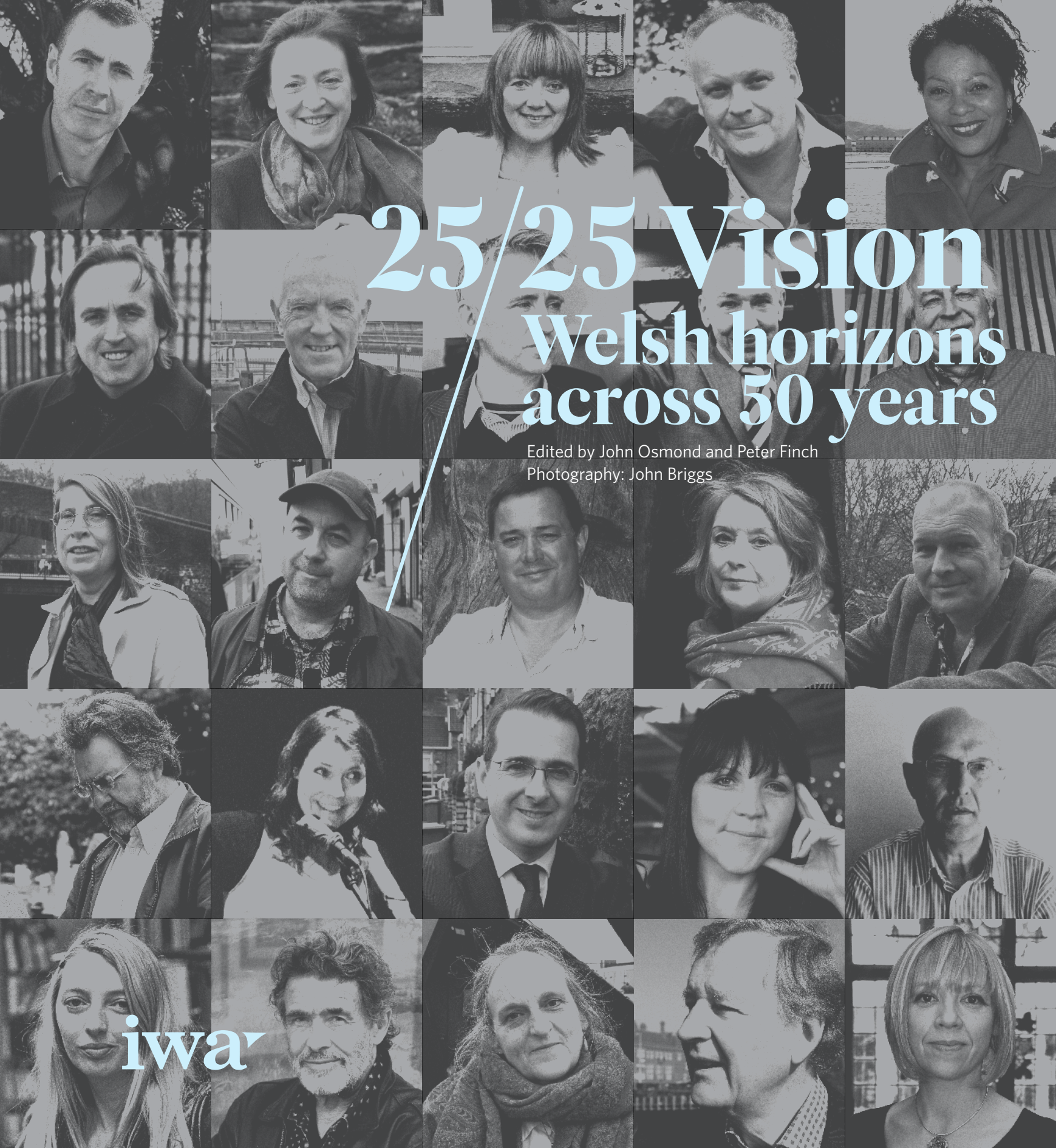

25/25 Vision

Welsh horizons across 50 years

Edited by John Osmond and Peter Finch
Photography: John Briggs

iwa

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The Institute of Welsh Affairs exists to promote quality research and informed debate affecting the cultural, social, political and economic well being of Wales. The IWA is an independent organisation owing no allegiance to any political or economic interest group. Our only interest is in seeing Wales flourish as a country in which to work and live. We are funded by a range of organisations and individuals, including the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and the Waterloo Foundation. For more information about the Institute, its publications, and how to join, either as an individual or corporate supporter, contact:

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Inspired by the bardd teulu (household poet) tradition of medieval and Renaissance Wales, the H'mm Foundation is seeking to bridge the gap between poets and people by bringing modern poetry more into the public domain and particularly to the workplace.

