, as in the

[180] Roberts quoted in Joanna Lloyd, 'Correspondence between Lynette Roberts and Robert Graves', p. 59
[181] Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, p.208
[182] Roberts' term 'Homeric hills' is very similar to the phrase 'Homeric landscape' used by the English art critic John Ruskin in his discussion of the way the ancient Greeks viewed external nature. See John Ruskin, 'Of Landscape' in *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from his Writings* (London: Routledge, 1979), pp.72-83, p.81

context-dependent anthropology of Franz Boas, Roberts is concerned with cultural 'elements' – in this case the element is the landscape from which the married soldier departs – defined not simply as the present but as the result of 'the history of the people, the influence of the regions through which it passed in its migrations, and the people with whom it came into contact.'[183] What we have here again is a textual example of the degree to which Roberts' 'scientific' use of myth has its parallels in the methodology of anthropology.

Beyond Salvage

Roberts' privileging of all things 'traditional' is in some ways as much a product of the contemporary context of war in Europe as it is a reaction against it. Whilst the recourse to a simpler rural past could help one imagine an alternative to what she tellingly called the 'robot war', (i.e. a distinctly non-organic, impersonal affair) , the country's necessity for agricultural resources during the war actively promoted a throwback to an organicism of a similar order: 'Dig for Victory' as the government campaign had it. Marina Mackay has traced a similar nostalgia for the pre-industrial in the late works of Eliot and Woolf in her recent study of Modernism during the Second World War.[184] The opening of Eliot's *East Coker*, for example, provides a rather kitsch description of a long gone 'Merrie England':

> If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,
> On a summer midnight, you can hear the music
> Of the weak pipe and the little drum
> And see them dancing around the bonfire
> The association of man and woman
> In daunsinge, signifying matrimone –
> A dignified and commodious sacrament.
> Two and two, necessary conjunction,
> Holding eche other by the hand or the arm
> Wiche betokeneth concorde.[185]

As Mackay points out, the poem's projection into the past is prefaced by a rather explicit warning: not to come too close. The reiterated caveat 'If you do not come to close' suggests that one must remain at a distance from the past in order to receive its delights; thus, embedded within the very invocation of the past is a message of caution. Eliot's 'anti-

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[183] Boas in Stocking, *The Shaping of American Anthropology,* p.5
[184] Marina Mackay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
[185] T.S Eliot, *Four Quartets*, (New York: Mariner, 1968), p.24

nostalgia' is made explicit towards the very end of the poem where he once again inventories the same 'golden age' but reveals it to be a period of purposeless materialism:

> The time of milking and the time of harvest
> The time of the coupling of the man and the woman
> And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
> Eating and drinking. Dung and Death.[186]

Unlike Eliot, Roberts clearly delights in salvaging the material culture of Llanybri and, moreover, in her ability to offer it to others (compare the opening line of *East Coker* to that in 'Poem from Llanybri': '*If you come my way that is ...*'). However, to regard the comparatively 'naïve' nostalgia evident in 'Poem from Llanybri' as indicative of a fairly un-reflexive organic politics would be to disregard the fact that Roberts was aware of the dangers inherent in this kind of uncritical salvage operation in much the same way as Eliot was. In a diary entry for June 28th, 1944 Roberts wrote of the options of preservation open to rural communities at that time:

> There are two conditions open to us .... We can go backwards. Back to the primitive and rural crafts of the land. This school of propaganda is much in evidence just now. Led by Professors, who seem to live backwards anyway, Philanthropists, Hypocritical Vicars, who think farmers are idyllic illiterates provided they keep out of the pubs ... And why not have the courage? Where is the faith we should have today in our own generation? Can we not put up as good a village or building as our early ancestors? ... shall we not put all our modern research and scientific knowledge to the good purpose of humanity? And when a new gadget is invented, check it, use it, rather than let it be bought up and the patent destroyed by some monster fearing industrialist. And when the gadget proves false, chuck it sky high, blast it with all the power and objectivity of a robot plane. Tradition can be evil when the root of its repetition is associated, as it is so much today, with FEAR. Tradition is apt to exterminate the young and frustrate the fresh spirit of our generation. The word, *tradition*, is really a substitute for fear when it is used by the Tories, Industrial magnates etc.; when it is revived by a group of State Artists; flattered into position by popular Art Critics. .. Today let us retain only what is good of the past .. and not copy ... copy ... a ... cat. Rather let us have the courage to be adventurous, face up to our own generation. (*DLR*, 51-52)

For Roberts then, the rural past was to be salvaged only if it could be brought up to date with the technologies of the new generation. Primitivism of the kind propounded by ' intellectuals' led to a distorted view of rural folk as is evidenced by the 'noble savages' - the idyllic yet illiterate farmers - thought up by 'Hypocritical Vicars'. It is entirely possible that one of

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[186] Ibid.

these vicars whom Roberts is thinking of in this passage is R.S Thomas. In the opening poem of Thomas' first collection *The Stones of the Field* (1946) – which Roberts almost certainly would have read given that it was published by Keidrych Rhys' Druid Press – Thomas depicts an upland farmer with a 'sallow skull' who descends from the 'starved pastures' to the valley floor below.[187] As a result of his contact with the lowland inhabitants and their pub culture, the farmer is swiftly corrupted:

> In the indifferent streets: the sudden disintegration
> Of his soul's hardness, traditional discipline
> Of flint and frost thawing in ludicrous showers
> Of maudlin laughter; the limpid runnels of speech
> Sullied and slurred, as the beer-glass chimes the hours.[188]

Whilst, to some extent, Roberts was guilty of this simplistic idealisation of rural life herself, she was also aware of the need to modernise the local agricultural industries. Her prospectus for the future called for a selective salvaging ('let us retain only what is good of the past') which was to be combined with a process of technological upgrading.

It was no doubt difficult to sustain the idea of Llanybri as a pastoral idyll of the kind promised to Alun Lewis in her famous poem with the presence of war so close by and, sometimes, intruding upon the small village.[189] The hybridisation of the technological and the traditional occurs in several sections throughout *Gods*. A glance through Part 1, for example, reveals phrases such as 'Accelerate oxidised roads' and 'drill new hearts and hearths' which hint at a transformation of the rural landscape along the lines of the fast-paced urban world. In Part V Roberts addresses the technological directions of post-war reconstruction. Near the end of the section the landscape is mapped out as a barren land effectively colonised by new electric technologies:

> .... Over this maimed and cadaverous globe, the wind
> Had streaked each ridge with piercing prongs
> Of a curry comb, leaving here and there
> A thin sheet of aluminium which shone from out
>
> Of the Earth's crust. Over set currents
> Of ice, emerald streams and blue electric lakes
> Worked simultaneously to purify the

[187] R.S Thomas, *The Stones of The Field* (Carmarthen: Druid Press, 1946), p.7
[188] Ibid.
[189] In one diary entry, Roberts gives an account of a fighter plane crashing in a nearby field and the attempts of the villagers to save the pilot.

World ... down driving down .. following the thin
Strokes of mapping pens stretching page of

Music over vast terrain. This, and stronger
Network of rails: pylons and steel installations
The only landmarks of our territory ...(*RCP*, 68)

The anxieties that appear in the poem over the modernisation of the rural landscape can be seen as part of a wider debate over the future of Wales and its agricultural economies. Like Roberts, Iorwerth Peate was one among a group of Welsh intellectuals concerned with the land as an agent of sociological regeneration. Pyrs Gruffudd has detailed the way in which Iorwerth Peate attempted to create a new dynamic vision of rural Wales that could resist what he saw as the incursion of Anglicised aesthetic values of preservation.[190] Highlighting Peate's attack on plans made by the government in 1942 to utilise land in rural areas for scenic preservation, Gruffudd notes that Peate advocated the 'wholesale redevelopment of rural Wales on new technological foundations like hydro-electricity and mobile industries such as plastic alongside agriculture and crafts.'[191] For Gruffudd, this attempt to reconcile aspects of tradition and modernity is an example of what Luckin calls 'techno-arcadianism', a vision of where the old moral order is renewed on technological foundations. In *Questions of Power: Electricity and Environment in inter-war Britain* (1990) Luckin describes the context in which electricity established itself as the 'energy of the future' in the 1930's and probes the strategies of those who advocated the take-up of electricity (the 'pro-electrical ideologies') and those who were against it. [192] Luckin describes how pro-electrical lobby groups such as the Rural Reconstruction Association argued that the electrification of the countryside would contribute to the recovery of the rural agricultural industry as well as those urban areas suffering from industrial decline and environmental impoverishment by luring inhabitants of the latter back to the countryside, back to the land. The agricultural sector would then be revitalised on industrial foundations by pulling in labour from industrial areas. This 'revivallist blue-print', a product of intense anxiety over the future of agricultural society, connected the urban and rural areas in such a way that it 'incorporated deeply embedded cultural assumptions over the relative economic and moral value of the countryside.'[193]

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[190] Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Heritage as National Identity: Histories and Prospects of the National Pasts' *Heritage, Tourism and Society* ed. by David T. Herbert (London: Mansell Publishing, 1995), pp.49-68
[191] Ibid, p.58
[192] Bill Luckin, *Questions of Power: Electricity and Environment in inter-war Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990)
[193] Ibid, 85.

Given the anxieties over the integration of technology and land seen in Part V of *Gods* we might want to de-emphasise the Arcadian half of Luckin's formula but it seems entirely possible to think of the concept of 'techno-arcadianism' as analogous to Roberts' own thinking about the relationship between tradition and modernity in rural areas. Whilst Roberts' vision for the future of crafts in the area was certainly not one based on the non-human mechanised system that the pro-electric lobby groups envisioned as the salvation of rural areas, it was one that saw revolutionary potential in the technological augmentation of craft work. Roberts was, in effect, a force of modernisation tussling with the antagonistic relationship between the archaic and the modern. And in this sense, the ethnographic impulse in Roberts' work would seem to validate Terry Eagleton's contention that 'traditional culture provides modernism with an adversary, but also lends it some of the terms in which to inflect itself.'[194]Indeed, *Gods* is a poem that attempts to contain two seemingly contradictory impulses: the ethnographic desire to salvage a culture perceived to be undergoing rapid change and the impulse to implement that very same process of change along modern lines.

[194] Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London; New York: Verso, 1995), 297.

CHAPTER THREE

'Taffy was Transported': Welsh responses to Australia since the 1960s

Whilst there has been much critical interest in the literary correspondences between Wales and America there has been relatively little written about the Anglophone Welsh experience of Australia. In this chapter I explore the images and impressions of Australia inscribed in Welsh writing in English since the 1960s. I begin by examining the depiction of Australia in Harri Webb's poem 'The Boomerang in the Parlour' and in the poetry of T. Harri Jones and Bryn Griffiths before going on to look at more recent considerations of Australia in Robert Minhinnick's poem 'Ants' and Niall Griffiths' recently published Australian travelogue *Ten Pound Pom* (2011).[195]

A significant parallel between Australia and Wales is found in the first edition of *Poetry Wales* in the form of Harri Webb's famous poem 'The Boomerang in The Parlour'.[196] The poem is about the wish of the poet's father for his son to travel to Australia to complete the journey that he had made in his youth. Importantly, it relies on the perceived cultural, historical and geographical differences between Wales and Australia. In the opening stanza the speaker contrasts the restrictive, ordered environment of his father's home on a Gower farm with the freer environment his father encountered in Australia:

> Will Webb, a farmer's son from the cliffs of Gower,
> went as a young man to Australia, exchanging
> the cramped peninsula for the outback, the frugal
> patchwork of fields for the prodigal spaces he rode
> along the rabbit-fence or under the soaring jarra.
> When he came back, he brought with him a boomerang
> for the front-room mantelpiece, a spearhead chipped by an abo
> from the green glass of a beer-bottle, an emu-skin rug
> and the poems of Banjo Patterson. To me, his son,
> he looked for the completion of a journey
> stopped at Gallipoli, that in my turn I'd see
> the river of black swans. The map of Australia
> was tattooed on his right arm.[197]

Whereas, on the 'cramped peninsula' of the Gower, space has been systematically ordered as a 'Patchwork of fields', Australia consists of as yet unordered 'prodigal spaces': it has not yet

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[195] Although I do not have the space to explore it here, Lynette Roberts's prose account of Captain Cook's journey to Australia might be considered as another view of Australia from Wales. See Lynette Roberts, *The Endeavour: Captain Cook's first voyage to Australia* (London: Peter Owen, 1954)

[196] *Poetry Wales*, 1, No.1 (1965), p. 14

[197] Ibid

been made to conform to definitive spatial patterns. Moreover, not only does Australia provide the Welsh farmer with a land of spatial opportunity in contrast to the constrictive landscape of home but also a plethora of antipodean 'exotica' to be appropriated as souvenirs to be collected and displayed back home. In the second verse Webb considers the possibility that he might have 'another, hypothetical, Australian self' which has led him to the 'strange and silent shores' of Wales:

> And so I have
> another, hypothetical, Australian self,
> the might-have-been man of a clean, new, empty country
> where nearly all the songs have yet to be sung.
> It is this shadow that perhaps has led me
> past islands of enchantment, capes that could have been
> called deception, disappointment and farewell,
> to the strange and silent shores where now I stand:
> Terra Incognita, a land whose memory
> has not begun, whose past has been forgotten
> but for a clutter of legends and nightmares and lies.
> This land, too, has a desert at its heart. [198]

Webb's poem ostensibly appears to be an elegy for a failed nation whose people are suffering from a historical and cultural amnesia. However, as Matthew Jarvis has recently pointed out, the parallel between Wales and Australia set up in the poem suggests a potential to overcome that condition: 'As "Terra Incognita"', he writes, 'Wales is unexplored land, potentially waiting to be realised: its memories are yet to happen. The poem may end on a bitter assessment of the present, but the piece as a whole contains within it the sense of a land whose true history lies ahead.'[199] The poem then is an example of what Tony Conran has described as a 'future-directed' elegy; a mode of poetry which he claims was dominant in the early *Poetry Wales* school of poets which Webb was a part of.[200] Borrowing from the title of Idris Davies's famous poem, Conran places Webb amongst a group of poets who were concerned with either 'Gwalia deserta or Gwalia renovate' and he argues that, given the title of Webb's late sixties poetry collection, *The Green Desert* (1969), Webb may have been more concerned with the latter vision of Wales: a place renewed rather than deserted. However, premised on such a vision of Australia, the future of Wales as it is suggested in this

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[198] Ibid.
[199] Matthew Jarvis, 'Repositioning Wales: Poetry After The Second Flowering' in *Slanderous Tongues: Essays on Welsh Poetry in English 1970-2005*, ed. by Daniel G. Williams (Bridgend: Seren, 2010), pp.21-59, p.26
[200] Tony Conran, 'Poetry Wales and the Second Flowering' in *Welsh Writing in English*, ed. by M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp.222-254, p.232

poem is highly problematic. As Matthew Jarvis has recently noted, the poem's construction of Australia as 'a clean, new, empty country/ Where nearly all songs have yet to be sung', ignores the historical existence of the Australian Aborigines.[201] In fact, in failing to account for the indigenous people, Webb reproduces the popular colonial myth of Australia as *terra nullius* ('land that belongs to no one'), which functioned as a powerful strategy for the British to legitimise the appropriation of Australian territory.[202] Thus, somewhat ironically, the poem's vision of Wales's potential postcolonial future as a nation relies on an anachronistic and ethically deplorable colonial vision of Australia.[203]

It is perhaps odd to begin this chapter by looking at Webb's poem since my main concern is with those Welsh poets and writers during and after the Second Flowering who have actually visited Australia – which Webb did not. But his poem is useful because it is indicative of one of the ways Australia has been seen by several Welsh writers as providing a place where a new self ('hypothetical' or not) might be established as well as the way in which a Welsh writer has reproduced one of the key colonial myths about the continent through a particular representation of it.[204] In the rest of this chapter I shall pursue these two aspects in the work of several Welsh writers – their sense of Australia as a place where Welsh identity changes or can be renewed and their complex engagement with and negotiation of colonial forms of representation.

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[201] Jarvis, 'Repositioning Wales: Poetry after the Second Flowering', p.26.

[202] In *Possessing the Pacific: Land, Settlers, and Indigenous People from Australia to Alaska* Stuart Banner explains that the British were well aware of the existence of Australia's indigenous population prior to claiming ownership of the land but it was determined to be vacant and, therefore, ready to be legally claimed, because the aborigines were thought to be so close to nature that they had yet to reach a stage of civilisation where humans appropriated land as property. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007)

[203] A similar failure to take into account the existence of an indigenous population is also evident in Webb's poetry about Israel. Discussing what he calls 'the pitfalls of comparative perspectives in Webb's nationalist poetry', Nicholas Jones has recently pointed out that Webb's poems about the establishment of the Zionist state – which he strongly supported – do not mention the Palestinians and therefore give the impression that pre-1947 Palestine was 'a land devoid of inhabitants'. Nicholas Jones '"Marching Backwards": Nationalism, Tradition, and Ambivalence in the Poetry of Harri Webb' in *Slanderous Tongues: Essays on Welsh Poetry in English 1970-2005*, ed. by Daniel G. Williams (Bridgend: Seren, 2010), pp.60-86, p.69. Webb's attitudes towards Israel have recently been considered in some detail in Jasmine Donahaye, *Whose People, Wales, Israel, Palestine* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

[204] Webb's depiction of Australia as empty enacts a rhetorical strategy that is frequently employed in colonial discourse; namely, that of negation. David Spurr has explored the ways in which Western writing conceives of the Other as 'absence, emptiness, nothingness or death' through the use of this strategy. He finds that it functions as a 'kind of provincial erasure, clearing a space for the expansion of the colonial imagination and for the pursuit of desire.' David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.92-93.

Along with Harri Webb, two other poets featured in the first issue of *Poetry Wales* whose connection to Australia was far greater than Harri Webb's.[205] I want to turn now to the work of two Welsh émigrés, T. Harri Jones, the self-dramatised transported 'Taffy', and Bryn Griffiths, both of whom relocated to Australia during the 1950s and 60s respectively. [206] It is perhaps peculiar to examine the poetry that Jones produced in Australia for depictions of the place because there are, in fact, very few. Indeed, Australia appears in his work primarily as a location of exile from Wales, a place whose difference in terms of landscape and lifestyle produces a guilty nostalgia; it never becomes a 'home' in itself. In many respects, Jones' poetry enacts something close to what the Australian poet Judith Wright has described as the 'double aspect' of Australian emigrant identity: the sense of being caught between 'the reality of exile' and 'the reality of newness and freedom' offered by the country.[207] In the poem 'Wales – New South Wales. May 1961',[208] Jones juxtaposes the severities of the Welsh non-conformist background that he left behind and the new, hedonistic freedoms of Australia:

> Autumn was always cold, and so was spring,
> In the country that I remember for ever
> Despite this sun and despite whatever
> Landfall luckily after my voyaging.
> In that land it was always hard faring
> For men contracted to a brute endeavour
> By their great taskmaster to what would never
> Be more than a thin and bitter harvesting.
>
> But here the sun is warm on belly and back
> As I indulge in wine and memories
> And hear above the long Pacific swell
> Stern voices of my fathers saying I lack
> Their faith, their courage, their black certainties,
> And everything they knew of Heaven and Hell. (*CPTHJ*, 119)

Despite these new freedoms, the speaker is still haunted by a sense of guilt for abandoning the 'black certainties' of his home culture. In poems like 'Taffy Was Transported' (*CPTHJ*, 179) and 'Not on this Continent' (*CPTHJ*, 251), Jones plays with the idea that his emigration to Australia is a form of incarceration akin to that suffered by criminals transported to British

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[205] The edition contained Bryn Griffiths' poem 'Winter at Harlech' (p.4) and an obituary written by Professor Gwyn Jones for T. Harri Jones who had died the previous February in Australia (p.16). *Poetry Wales*, 1 No.1(1965)

[206] The 'push' factor for both these poets seems to have been the promise of a career in Australia.