The H'mm Foundation is named after H'm, a volume of poetry by R.S. Thomas, and because the musing sound 'H'mm' is an internationally familiar 'expression', crossing all linguistic frontiers.

This literary venture has already secured the support of well-known poets and writers, including Gillian Clarke, National Poet for Wales, Jon Gower, Menna Elfyn, Nigel Jenkins, Peter Finch and Gwyneth Lewis. The foundation is also supported by several organisations, including Media Wales, The Church in Wales, Institute of Directors, Institute of Welsh Affairs, Literature Wales, Venture Wales, and Community Housing Cymru.

H'mm was launched in December 2011 at the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff, and is recruiting Welsh organisations to use its 'Adopt a Poet' scheme. This involves engaging a poet to deliver a workplace poetry reading, which can add immeasurably to the wellbeing of staff. A poet could be brought in for a one-off event, or there could be a more substantial engagement, such as a year's incumbency as the organisation's bard.

Building links between the business and the arts communities should be creative for both, especially in a country which has a deep and innate respect for poetry. The creation of the H'mm foundation will be a new source of income for poets and hopefully a source of inspiration for people in business.

Ali Anwar, Chief Executive The H'mm Foundation
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Introduction

This publication was conceived to mark the 25th anniversary of the IWA. We asked 25 authors to write an essay casting their minds back over their experience of the past quarter-of-a-century in Wales and reflect on what this inspires them to hope for in the next 25 years. They were chosen mainly because of their facility as writers but also because we judged they have something to say about how their own lives relate to the wider collective experience of the nation.

We also commissioned the photographer John Briggs to take portraits of the authors, which are reproduced here alongside the respective essays. They feature in an exhibition that is touring Wales during 2012-13, beginning at the Old Library in the centre of Cardiff.

The years between 1987, when the IWA was founded, and 2012 saw a transformation in the political, economic and cultural fortunes of Wales. A quarter of a century ago the Welsh economy was still dominated by heavy industry coming apart in the wake of the miners' strike. Welsh politics were in thrall to a Quango-driven state. Meanwhile a little-noticed cultural revival was gathering pace.

Today that era looks altogether like sepia-veiled history. In its place Welsh democracy has been born with the creation of the National Assembly that was granted primary legislative powers in the 2011 referendum. While still struggling with the downturn, the Welsh economy has broken free of what 25 years ago was a third-world structure and is developing a more balanced profile.

Meanwhile, Welsh culture has flourished with sport, the arts and the media all gaining recognition on the world stage. Throughout the past 25 years these changes have been closely followed, analysed and promoted by the activities of the Institute. In this period our size and influence has grown in response to the emergence of Wales' civic culture. We now have a staff of six, a high-powered Board of trustees reflecting every aspect of Welsh life, over 1,000 individual members, more than 100 Fellows, and 130 corporate members. We have developed a branch network that covers the whole of Wales, produced a raft of publications including our journal *the welsh agenda*, and launched a daily online news magazine *ClickonWales*.

The contributors to this book were given no specific guidance as to what they should write about, other than they should relate some of their own experience to that of Wales during the fifty-year horizon we are examining. Inevitably the past 25 years predominates and it is interesting that, in a majority of the essays, two events in that period stand out. They are the miners strike of the mid-1980s and the devolution referendum in 1997. With the benefit of hindsight, and also the reflections contained in this volume, the interconnections between these two events can be plainly seen. They provide the essential background for all that has followed and is likely to emerge in the coming decades.

In producing this volume we have benefited from close collaboration with Literature Wales Chief Executive Lleucu Siencyn and her colleagues, with the Chief Executive of the Arts Council Nick Capaldi, and with the Chief Executive of H'mm Foundation Ali Anwar. We are grateful to them for their support and enthusiasm for what has been a rewarding project. As editors we are grateful, too, for the ready agreement of the writers to participate and to John Briggs for his superb photography.

John Osmond
Peter Finch


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Trevor Fishlock,
Cardiff Bay, 2012

1 An outsider's eye
Trevor Fishlock

My father spoke little of his boyhood. He was, perhaps, as reticent as many fathers of his time. Yet he was not at all withdrawn. He was cheerfully gregarious. He liked being in charge and enjoyed a little limelight as an amateur bass-baritone. He sang ballads at concerts and relished a pint afterwards.

For years I thought he was from Hereford, where Lily, my grandmother, lived. Father didn't drive so it was quite an expedition for us to travel from Hampshire to see her. My earliest recollection is of a small woman with a Welsh accent that delighted me. I had never heard one before. A sepia photograph of my grandfather hung on her sitting room wall. Grandmother said softly: "All those lovely Welsh boys."