[207] Judith Wright, *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965),p. xi

[208] T. Harri Jones, *The Collected Poems of T. Harri Jones* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1977), p.119 Henceforth referenced in the text as *CPTHJ*

penal colonies in Australia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[209] In the latter poem, an 'old poet' converses with an 'old convict' about their inability to unshackle themselves from their past. They decide 'to emigrate to Australia or somewhere' because 'it isn't any good on this continent' (*CPTHJ*, 251). In this case, the continent that the poet talks of being chained to is not Australia but the country of exile, a place located outside of Wales but not anywhere else in particular. Harri Webb expressed this idea in his elegy for Jones: 'You did well to get out of/ This hole in the middle of Wales,/ Only there is nowhere else/ Anywhere.[210] Jones emigrated to Australia with his family in 1959 to take up a university lectureship but he frequently returned in his poetry to the sense he had of having abandoned Wales; an act, which he saw, as a betrayal of his non-conformist Welsh roots. Jones' poetry demonstrates an abiding concern with specific localities and the human attachment to those localities – hence the recurring image of his home in Wales, Allt-y-clych. His poem 'Rhiannon' (*CPTHJ*,116) is perhaps the only instance where Jones considers a specific Australian locality (Ayer's rock) yet even then it serves only as a correlative to the poet's own attachment to the 'small hill' in Wales where he came from. In the poem Jones wonders whether the sight of Ayer's Rock will affect his daughter in the same way as the local landscape in Wales does to him:

> Would the vision of that monolith
> Stay in her mind and dominate her dreams
> As in my mind and dreams these thirty years
> There stays the small hill, Allt-y-clych,
> The hill of bells, bedraggled with wet fern
> And stained with sheep, and holding like a threat
> The wild religion and the ancient tongue,
> All the defeated centuries of Wales? (*CPTHJ*, 116)

Jones is clearly ambivalent about the possibility that Ayer's rock could linger in his daughter's mind and eventually come to 'dominate her dreams' as Allt-y-clych, his hill, does to him. His trepidation arises from the fact that even in Australia he remains powerfully subject to a landscape which is inextricably bound up with his own experience of Wales. Far from demonstrating a straightforward nostalgia for a lost homeland, the poem suggests a more complex engagement with the way in which the social and religious history of Wales has become, for the exiled poet, a kind of ghostly trauma that is triggered by the site of

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[209] It is possible that in using the derogatory term 'Taffy' in the title of 'Taffy was Transported', Jones is suggesting that he has been transported as a result of some kind of discrimination against the Welsh by the English – possibly economic exclusion – although the poem itself does not explicitly pursue this idea.
[210] Webb in Julian Croft, *T. Harri Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979), p.20

Australia's own domineering monoliths. The speaker feels a kind of survivor's guilt at having not suffered a non-conformist way of life which he imagines as oppressive and which the 'small hill' he reminisces about represents. The fear and perhaps guilt he expresses is that his daughter, who is already associated with Wales by virtue of the 'Mabinogion name' that he bestowed upon her, would develop such an oppressive place-identity. As Julian Croft has remarked, the image of his hill is 'a threat not a promise, and this seems to be the way in which the poet conceptualises the difference between Wales and Australia.'[211]

With their theme of nostalgia for and sense of an irredeemable disconnection from a particular Welsh way of life, Jones's poems are in many ways typical of the poetry produced in Wales during the sixties, particularly by those poets who emigrated out of Wales. According to Tony Conran, the experience of exile was central to those who became poets during the sixties – partly because they were starting their working lives at a time when the need to emigrate from Wales for work was great. Conran explains that many of the poets at this time, including him, did not believe they could make a career in Wales. The depressed state of the post-war job market, accompanied by a general sense that English-language writing lacked a cultural centre in Wales around which they could base themselves, left them feeling that Wales was 'narrow, petty-bourgeois and hypocritical.'[212] Thus, in the poetry of émigrés like Jones we find, in Tony Conran's words, a 'profound nostalgia for Wales, a centripetal and lyrical re-affirmation of Welsh distinctiveness'.[213] Hence the popularity of the elegy in 'Anglo-Welsh' poetry during the sixties; it functioned, as Conran explains, to mitigate the poet's sense of guilt derived from his separation from the tribe at the same time as it reinforced the reality of that separation.[214]

Both T. Harri Jones and Bryn Griffiths imagined their relocation to Australia as a form of exile from their homeland – though their relationship to Wales, as evidenced in their poetry, was very different. Whereas Jones' Australian poetry seems to look back at Wales far more than it looks at Australia – a perspective conditioned by his complex though highly ambivalent nostalgia for Wales – the landscape and people of Australia became a major theme in the poetry of Bryn Griffiths after he moved there in the late 1960s to work and live with his wife. Although Griffiths has been characterised by Tony Conran as a significant figure of the renaissance in Welsh poetry during the 1960s and 1970s – he created the *Guild*

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[211] Julian Croft, *T.H. Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), p. 65
[212] Tony Conran, 'Poetry Wales and the Second Flowering', p.232
[213] Ibid, p.225
[214] Tony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness: Essays on the English Poets of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982), p. 121

of Welsh Writers in 1964 and edited the controversial anthology *Welsh Voices* in 1967[215] – his work has received remarkably little attention – a fact no doubt partly attributable to his long absence from Wales. His little-known collection, *The Survivors* (1971) documents across eighteen poems his experience of emigrating to Australia.[216] It is structured very much like a travel account: the opening poem meditates on leaving for a new land and new identity, the poems that follow are about the experience of encountering the culture and environment of Australia and the issues that arise from that encounter, whilst the final poem of the collection reflects on (and in part apologises for) the initial impressions of Australia inscribed in the poems that preceded it. Like T. Harri Jones, Griffiths is concerned about the specifically *Welsh* experience of exile in Australia but, unlike Jones, his poetry also concerns the nature of Australian society, the attitudes of non-aboriginal 'settler' Australians towards the indigenous aborigines, and the relationship between the Australian landscape and its inhabitants, both indigenous and immigrant.

Griffiths' Australian poetry repeatedly figures the environment as hostile and barren, providing very little sustenance to the non-aboriginal people who enter it. In 'Looking Back' (*TS*, 3), the speaker juxtaposes the Australian landscape, where environmental conditions hamper the poet's craft, with the Welsh landscape he has left:

> Through the window, the wire-screened eye
> of this hot skull of a house, Australia
> shimmers in a blast of sun,
> blue sky, flies and dust,
> and the red tiles of endless suburbia.
> Can one make a pattern out of this,
> weave words from such thin threads,
> make sense of the mind's desert?
> I have tried, and failed, for I am not of this.
> I need another landscape, a sense of history,
> a place where rain falls on sombre valleys,
> the salmon run in their good season,
> the hills billow green to the sea.
> I take you with me, Wales, wherever I go. (*TS*, 3)

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[215] Conran explains that Griffiths' anthology was perceived to be representative of one side of the debate that occurred during the 1960s and 70s over the position of English-language writers in Wales. According to Conran, English-language Welsh writers faced a choice of either basing themselves in London as what he describes as 'a group of colourful immigrants gradually assimilating to the "British" norm' or in Cardiff where they could create a separate indigenous cultural market. After publishing his anthology Griffiths was perceived to have chosen the former London-based option. He was criticised by Meic Stephens in his important article 'The Second Flowering' for producing, in Conran words, an 'interim report designed to publicize an interesting poetic movement for a London-based market, not an official survey of a 'literature' to justify a separatism rooted in Cardiff.' Tony Conran, 'Poetry Wales and the Second Flowering', p.224. Stephens' article 'The Second Flowering' appeared in *Poetry Wales* 3.3 (1967), pp.2-9.

[216] Bryn Griffiths, *The Survivors* (London: Dent, 1971). Henceforth referenced in the body off the text as *TS*

The poet's failure to write is derived from the fact that he is not 'of' Australia and does not therefore possess a connection with the landscape or a sense of its history. But the fact that his creativity is being stifled is not only put down to this lack of connection, his outsiderness, but also to Australia itself – its barren and oppressive environment (the 'wire-screened' windows and the 'endless suburbia' that surround the speaker give the impression of a prison) stifles his creativity. Wales, by contrast, possesses a diverse and fertile landscape providing the requisite environmental and historical stimulation for poetry. The dominant image of Australia that emerges in the poem is something of a desolate wasteland, a place in which it is difficult to live let alone create poetry – though, ironically, that very perception of the place has obviously proven productive in terms of poetic output. This concern over the poet's inability to make poetry out of the landscape is also revisited in the later poem 'Terra Incognita' (*TS*, 19) in which the speaker wonders 'What can one write of and make true here?/ There is no history, no racial heritage,/ nothing to make meaning of yet.' (*TS*, 19). Here it is not only the sense of history that is crucially missing but also a 'racial heritage'. Griffiths is not only fundamentally ambivalent about his own immigrant experience in Australia and the issues that that raises, but also, more generally, the existence of European settlers there. Australian society, particularly in suburban areas, is often presented as a vacuous society that is alien to the landscape on which it struggles to survive. The central problem that he seems to go over and over in his poetry then is the unshakable sense that whilst they are and have long been present in Australia, the European settlers do not quite belong there – a fact which is mostly commonly manifest in his portrayal of the relationship that the settlers have with the landscape. In 'Terra Incognita' (*TS*, 19), the modern city of Kalamunda (the poem is subtitled 'Kalamunda, Australia, 1968') is depicted as a colony that remains on the edges of the continent struggling to survive because its people have yet to reconcile with the environment:

> From these hills, these worn fangs of stone
> serrating the skyline of night,
> the myriad lights of the distant city -
>
> glittering white spark on white spark -
> are small campfires where transient aliens
> huddle afraid, as always of the dark.
>
> ...
> The pioneers have long gone, into folklore,
> all colour and spirit lost in their wake;
> and now the people here build wall on wall,

raping the old landscape with an old greed,
as they drive back the slow tides of time;

while about them sweep the silent seas
of desert and bush, waiting for life, where
they cling to the safe edge of sanity. (*TS*, 19-20)

Ross Gibson has described the reverence and fear that Europeans accorded to the Australian landscape as being a result of 'an alienated society's experience around the ridges of a vast, unpopulated, and speciously indomitable country' and it this image of Australian settler society that Griffiths appears to be working with here.[217] Kalamunda is essentially a relic of colonialism, composed of people who, in building 'wall on wall' with 'an old greed', are still hopelessly pursuing an anachronistic expansionist colonial project. Not possessing the 'colour and spirit' of their colonial forebears, however, the colonists 'build in blindness a tinsel society,/ thin as tissue, covering a vacuum of fear'. (*TS*, 20) In Griffiths' Australia, the colonial age has given way to a moribund, hollow society living in fear of the hostile environment surrounding them.

It is possible that the representations of Australia we find in Griffiths' poetry were influenced by those found in the poetry of the Australian academic and poet A.D Hope, a friend of T. Harri Jones.[218] Hope's well-known poem 'Australia' contains several images and tropes similar to those found throughout *The Survivors*.[219] In the poem, the speaker presents the country as a wasteland that is lacking in culture and history: 'A nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey ... Without songs, architecture, history.'[220] The landscape is personified as a post-menopausal mother who is no longer able to give birth:

They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry.
....
And her five cities, like five teeming sores,
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
Where second hand Europeans pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.[221]

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[217] Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992), p.73.
[218] Jones was familiar with several conservative literary figures who dominated Australian poetry during the 1950s, in particular the poets A.D Hope and James McAuley. See P Bernard Jones and Don Dale-Jones, *T.H. Jones: Poet of Exile* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001)
[219] A. D. Hope, *Collected Poems 1930-1970* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), p.16
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.

Hope's sense of each city as a 'vast parasite robber-state/ Where second hand Europeans pullulate/Timidly on the edge of alien shores' recalls the city in Griffiths' 'Terra Incognita' where the people are 'transient aliens' who 'build wall on wall/ raping the old landscape with an old greed' and 'cling to the safe edge of sanity.' (*TS*, 20) Later in Hope's poem, the speaker turns optimistically towards the 'Arabian desert of the human mind' for the potential of renewal which cannot be achieved in the real desert. This recalls the struggle to 'make sense of the mind's desert' in Griffiths' 'Looking Back' as well as the 'painted desert of the brain' where 'men are changed and warped' in 'The Outback'. Both poems contain the idea that the geographical desert reflects and in some way creates an internal psychological desert which is, for the poet-speaker, disabling.

Hope's poem has been seen as a reflection on the failure of the (European) 'Australian Dream' and the utopian idealism that underpins it. Similarly, Griffiths' poetry portrays Australia as a dystopic land where humanity is 'warped into a difference'. Indeed, the landscape is even used as the location of a post-apocalyptic human survival narrative in the title poem of the collection, 'The Survivors' (*TS*, 12).[222] In his exploration of recent 'narrative constructions' of Australia in film, Ross Gibson discusses the reason why ambivalence towards the Australian landscape has long been present in European perceptions of the continent:

> For two hundred years the South Land has been a duplicitous object for the West. On the one hand, Australia is demonstrably a "European society," with exhaustive documentation available concerning its colonial inception and development. Yet on the other hand, because the society and its habitat has also been understood (for much longer than two hundred years) in the West as fantastic and otherworldy, the image of Australia is oddly doubled. Westerners can recognize themselves there at the same time as they encounter an alluringly exotic and perverse entity, the phantasm called Australia. Westerners can look South and feel 'at home', but, because the region has also served as a projective screen for European aspiration and anxiety, Australia also calls into question the assumptions and satisfactions by which any society or individual feels at home.[223]

Gibson's sense of Australia being both familiar and uncanny is palpable throughout Griffiths' poetry. The 'newcomers' – his term - are mostly presented as a people who have yet to develop the kind of harmonious, organic relationship with the environment which the

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[222] There is a long tradition of presenting Australia as an apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic place. One of the most popular is the Mad Max film series of the 1980s. See Roslyn Weaver, *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film: A Critical Study* (North Carolina: McFarland Press, 2011)

[223] Ross Gibson, *South of the West*, p.x

aborigines possess and, as a result, their existence in Australia is haunted by this disconcerting incongruity. However, whereas Hope's poem presents Australia and Australians as spiritually and culturally impoverished – the people do not 'live' but are reduced to survivors unable to contemplate normal life because much of their time is taken up by the demanding requirements of survival – Griffiths' poem 'Accept and Endure' imagines a biological and cultural teleology whereby the 'newcomers' – presumably the European settlers, including contemporary ones such as himself – gradually become part of the land and are bestowed with culture determined by and based on the indigenous environment.[224]

In almost every poem the environment of Australia is figured as the force that shapes and changes human existence either for better or for worse. Much like the African interior in Conrad's novella, Griffiths' Australia is frequently depicted as a heart of darkness, a place with a spirit at the centre of it which has and continues to subject those that inhabit it, both aboriginal and immigrant, to radical change. His most significant poem, in regard to the last theme, is 'Accept and Endure' (*TS*, 9) which gives an interesting historical narrative of the aborigines and people he calls 'the newcomers'. The opening lines explain how the 'first men' in Australia were 'warped into a difference' as a result of their contact with the living ancient spirit that inhabits the land:

> The first men were changed here by the brooding land,
> warped into a difference lost in time;
> the flesh whittled away from taut bone
> til the body knew its way.
> The sun bored holes into their brains
> and filled their exploding skulls with fear.
> The stars sang down their dream and legend.
> They learned to survive in the burning earth
> They heard the silent country's utterance:
> *Thus you accept me, thus you are changed,*
> *for I am ancient and the first and the last:*
> *in me is the infinite mystery.*
> They became one and part of the wilderness. (*TS*, 6)

The opening lines appear to locate the source or beginnings of aboriginality in a violent, prehistoric Australian past. Indeed, the fact that the 'first men' were changed and 'warped into a difference' implicitly suggests that they did not possess the ability to survive in Australia until they came into contact with the land. The shocking, violent images of bodily intrusion and torture initially create the sense that this Australia was extremely hostile

[224] In its appreciation of the aborigines way of living with the landscape 'Accept and Endure' is perhaps close in ethos to the Jindyworobak group of white Australian poets who advocated the use of Aboriginal ways of life as sources of poetry.

towards the aborigines. The landscape is itself an extreme other which invades the human body and changes its physiology in what amounts to an act of extreme environmental determinism. Griffiths' rather melodramatic dramatization of this process recalls the way in which early twentieth-century modernist fictions of colonial travel represented foreign landscapes as malevolent entities that posed a threat to the European traveller. The speaker's description of the Australian landscape as 'brooding', for example, recalls the early passages of Conrad's novella where the word is frequently used by the narrator Marlow to describe the atmosphere of London and the African interior.[225] In one of the more striking examples, Marlow describes the oppressive force he felt to be 'out there' in the jungle as an 'implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention.'[226] Similarly, the way in which the environment mutilates and invades the bodies of the aborigines – 'the flesh whittled away from taut bone ... the sun bored holes into their brains/ and filled their exploding skulls with fear' – is described in terms strongly reminiscent of the effects the jungle has on Kurtz: 'The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball – an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and – lo! – he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish intention.'[227] The sense of the environment having a detrimental effect on the body is also seen in Griffith's later collection of 'sea poems', *The Dark Convoys* (1974). In the eponymous poem the sailors are described as 'the sea's survivors/[who] once worked the long watches/ under a sun burning voids into the brain.'[228]Again we see an image of the sun penetrating the brain and burning the matter inside, leaving it less than whole.[229] In a Welsh context, his depiction of the Australian aborigines might also be usefully compared with R.S Thomas' portrayal of hill farmers in his poetry as examples of aboriginal or prototypical Welshmen etching out an existence in a similarly harsh environment.[230] Like

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[225] Brooding' is repeatedly used throughout Conrad's novel. For example: 'The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.' (p.15) 'Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach to the sun.' (p.16), 'that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.' (p.16) Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1995 (1902)).

[226] Ibid, p.60

[227] Ibid, p.91

[228] Bryn Griffiths, *The Dark Convoys* (Aquila Press: Solihull, 1974), p.17

[229] Ibid.

[230] In Thomas's poem 'A Labourer', for example, the speaker asks 'Who can tell his years, for the winds have stretched / So tight the skin on the bare racks of bone / that is face is smooth, inscrutable as stone?' R.S Thomas, *The Stones of the Field* (Carmarthen: The Druid Press, 1946), p.8. Ironically, Griffiths, like several poets of the Second Flowering, responded to Thomas by producing a parody of the Prytherch poems. In Griffiths's poem 'The Master', Prytherch gently upbraids Thomas, the eponymous 'Master', for having misrepresented him as a cultural and intellectual primitive. Bryn Griffiths, *The Mask OF Pity* (Llandybie: Christopher Davies, 1966), p. 23. According to Anthony Conran, such parodies of Thomas's conversations with Prytherch were typical of the

Thomas, Griffiths is not only fascinated by the indigenous aboriginal figures he encounters but also fundamentally ambivalent about his own relationship to them.[231] In 'The Outback' (*TS*, 16) we find the same anxiety towards the changes that mankind undergoes in Australia:

> Here, in this painted desert of the brain,
> men are changed and warped
> to a different shape of being,
> and women are withered before their time.
> So we cling to the green frontier
> Of existence, blind to the beauty
> Of all the forgotten dreamtimes,
> And the land endures while man passes on. (*TS*, 16)

Griffiths pits the indomitability and permanence of the outback against the frailty and impermanence of the humans that inhabit it. The landscape is figured as a monstrous mother committing a kind of maternal filicide, the outback 'waits to draw back/ into her ancient womb the brief seeds/ of men who venture there.' (*TS*, 16). Entering the outback is a return to the womb, the place of origin, but it is a return which symbolises death rather than life. Interestingly, whilst the men are 'warped/ to a different shape of being' by this female landscape the effect on the women is different: they 'wither before their time.' There is thus a temporal dimension to the effect on women whereas the effect on the men is more spatial. The sense of them withering has connotations of a loss of beauty or perhaps a derailing of the natural process of life.

Australia in Griffiths' poetry then is a kind of heart of darkness; a place, like Conrad's African interior, that spells some kind of radical change, possibly even dissolution, for those who encounter it. However, whereas Conrad's novel associates the African wilderness with a kind of supernatural evil, Griffiths' poem 'Accept and Endure' suggests that the intentions of the 'spirit' at the centre of the Australian landscape are, ultimately, benevolent. The

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school of poets associated with *Poetry Wales* in the 1960s. Conran explains that for poets like Griffiths, Harri Webb and himself such reactions were part of a 'desperate need to put up shelters against [Thomas's] radiation'. Tony Conran, 'Poetry Wales and the Second Flowering', p.232

[231] R.S Thomas's attraction to Prytherch is usually explained as a reaction against his middle-class, urban bourgeois background. Although Griffiths may not share the same social background as Thomas there seems to be parallels in the way both poets are attracted to the indigenous people but distanced from them because of their cultural position as outsiders. Commenting on Thomas's 'A Peasant', Tony Conran argues the speaker's attitude towards Prytherch cannot be reduced to simple revulsion and that the last lines of the poem present the 'conscious act of empathy, the recognition of fellow humanity.' The position of the speaker in the poem is, according to Conran, 'totally alienated, yet finding peace in an imaginative union with lower life that is not possible to achieve in practice.' Although they are by no means constructed as examples of 'lower life', the aborigines of Griffiths' poem are shown in the later part of the poem to be radically different from the people he calls the 'newcomers' but possessing an organic relationship to the landscape which is clearly perceived to be desirable. Anthony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness: Essays on the English Poets of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982), p. 232

environment directs the changes of the bodies of the 'first men' so that they will be able to survive in the harsh environment. Moreover, it provides them with a nature-based 'natural' religion ('the stars sang down their dream and legend'), which allows them to become organically linked to the landscape - 'one and part of the wilderness' (*TS*, 6). In *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European encounters in settler societies* (2001) Lynette Russell has explored the ways in which the discourse of a natural, prehistoric 'Aboriginality' was central to colonial representations of the Australian landscape and its inhabitants.[232] She explains that by consigning 'Aboriginality' to a pre-colonial, 'natural' Australia, the aborigines became 'synonymous with uncolonised Australia – not simply in terms of Aboriginal ownership of the land, which, under the international law that permitted Australia's colonisation, was forsaken at the onset of colonial occupation – but with the very land itself.'[233] Griffiths' poem also appears to locate the source of aboriginality in the Australian past and it portrays the aborigines as 'one' with the land, as was common in colonial representations of the aborigines. But, as will we see in the next verse, Griffiths goes on to portray aboriginality as something which the non-aboriginal 'newcomers' should seek to emulate rather than ostracize.

In my earlier discussion of Alun Lewis' poem, 'The Mahratta Ghats' (*CP*, 131) I discussed the way in which the Indian landscape is similarly figured as a transgressive land/bodyscape which threatens to destroy the rural Indians that live on it and the soldiers who pass through it. I referred to Rebecca Stott's analysis of colonial landscapes in the writing of Conrad, Haggard and Henry Morton Stanley and her discovery that in these works where the landscape is conceived of as threatening, the 'imperialist fantasy of consumption' is replaced by 'the nightmare of being consumed.'[234] Stott's remarks are pertinent to Griffiths' poem because in the final section of the poem we find a parallel inversion of the consumer/consumed dichotomy but this time it is happening to the 'newcomers' rather than the 'first men':

> And now the newcomers, dreaming
> they master and change these timeless deserts,
> are themselves being changed, adapted
> to another make of man … And they too
> must learn to accept, endure and survive
> For their time will be triggered by the stars ... (*TS*, 6)

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[232] Lynette Russell *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settlers Societies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001)
[233] Ibid, p.49
[234] Rebecca Stott, 'Of Cannibal Mothers and Colonial Landscapes', p.155

The newcomers – Griffiths presumably uses the term to refer to non-aboriginal immigrants – who fantasise about having mastery over the environment in order to shape it to their own purpose are being undermined by the very landscape onto which those fantasies are projected. Furthermore, the would-be colonisers are, ironically, being radically changed themselves; they are undergoing an environment-directed process of becoming 'naturalised' to the land in much the same way as the 'first men' had in Griffiths' version of primordial Australia. The broader significance of this idea of naturalisation to the landscape is made apparent when it is compared to the national myths that have been generated by non-aboriginal 'settler' society in Australia. Ross Gibson has discussed the ways in which the Australian landscape has been repeatedly called upon throughout the history of settler Australia as a means of defining the nation.[235] One of the central and most enduring myths of settler society, according to Gibson, was the idea that through some form of reconciliation with the landscape the colony would 'gradually "belong", it would eventually be "in place," and it would cease to be a colony.'[236] The nation, according to this myth, would autochthonously grow from the landscape and therefore exist in harmony with it. In providing a historical narrative in which the 'newcomers' to Australia are seemingly becoming indigenised to the landscape (despite being unaware of that process), Griffiths seems to be drawing on and presenting his own version of the mythical teleology of settler Australia that Gibson identifies. Indeed, perhaps the most important aspect of Griffiths' poem is its construction of a narrative in which the conditions for (future) reconciliation between the non-aboriginal settlers and the environment are created. If the 'newcomers' accept the environmental changes happening to them rather than resisting them, the poem implies, then they will survive, they will eventually be changed enough to 'belong'. In this respect, Griffiths' vision of reconciliation parallels Gibson's argument that an authentic relationship to place can only be established once what he calls 'the acquisitive processes of conquistadorial survey' are abandoned in favour of a 'subjective immersion in place', which he defines as 'th[e] ability to place and think oneself in systems of settlement'.[237]

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[235] Ross Gibson, *South of the West,* p.71

[236] Ibid, p.72

[237] Ibid, p.18 Interestingly, Gibson suggests that the creation of highly individualistic figures who could adapt to the demands of the environment, figures such as Mad Max and Crocodile Dundee who were the eponymous stars of several films throughout the 1980s and 90s, may in part be a response to belief that Australian society en masse was unable to conquer the continent. These highly adaptable individuals emerged as the only people who could withstand the hostile environment.

As a newcomer himself it is perhaps unsurprising that Griffiths should reproduce a version of the settler myth where the body and mind-set of the 'newcomer' is being slowly rewritten by the new environment, particularly given that much of his poetry appears to display anxieties over the idea of assimilation and the changes that this process would have to his own cultural identity. The end point of the process outlined in 'Accept and Endure' appears to promise an authentic relationship to place, a state of 'being-at-home' in Australia. One senses an uneasy admiration for the ways in which the Australian Aborigines have suffered in order to adapt to the environment which the Europeans find so difficult to live in yet he is clearly ambivalent about 'newcomers' such as himself going through the same process of adaptation. Whilst the process is no doubt perceived to be a positive step towards forming an organic relationship with the Australia environment, the process itself is imagined as violent and intrusive, requiring what seems like the dissolution of the former 'shape of being'.

The phrase 'shape of being' is used in Griffiths' early poem 'Exiles', in which the historical relocation of the bluestones from Wales to Stonehenge[238] is used to explore exile and, in particular, the loss of a unique, original identity.[239] The relocated stones, the speaker tells us, 'can never return, toll back the past,/ regain [their] former shape of being.'[240] In this new environment they have become 'blunt alien cogs in the stone clock/ of the centuries ...forever strangers here.'[241] Griffiths' understanding of the position of the Welsh stones within the larger circle of stones recalls the description of the 'stranger' figure in Georg Simmel's 1908 essay as a man who is 'fixed within a certain spatial circle – or within a group whose boundaries are analogous to spatial boundaries – but his position within it is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous.'[242] For Griffiths, geographical

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[238] The bluestones forming the inner circle of Stonehenge have long been thought to have been relocated in the pre-historic period from their place of origin in Pembrokeshire to the monument near Salisbury. In December 2011 the National Museum of Wales announced that they had discovered the exact location of the source rock used to create Stonehenge's first circle at a rock outcrop called Craig Rhos-y-Felin, near Pont Saeson in north Pembrokeshire after conducting a geological survey of the area. See www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/news/?article_id=642, accessed on 02.07.2012

[239] Bryn Griffiths, *Scars* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1969), p.1

[240] Ibid.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Simmel argued in his essay that the figure of 'stranger' was a unique, sociological category associated with a specific form of group interaction. He was attracted to the idea that, in terms of his/her relation to the host group, the stranger embodied simultaneous opposites, exhibiting a certain degree of social inclusion and social exclusion at the same time. In his 1908 note entitled 'The Stranger', Simmel identified the stranger as 'the person who comes today and stays tomorrow' , unlike the wanderer, who 'comes today and goes tomorrow'. Georg Simmel, 'The Stranger (1908)' in *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory: Text and Readings* ed. by Laura Desfor Edles and Scott Appelrouth (California: Pine Forge Press, 2008), pp.259-262, p.259

relocation also results in change of social identity; the stones become 'forever strangers' - among the group but not *of* the group. Only the poet knows of their origins and is able to recognise their difference, their strangeness. In the last verse, however, the stones status as 'strangers' is lost on modern tourists who, being unfamiliar to the site, are unable to recognise the indigenous qualities of the Welsh stones:

> the tourists, the strangers, climb
> your scarred sides and wonder at your meaning –
>
> not understanding your difference from the others,
> not for one moment comprehending
> the reason in your being so far from home.[243]

The fear expressed in the poem is over the implication that once one's indigenous difference is not taking into account by others, the self dissolves into and becomes indistinguishable from the host group. 'Exiles' is a useful poem because it dramatizes some of the fears and anxieties that Griffiths holds about place-identity, emigration and assimilation – all of which are key issues explored in his Australian poetry. For Griffiths, resettlement generates a crisis of subjectivity over the loss of a unique, autonomous identity.

The attitude towards the British colonisation of Australia and its legacy is complex and, at times, even contradictory in Griffiths' Australian poetry. At times the poetry appears to lament the loss of the 'colour and spirit' of the early European pioneers who pushed the boundaries of (i.e. colonised) the Australian frontier and at times it also repeats the myth of Australia as an empty, unoccupied place. Thus, in 'The Outback' Australia is a location without any historical or physical content: it 'sleeps on in silence/ as in all the empty centuries' (*TS*, 16). Moreover, it is an impermeable environment where even the natural elements have little effect: 'the sun's rays splinter/ and ricochet in nothing.' (*TS*, 15) Elsewhere, however, he presents the colonial mind-set that the 'newcomers' bring with them as redundant in the face of an indomitable environment which, ironically, has been undermining them without their knowledge since their arrival. He is also critical of the legacy of colonialism that still lingers in parts of Australia. In 'Victoriana' (*TS*, 14-15), for example, he sees Melbourne as being 'still shackled by censors, custom,/ pretension and tea cosies,/ still beating the same old drum.' (*TS*, 14) It is a place where Queen Victoria lives on as 'a lingering parasite of the past' who 'imprisoned so many in the legacy/ of a dead imperium' (*TS*, 15). At the end of the poem the speaker implores the city to jettison its links with

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[243] Bryn Griffiths, *Scars*, p.1

imperialism by 'kill[ing] that queen ... before she murders the generations to come!' (*TS*, 15) Griffiths also focuses on the aborigines and how the legacy of colonialism has and continues to dispossess them of land and devastate their traditional ways of life. In the poem 'ABOS' (*TS*, 5) – a derogatory term for the indigenous aborigines - Griffiths vents his frustrations with the attitudes of white Australians towards the aboriginals. The poem begins by quoting a 'bronzed' Australian (i.e a white non-aboriginal) talking about the aborigines to the poet:

> 'They don't fit in here, mate,'
> the bronzed Australian said,
> 'the abos just don't fit in.' (*TS*, 5)

They are, he goes on to say, 'like prehistoric men ... lost out of their time,/ and they've got to make way.' (*TS*, 5) The Australian's representation of the aborigines in the poem displays a classic case of what Fabian calls the 'denial of coevalness', whereby the indigenous population being observed are deemed to be temporally distant from the observer's culture.[244] For the Australian in the poem, their temporal distance necessities a spatial distance from the rest of Australia – the aborigines have 'got to make way.' (*TS*, 5) Viewed as anachronistic primitives, the aborigines are thoroughly dehumanized. Moreover, such a view repeats the eighteenth century belief that the aborigines, being so close to a state of nature, had yet to reach a stage of civilisational development where humans grasped the idea of property – a belief that was used by British colonists in order to legitimise the *terra nullius* myth. In response to this, the speaker of the poem goes on to question why the aborigines should adhere to the Australian's wishes for them to move given their history and the way they have suffered as a result of colonialism:

> make way for what? Each year
> their land constricts, deserts begin.
> progress fouls the landscape.
>
> Forty thousand years of freedom
> under the Southern Cross degenerate
> now into suffering and squalor
>
> beneath some broken shards of tin
> too pitiful to be called a shack.
> This, for them, is civilisation.
>
> we watched the aborigines shamble on
> down the street, staggering through

[244] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Work of Anthropology*, p.198

the bulling crowds, making way. (*TS*, 5-6)

It is useful to recall Alun Lewis' poem 'The Peasants' to gain a sense of how far the treatment and representation of indigenous peoples and their relationship to non-aboriginals changed by the time Griffiths is writing in the 1970s. In Lewis's poem the British soldiers 'stagger' past the rural Indians who are represented as existing in a world that is both temporally and spatially 'other' and are therefore completely unaffected by the European history that is playing out around them; the two peoples are completely separate and live in incompatible worlds. In Griffiths' poem, the aborigines are not temporally or spatially distant from the world of the non-aboriginal Australians (although they believe they are) but amongst them, 'staggering *through*/ the bulling crowds, making way.' (*TS*, 6) Moreover, in a reversal of the trope of 'going native', the poem depicts the aborigines as the ones who have 'degenerated' in contact with the dominant European culture rather than the other way around. The poem pulls no punches in its critique of white Australian attitudes towards the aborigines. The supposedly friendly, 'matey' tone with which these openly racist attitudes appear to be communicated to the speaker is particularly disturbing, suggesting, as it does, that such attitudes are commonly and unashamedly given expression in Australian society with little or no condemnation.

Griffiths' poem then appears to be far more attuned to the way in which indigenous peoples are presented as 'other' and how this othering has justified their marginalisation, in various forms, from the supposedly advanced and civilised non-aboriginal Australians. From the perspective of an outsider, the speaker expresses incredulity towards the racist attitudes of the Australians and anger at the injustice of a situation where the aborigines have been reduced to an abject state as a result of their contact with these people. The incongruities between the aborigines and the non-aboriginal Australians who live a pleasurable life at the expense of the indigenous people are palpable in the speaker's observation of the aborigines 'at drunken play/ on the sleazy side of a town ... [whilst] the far beaches rang with people,/ pleasure, the good life being lived.' (*TS*, 5)

'ABOS' reflects Griffiths' liberal humanist stance towards the indigenous peoples of Australia and is indicative of a multicultural approach to society that endorses plurality and shared values between different cultures whilst being critical of divisions based on supposed racial and cultural differences. That he should write a poem that is perceptive of the ways in which an indigenised culture was being slowly pushed into the margins of a society (and land) by a more powerful and dominant culture is not surprising given that he appears to have

felt the same regarding his own cultural background. Indeed, at times in his collection *Scars* he seems to be dealing with the same issues in the same manner but merely in a different setting:

> 'But I love Wales and the Welsh,'
> Said the Englishman, said the Englishman,
> Said the Englishman – buying up
> Cottage after cottage, farm after farm,
> Until the entire countryside
> Smacked of flat English shires . . .
>
> So each year the Englishman came
> To spend a few summer days in Wales.
> And each year he wondered
> Why the natives – strange,
> But loveable people – seemed less.[245]

'All Men Kill' is remarkably similar to 'ABOS' in its focus on a gradual, insidious colonisation of an indigenous people through land appropriation (the phrase 'each year' is present in both poems) and in terms of its poetic format – in both poems the speaker begins by quoting the coloniser before going on to highlight how their attitudes are affecting the slowly dwindling 'natives'. Tony Conran has described the poem as getting to grips with the 'social nitty-gritty of contemporary Wales' and it seems that in Australia Griffiths carried on producing a poetry attuned to the social injustices and inequalities of his new home.[246]

The state of the indigenous Australian aborigines has also been touched on in a poem by the contemporary poet Robert Minhinnick, whose poetry and travel writing I examine further in the next chapter. In his poem 'Ants' (*TL*, 7), Minhinnick depicts the aborigines as suffering from the loss of an authentic culture and language. Although the poem is dedicated to 'Australia in 1988, on its "Bicentennial"' (*TL*, 7) it is not a celebration of that event. Indeed, by placing inverted commas around the word 'bicentennial' Minhinnick signals his scepticism regarding the legitimacy and credibility of a day which was intended to celebrate two hundred years of European settlement. It is therefore ironic that his poem concerns the exploitation of the aboriginal people and the decline of their traditional culture over the course of those two hundred years of colonial subjugation. As in Griffiths' 'ABOS', the malaise of the contemporary aborigines is attributable to their contact with the non-aboriginal world:

> Your people once walked

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[245] Bryn Griffiths, *Scars*, p.32
[246] Tony Conran, Anthony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness*, p.227

Down the spine of a continent
Discovering the one right name
For the lizard, the right name for the tree,
Laying the highway with their songs.

Now your father swats at daylight
In his corral of cans,
Sometimes pushing a broom for a dollar
around the trailer-park.
He is the chief who serves at the diesel pump,

Magician without a memory,
Watching and offering no comment
As the young men suck the whisky stem,
Then pour gasoline
Over the ant-thrones ... (*TL*, 8)

The destructive influences of modernity and capitalism are manifest in the malformed architecture of the aborigines' bodies, in 'the grey-haired man and women/ Rubbing their misshapen dugs' (*TL*, 8), and in the historical amnesia which has left the elderly members of the community unable to reconnect with their past. In such a state, the poem implies, they are reduced to drunken spectators of the slow decline of their people. In an interview with the critic Ian Gregson, Minhinnick has talked about how the poem was influenced by his witnessing of opencast mining in various parts of the world, Wales in particular, and the ecological and cultural destruction caused by this method of coal extraction:

> [The poem] is about Australia, the arrogance of power and the disinherited. In the US I've worked with native people who felt instinctively that uranium mining was destroying their sacred places. But 'Ants' was influenced by opencasting of coal in Welsh landscapes. Opencasting destroys everything from geology to field names. It creates a kind of amnesia, which is one of the processes by which the sacred is lost from life.[247]

Although 'Ants' ostensibly appears to have nothing to do with Wales, Minhinnick's commentary on the poem has led the critic Ian Gregson to read Wales into the poem as a 'hidden or allegorical presence' and he has suggested that the poem could be read as the 'globalizing of an Anglo-Welsh theme'[248]. According to Gregson, the 'traditional route' for the poet would have been to 'have made the poem an attack on opencasting in Wales, and the international capitalists who were perpetrating it' but the Welsh subject-matter in the poem, he suggests, is 'subsumed inside a poem about Australian aborigines which, nonetheless,

[247] Robert Minhinnick in Ian Gregson, *New Poetry in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p.43
[248] Ian Gregson, *New Poetry in Wales*, p.43

dwells on an issue of language which could also be applied to the suppression of Welsh and the concomitant damage to a whole culture'.[249]

The poem's depiction of the aborigines as possessing a 'natural' language is particularly relevant to Wales and the debates surrounding the equation of land and language in Welsh writing in English. 'Ants' implies that prior to being colonised, the aboriginals developed a 'natural' relationship to the landscape and as a result were able to 'discover' – rather than 'give' – the 'right name' for plant and animal life. Towards the end of the poem one of the aborigines dies after being locked up in a cell by the police for being drunk and his death is equated with the 'murder' of the aborigines' language:

> And if there's an absence
>
> no-one speaks of a drinking-place unfilled
> or a gap in the welfare line.
> So many of your sort might not appear
> for days or weeks before the slow
> perplexed acknowledgement of wrong.
>
> That there was trouble in the night
> is murmured and shrugged off:
> there's no-one with the name for it,
> the one right word that measures you
> hung by your shirt-sleeve in the cell
>
> like a sheaf of drying flowers,
> a few spilled petals on the floor below.
> They've murdered language, killed the one
> whose speech might act as searchlight through
> the coagulating dark,
>
> and name the action, name the act. (*TL*, 10)

The murder of the aborigine is inexpressible without their language; it is a non-event requiring no explanation and no one to hold in account.

Gregson has suggested that Minhinnick's depiction of the aborigines is influenced by Bruce Chatwin's book, *The Songlines* (1986), in which the writer explores the supposedly nomadic culture of the aborigines. Yet Chatwin's account has been criticized for its romantic primitivist descriptions of the aborigines and their culture. Following Tim Youngs' description of Chatwin's book as 'a populist, pseudo salvage ethnography', Alison Russell has suggested that Chatwin is 'performing a variant of salvage ethnography – salvage travel

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[249] Ibid.

writing – especially since one source of the "allegory of salvage", according to Clifford, "is appropriately located within a long Western traditional of pastoral"'.[250] The focus on the aboriginal cultural losses in Minhinnick's poem would also seem to suggest a form of salvage ethnography. Following Clifford's example, however, we might question the seemingly essentialist assumptions that the poem makes about the aborigines and the 'naturalness' it ascribes to their culture and language. At the heart of the poem is obviously a lament for a supposedly vanishing 'natural' culture – it portrays the aborigines as a people who are becoming gradually more separated from their original relationship with nature – as well as a dismay at the injustices suffered by modern-day aborigines. However, positing an essential notion of their culture even as a form of protest is arguably counterproductive since it suggests that they will never themselves retrieve that state of oneness with nature – the Golden Aboriginal Age – that such a depiction of them presupposes. In other words, they will always remain fallen from their original state of organicism. One might even make the point that in a modern, multicultural Australia such notions of linguistic naturalness are exclusive and divisive. Similar criticisms to these were made by Ian Gregson in his analysis of Gillian Clarke's poem 'The Water Diviner', in which water coming up from an underground well sounds out as 'dŵr' (the Welsh word for water).[251] According to Gregson, this sound implies that 'the water speaks Welsh'.[252] He regards this as a 'fantasy of a pure original Welshness reasserting itself' which implies a 'very unsettling racial essentialism' and which leads to 'the ideology of blood and soil.'[253] It is interesting then to compare his analysis of Clarke's poem with his analysis of Minhinnick's 'Ants'. After pointing out that poststructuralist theories of language dictate that 'no name can be any more 'right' than any other', Gregson writes:

> If Minhinnick – in order to oppose civilized artifice and champion the sacred – were ignorantly just opposing the poststructuralist view, his poem would be flatly naïve. Instead, 'Ants' imagines an aboriginal language to focus upon its loss, which is made symptomatic of a more general loss inflicted by the forces of global capital.[254]

For Gregson, Minhinnick's equation of land and language appears to be legitimised by the fact that such a relationship is now lost and that loss is 'symptomatic' of other larger losses. However, the same could be said of Clarke's poem since it is essentially about the same thing: language loss. Like the aborigines who suffer linguistic amnesia ('They whisper like

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[250] Alison Russell, *Crossing Boundaries: Postmodern Travel Literature* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p.90.
[251] Ian Gregson, *New Poetry in Wales*, p.13
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid, p.44

phosphorous,/ Those beacons that once had names' (*TL*, 9)), the speaker in Clarke's poem attests to a similar condition as the word 'dwr' is 'a word we could not say, or spell, or remember'.[255] Curiously, Clarke is upbraided by Gregson because the one-to-one equation of land and language betrays a romantic essentialism that underpins her poem whereas Minhinnick's depiction of aboriginal language is 'thoroughly postmodernist'.[256] Yet it is difficult to understand the difference that Gregson sees in the two poets' approaches toward language since, arguably, each poem displays an organicist depiction of the languages they feature. Moreover, the problems that Gregson identifies are arguably avoided because the poems present that one-to-one equation of language and nature as *internal* to the cultures they talk about. Minhinnick is not saying that objectively it was the right name but referring to the aborigines' belief that it was. He is calling attention to the way in which the aborigines believe that they have lost their own cultural heritage and the power to name. Moreover, although it posits an original pastoral state, the poem focuses on the contemporary material reality of aboriginal culture. Indeed, perhaps the crucial aspect here is that Minhinnick's poem does not present aboriginal society as inherently 'weak' and in need of saving by an outsider but registers the problems that that society encounters in continuing its traditions in a post-colonial Australia.