Grandfather was a farmworker who travelled from his native Wiltshire to mine coal in the Rhondda. Lily was from Nantymoel. They married in Pontypridd in 1905 and had three sons and a daughter. My father, the eldest, told me that in 1914, on the morning their dad marched off to war, the family watched him eat a breakfast memorable for its two eggs rather than one. They all remembered that one of his boots was shining, the other not. Within weeks, in November, he was killed in action in Flanders, aged thirty-two. My eight-year-old father saw a tribute photograph of him on a cinema screen in Pontypridd.

The devastated family left for Hereford. In the 1920s father signed for long service in the Royal Marines and never returned to Wales. The way he pronounced Pontypridd, of course, was unmistakably authentic. No one where we lived would have said it like that. But father rarely talked of Pontypridd or Wales. Sometimes, though, when I returned home from school he called to my mother and joked: "Here's the mayor of Penrhiwceibr", or "It's the mayor of Troedyrhiw." I had no idea what he was talking about.

I was apprenticed to an evening newspaper at sixteen and shaped as a reporter by old hands and stern grammarians. In my twenties I went to Fleet Street. The Times offered me 'an independent command' as staff correspondent in Wales. Father was pleased about the job but we did not talk of Wales. Coming into the country, then, I knew little of it. I had seen neither Cardiff nor Caernarfon, nor yet Pontypridd.

In the last days of 1968, when I began, an auspicious Welsh clamour rattled the cutlery on London tables. It promised a narrative of incident, argument and change. I had an embraceable assignment, the opportunity to write about a country, to describe a people and their times and make their stories live on the page.

To start writing one must start writing. A reporter needs voices and detail; and nothing beats going and seeing. I had never seen a colliery so I asked for a trip underground and stumbled to the coalface to see a little of what mining meant. I liked being on the road. I wrote at home and in cafes and libraries. The Times, newly-modernised, with news on the front page since 1966, had a commitment to better reporting of Britain to the British. Describing Wales to Welsh and British readers I was a resident stranger, an outsider's eye.

It is not always easy to see the shape of things in the swirl of current events. Wales was undergoing social change perhaps more significant than political change. News arose from entwined sources: the decline of coal in the last years of its Welsh century, miners' anger and, the power of history, the strike of 1972 described as revenge for 1926. There was the pain of Aberfan, ill-treated by Coal Board and government; Welsh language protest; several bomb blasts that damaged public buildings; the persistence of the debate on devolution; angry farmers; protests against the military use of land; Labour's changing fortunes; the growing viability of Plaid Cymru; elections and politics and smoke-filled halls. There was discontent in the steel industry and a memorable moment in history when Michael Foot's steelworker constituents howled him down in his own Ebbw Vale.

One of the differences I discovered in Wales was an intensity of discussion. People said: What do you think? I was expected to have a view. Wales really did seem disputatious, a country where a man had only to go into the street to shout Yes to bring out a dozen to shout No, a land which has a village called Loggerheads. It was comforting to find that the ubiquitous Thomas Jones, confidant of Lloyd George, had noted that his countrymen were "intemperate and inflammable, but neither cruel nor murderous, and slanderous within the bounds of the law".

The investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon held a mirror to Welsh tensions. I wrote from Aberystwyth of the mixed feelings about Windsor C. who was to study at the university prior to the ceremony. In the event his liking for Welsh history and language alarmed George Thomas, Secretary of State for Wales, who suspected nationalist brain-washing. He wanted the Queen to have a word with her son.

The protests and civil disobedience of Welsh speakers were fuelling a revolution that grew from Saunders Lewis's radio lecture

I wrote the stories of colliery horses and male voice choirs, of artists and poets. I spent a backstage evening with entertainers in a summer pier show. I bathed in the cultural Ganges of the Eisteddfod; and, although an englyn is in English rather lame, I dared a story on Welsh poetry and its rhymes.

of 1962 on the fate of the language. It had inspired the birth of Cymdeithas yr laith Gymraeg and an increasingly militant campaign of civil disobedience.

I went to knock on Saunders Lewis's door in Penarth one morning. There was no need: he was mowing his front lawn with a furious energy. He seemed not to mind being doorstepped. He had a light in his eye. He invited me in, poured wine for both of us and talked for an hour. He insisted that Wales did not need separation from England, simply freedom to be responsible for its social and cultural life. "Welsh nationalism," he said, "is a movement to restore self-respect to the Welsh."