I want to turn now to examine the representations of Australia in Niall Griffiths' recent travelogue *Ten Pound Pom* (2011).[257] Griffiths' book is very interesting because it exhibits many tropes and motifs that I have so far explored in the work of other Welsh writers but also challenges them in complex ways. Like Harri Webb who wondered about his 'hypothetical, Australian self', Griffiths travels to and around Australia in pursuit of his 'antipodean self' (*TPP*, 5). Griffiths means to revisit the formative years he spent there when he and his family emigrated there in 1976 as part of the eponymous 'Ten Pound Pom' offer which the Australian government launched in the 1960s in order to expand its population. Throughout the book he repeatedly describes himself as being intrinsically linked to Australia: 'My past is threaded through Australia, from childhood to middle youth and, now, early middle-age. The parabola of my life will always touch the antipodes, whether I like it or not.' (*TPP*, 75). He frequently finds places that link him back to home which cause him to wonder if he is moving away from the identity that he has in Wales:

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[255] Gillian Clarke, *Letter From A Far Country* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1982), p.33
[256] Ian Gregson, *New Poetry in Wales*, p.44
[257] Niall Griffiths, *Ten Pound Pom* (Cardiff: Parthian Books, 2011). Henceforth referenced in the body of the text as *TPP*

> Yet another place that rings and echoes with the boy I was. Sometimes, here, it seems as if the older me on the other side of the world, in Wales and in Liverpool, needs re-visiting; as if I've properly regressed, and the me that I am in Wales is becoming more and more distant. This isn't just touring Australia, this is touring a large and formative part of my life. I'm a tourist through my own childhood. Strange jaunt, this; I become more alien to myself with each passing day. (*TTP*, 164)

This sense of himself as alien is also exacerbated by the sense he has of Australia as a place that it simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar:

> These things on the other side of the world; echoes of Wales and a place called Liverpool Ranges. And the road atlas says there's a small town called Liverpool, too, outside Sydney. These familiar things on the other side of the planet but familiar in name only so that in fact they underline the essential unfamiliarity of where the boy is now. (*TPP*, 60)

Like Bryn Griffiths, he tends to repeatedly define the Australian landscape and measure its 'otherness' against the landscape of Wales: 'We drive through mountains. Low mountains, unspectacular as yet – they're not Welsh – but by God they go on. And on and on and on.' (*TPP*, 61). Similarly, later he writes that Wales would 'fit several times' into the wheatfields in Kimba. (*TPP*, 106) Australia also provides Griffiths with the same problem that Bryn Griffiths confronted time and time again in his poetry. Just as the speaker in his poem 'Looking Back' worries about how he is going to make poetry out of the barren landscape of Australia, Niall Griffiths laments the fact that there is no 'joy of discovery' (*TPP*, 115) when he is crossing the Nullabor desert in his car and he describes the difficulties that the environment poses in terms of providing enough material for him to entertain the reader:

> ...I start to wonder how I'll describe the Nullarbor crossing, in written words. How to make that hellish trek readable? Is it possible to write such a journey in an exciting and interesting and compelling way? No, my inner voice says, slow and droney, like a 78rpm record played at 33 and a third: I'll go for literal transcription. I'll go for mimesis, and make it as dull and frustrating to read as it was to actually do. Sod the reader's comfort and fun: Share the misery. Make it a chore, a task, onerous, to read. Drag the reader into the gaseous and stifling cabin of the van, on the endless red desert. Make them suffer, as you did. Share the misery.' (*TPP*, 130-121)

The implication here is that the desert is a place where people suffer as a result of its bareness. The fear of dissolution is again palpable when he describes his entrance into the Nullabor desert:

> The country starts to get emptier, harsher, hotter. Blasted, backed. Red sand. Scrub, desiccates. Leafless and scrawny tress ... We buy some supplies for the van; dried fruit and water and stuff. Leave. Into sudden, abrupt desert; red, endless desert. Quintessential Australia. Scrub and what grass there is a kind of bluey-grey colour, in sharp contrast to the red dust of the ground. Fine talcum. A dread desert, stretching ahead for a continent. Bit of apprehension creeps in. And now the sun roars in the sky. Flat blue of the sky. Vast and without mercy. I think of blistered, popping skin. (*TPP*, 104)

Notice how the sentences are now structured as concise isolated units – as if the language itself reflects Griffiths' reaction to the environment. This 'Quintessential Australia' inspires a sense of awe and fear; as a 'dread desert', the landscape takes on a hostile personality, threatening to mutilate the human body.[258] These descriptions seem to reproduce the version of hostile Australia that we find in the work of Bryn Griffiths and again recalls those early twentieth-century modernist colonial travel narratives in which a journey into a particular non-European interior is accompanied by the dissolution of the Western colonial subject. Yet Niall Griffiths' portrayal of the effects the desert has upon him never reaches the melodramatic heights of Bryn Griffiths' poetry. So upon entering the landscape of the Nullabor desert he announces that 'The sense of isolation *almost* overwhelms' (*TPP*, 111, my emphasis). Later he writes how he is 'barely keeping it together' driving across the desert (*TPP*, 188). In these instances it is as if the standard European reaction to the desert of Australia that he thinks he should feel is only experienced approximately: *almost* overwhelmed but not quite. Elsewhere Griffiths is keen to challenge some of the tropes which are frequently wheeled out in representations of Australia. In the following passage, for example, Griffiths debunks the myth of Australia's desert as a place that is devoid of content and links it to colonialism:

> We're on the Nullarbor, now, its eastern edge. I've seen enough of deserts of both sand and ice to know that they're not barren, desolate places, and to believe so is to bow to a speciously inverted and unquestioningly received 'knowledge' that benefits only the aggressively colonialist mind-set. Look closely, and listen to what their inhabitants – human and animal, vegetable and mineral – tell you and you'll realize that deserts are jumping with abundant life. Not just that; they're labyrinthine libraries of offered knowledge. But I'm daunted, to say the least, as the country's fierce interior opens up around me and I see ahead of me what I suddenly remember very,

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[258] Griffiths' sense of the desert as a dangerous place is partly influenced by popular cultural representations of it. Several times throughout the book he mentions having watched the Australian horror film *Wolf Creek* (2005) in which three white tourists are terrorized by a crazed Australian male who lives at an abandoned mining outpost in the outback. As Roslyn Weaver points out in her study of apocalypse in Australian literature and film, the film is one of many in which the outback is conflated with horror and it raises questions over who should belong in this landscape. The answer, according to Weaver, is that white tourists 'certainly do not'. Roslyn Weaver, *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film,* p.88

> very clearly – approaching a distant crest in the road then going over it only to see another distant crest in the road and so on and so on and so on – and I'm filled with a deep admiration for what my mum and dad did, all those years ago, their bravery, three young children and another one on the way and all of them in a Holden car travelling across some of the emptiest, most hostile terrain on earth. *Terra nullius*. (*TPP*, 104-105, my emphasis)

This passage is remarkable if only because of the contradictions that Griffiths appears to inadvertently fall into. He claims that the perception of the desert as empty is a form of 'received knowledge' that serves the colonial mind-set and he urges the reader to 'look around' and discover a highly varied terrain which is 'jumping with abundant life.' (*TPP*, 104) Yet immediately after making this point he goes on to describe the land he and his family travelled across as 'the emptiest, most hostile terrain on earth' before dramatically ending the paragraph with the stand alone Latin phrase 'Terra Nullius' (*TPP*, 104-5). In doing so, Griffiths reproduces and reinforces the very perception that he had just criticised as being incorrect and, furthermore, as the belief of those who 'bow to a speciously inverted and unquestioningly received 'knowledge' that benefits only the aggressively colonialist mind-set.' (*TPP*, 104) Griffiths is obviously not pursuing a colonial agenda on his trip but it appears that despite his admirable effort to do so, he cannot sustain the idea that that the desert is not empty. Indeed, in his account the desert appears to be simultaneously teeming with diverse life and devoid of any content. Whilst this incident may highlight the contradictions and inconsistencies within Griffiths representation of Australia it is also worryingly indicative of the enduring hold that these myths seem to have on travel writers or rather the way that these writers can easily lapse into a repository of rather hackneyed colonial tropes.

Another sign of Griffiths' difficulty with Australia is the way in which the historical existence of the aborigines appears to contradict his impressions of the country or, to put it another way, his 'normative' narrative of Australia. Crossing the desert, for example, he tells us that the landscape has 'evolved to repel the human', it is 'all jagged and arid and spiked and comfortless. Except humans lived in it, quite happily, for 40,000 years.' (*TPP*, 127) After noting this caveat he goes on to say that the landscape 'pummels you, batters you' and describes it as 'without mercy or respite' (*TPP*, 127). Griffiths frequently qualifies his narrative with comments like these about the aborigines. Such comments are rather conspicuous because they appear to contradict the dominant version of Australia (empty, lifeless, hostile) that he tries to sustain. Another myth that he repeatedly recycles is the idea that Australia is virtually devoid of history. Indeed, he argues that this lack of history is the

current cause of Australia's current problems. There is a significant moment in the book where, after meeting his friend Felix who originally hailed from York but now lives in Sydney, Griffiths explains how the 'shallowness of the available history' is the source of the aggressive behaviour shown by Australians to foreigners such as himself:

> I tell him of my misgivings about Australia, about its parochialism, the curtailed level of expansion in much of its citizens, its false air of 'no worries' acceptance. Felix tells me, echoing Steve and Ian, that Oz has pretty much of a tolerant attitude towards anything but the smallest misdemeanour; jaywalking, for instance, is seen as a vile and heinous crime. This makes a kind of sense, to me; I don't mean that the judgement itself seems rational, rather that its appearance in Australia, given the country's historical and on-going socio-political climate, is logical and unsurprising. See, the convict strain seethes deep in the collective psyche; it shouldn't really – sons don't need to pay for the sins of the fathers – but it does. It smoulders in the marrow of the Australian Everyman. It means that he doesn't really trust others; that he feels anger and shame at not being trusted himself. The shallowness of the available history – an 80-year-old telegraph station is seen as an ancient ruin – is reflected in the general mental attitude, which is happy to accept whatever lies on the surface and has an intense aversion to investigate endeavour. In Oz, history is not what you live; history is something other countries have. The aboriginal historical narrative is closed and removed, unless trampling over their temples such as Uluru can bring in the tourist dollar, and the aborigines themselves, when encountered in cities and towns, are either doing funny dances in face-paint for small change, or have been reduced to wretched drunks. Australian culture is, largely, at your shoulder, right in front of your nose; it's all immediate. By and large, it has no depth (of course, there are exceptions), which generates a kind of surface mateyness, which leads to a specious sense of solidarity, which produces a culture of snooping because if that mateyness wants to survive it needs the fuel of antithesis, for something to measure and define itself against; so revile the jaywalker, hold the smoker in disgust and disdain, sneer at those who want to wear a hat in surf-bars. (*TPP*, 76-77)

This passage pulls together several of Griffiths' gripes regarding Australian culture and history that he mentions earlier in the book. The examples of repressive Australian actions in the last sentence (jaywalking, smoking and wearing a hat indoors) refer to 'offenses' that he actually committed earlier on his journey, a fact which indicates that the ideas (and anger) he expresses here are at least partly derived from his own travel experience rather than any sustained research into the nature of Australian society. To apply then, as he does, his ideas, derived from his experiences of a few isolated incidents, to the entire (noticeably male) Australian population is a hugely simplistic generalisation. Indeed, there are several points in this passage worth going over. Whilst he declares that the historical narrative of the aborigines is closed (and doesn't seem intent on opening it), Griffiths' appears to find the narrative of white Australians open to him. He portrays this Australia as a place with rigid social codes and customs. The overzealous adherence to these codes is a result of what he

calls the 'convict strain' asserting itself in the Australian psyche. This strain means that 'he [the Australian male] doesn't really trust others [and] that he feels anger and shame at not being trusted himself.' (*TPP*, 76) Griffiths presents himself as a liberal minded traveller shocked by Australia's apparent oppressiveness and the explicit hostility Australians show to outsiders such as himself but no doubt many Australians would find his thoughts on their socio-political climate and their psychology offensive, especially his positing of the existence of an atavistic 'convict strain' which causes them to inflict the sins of their ancestors on themselves.[259] Although Griffiths determines this to be the problem of the 'Australian Everyman' it is clear that he is talking specifically about those with ancestry connected to the British penal colonies – or at least, he is suggesting, that *they* are universally haunted by that past. This is an Australia, he seems to say, that is wholly determined by its history (despite possessing not much of it in the first place).The implication is that Australian males are unable to behave any other way because they are shackled, so to speak, to this identity and the history of British Australia's origins as a penal colony. The primitivism insinuated in these lines is more explicitly made elsewhere in the text, often in reference to Australian males. Earlier in the book Griffiths declares, for instance, that 'the average Aussie male needs reconstructing' after he meets a man who appears to treat his wife like a waitress (*TPP*, 44). When Griffiths and his companion have a heated encounter with a man outside a nightclub he produces a primitivist parody of his thinking:

> I watch the ponderous thoughts porridge themselves through his echoing skull; Pom calls me small of dick and bad lover. Tall Pom is not biting. But shorter Pom has made insult. What I do? Smash Pom? Me not like be told him bigger and better than me as lover of ladies. Me not like him. Smash Pom? Smash Pom! MUST SMASH POM! (*TPP*, 41)

Griffiths portrays contemporary white male Australians as backward because of their inability to free themselves from their convict ancestry. Furthermore, his attribution of this behaviour to the 'shallowness of the available history' repeats a common motif (the absence of history) that has long been used in representations of the continent. It recalls, for instance, A.D Hope's poem in which the nation is determined to be without a history or culture. His sense of Australia as possessing a surface quality is also evident elsewhere in the book. He

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[259] Interestingly, a recent sociological study noted that Australian attitudes towards convict ancestry began to change in the 1960s. Formerly a source of shame for Australians and often resulting in forms of ostracisation, the convict strain becomes, according to Bruce Tanter and Jed Donoghue, a source from which some Australians derived a slight prestige during the 1960s. Moreover, towards the end of the twentieth century it became 'increasingly fashionable to uncover a convict ancestor'. Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue, 'Convict Ancestry: a neglected aspect of Australian Identity', in *Nations and Nationalism*, 9, No.4 (2003), 555-77 (p.556)

explains the abundance of road signs warning people to slow their speed, for example, as 'of a piece with the surface, depth-less beauty of much of Australia.' (*TPP*, 128) To be fair, at other times, Griffiths' appears to admire this aspect of Australia. In Canberra, a city which he admonishingly describes in post-apocalyptic terms, a lone bugler's playing of the Last Post outside a military history museum moves him to make this comment on Australian culture: 'I admire this about Australia, the way it honours and reveres its dead. This is something to do with a young country constructing its heroes and mythology, for sure, but it's no less stirring and laudable for that.' (*TPP*, 83) Yet even here Australia, or at least European Australia, is presented as still in construction; it does not have a complete set of heroes or a mythology of its own but is still in the making. In this instance, the immaturity of the culture, rather than being one its major problems, is praiseworthy but the lack of history is still viewed as a defining trait of the country. Where Griffiths does detect a sense of (European) history he tends to appear far more comfortable. He praises Sydney, for example, not only because it is a multicultural place containing 'differences to celebrated' but also because it is a place where he feels a palpable sense of history. He checks in to a bar in 'one of the oldest European-settled parts of Australia' and, after surveying the place, declares that he likes this part of the city as it 'seems old, or at least as old as European-settled Australia can get.' (*TPP*, 68)

It is worth comparing his impression of Australia as a place lacking history with the way he portrays Wales when he arrives home at the very end of the book. On his way back from the airport, Griffiths muses on the fact that he is returning to a place with a history that he can almost naturally feel:

> ... the weight of a long history is a good one to carry. I dwell on this as we drive back, the next day, to Wales. The castles, the hill-forts, the old houses, the standing stones and cairns on the mountain tops and in the green fields. A depth of human life is open and available here, at your shoulder, ready to hand, and there's a heft to it but it's a good weight to carry like muscle or a favourite coat. Makes you feel part of a grand and epic story. And the seasons turn around you, here, come and come again, alternately turning your skin pink then brown, pink then brown. Measure your life in the appearance and disappearance of swallows. (*TPP*, 180)

In ending the travelogue like this, Griffiths is further emphasising Australia's lack of history relative to Wales, whose history 'at your shoulder' and 'depth of human life' is perceived to be a good thing. This difference between Wales and Australia in this passage is very much like that found in Bryn Griffiths' poem 'Looking Back' where the latter's lack of diverse topography and historical content is compared to the former's abundance of those things.

Such a simplistic binary construction of historical and cultural difference works to separate Wales and 'us', Griffiths' readers, from Australia and 'them' over there. Moreover, it also appears to be repeating in a circuitous fashion the myth of Australia as mostly empty, as 'terra nullius.' Not, in this case, to legitimatise its colonisation but to disparage the place as unworthy of repeated visits. The last paragraph seems to say 'you might as well just stay home, there's nothing there for you.' This sense is also heightened by Griffiths' depiction of Australia as a place which is mainly composed of a *faux* European society that has tried to replicate images of home but failed badly and is now something to be laughed at. The irony which Griffiths does not seem to have detected is that although he depicts Australia as having no history much of the travelogue is made of him essentially moving from place to place picking up and quoting local history books and pamphlets. He does not consider the possibility that his own travel account may be superficial and derivative rather than Australia itself.

When he returns to his home in Wales at the end of the narrative, Griffiths finds a copy of Joseph Jenkins's *Diary of a Welsh Swagman* (1975) which he had ordered in Australia waiting for him.[260] Perhaps one of the earliest English-language accounts of the Welsh experience of Australia, Jenkins' diary details his journey from Tregaron where he left his home and family in 1868 to seek fortune down under. Finding consistent employment there, Jenkins remained in Australia until he was 76 before returning to Wales. Griffiths falls asleep before opening the diary but his interest in the book suggests a desire to compare his own experience of Australia with that of another Welsh man. Indeed, it is interesting that in the most recent Welsh account of Australia we find a writer looking back to what must surely be one of the earliest accounts of a Welsh experience of Australia written in the English language.

Although there have been far fewer instances of literary correspondence between Wales and Australia than there have been across the Atlantic, the Welsh engagement with Australia has arguably been just as multifarious and complex. In the Welsh poetry of the 1960s and 70s alone, Australia features as a place of exile from Wales (T. Harri Jones and Bryn Griffiths), a model on which Wales's future as a nation could be based (Harri Webb), as well as a place where Welsh identity is, or can, be radically altered or renewed. However, an exploration of Anglophone Welsh writing about Australia also reveals some of the ways in which the Welsh have employed outdated colonial myths for their various purposes.

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[260] Jenkins' dairy was re-discovered 70 years after he returned home from Australia. It was published in Melbourne in 1975. Joseph Jenkins, *Diary of a Welsh Swagman* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1975)

CHAPTER FOUR

'We are not tourists': Robert Minhinnick and the politics of contemporary travel

> Out there, swathed in milk-in-water nimbus, were the pinnacles and natural castellations of fortress Wales. On the journey up I had wondered if this would be one of the occasions on which I, a kind of racial atheist, would be forced to doubt my philosophy. Would I discover now in myself the capacity for awe or wonder at the concept of patria? Was I about to be overwhelmed by the humility of 'belonging'? There was no need to worry ... I was experiencing the inevitable disappointment of Snowdon, the peculiar cocktail of guilt and betrayal tasted by many of the tourists who target their free time at Wales.[261]

Here we see Robert Minhinnick suggest a form of identity that is clearly very different from that held by the writers examined in the previous chapter. Whereas Bryn Griffiths, for example, laments the lack of a 'racial heritage', which he sees as being integral to establishing a sense of place-identity, Minhinnick describes himself as a 'racial atheist', and appears to be highly sceptical of all bonds of attachment to place.[262] Critics of Minhinnick's writing have frequently noted the scepticism he shows to towards such forms of identity. Matthew Jarvis, for example, has recently suggested that Minhinnick's reaction to the successful 1997 referendum, as evidenced in his editorials for *Poetry Wales*, can be seen to be part of an emergent shift towards internationalism in the cultural attitudes of Anglophone Welsh writers during the 1970s.[263] Jarvis argues that Minhinnick's call for Welsh writers to 'simply get on with being' demonstrates and promotes a 'post-national' conception of identity where Wales is 'available as a potential context or a possible source for self-definition (if required), but in which it is far less frequently a subject of outright concern.' [264] In his first editorial Minhinnick argued that the degree of political autonomy gained through the referendum had resulted in a Wales in which the need to define one's national identity

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[261] Robert Minhinnick, *A Postcard Home: Tourism in the Mid-'Nineties* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), p.5. Henceforth referenced in the text as *APH*

[262] In his study of recent poetry in Wales, Ian Gregson suggests that Minhinnick's description of himself as a 'racial atheist' is a 'Welsh equivalent' of Derek Walcott's statement that 'race is ridiculous'. Ian Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales,* p.11

[263] Jarvis' essay examines the way in which the place and function of Wales has changed within Welsh poetry in English since the mid-1960s. Matthew Jarvis, 'Repositioning Wales: Poetry after the Second Flowering' in *Slanderous Tongues: Essays on Welsh Poetry in English, 1970-2005* edited by Daniel Williams (Bridgend: Seren, 2010), pp. 21-59

[264] Ibid. Jarvis suggests that contemporary Welsh writing in English may be approaching a 'postnational poetics', in which Wales is 'something to which poetry can choose to turn ... [but] is frequently neither a matter of primary investigation nor an issue which generates a great deal of anxiety.' Jarvis, 'Repositioning Wales: Poetry after the Second Flowering', p.52

was no longer relevant.[265] The 'era of introspection', as he calls it, had now ended and with it went the need to regurgitate the identity politics that he believed occupied the previous generation of Anglophone Welsh poets. Indeed, in a later editorial Minhinnick criticises poets such as Harri Webb and R.S Thomas for producing poetry so preoccupied with nationalist identity politics that its radical political potential was wholly compromised.[266] One of the key components of Minhinnick's post-national vision for Welsh writers appears to have been the cultivation of an outward-looking, international perspective through travel. Later in the same editorial, for example, he argues that there is 'no profit and no future in the dour, regional introspection that underlies much art in this country' and urges poets to

> look at the wider world, read about it, and visit it. New York is eight hours away from Cardiff. Writers should beg, borrow or steal the £300 it takes to get there. Ireland is a ferry trip; Edinburgh a coach ride ... My advice is get moving and breathe the invigorating air of these places. Then come back and for all our sakes share what has been discovered.[267]

The contemporary Welsh poet is envisioned here as a traveller/explorer who, reinvigorated by the experience of new lands, should return to exhibit his/her discoveries for the benefit of the group. This move back is crucial: poets should procure a return, rather than one-way, ticket in order to reinvigorate the domestic culture. In urging Welsh writers to travel out and bring back what they discover Minhinnick was preaching what had long been a personal practice of his. In an interview with Sam Adams in 1997 he recalled how he had made a vow to return to North America every year after he left there in 1995 in order to give his poetry a 'transfusion of language'.[268] For Minhinnick then, the experience of other places is conducive to gaining significant insights for aesthetic renewal. There is, however, an obvious danger that such thinking could be interpreted as endorsing what Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan describe as an 'imperialist perception of travel' where 'the exciting "otherness" of

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[265] Ironically, of course, Minhinnick advocated this post-national identity at the very time that Wales gained some semblance of political autonomy as a nation and he did it in a magazine that was founded in the mid-1960s to house the work of Welsh writers trying to raise the national consciousness.

[266] Minhinnick argues that the political poetry of the 1960s failed because the poets were 'burdened with the intolerable demand of proving themselves as patriots as much as poets'. He contrasts Harri Webb, who comes under particular attack for producing a 'smorgasbord of propaganda, hackwork, and calamitous pseudo-lyricism', with later writers such as John Davies and Anthony Conran who he deems to be 'outward-looking' because 'they do not berate the Welsh people for not being angry enough or socialist enough or Welsh enough.' Editorial in *Poetry Wales*, 36 No. 4 (2001), p3.

[267] Robert Minhinnick, 'A Country That Said Yes', *Poetry Wales*, 33 No.2 (1997), p. 2. His promotion of this international outlook continued in subsequent editorials. In a later issue Minhinnick declared that 'this magazine once again urges writers in Wales to pack their bags, whether physically or intellectually, and explore fresh means of achieving what they want to say.' Robert Minhinnick, *Poetry Wales*, 34 No.3 (1997), p.4

[268] Robert Minhinnick 'In Conversation with Sam Adams', *PN Review* 117, 24 No.1 (1997), pp.6-12, p.8

foreign ... peoples and places is pressed into the service of rejuvenating a humdrum domestic culture.'[269] In this chapter we explore Minhinnick's travel writing and poetry about Brazil in order to investigate the extent to which his own writing demonstrates or lapses into such an 'imperialist perception' of travel. I will argue that, although it might be motivated and occasioned by his arguably worthy environmental and humanitarian politics, his travel writing frequently betrays a colonial vision where the culture and environmental authenticities supposedly evident where 'others' live is appropriated in order to either satisfy his own fantasies (i.e. the discovery of a pristine tropical environment or 'first contact' with the indigenous locals) or revivify a 'we' which is perceived to be lacking or deficient in some way.

Marginality and the state of Wales

Before going on to examine the myriad ways in which his travel writing enacts a search for various authenticities, it is important to understand Minhinnick's relationship to Wales and his perception of it as a place which has lost its cultural and, indeed, environmental vitality. Looking back to his first collection of essays, *Watching the Fire Eater* (1994), published six years prior to his first editorial for *Poetry Wales*, we find Minhinnick clearly preoccupied with the state of the (then pre-devolved) nation and his own identity. Far from having a secure, culturally-confident 'post-national' identity, he describes himself as occupying a 'view from the sidelines' and considers Wales to be 'a country increasingly hard to locate as it sloughs an identity of clichés.' (*WTF*, 8)[270] In many of his travel essays Minhinnick self-dramatises as a person displaced in some fashion from modern Welsh culture. In an essay detailing his trip to Dublin, for example, he characterises himself as a 'temporary refugee from a land anaesthetized by jock-strap culture' (*WTF*, 88). Of course, the figure of the refugee is adopted by Minhinnick not as an objective description of a social or even cultural location but more as an aesthetic condition. He has not been removed from his homeland by

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[269] Speaking about the status of travel literature in what they call 'the age of postcoloniality', Holland and Huggan note that, historically, travel writing has capitalized on 'exoticist perceptions of cultural difference ... making a virtue of, and profit from, the strangeness of foreign places and cultures' and they warn that 'however entertaining ... behind its apparent innocuousness and its charmingly anecdotal observations lies a series of powerfully distorting myths about other (often, "non-Western") cultures.' Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p.8.

[270] The metaphor of the nation 'sloughing' off its skin is a highly suggestive one. The act of sloughing is a casting away (as Joyce would try to cast away the nets of language, nation, and religion), but sloughing also assumes that a new skin will grow in its place. It implies a postmodern rejection of a rooted identity (even one full of clichés) while at the same time a re-invention or re-mythologisation of identity rather than its outright rejection.

force or coercion nor forced to stay away; the exile implied here is a condition that he voluntarily assumes. Minhinnick's construction of his marginality as something which informs his writing comes close to what Caren Kaplan terms the 'modernist construction of authorship through displacement'.[271] Kaplan has discussed the way in which exile and expatriation tend to be conflated in modern discourses of displacement:

> [The] conflation of exile and expatriation by modern writers and critics can be read in the way that distance has come to be privileged as the best perspective on a subject under scrutiny and in the related discourse of aesethtic gain through exile. When detachment is the precondition for creativity, then disaffection or alienation as states of mind becomes a rite of passage for the "serious" modern artist or writer. The modernist seeks to create the effect of statelessness – whether or not the writer is, literally, in exile. As a result, even those writers who do not find themselves actually exiled may easily extend the metaphor. Within this form of modernism, exilic displacement occupies a privileged position, legitimating points of view and constituting a point of entry into a professional domain.[272]

In describing himself as a 'temporary refugee', Minhinnick takes part in the modernist tradition of conflating exile and expatriation that Kaplan identifies. Like the modernist writers who 'do not find themselves actually exiled', Minhinnick appears to 'extend the metaphor', to use Kaplan's phrase. This exilic perspective, according to Kaplan, becomes a 'vocation and a virtue' for modern writers.[273] The question that seems pertinent to ask then is why does Minhinnick ascribe himself the status of refugee or, in general, of a disillusioned outsider, and what does he gain from such an act? Steffan Collini has discussed the way in which the claim to be an 'outsider' can often be a highly fruitful one:

> It is principally a claim to a kind of glamorous validation, a way of pulling rank on those who are ostensibly in control of rank and its rewards. It hints, usually without really elaborating, at an epistemologically advantaged position: spurred by antagonism, pricked by the necessity to start from scratch, uncontained by the conventional, the outsider perceives things the complacently comfortable could never recognize. One sees more clearly, speaks more freely, lives more honestly when unconstrained, and to be an outsider is to claim to be unconstrained in fundamental ways (though in reality it may simply represent containing others). And the glamour of exclusion hovers over the status.[274]

Paradoxically then, ascribing to oneself the status of outsider (or even refugee) can be rather advantageous. Far from being a debilitating condition, it allows Minhinnick to claim an objective, 'epistemologically advantaged' perspective of a culture he deems to be plagued by

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[271] Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p.36.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid, p.37.
[274] Steffan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.414

artificiality ('sloughs an identity of clichés') and excessive masculinity ('jock-strap culture'); it is, in other words, an enabling fiction.

As is evident from his comments, Minhinnick's adoption of this displaced identity is linked to a profound anxiety over the state of Wales. In 1993 he produced a pamphlet entitled *A Postcard Home* (1993) in which he described the various ways by which the 'miasma of tourism', as he calls it, was destroying the 'two essential characteristic of Wales – its environment and its culture.' (*APH*, 35) Minhinnick repeatedly depicts tourism as a colonising force which corrupts the culture and environment of Wales. Tourism-influenced immigration, one of the major problems that he identifies, is described as 'the real Trojan Horse' which threatens to 'fundamentally alter the social character of rural hinterlands' (*APH*, 30). Minhinnick is also critical of the creation of heritage museums as tourist attractions:

> What service Big Pit, Afan Argoed Museum, Sygun, the Rhondda Heritage Park and other commemorations of mining perform is to allow us to become tourists in our own history. This is an awkward concept. It implies that when the mineral workings closed, so did Wales. Time, it appears, stopped, when the last pit-pony was put out to grass and the final shower taken in the colliery baths. The 'real Wales' has finished, rather like a three-hour Hollywood epic, and we are left waiting for the next picture ... Thus how we behave now, or what we do, does not matter so much, because we are outside the history of our country, looking in through slightly clouded exhibition glass. We are spectators, not participants, whose knowledge of Wales is gained vicariously. (*APH*, 20)

What Minhinnick takes issue with is not the quality of the exhibits in the museums but rather the implication that the Wales they represent has passed. For him, the museum signals the death knell of a particular historical reality. His remarks are strikingly similar to those of Peter Lord who has criticised the Welsh Folk Museum at Sain Ffagan and its original curator, Iorwerth Peate, for producing a narrow historical narrative that depicts Wales as an exclusively rural country that, by implication, ended in the nineteenth century.[275] For Lord, the museum effectively locked Wales into a 'perpetual rural past': 'Wales has come to an end at some indeterminate point in the nineteenth century, a passive nation existing in a time warp. It is a concluded story.'[276] Though his argument is directed at the industrial heritage museums rather than the Folk Museum, Minhinnick's criticisms closely mirror Lord's: the

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[275] Minhinnick's critique of the industrial heritage museums in the South Wales valleys may have been influenced by Peter Lord's ideas about the museum at Sain Ffagan and the exclusively rural version of Wales that it constructed. Both Minhinnick and Lord published a pamphlet in the same *Changing Wales* series in 1993. Peter Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), p.40

[276] Ibid.

museums imply that Wales has ended at a certain point in time.[277] For Minhinnick, this implication reduces the current Welsh people to ineffectual spectators of their own history. Later, for instance, he writes that the museums are indicative of the way that tourism is 'assisting in the force-feeding of the Welsh a diet of their own peculiar history - whether they comply with the process or not' (*APH*, 26). He goes on to highlight the irony in plans by the Rhondda Heritage Park to build a replica chapel for tourists to visit when the actual chapels are 'still very common sights in authentic streets in authentic valleys' and are 'part of the everyday experience, not some bricks-and-mortar mythology that we desperately need to preserve' (*APH*, 22). It is interesting to recall that Lynette Roberts made similar remarks about Iorwerth Peate's ideas for an open air museum at Sain Ffagan. In her article 'Simplicity of the Welsh village', Roberts wrote that the examples of traditional Welsh culture that Peate wished to preserve in his museum were still present in her village. She argued that it would be better if Peate used his expertise to help maintain the 'authentic' traditional houses in Llanybri rather than build Hollywood-style replicas in the museum.[278] Although their arguments are separated by over forty years and the museum versions of Wales that they write about are very different, Minhinnick and Roberts are essentially making the same point: namely, that the Welsh culture that the museums represent as having vanished is still present in the real world and part of everyday life. For Minhinnick, the question 'when was Wales?' – a question famously asked by Gwyn Alf Williams in the title of his seminal study of Welsh history – is misleadingly answered by the museums since they suggest that it ended with the collapse of the mining industry.[279] At the same time however, Minhinnick also constructs a similar historical narrative when he goes on to suggest that the culture that he knew which

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[277] The arguments made by both Lord and Minhinnick about the heritage museums are not without their problems. Discussing the criticisms directed at British heritage museums in his book *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), John Urry points out that the criticisms directed at heritage rarely admit the possibility that visitors can gaze at the same objects and interpret them in different ways. He suggests that these forms of criticism bear a similarity to the critique of the 'mass society thesis': 'social scientists may well be prone to a kind of nostalgia, that is, for a Golden Age when the mass of the population were supposedly not taken in by new and more distorting cultural forms. There has, of course, never been such a period.' John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, (London, California, New Delhi, Sage 1990 (rpr. 2002)), p.100

[278] 'The plan for a cottage, farmhouse or mansion has varied so little over the many centuries that all Dr Iorwerth Peate describes in *The Welsh House* can be found today, not only in my own village, but over the whole of Wales ... What we need, then, is not so much to preserve the rural architecture of Wales in a museum behind glass, nor to build an exact model of a Welsh village retaining all its craft and folklore, such as Hazelius founded in Sweden, and was later developed in Denmark and Norway, etc. This is good if it is kept to Dr Iorwerth Peate's original purpose and not misinterpreted to mean a pseudo Hollywood village, part modernised with concrete bathing-pool and cinema ... But what is far more urgent, is to have the support of valuable persons like Dr Peate to help preserve and repair the numerous farms and cottages, no different from those which he wishes to represent in his Open Air Museum. Here, in whole villages, or on isolated farms, exist the very buildings of the peasantry, together with the natural mode of life and craft which goes with it.' *DLR*, 128

[279] See Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (London and Cardiff: BBC publications, 1979)

ended with the collapse of the mining industry was comparatively more substantial than the present culture, characterised as it is by a political and creative passivity; characteristics which allowed heritage tourism to flourish in the first place: 'the last card of the older, more vital culture was perhaps played by the Maerdy miners, walking back to work en masse after the defeat of the coal-strike in 1985' (*APH*, 21). Characterised by collective defiance, solidarity and nobility in defeat, the 'older' culture is represented as being of far more substance than the current. The virtues of that culture, particularly its political assertiveness, are absent in the present and are correspondingly lamented. Ironically of course, the writers of the Second Flowering that Minhinnick lambasted in his editorials display a similar species of lament for a vanishing way of life deemed more vital than the present.

Belated travel in the tropics

Minhinnick's experience of Brazil, as depicted in his travel essay 'Rio De Journal' is particularly revealing in terms of his search for authenticity (*WTF*, 9-35). The essay might best be described as a moralistic eco-travelogue in which Minhinnick attempts to mount a case for the rescue of the rainforest. However, the essay reveals a narrator who is seemingly caught between the critical judgements of the committed environmentalist and the highly uncritical, clichéd fantasies of the eco-tourist. In their survey of contemporary Amazonian travel writing, Holland and Huggan have argued that the tropics have provided 'a fertile soil for the flourishing of European romantic myths': 'Persuading themselves that the tropics leads "naturally" to hyperbole, self-styled "tropical travellers" have given free rein to their conquistadorial ambitions and exoticist fantasies.' [280] According to them, 'patently outdated modes of ethnographic enquiry and analysis' repeatedly re-emerge in 'ecologically-conscious' forms of travel writing. These modes, they argue, include 'the idea of "primitive" culture; the trope of "disappearance" [and] the notion that Western writer-observers, in salvaging the values of "other" cultures, might somehow rescue their own'.[281] Adopting James Clifford's phrase, they suggest that such travel writing enacts a form of '*pseudo*-ethnographic salvage': 'it makes, through writing, as if to retrieve the world from the clutches of imminent destruction, but the world that it fears losing is one that no longer conforms to the dominant culture's myth.'[282] Despite the liberal-humanist agenda of eco-travel writers

[280] Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, p.81
[281] Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, 'Varieties of Nostalgia in Contemporary Travel Writing' in *Perspectives on Travel Writing* ed. by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Vermont and Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), pp. 139-152, p.148
[282] Ibid

(including 'despoliation of the environment; wastage of natural resources; continuing mistreatment of indigenous peoples; and so on'), they invoke a species of nostalgia in their texts that is 'antithetical to historical change'.[283]

Minhinnick is clearly aware of some of the European romantic myths which surround the perception of the Amazon. He notes, for instance, how people 'persist in seeing the rainforest as that psychological dark side of the moon, which somehow might offer to us personally, the secret we have misplaced and now hunt for through our dreams.' (*WTF*, 29) However, he never explicitly challenges these notions. In the following passage, for example, Minhinnick lists the reasons why he thinks 'We' desire and need the rainforest and its indigenous inhabitants:

> Forget for a moment, if that is possible (it certainly is not wise) that its products contribute vital ingredients to a quarter of our medical prescriptions. ... We desire the tropical rainforests to exist because of our lack of knowledge of what they contain. We need them because they constitute some of the last places on the planet that have not been visited or explored ... Thus they still might harbour the strange and miraculous, the very unknown that our souls crave, as we tread once more the too familiar track ways of our own existences. And the people that might yet be found in those areas of forest, uncontacted, nameless, are surely the inhabitants of our dreams, men and women of limitless potential, unconstructed by everything that confines us to the mundane. We need their savage gentleness, the reality of their remote survival along with all the other extraordinary untouched wealth of the uncharted rainforests. Anything might exist, be possible, in that dark green territory of the unconscious. ... Some fantasies are worth having, as long as we do not blame the world for not offering them to us as a reality. (*WTF*, 29)

All the clichéd Amazonian tropes are wheeled out in this passage: the rainforest provides potential access to the primitive unconscious, miracle cures, and (most shockingly perhaps) the noble savage - all of which are perceived to be antidotes in some way to the ailing condition of the Western world. The 'strange and miraculous' nature of the rainforest can potentially rejuvenate the mundane and repetitious 'track ways' of 'our own existences'. Furthermore, as the 'last place on the planet' the rainforest is a final frontier that awaits exploration, thus conveniently resolving the sense that the world has been exhausted of new territories and new experiences. The deliberately hyperbolic language in this passage (note the romantic turn of phrase 'savage gentleness', for example) suggests that Minhinnick is clearly aware of the spurious nature of the romantic primitivism he employs yet he does not directly challenge or refute these notions. More worryingly, he seems to be suggesting that such 'fantasy' perceptions of the rainforest are necessary, or 'worth having', if they

[283] Ibid, p.149

encourage 'us' to engage in environmental politics. In other words, he has resurrected these rather hackneyed colonial tropes to make the rainforest more alluring to his readers and convince them it is a place worth rescuing.[284]

If Minhinnick invoked such tropes in a genuine, straightforward manner then he could be accused of being flatly naive and of promoting an imperialist view of the Amazon as simply a place for the West to repair and renew itself. However, by flooding such passages with irony and hyperbole, he distances himself from the ideological implications of these clichéd tropes whilst still indulging in the language of primitivism. Indeed, whilst it is not entirely clear he believes what he is saying, he certainly seems to enjoy revelling in such romantic language.

Much of the essay is taken up by descriptions of him and his partner encountering natural spectacles such as waterfalls and beaches. While they are travelling around the rainforest Minhinnick and his partner come across a waterfall, the magnitude of which appears to mitigate the fact that it is surrounded by civilization:

> It did not matter that travellers had been here before us, horsemen, farmers, the owners of Swiss-style wooden chalets that were now being built in the hills, each with their garland of semi-wild garden. Here the forest was accessible but not tamed ... And then there was the waterfall. Modest enough by Brazilian standards, this eighty foot high cataract immediately fulfilled any need I possessed for a glimpse of the natural world's ferocity. (*WTF*, 15)

Here he repeats the common desire to gain access to an untamed natural environment. Although he concedes that they are not the first to discover this place, the presence of nearby humans is subtly diminished in his description (as if not to ruin the moment): the gardens of newly built chalets are merely 'semi-wild' compared to the wholly wild nature of the waterfall scene. In some respects, Minhinnick displays one of the most common forms of tourist gaze as theorised by John Urry: namely, the 'romantic gaze'.[285] According to Urry, tourists displaying this gaze emphasise a solitary, private and 'personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of their gaze'.[286] They expect to see the object 'privately or at least only with "significant others" and are likely to go on quests for new objects such as 'the deserted beach, the empty hilltop, the uninhabited forest, the uncontaminated mountain stream and so on.' [287] What is also interesting about the kind of scene he depicts here is that

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[284] It is difficult to believe that any serious environmental politics might be based on such problematic perceptions of the Amazon.
[285] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p.150.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.

elsewhere Minhinnick has been critical of forms of domestic tourism in Wales that have sought to cater for the environmentally friendly traveller. He describes eco-tourism, for example, in terms of a virus - it is a 'current out-break', a 'form of malaria' that 'enters a country's bloodstream' (*APH*, 35) - and he lambasts forms of 'unstructured' tourism which allow tourists 'too many opportunities to slip out of the tourist role-model', where they 'either abandon the visit altogether or revert to some entirely personal activity outside the blandishments and influence of the tourism machine' (*APH*, 13). Of course, the irony here is that by frequently attempting to step off the beaten-track on his own travels, Minhinnick is guilty of the very same thing. This is in fact exactly what happens later when he remembers a deserted beach that he and his partner discovered just outside Rio:

> .... I calculate Brazil's too big for us to hurt. It's two and a half times the size of India and a zillion times bigger than Wales. We can't touch it, we can't leave a trace. But I think of the strange Antarctica of sand at Saquerama. We had walked miles out of town and the beach had become an endless white dune. There was not a mark on it, not a coke can, a fishing hook, a crushed pack of Hollywoods. We looked back over the prehistoric landscape and saw two lines of footprints running up to meet us in the seamless, the creaking sand. We had walked for miles where no-one else had ever trod, and there were our signatures on the canvas to prove it. We were the first, and we were the only ones. (*WTF*, 25)

Here Minhinnick indulges in a fantasy of discovery in which he imprints his 'signature' on a pristine, hitherto undiscovered piece of land. This 'prehistoric' beach has not yet been tainted by the presence of modern man (until he and his partner arrived of course). Moreover, it is a place which is commodity-free (though arguably it is undergoing a process of commodification through Minhinnick's exoticist representation of it). The absence of the Coke can, that symbol of American capitalism, is significant because it implies that the place has not yet been subject to modernity. The significance of this 'find' is highlighted if we briefly turn to a poem from his early collection, *Native Ground* (1979).[288] In the poem 'Salvage', based on the time Minhinnick worked in industry in the East Moor area of Cardiff, a solitary speaker walks along a beach that is littered with the derelicts of industry. As the tide goes out the speaker sees a 'Tundra strewed with weed, an obscene/ Exposure of a city's sludge'.[289] Walking 'a coast poisoned/ By people, crossboned with shipwreck' he finds he is 'happy to retreat ... And there is/ No shaking off one's own defeat.'[290] The post-industrial landscape of Wales does not allow the speaker to gain any territorial purchase on the

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[288] Robert Minhinnick, *Native Ground* (Swansea: Triskele Press, 1979)
[289] Ibid, p.13
[290] Ibid.

environment (a significant theme in Minhinnick's poetry) but on the pristine Brazilian beach, however, Minhinnick finds he is able to leave his 'signature on the canvas' (*WTF*, 25) – despite the fact that this seems to contradict his earlier (somewhat baffling) claim that Brazil is too big for him and his partner to 'leave a trace' (*WTF*, 25).

Ian Gregson has argued that much of Minhinnick's writing is a polemic against the complete 'superseding of nature' that Fredric Jameson has identified as a defining characteristic of postmodernism.[291] Gregson quotes a remark made earlier in the travelogue by Minhinnick that 'Living without nature is our last art, and we are bringing it to a state of perfection' (*WTF,* 21). Yet in his Brazilian travelogue Minhinnick purportedly discovers a nature that has yet to be overruled by capitalism. This is significant because in Jameson's theorisation of postmodernism, the kind of left-wing environmental politics that Minhinnick advocates would be untenable. In order to be effective such politics are reliant on a critical position outside global capitalism that no longer exists. For Jameson, it is no longer possible to achieve the 'critical distance' needed to mount a critique of capitalism because capitalism is inescapable. In a significant passage, Jameson writes that the 'prodigious new expansion of multinational capital ends up penetrating and colonizing those very pre-capitalist enclaves (Nature and the Unconscious) which offered extraterritorial and Archimedean footholds for critical effectivity.'[292]In some ways Minhinnick's discovery of the apparently pristine beach in Brazil is figured as the discovery of such a 'pre-capitalist enclave' which has yet to be penetrated and colonised by capitalism. However, as a basis on which to launch an environmental politics this particular 'extraterritorial' foothold is highly problematic. In order to make us aware of the global environmental crisis, Minhinnick has to travel to Brazil to discover, or rather fantasise about discovering, pristine examples of nature (i.e. the beach, the rainforest) which he tells us are under threat. Yet here he not only reproduces the colonial myth of land as *tabla rasa* but also the idea that the white travelling European can save the Brazilian environment (and in doing so appropriate it for the rest of us in the process). Ironically then, Minhinnick's moralistic eco-travelogue is in danger of repeating the same (Western) imperializing moves that it protests against. In his writing, the foreign environment, along with the human culture that resides there, is the subject for the anthropologist-cum-eco-warrior to salvage (for the purpose of rejuvenating a humdrum domestic culture).