The language campaign generated demonstrations, uproar and a fallout of trials and imprisonment. It had its part in politics, education and the nature of the country itself. It was certainly a significant aspect of broadcasting; and broadcasting was, willy-nilly, helping to reinforce the idea of Wales as a nation. The language was not a sideshow. It was in the mainstream. It was making history.

Certainly it promoted seething in Wales. Magistrates paid a language protester's fine and letter-writers and editorialists seethed. In the opinion pages of The Times the affronted and acerbic Bernard Levin seethed; and some loved him for his bile. But this itself contributed to what he no doubt did not intend. It made people think about the reasons for agitation. It raised the question: Why? Both inside Wales and out of it, it contributed to a growing consciousness of Wales as a country. People were concerned about the demonstrations but it was increasingly evident that protest was not a sentimental dance around a pile of bones. It was about a country and the simple wish of a good number of its people to use their living language.

I loved reporting. I liked deadlines and the buzz. One of my pleasures was writing in the interstices of news. At times when news of coal, steel and politics was thin I sought out the country's biographies, the illustrative, remarkable and pertinent human stories outside the usual turbulence. Wynford Vaughan Thomas said that Wales was a country of the right size for one person to get to know well in one lifetime. I set out to explore it from colliery shaft to mountain peak.

In Llyn I talked to a monoglot woman who was one of the last of the people who spoke no language but Welsh. I described the passion in Wales, in the wake of Aberfan, to restore and make green the brutalised parts of their landscape. I composed portraits of villages. I wrote of the life and hopes of a farmer and described how he cut the skin from a dead lamb and fitted it like a glove on an orphan lamb to deceive a ewe into thinking it was hers. I noted the plunder of working-class libraries in the Valleys, and compiled the recollections of people in Maerdy, Little Moscow of the Rhondda. I wrote the stories of colliery horses and male voice choirs, of artists and poets. I spent a backstage evening with entertainers in a summer pier show. I bathed in the cultural Ganges of the Eisteddfod; and, although an englyn is in English rather lame, I dared a story on Welsh poetry and its rhymes.

The warrens of broadcasting always yielded stories. I wrote of the rise in the BBC and HTV of sons of the manse and their claiming "new pulpits without the encumbrance of God". I noted the ending of the era of miners' MPs in the Valleys and the advent of their young

successors, like Neil Kinnock. I did not, of course, report rugby matches, but I wrote about rugby's place in the heart and mind of Wales, and the atmosphere and meaning of Cardiff Arms Park. And I was lucky, I wrote in golden years.

I wrote studies of Gwynfor Evans, George Thomas, Gwyn Morgan, Ryan Davies, Gwyn Thomas, Clough Williams-Ellis and others. There was emotion in plenty in Merthyr Tydfil's politics. So there was in the matter of second homes. I wrote of Dylan Thomas, Tryweryn, fishermen, sheep, the great little trains, gold and silver mining, bilingual schools, Welsh swear-words, and of salmon chauffered to their river spawning grounds in Land Rovers. I reported the rise of the book kingdom of Hay, praised mountains and the laws of Hywel Dda, told the stories of Welsh surnames and nicknames and explained why there were so many Joneses in Wales.

For the sake of an article I undertook a gruelling National Coal Board physical test and was passed fit for mine rescue. For the sake of my own enlightenment and a feature article I walked from south to north Wales in nine days, with half-a-day on a sodden horse. Wynford Vaughan Thomas marked my maps for me and filled me with stories to last the journey.

In those days in the countryside of Wales The Times itself seemed as rare as a unicorn. I called at a village shop for a copy one morning and the woman at the counter said, "I'm so sorry. I've only got one and that's the doctor's copy." And then she took pity on me. "But you can sit and read it here - and when you've finished, I'll iron it for the doctor."

I found another sort of Welsh welcome, an act of inclusivity, when a school invited me to give a talk on speech day. I arrived for lunch with the headmaster. He gave me the programme for the event and I was embarrassed to see, after my name, the letters MA, an honour which at that time I did not have.

"Headmaster," I said, 'I am not an MA."
"Don't give it a thought," he said, "in Wales we are all MAs."

Among people in Wales I found a considerable interest in history and local history, and a complaint that schools had left them short of knowledge of their own country. I reported Wales in a time when a tribe of young historians, many inspired by their guru Glanmor Williams, were engaged in vivid and revelatory work. I was also fortunate in my colleagues and friends. Patrick Hannan, the BBC Wales political correspondent, Geraint Talfan Davies, journalist and energizer, and Emyr Daniel, political interviewer - they all thought hard and talked hard about history and politics.

Before I left Wales for America in 1977 I took my father to Pontypridd for a voyage round his boyhood. I also accompanied him to Flanders, to the battlefield where his father died, and the memorial columns bearing his father's name.