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[291] Ian Gregson, *New Poetry in Wales*, p.43

[292] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press,1991), p.49

Like much European travel writing about the tropics, Minhinnick's romantic language and indeed his condemnation of the destructive influence the Western world has on the Amazon rainforest repeats the style and argument of Claude Levi-Strauss's ethnographic travel narrative, *Tristes Tropiques* (1955).[293] Holland and Huggan describe Levi-Strauss as a 'spectral figure hovering behind much of the contemporary environmental literature.'[294] The text is infamous for the remarks made in its opening sentences: 'I hate travelling and explorers. Yet here I am proposing to tell the story of my expeditions.'[295] The irony, reluctantly pointed out by the narrator, is of course, that despite despising 'explorers' he goes on to produce an account of his explorations in the rainforest. Levi-Strauss's ironic lament is often explained as a reaction to the perception that such an activity is hopelessly belated in the contemporary world. He frequently bemoans, for example, how the process of global modernization has left no part of the world 'primitive' or untouched and therefore left no opportunities for 'real' travel. In a significant passage, Levi-Strauss recalls travelling to Lahore where he found himself 'seeking in vain to recreate a lost local colour with the help of fragments and debris.'[296] As a reaction to this failure he discusses how an insidious 'illusion' had began to work its way into his mind: the wish that he 'had lived in the days of real journeys, when it was still possible to see the full splendour of a spectacle that had not yet been blighted, polluted and spoilt.'[297] He then considers the only options that are left open to him as a modern day traveller:

> ... I have only two possibilities: either I can be like some traveller of the olden days, who was faced with a stupendous spectacle, all or almost, of which eluded him, or worst still, filled him with scorn and disgust; or I can be a modern traveller, chasing after the vestiges of a vanished reality ... A few hundred years hence, in this same

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[293] The relationship between travel writing and ethnography has been extensively explored in recent critical considerations of travel literature. In her important essay, 'Fieldwork in Common Places', Mary Louise Pratt deconstructs the supposed opposition between the two forms of writing by pointing out the similarities between the figure of the ethnographer and literary figures such as the castaway and captive: 'The authority of the ethnographer over the 'mere traveller' rests chiefly on the idea that the traveller just passes through, whereas the ethnographer lives with the group under study. But of course this is what captives and castaways often do too, living in another culture in every capacity from prince to slave, learning indigenous languages and life ways with a proficiency an ethnographer would envy, and often producing accounts that are indeed full, rich, and accurate by ethnography's own standards.' She also points out that both travel writing and anthropology rely on exoticist representations of a designated cultural 'other' and that such a reliance demystifies anthropology's claims to objectivity. Mary Louise Pratt, 'Fieldwork in Common Places' in *Writing Culture: The Poetic and Politics of Ethnography* ed. by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkley and London: University of California Press, 1986), pp.27-50, p.38

[294] Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, p.237

[295] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. by John and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), p.17

[296] Ibid, p.43

[297] Ibid.

> place, another traveller, as despairing as myself, will mourn the disappearance of what I might have seen, but failed to see.[298]

Though it appears to have happened sooner than he expected, Levi-Strauss seems to have been right to predict that his laments would be repeated by others in the future. Indeed, his writing anticipates the nostalgic mourning for a time when Europeans could explore the tropics as adventurers which we find ironised in Minhinnick's Brazilian travel account. Like Levi-Strauss, the problem Minhinnick encounters in the rainforest is the unavoidable fact of his own belatedness. He knows full well that he is too late to indulge in such romantic notions about the rainforest but the desire to do so is clearly there, hidden underneath all the self-irony and hyperbole. It is important to stress, then, that Minhinnick's nostalgia is far from straightforward but is in fact weighted with a knowing irony that serves to emphasise his distance from that which he laments. Indeed, self-irony is his chief weapon in the fight against his own belatedness. We see it later, for example, when Minhinnick discusses what kind of traveller he is. In the following passage, he repeatedly refutes the notion that he and his partner (known only as M) are tourists and launches an acerbic attack on those who are:

> We are not tourists, I tell M, who has been foolish enough to use that derogatory word about ourselves. We are travellers, visitors, adventurers. We are experimenters. We are environmental pilgrims, discoverers, liason-makers. We are pathfinders, trailblazers. We are definitely not tourists ... For my own self-esteem I repeat this litany as we sip sucos and watch a thunder storm flush out the polluted streets of a small fishing port ... Tourists are destroyers, I add firmly. Calling yourself a tourist is like fixing a satellite dish to the outside wall of your house. Or wearing a tee-shirt advertising a heavy metal group. Or going into a bar and ordering a larger and blackcurrant. It's admitting to membership of that empty-headed tribe that circulates the world leaving broken sandals and rumpled boxes of Kodachrome in its wake ... But here we are not tourists, I tell M. Rio was hysterical with cars. It had overdosed on the methedrine of cars. But we were not tourists there when we sat in the bars of Ipanema and watched the surfers combing salt out of each other's hair (*WTF*, 23-24).

Reluctant to acknowledge his own status as a tourist outright, Minhinnick invokes this 'litany' of non-tourist identities – travellers, visitors, discoverers – precisely to send up his own touristhood. The repeated definition through negation, 'We are not tourists', alerts us to this understanding of the distinction between the tourist and traveller as highly specious and that, ultimately, he is a member of the '"empty" headed tribe' that he so abhors. It is important to notice, however, that Minhinnick never actually admits that he is a tourist – how

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[298] Ibid.

could he when the blurb on the back of his book markets its contents as an anti-touristic attempt to 'strip away' the 'exhausted mythologies' of the '*increasingly-packaged* places [Minhinnick] visits'? In some ways, Minhinnick has locked himself in a double-bind in terms of the travelling personae available to him: either he admits to his status as a tourist and concedes complicity in an industry he sees as exploitative or he turns instead to the belated persona of the explorer-adventurer associated with an earlier age of colonial expansionism in the tropics. The problem with sustaining the latter position is its connection with Empire. Many critics of contemporary travel writing associate this Golden Age which travel writers seek to recuperate through their writing with the time of Empire. Mary Louise Pratt points out, for example, that the figure of the 'gentleman explorer' in travel writing was one of the major forces in the production of the nineteenth-century European imperial myth of colonial geographies. Holland and Huggan suggest that the 'imperialist nostalgia' evident in many contemporary travel texts often functions to mystify the economic motives of the traveller and contest the perception that the genre of travel writing is obsolete within an increasingly globalised world where the possibility of 'real' travel to 'new' places is no longer possible. They argue that this nostalgia 'describes a more generalized, pastoral mode of wistful reminiscence that seeks control over, but not responsibility for, a mythicized version of the past ... it attempts the restoration of Empire's former (imagined) glories, and the resuscitation of Empire's erstwhile (imaginary) 'subordinate' subjects.[299] Debbie Lisle argues that the discourse of nostalgia is attractive to contemporary writers because it allows them to escape complex contemporary issues such as multiculturalism, political pluralism, and ethnic conflict by positing the existence of a world in which geopolitical borders were distinct and firm, separating civilised from primitive, safe from dangerous:

> [Travel writers] long for the territorial distinctions of Empire where everyone understood how the structures and practices of colonial power separated home and away. But as the home is penetrated and re-imagined by foreign subjects and cultures, it becomes a space of ambivalence that is no longer secured by the borders of Empire. But it also becomes a time of ambivalence: globalisation makes it increasingly difficult to locate a sanctified home at the front of the historical queue (and therefore in the present) and everywhere else farther behind in different stages of evolution (and therefore past). Nostalgia, then, becomes the cure for spatiotemporal ambivalence: by looking back to a time when the territorial claims of Empire were sacrosanct, readers and writers are assured of *natural* distinctions between civilised and uncivilised, modern and primitive, evolved and backward.[300]

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[299] Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, p.29-30
[300] Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, p. 213-214

For Lisle then, nostalgia works to relieve some of the pressures and anxieties of the present. In her book, *Future of Nostalgia* (2001) Svetlana Boym distinguishes between two forms of nostalgia that are helpful in explaining Minhinnick's position with regards to the identity crisis that is clearly evident in his travel writing.[301] According to Boym, 'reformative nostalgia' is a form of nostalgia that is often mobilised in nationalist movements seeking to 'reconstruct[...] emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time'.[302] By contrast, 'reflective nostalgia' is a form which 'does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home ... [Its] nostalgic narrative is ironic, inconclusive, and fragmentary.'[303] Boym connects this latter species of nostalgia to Freud's dichotomy of grief and melancholy:

> Reflective nostalgia has elements of both mourning and melancholia. While its loss is never completely recalled, it has some connection to the loss of collective frameworks of memory. Reflective nostalgia is a form of deep mourning that performs a labour of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future'.[304]

Boym's comments suggest that irony is one way people respond to the irresolvable state of their own nostalgic position, to their state of melancholia. In Minhinnick's case, irony is his way of responding to the realization that the role of the adventurous male explorer which he seeks to cast himself in is thoroughly belated in an era of postmodern tourism. Of course, his inability to become pioneer in the tropics is also an inability to access the unimpeachable authority that those colonial identities supposedly possessed.

What is remarkable about the reluctance he shows here to acknowledge his tourist status is that in another essay in the same collection, Minhinnick criticises the duplicity of those who pretend they are not tourists and who demonstrate an anti-tourist attitude. He argues that it is one of the 'blatant contemporary hypocrisies' that people dislike visiting tourists while 'frequently indulging with relish [their] own desires to travel out of [their] locals and squat, however damagingly, elsewhere' (*WTF*, 68). In the following passage he attacks the tourists and tourist behaviour only to concede that everybody – including himself - is one of them:

> The tourist is despised, and has become a figure of fun in modern folklore, precisely because all of us know exactly what it is like to be one of these wretched creatures. Tourists are destructive, ignorant, arrogant and immensely pathetic, and we only fool

[301] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001)
[302] Ibid, p.49
[303] Ibid, p.50
[304] Ibid, p.55

> ourselves if we don't understand how they feel. For the tourist is the prime example of the passive, non-contributing, hungry-eyed, empty-headed victim that out culture would have us all become. I feel it myself every time I put a new film in the camera, buy the tickets or the map, and fill the suitcase with hideous but obligatory leisure-wear. The end of the journey is always a place where you can add nothing, offer nothing, only take from. I look down the streets of my town and see such visitors, and mingling with scorn, that most rapid of all emotions, is, I hope, at least a little sympathy. The tourist bears the marks of his caste with as much dignity as he can muster. He acknowledges that his fate of a day, a fortnight, a year, God help him, is to accept society's plan to turn him into a spectator, never a participator, a human sponge ...What he might not be aware of is the trail of damage he leaves in the slow, aimless wake of his progress. (*WTF*, 68)

Whilst he admits to being a tourist himself his self-reflexive critique is diminished somewhat by his notion that tourists are 'victims' themselves – even here it seems that he is trying to excuse the behaviour of tourist, and by extension, himself. Despite his scorn for tourists as 'destructive, ignorant, arrogant and immensely pathetic' beings, Minhinnick finds he sympathises with them: they too are 'victims' but victims of the culture that engenders them. To see the tourist as an unwitting 'victim' of culture which is the actual perpetrator of the crime, however, is to relieve the figure of all culpability. Arguably, such a view displaces the tourist's sense of guilt for interfering with the cultures through which he/she passes onto the culture from which they came. By this logic, tourists can legitimately continue to 'tour' because they are personally relieved of the ethical considerations that their 'destructive' interactions raise. In other words, the blame lies not with them but with the 'culture' from which they came. This implies that tourists are merely 'spectators' with very little agency – it is culture which controls their 'destructive, ignorant, arrogant, and immensely pathetic' behaviour. The passage ultimately reveals a struggle between acknowledging tourists as individuals who are guilty of their destructive interferences and excusing them and their behaviour because they are 'victims' of the culture that creates them.

In *Crossing Boundaries: Postmodern travel literature* (2000), Alison Russell observes that recent sociological studies of travel and tourism indicate that the changing conditions and methods of travel, as well as new technological advances in global communications, have produced a new kind of traveller in the past few decades: the post-tourist. Coined by Maxine Feifer, whose work examines the history of tourism, the term describes the self-conscious contemporary traveller who 'knows that he is a tourist: not a time traveller when he goes somewhere historic; not an instant noble savage when he stays on a tropical beach; not an invisible observer when he visits a native compound. Resolutely

"realistic", he cannot evade his condition of outsider'. [305] Feifer's term would seem perfect to describe Minhinnick's attitude in the above passage: he is clearly aware that he is a tourist and not something else. However, if we turn to his actual travel writing it appears that he is still uncomfortable with his own awareness of this fact. If Minhinnick is a post-tourist, he is certainly a reluctant one. The desire to differentiate himself as a superior traveller from mere tourists is still clearly a priority in his writing.

According to Debbie Lisle, travel writers' depictions of tourists operate in terms of the same 'identity/difference logic' (i.e. 'us' vs. 'them') as their depictions of the foreign 'other'.[306] However, she points out that, these writers' desires for authenticity aren't satisfied by the difference of tourists from themselves but often require what she describes as 'more concrete example of otherness': 'Tourists are different but not different enough: they don't exhibit the obvious traces of the exotic and the primitive that travel writers require as markers of difference...In effect, the more difference displayed by the locals, the more authentic the encounter is.'[307] Lisle's comments are pertinent to Minhinnick's writing because he too goes in search of local difference, both human and non-human, in addition to highlighting his difference from tourists. Walking through the rainforest, for example, he and his partner suddenly come upon (so we are to believe) a local family who are utterly perplexed as to why they have arrived at their home:

> Beautiful, generous country people, they are completely baffled by our presence here. Or should I say our lack of Portuguese. Arriving without a word of the language was a mixture of bravado, laziness and our inbred sense of cultural superiority. So it is gestures, smiles and inward groans as the platter of white rice appears yet again, the familiar cauldron of purple beans, the tough manioc ... This afternoon our hosts startled us by bringing to our door, like a doctor or psychiatrist, an exiled American who has moved into a remote farmstead in the hills. The mother, father and fifteen-year old daughter in baseball cap and English tee shirt thought we might be hungry or ill. Or lost. Or mad. Or all of these together. So they smilingly pushed the interpreter towards us who translated their wonder at out arrival. (*WTF*, 16)

With the interpreter's help, the indigenous family are able to reveal that they are 'very proud' that Minhinnick and his partner are staying with them. However, when asked by the family why they had turned up on their doorstep, Minhinnick admits that he and his partner were unable to provide any answer at all:

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[305] Maxine Feifer in Alison Russell, *Crossing Boundaries: Postmodern travel literature* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 6
[306] Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, p.83
[307] Ibid, p.83

> But we could not explain ourselves. There was no particular reason why we should be where we were. We had simply arrived. In three days more, I said, we would be gone. Somewhere else where we will simply arrive. It was difficult to know if the family understood this. (*WTF*, 17)

Whereas elsewhere in the travelogue, Minhinnick employs hyperbole and irony to signal his recognition of the belatedness of his attempts to construct for himself a self-portrait as an explorer, here he seems genuinely mystified by his inability to explain his presence to the people who have suddenly, inexplicably become his 'hosts'. It is an incident that exemplifies Francis Spufford's insightful remark that travellers are 'notoriously bad at saying why.'[308] Steven Clark has similarly pointed out that travel narratives are marked by the 'virtual absence of individual motivation'. 'There are', he writes, 'remarkably few direct avowals of either positive impulses of curiosity or invigorating novelty, or negative ones of grief and bereavement.'[309] The scene is similar in some ways to the kind of 'entry narrative' we might expect to find in early twentieth-century ethnographic accounts, wherein the anthropologist enters a particular culture and begins to develop a 'rapport' with its people, yet Minhinnick's inability to give a reason as to why he is there again points to the belatedness of repeating such a narrative in a contemporary travel account [310] Whereas ethnographers could claim to be in the field in order to conduct research into indigenous cultures, Minhinnick cannot and, furthermore, does not have the authority to do so. In a postcolonial world, the authority attached to the ethnographer/traveller is no longer absolute but frequently called into question. It is worth recalling Alun Lewis's stated desire to become a Kurtz-like figure, a 'God among the primitives' in India. Whereas Lewis was quite open about the fantasy of control that motivated his desire to be amongst the Gond tribe of rural Indians that the British ethnographer Elwin Verrier was studying, Minhinnick is unable to explain why he and his companion have travelled into the rainforest to stay with the Brazilian family. In some respects, it is as if, in 'discovering' these people in the jungle, Minhinnick is re-enacting the moment of 'first contact' between a hitherto undiscovered indigenous people and the European explorer – the kind of moment we might expect to find in Victorian exploration

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[308] Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (New York: Picador, 1997), p.2

[309] Steven Clark, *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), p.13

[310] The links between travel writing and ethnography have been commented on by several critics working on travel literature. Holland and Huggan note that like their predecessors, modern travel writers 'tend to share with professional ethnographers the yearning to establish reciprocity with the people and places they visit and about which they write.' Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, p. 68

narratives and early twentieth-century ethnographies – yet he is unable to avoid asking the glaring questions which those earlier texts, according to Mary Louise Pratt, were able to deflect or avoid altogether. [311] In her fascinating discussion of the way in which fieldwork is narrated in early twentieth-century ethnographic accounts, Pratt notes that this line of questioning is exactly the kind of thing that ethnographers circumvented:

> Much is ironized, indirectly questioned, but never named – notably the sheer inexplicability and unjustifiability of the ethnographer's presence from the standpoint of the other ... Equally mystified is the larger agenda of European expansion in which the ethnographer, regardless of his or her own attitudes to it, is caught up, and that determines the ethnographer's own material relationship to the group under study. This relationship is one of the great silences in the midst of ethnographic description itself. It is the silence that shapes the traditional ethnographic project of trying to describe the culture as it was before Western intervention.[312]

The belatedness of Minhinnick's position is once again made obvious in this scene. He may be able to travel to remote places as an explorer or ethnographer might, but he is unable to come to terms with the implications that such an act entails. He later reveals how he wants 'to hug the whole family' and regrets his decision when he does not:

> There is a guilt here, a disappointment. Because I know that is as close as we are going to get to the ordinary people of Brazil. This humid evening high amongst the trees, with the racket of frogs and crickets outside, and the peculiar stars above the black horizon of peaks, this is as close as we are ever going to get to anything here. To anything on a personal level. And this is the place where gradually, I can relax and slowly drop my defences ... this is the place that almost feels like home. (*WTF*, 18)

The episode reveals something of Minhinnick's desire to affiliate with people whom he considers to be authentic examples of the apparently rarely experienced, 'ordinary' indigenous culture. Raymond Williams' famous decree that culture is 'ordinary, in every society and in every mind' resonates here, but for Minhinnick, the 'ordinary' culture which he finds evidence of in this family does not exist in the other parts of Brazilian society he has encountered but is exclusively found in the rainforest. [313] 'Ordinary' for Minhinnick, it seems, loosely equates to the extraordinary, the exotic. Tellingly, he finds that he is so comfortable amongst these people that the experience invites comparison with a more permanent dwelling: home. Of course, the 'home' Minhinnick refers to here is likely not in Wales, a place which he describes in the introduction as 'increasingly hard to locate', but rather an imagined one. He feels home in the country of otherness or, to be more precise,

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[311] Mary Louise Pratt, 'Fieldwork in Common Places', p.42
[312] Ibid.
[313] Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy and Socialism* (London, Verso, 1989), p. 93

other peoples' traditions. Notably, Minhinnick shows no sign here of that scepticism towards belonging that, according to Ian Gregson, characterises much of his work. Apparently, the 'ordinary' people of the rainforest do not 'slough an identity of clichés' like the Welsh.

In his classic sociological study of the modern tourist, Dean MacCannell argued that a desire for authenticity lies behind much modern travel and tourism.[314] The search for supposedly better lifestyles and exotic forms of culture compels the modern traveller/tourist to continually move into areas of the world that are perceived to be different. According to MacCannell, the modern (Euro-American) tourist locates reality and authenticity 'elsewhere in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles.'[315] MacCannell asserts, however, that finding these supposedly 'authentic' realities is rather problematic. He points out that those who are subject to the tourists' gaze have often constructed elaborate facades that are deliberately contrived and artificial. The authenticities that tourists seek are often performed on stages to appease the desires of visitors. For this reason, MacCannell describes tourist space as being organised around what he calls 'staged authenticities'.[316] This staging functions to protect those that are subject to the tourist gaze from unwanted intrusions whilst allowing them to take advantage of the opportunities tourism presents for profitable gain. Given his hatred of tourism, we might characterise Minhinnick's travel writing as a search for that elusive authentic 'backstage' of other peoples' lives. His desire for what he describes as the 'ordinary' culture of Brazil may be part of his reaction against tourism and the 'staged authenticities' which tourists are usually satisfied with. Minhinnick wants to go further, to witness the authentic people of Brazil. Outlining some of the basic characteristics of tourism as a social practise, John Urry notes that the tourist gaze is 'directed to features of the landscape and townscape which set them off from everyday experience'.[317] These aspects are viewed, he writes, because 'they are taken to be in some sense out of the ordinary'.[318] As someone who wishes to dissociate himself from tourism and be recognised as a 'real' traveller rather than a tourist, Minhinnick appears to be directing his gaze towards the opposite of what the conventional tourist gaze is; he looks for what is ordinary rather than out-of-the-ordinary. Ironically, however, the 'ordinary' people that he encounters are clearly extraordinary enough to warrant mention in his travel narrative. In this respect, Minhinnick is no different to the tourist who looks for the 'authentic' English pub or the 'real-life' French

[314] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1999)
[315] Ibid, p.3
[316] Ibid, p.94
[317] Ibid, p. 3
[318] Ibid.

restaurant. The 'ordinary' has simply become an exotic quality that is the province of the 'real' traveller rather than the tourist.

Minhinnick's appropriation of cultural difference betrays a problematic colonial vision lurking within his travel writing. Although it might be motivated and occasioned by his arguably worthy environmental and humanitarian politics, his approach to travel often betrays or lapses into a colonial vision where the culture or environmental difference evident where 'they' live is appropriated in order to either fulfil his own fantasies (i.e the discovery of a pristine tropical environment or 'first contact' with the indigenous locals) or revivify a 'we' which is perceived to be lacking or deficient in some way. Although Minhinnick is a well meaning traveller he is unable to refrain from reproducing colonial visions of travel, the ethos of which would seem directly opposed to his professed liberal, humanitarian and environmental politics.

Close Encounters in the Third World

I want to now move on to contrast Minhinnick's depiction of the rainforest and the people that he visits there with his depiction of Rio de Janeiro and its own inhabitants. In his closing comments Minhinnick summarises the differences between the indigenous people in the Amazon and the 'urban poor' in the city:

> The rainforest is the world's genetic reservoir. Its destruction will affect our climate, health and future. The Indian cultures are curious, attractive and present real lessons. But the urban poor seem to have no culture to offer us. Their world is merely the grisly underside of our own. They are unfortunate losers, whilst the tribes of the Amazon are blameless victims. (*WTF*, 34)

Minhinnick's rather condescending and simplistic presentation of the Amazon Indians as 'blameless victims' is strikingly similar to Levi-Strauss' remark (in which the condescension is far more palpable) that the 'savages of the Amazonian rainforest are sensitive and powerless victims, pathetic creatures caught in the toils of mechanized civilization.'[319] In representing the Indians in this way he repeats the idea that the Amazonians are on the brink of destruction as a result of their contact with the outside world and lack any agency to halt this process. Whilst Minhinnick is arguably right to advocate the protection of the rainforest we should, I think, be sceptical of the way in which he frames his argument here. He seems to be suggesting that the rainforest should be rescued because it would secure future access to the Indians (and all that they have to offer) for the rest of 'us'. Indeed, both of the cultures

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[319] Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, p.41

that Minhinnick encounters and mentions here are essentially assessed in terms of what they can 'offer us'. Along with the rainforest in which they reside, the 'Indian' people are depicted as good-natured exotic commodities: they are rhetorically sold to 'us' as products that benefit 'our' health and well-being. Theirs is a resource abundant culture that is seemingly offered to 'us' freely. There is no sign of reluctance or resistance on their part to engage in such a relationship or to share their culture; it is simply assumed that they are willing to teach us their knowledge. Minhinnick's language gives the game away here. He fall backs on exoticist depictions that construct the rainforest as a commodity to be bought. Indeed, in this respect, Minhinnick's depiction of the Amazon resembles the way in which nineteenth-century explorers depicted foreign landscapes as 'cornucopia[s] of resources' to be harvested by the West.[320] In contrast to the Amazon Indians, however, the urban poor of the city have 'no culture to offer us' (*WTF*, 34). In the space of one sentence Minhinnick evacuates that culture of all meaning and substance, rendering it worthless. There are no 'lessons' in Rio to bring back home. Indeed, Rio is criticised here because it is *not* that different to Europe. Unlike the exotic world of the rainforest, which, according to Minhinnick, can potentially serve to revitalise 'us', urban Rio provides little of value because it simply presents us with a mirror image of Europe. It is this perceived lack of difference that causes him to dismiss it as a place which has 'nothing to offer'. The resource abundant rainforest is worthy of rescue, the city is not. It is (cultural and ecological) difference that Minhinnick seeks and sees as antidote to the ailments of his culture; the kind of exciting, exotic difference that the people living in the Amazon rainforest are perceived to represent. The urban poor that he finds in Rio, however, resemble 'us' and so do not offer anything new or different.

Minhinnick may in fact be deploying a somewhat stereotypical Western representation of the Third World in his depiction of Rio de Janeiro and its inhabitants. Mary Louise Pratt's analyses of the representational strategies used by contemporary travel writers to depict the 'Third World' can be usefully applied to Minhinnick's work in this respect. Towards the end of her study *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt argues that the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' scene deployed by nineteenth-century explorers' in their accounts of non-European territories is repeated in contemporary Western travel writing.[321] According to her, 'postcolonial adventurers' perch themselves on top of hotel balconies in large third-world cities in order to 'paint the significance and value of what they see'.[322] Like their nineteenth-century

[320] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.220
[321] Ibid, p.216.
[322] Ibid, p.217

predecessors, these contemporary writers claim 'authoritativeness for their vision': 'What they see is what is there. No sense of limitation on their interpretive powers is suggested.'[323] Pratt asserts, however, that the beautiful and bountiful natural landscapes depicted in the nineteenth century travel accounts of non-European territories become, in contemporary Western travel writing, grotesque and joyless third-world cityscapes characterised by 'ugliness, incongruity, disorder and triviality.'[324] Examining Alberto Moravia's impressions of the capital city of Ghana in his travel book, *Which Tribe Do You Belong To?* (1972), and Paul Theroux's depictions of Guatemala City in *The Old Patagonian Express* (1978), Pratt argues that the 'impulse of these postcolonial metropolitan writers is to condemn what they see, trivialize it, and dissociate themselves from it.'[325] They do so, she argues, because they are writing 'deep in the postcolonial era of "underdevelopment" and decolonization,' when few pristine environments remain for Europeans to discover, and when the 'myth of the civilizing mission' no longer has any cultural authority.[326] Unable to travel with the aura of unchallenged authority which their colonial forebears supposedly possessed, these European writers revert to condemning the places and people that no longer faun in deference to their superiority. They produce what Pratt calls a 'white man's lament', which she finds is 'remarkably uniform across representations of different places, and by westerners of different nationalities' and is accompanied by a specific discourse:

> A discourse of negation, domination, devaluation, and fear remains in the late twentieth century a powerful ideological constituent of the west's consciousness of the people and places it strives to hold in subjugation. It is the official metropolitan code of the 'third world', its rhetoric of triviality, dehumanization, and rejection coinciding with the end of colonial rule in much of Africa and Asia, the rise of national liberation movements , and accelerated processes of modernization, industrializing, and urban growth in many parts of the world. No longer cornucopias of resources inviting the artful, perfecting intervention of the west, newly assertive, de-exoticizing places and peoples become in the eyes of the seeing-man repugnant conglomerations of incongruities, asymmetries, perversions, absence, and emptiness. Lament as they might, these seeing-men do not relinquish their promontories and their sketch books. [327]

Nevertheless, these 'seeing-men', Pratt goes on to say, continue to command a view and assign it value. However, the relations of privilege that these travel writers once had are no longer 'perfectly naturalized':

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[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid, p.217.
[325] Ibid.
[326] Ibid, p.217.
[327] Ibid, p.219-220.

> The seeing-man's dominion now comes accompanied by persistent fears of annihilation and violence. It is in this fear the contemporary seeing-men records what has always been there: the returning gaze of others, now demanding recognition as subjects of history.'[328]

Minhinnick's representation of Rio in his prose and poetry accords in significant ways with the representational strategies that Pratt finds in contemporary travel writers' depictions of the so-called 'Third World'. On his journey through the city of Rio he appears haunted by a fear of the 'returning gaze' of the other, particularly as it threatens to expose him as an outsider, or worse, a tourist. Walking around the streets of Rio de Janeiro, he describes himself as being 'irradiated by paranoia':

> Brazil is the second most violent country in the world ... There's no way of disguising my foreigner status as I spread-eagle on the bathmat and struggle with a broken-spinned Margaret Atwood. I've met plenty of pale Brazilians but my pallor is different. It has the greeny look of the underside of a strawberry. There is something shameful about it. Or obscene. In the streets like everybody else I wear dirty tee-shirts and darned shorts. And still the posses of moneychangers, the street committees of orphans with offers of stolen sweets and postcards, home unerringly in on my tropical virginity.' (*WTF*, 10)

Contrary to the image of the intrepid explorer of the tropics that Minhinnick attempts to construct earlier in the essay, here he reveals himself to be highly self-conscious of the way he is perceived by the locals, paranoid that he will be found out as an intruder or a stranger, someone who doesn't belong.[329] This sense of paranoia is also palpable in two of the poems Minhinnick wrote about his experience of Rio, which are collected in the 1994 volume *Hey Fatman*.[330] In the title poem of the collection, Minhinnick dramatizes a particularly tense incident where the speaker, an aggressively voyeuristic tourist, attempts to describe the inhabitants of the bar he has come upon. From the outset, he finds that doing so is not without complications:

> Me? I was only watching. Nothing else.
> It had been one hundred degrees that day
> And I'm not used to frying. So I took a seat
> Outside and ordered a drink. (*HF*, 39)

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[328] Ibid, p. 220.

[329] Ironically, despite his worries about blending in with the indigenous inhabitants of the city he does not conceal from readers his nostalgic yearnings for the familiarity of home. He finds himself comforted, for example, when he finds out that Rio has a branch of C & A's although he admits that nobody is wearing their clothes. (*WTF*, 9)

[330] Robert Minhinnick, *Hey Fatman* (Bridgend: Seren, 1994). Henceforth referenced in the body of the text as *HF*.

The defensive stance taken by the speaker in the opening line suggests that he is in the middle of responding to an interrogation intended to ascertain what exactly he has been doing. The poem opens by playing on a fear of exposure, of being found out to be more than a casual, innocent observer. Michael Cronin has pointed out that the indigenous peoples in colonial contact zones are often presented as 'transfixed by the imperial gaze'.[331] The modern equivalent to this, he notes, is tourists 'gazing at local people as if they were objects in a visual landscape'. [332] However, here we have a situation where the 'watching' outsider has seemingly been confronted about his actions. Minhinnick may be parodying the figure of the tourist or a certain type of tourist who expects to gaze at the indigenous people unimpeded and without reproach but does not expect that gaze to be returned (as the reactionary tone of the first line implies) in an accusatory and threatening manner, if at all. As Sarah Mills observes, in travel writing 'the narrator gazes at the "natives" – and is irritated if they have the temerity to gaze back'. [333] In the second verse, however, the speaker regains the confidence to 'look around' and survey the scene in front of him:

> But after a while I felt the energy
> To look around. And I saw
> What I expected to see from a street like that:
> The last soccer players on the beach,
> A big surf pounding, angry, futile
> In the place where it always stopped its charge,
> And a beggar eating fire,
> Walking up and down outside the restaurants,
> A magician folding banknotes for his pimp. (*HF*, 39)

Ironically, when the poet is able to observe unquestioned and unimpeded he finds that the view conforms exactly to his expectations (one suspects that he needn't have bothered looking at all to see what is there). Moving his gaze from one image to another, Rio emerges as a kaleidoscopic spectacle of relentless violence ('big surf pounding, angry, futile' (*HF*, 39)), desperate poverty ('a beggar eating fire' (*HF*, 39)) and exploitation ('A magician folding banknotes for his pimp' (*HF*, 39)). As the verses progress it seems that the poet's initial desire to escape notice as a voyeur diminishes. Indeed, in the third and fourth verses he

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[331] Michael Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language and Translation* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), p.82

[332] Ibid.

[333] Sarah Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London, Routledge, 1991), p.78.

actively attempts to be noticed and, significantly, to physically affect a scene that he hitherto documented through observation only:

> At the bar stood the boss in a mildewed tux,
> The sweat hanging off him in icicles.
> He looked at me once and passed over –
> Not important, not a player tonight.
> I order another drink to make him doubt,
> But he never blinked. You can't buy style.
> So I studied his empire's neon sign
> Out on the pavement. There was a moth on it
> With wings like two South Americas.
>
> It was bigger than my hand. But either
> Nobody had seen it or nobody cared.
> I wanted to scare it off that scorching globe,
> Grab its wings like the old man's lapels,
> But it was impossible to move.
> I couldn't get out of my chair,
> Couldn't speak. So I sat and looked,
> With a radioactive thirst, at the bar
> And its imperceptible protocols. (*HF*, 39)

Making contact with the bar and its inhabitants (both human and non-human) proves a difficult and frustrating task for the speaker; he is ignored by the bar tender and is unsuccessful in his attempt to 'grab' the unruly moth. Despite clearly wanting to make contact and, crucially, interfere with the scene in some way, he cannot, finding instead that he is paralysed and has lost the ability to speak.

There are aspects of Minhinnick's poem that are reminiscent of R.S Thomas's poem 'The Watcher', in which a male onlooker observes farmers working in the field below him but finds that no matter how long he watches the objects of his gaze are 'busy/ In ways never to be divulged.'[334] In both poems we encounter an outsider figure trying and failing to gain some sort of admission to a culture which appears irreducibly foreign to them. However, whereas there is, as M. Wynn Thomas has pointed out, a palpable tension in Thomas's poem between a respect for 'the stubborn, impenetrable self-absorption of the workers in their inscrutable tasks' and a desire to participate in their lives, the aggressively voyeuristic speaker in Minhinnick's poem is clearly angry and frustrated by his inability to pierce the 'imperceptible protocols' of the bar as well as by the locals' refusal to pay him any heed. [335] One of the important and revealing differences between 'The Watcher' and 'Hey Fatman' is

[334] R.S Thomas, *Tares* (London: Hart-Davis, 1961), p. 41
[335] M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference: Twentieth-Century Writing in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p.114

that whereas in the former poem the speaker is detached culturally as well as spatially from the 'others' he observes, in the latter poem the speaker, though clearly an 'outsider', is within touching distance of his respective 'others' and, as a result, has to negotiate the complex foreign politics of the space which he now co-habits. The description of the moth which he tries and fails to interfere with as being 'like two South-Americas' perched on a 'scorching globe' is very suggestive in this respect. It might be taken as indicative of the speaker's powerlessness not only in the immediate situation but also perhaps in South America as a whole. In fact, one could go further and suggest that the complex politics of cultural interaction dramatised in the poem point to a broader state of affairs in which the Western traveller no longer has control over, much less in, parts of the world where he/she used to. As Pratt observes, the 'white man's lament' is derived in part from the wavering authority of the westerner in the non-western world and was accompanied by a specific discourse which sought to hold that world in subjugation. Whilst it might be an exaggeration to argue that the speaker in Minhinnick's poem enacts an explicit attempt to hold the inhabitants of the Rio bar in subjugation, his attempt to grab the moth suggests a *desire* to do. The important thing to notice, however, is that the speaker recognises that he cannot intervene and is paralysed by his lack of agency. This situation changes in the following verse when the speaker reverts to describing what he sees. In the following verse he describes a group of prostitutes who have entered the bar:

> They weren't collecting for charity,
> That's for certain. I couldn't understand
> A word, but I knew what their smiles said
> As they squeezed past, what their fingernails
> Meant as they chimed against glass,
> The stick-on ones, red as foxgloves:
> *Hey Fatman*, that's what they said;
> Almost without saying it, if you know what I mean.
> Because that's all it takes in a place like that.
>
> Their earrings said it, their crossed
> And uncrossed legs: and off they'd go. (*HF*, 40)

What is staggering about this part of the poem are the assumptions made by the speaker about the women who have entered the bar. Despite admitting an inability to understand their language, the speaker *knows* these women and what they are up to. Moreover, he implies that the reader does too. For the speaker, their bodies reveal so much about them that he does not need to know the language they speak: their smiles and their legs *talk*; their fingernails *mean.* This kind of attribution of meaning to 'foreign' peoples through the body is in fact commonly

found in travel literature and depictions of the 'other'. Highlighting the difference of approach to cultural difference taken by travel writers and ethnographers, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan note that whilst the 'roving "I"'s' of the former seek out difference just as ethnographers do, they are 'less likely than their ethnographic counterparts to relativize their findings, to analyse the local systems through which cultures shape and reshape meaning' and are instead 'often drawn to surfaces – more particularly, to bodies – onto which they project their fears and fantasies of the ethnicized cultural "other"'.[336] Similarly, Homi Bhabha has described how the skin is often regarded as 'the key signifier of cultural and racial difference' because it is 'the most visible of fetishes, recognized as 'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political and historical discourses'.[337] The speaker in Minhinnick's poem does not even hide the fact that he projects his own assumptions onto the women through the surface impressions he gets from their bodies. He now *knows* them to such an extent that he gives them speech: '*Hey Fatman*, that's what they said' (*HF*, 40). No longer content with merely observing, the speaker becomes a ventriloquist, performing the natives (in English, of course) with the authority of the knowledge has derived from their bodies. Thus, despite having hinted at the limits of his abilities of perception earlier in the poem, the speaker ultimately switches back to the rather crude, stereotype-confirming descriptions of the local people that are apparent in the second verse only this time he implicates the reader in the process too. The phrase 'If you know what I mean' brings together the reader and the speaker of the poem in a (uncomfortable) textual participation in which both are colluding in the construction of the other as an object of Western knowledge.

From his covert observations in the bar the speaker finds that Rio conforms to what he expected: it is a seedy place, infested with violence and exploitation as much as it is with cockroaches. The 'fat men', for instance, are figures of excess, while the prostitutes that court their business are a reminder of the commonplace exploitation that occurs as a norm there. Mary Louise Pratt has commented that the only future for the Third World implied in the texts of the metropolitan writers that she analyses is 'one of violence, by and against themselves.'[338] A similarly violent future is implied in the apocalyptic vision of Rio found in the last verse of Minhinnick's poem. Rio at night is a hellish nightmare place in which people appear oblivious to their own acts of violence against themselves: 'baby roaches ran/ Warning of fire ... A man in a mirror tried to douse his boiling eyes .... the women of the city

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[336] Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, 19.
[337] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 78.
[338] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.217.

... stepped once more out on to its hot coals' (*HF*, 41). Notably, the indigenous people are depicted as being oblivious to their own self-induced suffering. It is worth recalling that Alun Lewis uses a similar representational strategy when depicting the Indian peasants.[339] In 'The Mahratta Ghats', for example, the female peasant who works the land is unaware of her plight; it is only the speaker who observes her from a (cultural as well as geographical) distance who recognises the truth of the situation. In Minhinnick's poem the same principle seems to apply. It is only the outsider who is able to observe the truth of the situation, who knows the observed better than they know themselves.

It is worth recalling Pratt's claim that despite lamenting their diminished hold over such places, 'seeing-men do not relinquish their promontories and their sketch books ... they are still up there, commanding the view, assigning it value, oblivious to limitations on their perceptual capacities, their relations of privilege perfectly naturalized'.[340] From his bar stool, the speaker in Minhinnick's poem also proceeds to 'sketch' the inhabitants of the bar despite being dismayed at his inability to intervene in any physical way with them or their world. While he may momentarily gesture towards the possibility that his powers of perception may be limited he continues to interpret what he sees regardless.[341] Momentarily, then, it seems like the speaker is relieved of all powers of intervention in a world over which he has no authority. Although brief, it is an incident which reveals the vulnerability that the speaker, as a contemporary 'seeing-man', to use Pratt's term, is open to. Not only is he unable to intervene physically but his powers of interpretation are revealed to be limited.[342] He can only remain seated in silence and observe the foreign scene in front of him and even in this his abilities are curbed. Recalling Pratt's observations that metropolitan travel writers tend not to reveal the possibility of limitations on their interpretative capacities (and therefore their

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[339] See the discussion of 'The Mahratta Ghats' in Chapter 1.

[340] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.220.

[341] There is a brief moment in his Rio travelogue in which Minhinnick gestures at the inadequacy of his ways of 'seeing'. He concedes that travelling to the rainforest in Brazil has forced him to reanalyse his perception of the rainforest: 'Even on our very modest and tentative explorations, we have discovered that the rainforest is not the colourful world that we have displayed on our tee-shirts. Rather it is green, dark, impenetrable and entirely unwelcoming. Nor does it teem with cuddly jaguars and toucans. Instead there is a silence, what appears to our untutored eyes and ears as an ominous lack of life.' *WTF*, 30

[342] The speaker's frustrated attempts to become an active participant in the bar scene rather than merely an observer of it may usefully be seen in the larger context of Minhinnick's ideas about his role as a poet and the degree to which he engages with the world in general. In an early interview in *Poetry Wales*, Minhinnick is invited to respond to a recent review of his poetry in which he is described as 'an observer peering over the edge of a pit, not involved in the subject': 'Am I only an observer? In a way as a poet you have to observe, it's a big part of your work, but I hope now I'm also an active person, I take part in things.' Minhinnick 'hopes' to be not just a poet who observers but someone who is active participating in the world. 'Interview', *Poetry Wales*, 25. No. 2 (1989), p.23

authority), Minhinnick's poem briefly attempts to do the opposite: it hints (but only hints) at the limitations of the observer's ability to perceive and interpret the scene before him.

The urban city dwellers depicted in Minhinnick's poetry certainly do not possess the innocent, childlike qualities of the Amazon Indians he speaks of in his travelogue. Here the speaker finds his powers of observation only take him so far. He is revealed to be an outsider who does not possess the tools to understand the customs of foreign places. Could it be that the reason Minhinnick deems the urban people to lack culture is because he, like the speaker of the poem, found them resistant to interpretation at times?

'Hey Fatman' is an interesting poem because it plays on what might be described as a postcolonial politics of travel. The speaker's legitimacy as an observer is repeatedly being called into question. The people in the bar appear initially to him to be cast to type, living examples of the kind one would expect to find in Rio yet, as he continues to observe them, he admits that they are opaque and difficult to read. In this sense, the poem can be regarded as being as much about the observer and the difficulties he has in observing as it is about what is actually being described. The poem might also be read as an attempt to explore a 'contact zone' outside the safety-net of organised tourism and the conventional, often prescribed, relationship between the tourist and the native. Indeed, it registers the limits of going beyond the tourist norm: the speaker cannot make contact, physical or otherwise, with the bar; he can only observe. In probing these limits the poem explores the boundaries that are constitutive of personal identity and of inter-cultural contact itself.

The convention of a plain observer is also used by Minhinnick in the poem 'Rio Sul' (*HF*, 44-45). The speaker and his partner have sat down in the street and it is from this position that they observe a solitary figure candle-seller:

> She has pitched her booth at the tunnel-mouth.
> Here the sun slows us down
>
> Like an American meal,
> And we sit on the iron slats
>
> Where the soiled petals of banknotes
> Blow around our feet
>
> And each lance of the hibiscus
> Shakes its rust over our shoulders. (*HF*, 44)

As in his other Rio poems, a survey of the native, or more precisely of the plight of the native, is conducted from a close observation point by the speaker. Specifically, the poem explores the candle-seller's material poverty. Deploying a typical western stereotype of third world economies, the speaker likens Brazil's deflated currency to the decay of the natural world: banknotes are 'soiled petals' which 'Blow around [their] feet' (*HF*, 44). In making such an analogy, Minhinnick naturalises the notion of deflated currency – and by extension, of a decaying economy - to Rio, implying that a corrupt financial system is inherent or 'natural' to Brazil. Indeed, the entire scene itself evokes a poverty of endemic proportions; poverty not only visible at the level of individuals (later, for example, he witnesses a 'pavement family sift[ing] our useless change' (*HF*, 45)) but also of the nation itself. The humans subject to this poverty are dehumanized, likened to animals: the babies of the candle seller, for example, 'lie open-eyed/Like lizards under the stall' whilst she continues to work (*HF*, 44). Notably, the poem tells us as much about the observers as it does the candle-seller, the object of their gaze. Indeed, it tells us why they are there and what state they are in: made weary by the heat they sit as the deflated currency blows 'around [their] feet' and the rusted leaves of the tropical plant fall 'over [their] shoulders' (*HF*, 44). These observers are very much participants in the scene, affected by what is happening around them. Significantly, the speaker in this poem refrains from 'producing' the natives in such a way as to make them (or more precisely, their bodies) speak. Here the speaker appears to limit his representations to what he can immediately see and smell, relaying only a series of surface sense impressions to the reader, rather than proclamations of 'knowing' the natives via an unspoken knowledge. Interestingly, a concern over the legitimacy of the observers' presence within the scene being described is also palpable in this poem. The third verse opens with the line 'Perhaps we have taken someone's seat' and later the speaker comments:

> But no-one claims this place
> And under the hoardings beside the church
>
> We sit and watch ... (*HF*, 45)

The question of who has laid claim to the territory that the speaker and his partner temporarily inhabit appears to cause him concern. As in the earlier poem, the speaker is sensitive to the territorial politics of the foreign space in which he observes the indigenous people, demonstrating a fear of being discovered or revealed as an illegitimate presence in that space. Minhinnick's speakers seem to repeatedly ask themselves who it is that controls

the place that they find themselves in - as if such a question was part of specific protocol to be followed in 'contact zones', the spaces where different cultures meet. In some sense, the speakers in these poems ostensibly set out to depict the social predicament of people in Rio but the poems themselves reveal more about what effect Rio has on the foreign observer. Arguably, the primary subject is not Rio but the poet and the difficulties involved in an outsider attempting to move from spectator to participant, outside to inside.

In one of his early poems, Minhinnick has explored the pleasure and fear involved in making physical contact with a non-human 'other'. In 'Eels at Night', the speaker sits by a stream attempting to capture eels in a rock pool.[343] In gothic fashion, the speaker tells us that the 'terror of the eels is their writhing fleece/ The corpse that Ffornwg [the pool] shreds with slow razor'.[344] He describes the process of capturing them and how it makes him feel:

> ... Into my own shadow I can plunge my hand
> And feel the slippery texture of congealing eels
> Like a wound opened in myself, our common skin.
>
> Get an eel in the fist they say, and that's money,
> But the cold coin that I grasp now surely buys
> More than is guessable, but something like knowledge
> Of a life joined with mine, gnashing in blood's long pod,
> And a joint affirmation of the hollow flesh.[345]

The physical otherness of the eel with its 'slippery texture' and 'writhing fleece' makes for a profoundly disturbing encounter. Yet touching this otherworldly thing leads to a profound experience of a life beyond the body and the subject itself: grasping the eel he feels he has an 'open wound in [his]self'. Whilst this connection with the eel is certainly accompanied by a fear of the (non-human) other it is, ultimately, a revelatory experience, leading to a 'joint affirmation' of 'common skin'.[346] In other words, touching this animal leads to a new experience of inter-subjectivity. Indeed, its ultimate value lies in allowing the speaker to gain 'something like knowledge/ of a life joined with mine', a phrase which captures something of Minhinnick's poetic practice, particularly when he deals with people and places he deems to be 'other'.[347]

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[343] Robert Minhinnick, *A Thread in The Maze* (Swansea: Christopher Davies publishers, 1978), p.15
[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Matthew Jarvis has explored this poem in terms of ideas of human/nature dualism, pointing out that the new 'common skin' that the speaker gains as a result of contact with the eel is a 'moment of radically anti-dualist thinking'. However, Jarvis goes on to note that the poem is also highly anxious about this human/non-human connection as the speaker displays a 'profound sense of ecophobia – a fear, in other words, of the non-human.' Matthew Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p.80
[347] Ibid.

Jane Aaron and M. Wynn Thomas have suggested that 'Eels at Night' is indicative of the way Minhinnick's poetry exhibits an 'identifying attachment to *bro* (locality) rather than nation.'[348] Minhinnick's Rio poetry might also be characterised in such a way, concerned as it with intense experiences of a foreign locality. Given Minhinnick's propensity for 'joint affirmations' it seems logical that the places in which his poetic speakers observe the inhabitants of Rio are the type of public spaces which would have been formerly regarded, in the nineteenth century at least, as dangerous because of the potential risk they posed of contamination via physical contact. In 'Hey Fatman', physical contact with such 'otherness' appears to be desired. Being 'othered' by contact with new lands is also another primary facet of his travel writing. Towards the end of his Rio essay, Minhinnick discovers that that once he and his partner return to Wales their blood can only be used for plasma due to the risk it may pose of transmitting a tropical disease. (*WTF*, 18)This causes him to have 'an odd feeling of rejection and shallow pride' at having been 'tainted at last by the exotic' (*WTF*, 18). Though he treats this situation with his trademark irony, his remarks hint at a desire that is found throughout his writing that deals with travel: namely, the desire to be 'othered' and return home carrying, quite literally in this case, an authentic souvenir of exotic difference. He and his partner now 'carry the mark of the tropics in [their] hearts.' (*WTF*, 18) Thus, in Minhinnick's late twentieth-century travel narrative, contamination is something to be proud of and is a veritable badge of honour; it is the mark of the 'authentic' traveller. Steven Clark has pointed out that the persona of the traveller is often regarded as being 'implanted, infected, with foreignness' on return: 'Return embodies elements of defeat with those of triumph: it implies survival and resilience, but also rejection by the foreign environment, even a self-characterisation as a figure of contagion.'[349] For Minhinnick, being infected, bearing the mark of otherness, is a positive rather than negative result of travelling. Indeed, it is, as I shall suggest, the acquisition of such markers of exotic difference that motivates much of his travel writing.

It is significant then that the 'survey' of particular foreign localities conducted by the people in Minhinnick's poetry is taken from the vantage point of places such the bar stool and the city street rather than from the hotel balcony, which, according to Pratt, is the preferred vantage point of the modern 'seeing-man'. The adoption of such positions implies a desire for

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[348] Jane Aaron and M. Wynn Thomas, '"Pulling you through changes": Welsh witting in English before, between and after two referenda', in *Welsh Writing in English*, ed. by M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp.278-326, p.279

[349] Steven Clark, Introduction to *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, ed. by Steven Clark (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), pp. 1-28, p.16

an intimate, insider's view of the people and places he visits, the opposite of the far-removed vantage points taken up by the nineteenth-century explorers (mountain tops) and late twentieth-century travel writers (hotel balconies) that Pratt describes. Unlike those contemporary travel writers who maintain a safe distance from the other by regarding them from hotel balconies, Minhinnick frequently attempts to get 'up close and personal' with the foreign 'other' in his travel narratives. Indeed, his travel prose and poetry seem to thrive on what Steven Clark has described as 'the frisson of interrogation of and by the other.'[350] It is, perhaps, unsurprising then to find that elsewhere Minhinnick has shown dissatisfaction with the conventional hotel balcony trope. In his travel essay 'Letters from Illyria', Minhinnick describes the journey he made to post-communist Albania as an aid worker in the early 1990s after the country's government had abandoned the policy of cultural and economic isolation put in place by its former leader Enver Hoxha. In the following passage Minhinnick describes the view of Skanderbeg Square (the central square in Tirana) from his hotel bedroom:

> Only here, on the fourteenth floor, is this view possible. The Hotel Tirana is the city's first and last skyscraper, the lonely vantage point for this panorama. Skanderbeg Square is empty, its winter beach of marble radiant under sodium. Not a blade of grass or human footstep has ever been known here. The monolith was created by a vanished civilization, an altar for an abandoned God. Ganymede might look like this, or Callisto, impassive beneath the electric turmoil of their atmospheres. Not a leaf blows across the square, not a bus-ticket. Under the statuary the blackness begins, the trigonometry of shadow. And I know that in five minutes I will moonwalk across that totalitarian expanse, full of the ravenous exhaustion of the traveller used to getting his own way. I know that, not trusting the lift, I will tiptoe down thirty flights of stairs, minding the loose carpets, the missing stair-rods, cross the hotel bar and drawing room where a single smoker sits with a magazine. ... And then I will begin my journey across Skanderbeg Square, tiny and alien when watched from the fourteenth floor, an intruder purposeful in his lack of purpose. For five unforgettable, forgotten minutes I am the only inhabitant of Tirana. Here at midnight in its uninhabitable heart, I forget where I come from and why I have arrived. Identity, suddenly, is less than an echo. People without names once filled this place, people without graves. Identity for them was a chocolate wrapping tossed aside, a document deleted from the software. I listen closely and there is not the merest hint of their protest, their dialogue with creation, only my own steps coming towards me from the other side of the city. Now here is the centre of their world. A shadow extends like the hand of a great clock, and I am infinitesimally small. In Skanderbeg Square I have entered the dream of a dictator, explored the architecture of his monomania. This is his memorial, where time is paralysed until I can make myself move, and the shadow hand, black and trembling, registers life at 2 a.m. Under my foot the shell of a peanut detonates like a pistolcrack. But from the fourteenth floor no-one is visible.[351]

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[350] Steven Clark, *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, p.17
[351] Robert Minhinnick, *Badlands* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996), p.19-20

In this remarkable passage Minhinnick appears to deliberately set up the conventional balcony scene in order to subvert it. He begins by highlighting the exclusive capacity for perception that the view from his hotel enables ('Only here, on the fourteenth floor, is this view possible') and goes on to describe what he sees. However, he then abandons this position by descending into the square below and ends the passage by remarking that 'no-one is visible' from the fourteenth floor. Discussing the modern incarnation of the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey-scene' as theorised by Pratt, Michael Cronin has pointed out that the vantage point was advantageous to the traveller because not only did it allow him/her to produce a survey of the land but also observe the foreign 'other' from a distance: 'Like VIP enclosures in sporting arenas or the class geography of cities, the others are kept at a remove, where they can be observed by, but cannot touch, the viewing subject'.[352] The balcony vantage point then functions as a kind of defensive mechanism that safeguards the viewer from the risk of physical contact with the 'other'.[353] Unlike those contemporary travel writers who view the other from the safety of the balcony, Minhinnick forgoes that apparent safety for a kind of close-encounter with the 'third' world, an experience which actually overwhelms his sense of self: 'I forget where I come from and why I have arrived. Identity, suddenly, is less than an echo'. He develops amnesia and becomes an anonymous figure, similar, in this respect, to the Albanians whom he depicts as a people 'without names'. What Minhinnick does here is to effectively reproduce a version of the 'going native' trope as it figured in modernist accounts of colonial travel: descending into Albania's 'uninhabitable heart' of darkness he loses his identity, suffering the same fate as the Albanians under the former, violent regime of Enver Hoxha. To be sure, this radical loss of identity is only momentary – he appears to have made a remarkably full recovery of his identity in the next paragraph – but this fact alerts us to the underlying motivations and desires of Minhinnick's travel writing. Minhinnick is a writer who thrives on new experiences and situations. As such, he assumes a literary persona that is radically open and is susceptible, in particular, to the way in which a given environment and its inhabitants can have an effect on a person. Indeed, even supposedly disruptive and destabilising experiences which can, as in the instance above, render him other than himself are welcomed. He creates and then thrives off these intense and thrilling moments of contact.

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[352] Michael Cronin, *Across the Lines*, p. 77

[353] Cronin points out that touch can be a highly significant facet of what he calls the 'guest/host relationships of travel' because it has often been regarded as deeply transgressive. Cronin cites Peter Stallybrass' and Allon White's useful study *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), in which they describe the nineteenth-century male preoccupation with contamination and contagion. Stallybrass and White point out public spaces were particularly dangerous because of the potential promiscuity of contact. See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London, Methuen, 1986).

One of the reasons he does so is because such encounters produce their very own language, the language of contact, which can be as equally intense as the experience itself. The dizzying effects of encountering the foreign other are absorbed into and articulated in the language of the text itself, contributing to the overall aesthetic. It is for this reason that Minhinnick is less concerned with providing an accurate, straightforward 'I-see-this, I-see-that' type of description of place that you would normally expect to find in a travelogue and more concerned with conveying the subjective experience of place. What is also noticeable about this scene is that the square below is represented as empty. It does not contain an 'other' whose presence could potentially affect the traveller. So although his descent into the square seems to be a radical reversal of the balcony trope it is in fact just as banal and conservative. Unlike Rio, there is nobody here to challenge him or to enquire about his status as an outsider. Minhinnick constructs the square as a hitherto uninhabited 'winter beach' where he becomes a Crusoe-like solitary inhabitant. He also casts himself in the role of an 'intruder [who is] purposeful in his lack of purpose', someone who can defy the rules by breezily 'moonwalk[ing] across' a 'totalitarian expanse' because he is a 'traveller used to getting his own way'.[354] Minhinnick is clearly aware here of the economic privileges that allow him to travel and to 'get his own way', so to speak. James Clifford has pointed out that by definition the modern traveller is 'someone who has the security and privilege to move about in relatively unconstrained ways.'[355] A recurring trope in Minhinnick's travel writing is that of the traveller as a transgressive wanderer or 'intruder'. Moving about in a state of aimlessness without any preconceived route or intention he is, we are to believe, like a free-floating receptacle that simply absorbs whatever it comes into contact with. As a mischievous 'intruder', he goes places where he shouldn't necessarily be – or so he would have us believe – and gives no explanation why. The guise of the 'intruder' enables him to momentarily enter into and experience a foreign culture – or at least imagine himself doing so – and extricate himself from that culture whenever he chooses or whenever there are signs of danger. It is also, perhaps, a means of suppressing his privileged status since it hints at the sense of illegitimacy he knows he should feel as an outsider. It is for this reason that the trope of the intruder is often articulated with a healthy dose of knowing irony and hyperbole. By transforming the 'intruder' into a playful dramatic performance, Minhinnick mitigates his ethical misgivings about being somewhere he perhaps should not be.

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[354] Robert Minhinnick, *Badlands*, p.20

[355] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.34

Offering an explanation of why Western writers represented the so-called 'Third World' as they do, Pratt suggests that such representations may be considered a reaction to (and against) the advent of mass tourism:

> The depth-creating powers of the travel writer must compete with the ten-day nine-night air-hotel package, tips included, and the glossy, disembodied fantasies of tourist propaganda. In the 1960s and 1970s, exoticist visions of plentitude and paradise were appropriated and commodified on an unprecedented scale by the tourist industry. 'Real' writers took up the task of providing "realist" (degraded, countercommodified) versions of postcolonial reality. [356]

These 'realist' versions of reality, she suggests, are extremely powerful since they often produce an intense 'effect of the real' in contemporary metropolitan readers.[357] Like the contemporary travel writers that Pratt discusses, Minhinnick arguably depicts Rio as a similarly 'degraded reality'. Moreover, he does this partly to counter the commodified versions of Brazil created by the tourist industry. It is worth recalling that *Watching The Fire Eater*, for instance, was marketed as 'a vivid series of attempts to strip away the exhausted mythologies of the writer's own country and the other increasingly-packaged places he visits'.[358] At the core of his work, then, is an attempt to counter the commodification of spaces by the tourist-industry by producing stripped down versions of reality. Minhinnick's 'own country' as well as those he visits abroad are linked by their state of being 'increasingly-packaged'. If Minhinnick displays an odd mixture of attraction and repulsion to Rio through his poetry and prose, he also displays a similar mixture in his writing about tourism in Wales. Discussing Barry Island fun-fair, Minhinnick writes of the way in which the place is imbued with a 'strangely attractive under-current of violence, saturated with the promise of adolescent (and older) sex, and literally reeking with the sweet-meats of promiscuity – hot-dogs, beer and chips, Wales' favourite aphrodisiacs.' (*APH*, 14) Like Rio, the fun-fair is a threatening place of violence, sex and degrading excess but is, at the same time, a place that he finds himself 'strangely' attracted to:

> The fun-fairs are choreographed anarchy, arenas for bold spirits, and yet fascinating to the meek for the glimpses they provide of another, perhaps previously unknown culture of thrilling criminality and instinctive rebellion. Fun-fairs adopt bad taste and

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[356] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.221.

[357] Pratt describes how undergraduate students of hers were convinced that the South America depicted by Theroux in *Old Patagonian Express* was *the* reality of South America, of how it *really* was: 'Theroux had fired their imaginations, empowered them to argue for his veracity by the very vividness of the writing, the richness and intensity with which their expectations, stereotypes, and prejudices had been confirmed. The students were carrying out, and being carried out by, the ideological project of third worldism and white supremacy.' Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.220

[358] Quoted from the back cover of *Watching the Fire Eater* (1994)

> turn it into unmatchable art. The Ghost Trains, the Chambers of Horrors, the corridors of wax-work murderers, the celebrations of poisoners and torturers, attract generation after generation of devotees, who yet, after listening to the sound-track of screams, always flow uncaring and unblemished back into the dusk of rides and dodgems ... it still seems threatening to life, or to life-patterns; for that is the elixir of fun-fairs. (*APH*, 14)

As a place apparently imbued with violence, chaos and promiscuity, Barry Island is represented is similar terms to the Rio de Janeiro depicted in Minhinnick's poetry. In its own way, the poem 'Hey Fatman' offers up similar 'glimpses' of a 'previously unknown culture of thrilling criminality'. Moreover, like the fun-fair in Porthcawl, Rio is an attractive place to Minhinnick because it allows some insight into a degraded underworld of sex, prostitution and violence. Rio has its own equivalent 'elixir' to the fun-fair since it allows the onlooker to be rejuvenated, or at least thrilled, by the threats it poses. Minhinnick's imagination seems to thrive on the thrill of such places, on the electric shock of contact.

Minhinnick's writing displays a profound ambivalence toward Rio and the position and status of the European traveller there. However, there is also ambivalence evident in his writing about Wales itself. Minhinnick has long held the view that the British government, along with various multinational corporations, treat Wales 'like a Third World state'.[359] Speaking about the problem of engaging people in environmental issues, Minhinnick comments that 'we're not brought up to participate. We're encouraged to be spectators while our planet is destroyed ... Where but in Wales would people put up a monstrosity like the smokeless fuel plant near Aberdare. The people with the power, the government and the multinationals, just treat us like a Third World state. [360] He repeated this view eight years later in an interview with Sam Adams and he added that the Welsh have become 'culturally passive' because of a history of 'exploitation by outsiders'.[361] What Minhinnick seems to be implying is that the Welsh, like the people in the so-called 'Third World', have been victims of (neo)colonial subjugation. There are, of course, significant problems with this assertion. The historian Chris Williams has described the drawing of parallels between so-called Third World countries and Wales as 'little more than self-indulgent and potentially offensive illusions.'[362] Whether Wales can or cannot be considered in such a way is perhaps secondary to the fact that Minhinnick believes that it can. The problem with his position is that whilst

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[359] 'Interview', *Poetry Wales*, 25 No.2 (1989), p.28
[360] Ibid, 28.
[361] 'Robert Minhinnick in conversation with Sam Adams', *PN Review* 117, 24.1, (1997), p.24
[362] Chris Williams, 'Problematizing Wales: An Exploration in Postcoloniality and Historiography', in *Postcolonial Wales* ed. by Jane Aaron and Chris Williams (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2005), pp.3-22, p.10

he presents Wales as a third-world country that is exploited by external forces he does not refrain from exploiting those places in his travel writing which are normally considered to be traditionally part of the third-world.

CONCLUSION

Exploring the ways in which Welsh writers have represented their experiences of various places and peoples provides a means of understanding the ways in the Welsh have seen and portrayed themselves beyond Wales. It also provides a prism through which to consider the ways in which they have engaged with the, often highly fractious, national and international politics of other places. Whilst the thesis gives some idea of the variety of ways in which both Welsh and non-Welsh writers have textualised their experience of the 'contact zone', it also shows how instances of cultural interaction which are distant in time and place have been encoded in remarkably similar ways. Although they write about different places at different times, for example, analysis of the work of Alun Lewis and Robert Minhinnick reveals similarities in terms of their ambivalent relationship to Wales and also in terms of their depiction of colonial/ post-colonial realities. Whilst they portray Wales as a place that is being exploited by external forces (the British Empire/multi-national corporations) they both appear to fall back on rather hackneyed colonial tropes and stereotypes in their writing about non-European places, thereby reinforcing the kind of asymmetrical power relations that they seem critical of in a domestic context. The apparent contradictions in their work, however, are perhaps indicative of Wales' ambiguous position in relation to Empire and the forms of national/international relations that have succeeded it.

Many of the contemporary Welsh writers whose work is explored in this thesis show an awareness of the ways in which the places and people which they visit have historically been represented and how such representations are in the service of specific ideologies. However, despite their apparently more sophisticated cosmopolitan approach to cultural difference, these writers can still reproduce and reaffirm colonial myths about the cultures that they encounter as well as demonstrate complex and somewhat contradictory forms of nostalgia for the colonial age. The critic Deborah Lisle has been particularly vocal about the dangers of this kind of supposedly 'cosmopolitan' travel writing. In *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* Lisle argues that there are two political positions or 'visions' within travel writing that engage with cultural difference in contrasting ways. She identifies these opposing positions as 'colonial visions', which 'rely on the resuscitated power relations of Empire' and 'cosmopolitan visions', which 'seek to transcend the legacy of Empire through multiculturalism, tolerance and respect for cultural difference.'[363] Lisle asserts that within contemporary travel writing these visions are interrelated and can occur

[363] Deborah Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, p.260.

simultaneously: 'all productions of difference in the genre – even the most cosmopolitan – cannot escape the regulating force of Empire. ... while contemporary travel writing claims to have moved away from the authority of Empire – indeed, many authors try to act in keeping with the present age of a greater tolerance – we are, in fact, witnessing a complex rearticulation of Western authority within the most liberal and cosmopolitan gestures.' [364] For Lisle, cosmopolitan travellers can 'produce new forms of power that mime the "previous sensibility" of Empire.'[365] She warns that cosmopolitan texts can be far more dangerous than texts which are outright 'colonial' because they can 'smuggle in equally judgemental accounts of otherness under the guise of equality, tolerance and respect for difference.'[366]

In the last 15 years, travel writing has been one of the most consistent genres to receive the English-language Welsh Book of the Year award.[367] Robert Minhinnick has twice received the award for his collections of travel essays and Nigel Jenkins received the award for *Gwalia in Khasia* (1995). Given the popularity of the genre in Wales it is important for us to interrogate the ways in which these writers engage with forms of cultural difference and the politics of contemporary travel. Although their Welsh background may have given them an awareness of the asymmetrical relations internal to Britain both during and after Empire, the writers in this study still participate in a continuing narrative of colonialism and its legacy when they draw on widely circulated stereotypes of alterity in their representations of other (mostly non-European) places. In exploring the relationship between Welsh writers and the politics of colonialism/neo-colonialism this thesis hopes to have contributed in some measure to the understanding of the ways in which Welsh writers have registered their experiences of other places and engaged with colonial and post-colonial realities.

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[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid, p.5
[366] Ibid, p.10
[367] Minhinnick received the award for *Watching The Fire Eater* in 1993and for *To Babel and Back* in 2006. More recently, John Harrison has received the award for his South American travel book *Cloud Road* (2010).

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