During nearly twenty years as a foreign correspondent I lived for three years each in Delhi, New York and Moscow, and worked on assignments in seventy countries in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe. To see the mujahidin wage war against the Russians in Afghanistan I took my longest walk since Wales, from the Khyber Pass to the mountain redoubt of Tora Bora. I described the ugliness of conflict and revolution. When people say that something is impossible, I remember the impossibles I reported: the decline of the Soviet Union; the rebirth of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia after fifty years beneath the Soviet concrete; and Nelson Mandela's presidency at the end of apartheid in South Africa.

In 1995 I began writing and presenting television programmes in Wales directed by Wil Aaron. We drew on a passion for stories and made eighty-four programmes over fourteen years. I returned to live in Wales. The outcome of the 1997 referendum fitted my theory of strong Welsh fingernails. Anyone brought up on Saturday morning cinema serials remembers the hero's escapes, hanging by his nails at the end of one episode and saved by a hairsbreadth at the beginning of the next. The story of Wales tells of narrow squeaks, adversity, persistence and resilience. In the years I reported Wales a Welsh Government seemed, if not impossible, then certainly in the realm of hope and dream. Standing for self-respect and the dignity of responsibility, the Senedd asserts the fact of Wales. I certainly saw bilingual signs as common sense justice and regard them now as companionable, part of the furniture, evidence of an ease with diversity and a panache; though I never imagined such an advance in technology that I am now warned in two languages not to phone and drive at the same time.

Years ago in Wales I learnt how to write about a country, free to write about everything that caught my eye. No London newspaper reports in that way any more. Newspapers change like anything else. As a former staff correspondent of The Times in Wales I am an historical artefact. I like it here and continue the pursuit of stories. For the former mayor of Penrhiwceibr and Troedyrhiw it goes with the territory.

Catrin Dafydd,
Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff, 2012

2 Our collective imaginings

Catrin Dafydd

We were young lovers, devolution and I, courting in 1997 while I was still at school.

I hadn't experienced the disappointment of 1979, when Wales had decisively rejected a modicum of self-government. I've only ever known an assured Welsh people, who voted for their very own Assembly. Growing up, I saw the people of Wales gaining confidence in front of my eyes and it was confirmed once again, in March 2011, when we voted for yet more powers, thus establishing our own legislature in the Senedd in Cardiff Bay.

My generation's trajectory has clear parallels with Wales' emerging democracy. As a teenager I saw the Welsh people imagine a new Wales and it is those collective imaginings that have created the country we live in today. Experiencing this sense of confidence and creativity in our people taught me an important political lesson. Collectively, independently minded people with inspiring ideas can change things for the better.

Throughout my childhood, UK politics had left me disillusioned: Mrs Thatcher's ideological attack on our communities, the New Labour project rejecting its socialist roots and sending schoolmates of mine to unjust wars. But growing up in Wales there remained a sense of optimism in the air. The one thing we had to cling to was devolution and a sense that we were already able to do some things differently. Our young democracy seemed to me to be the antithesis of the tired politics of unionism. And yet, amidst all the optimism that came with devolution, poverty levels in Wales continued to soar, the gap between rich and poor continued to widen, and Welsh as a community language continued to decline.

It seemed that the Assembly, hailed by some devolutionists as the great saviour, had far too little power to truly improve people's lives. The Welsh still remained, as Gwyn Alf Williams once famously put it, *"a naked people under an acid rain"*, without the economic levers to turn their situation around. But for some of us, the Assembly had always been viewed as the beginning of the journey towards national freedom. What it did provide however, even with its limited powers, was an opportunity to be independently minded today, here and now.

It was this spirit of independence of thought that led me to join Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, a non violent, direct action organisation which campaigns for the Welsh language and communities, as part of an international movement to ensure rights and freedom. Growing up in Gwaelod y garth, I had always been of the view that Welsh was a common heritage to everyone in the village, whether they spoke the language or not. For me, the problem lay in the fact that the system was not making the language accessible to everyone. Welsh speakers weren't able to use it everyday, in all aspects of life and potential learners weren't given enough of an opportunity to learn. Today, despite the fact that many people think that the battle has been won, economic factors continue to determine our language's future. Young Welsh speakers are forced to leave their communities to look for work, multi-nationals come to Wales without having to comply with legislation, and large developments are placed in our communities without considering their impact on the Welsh language. All around us, we are putting profit before people and capital before our communities.

While some of these factors currently remain beyond our control, I still firmly believe that the Welsh language is the common heritage of everyone who has chosen to make Wales their home and that safeguarding Welsh as a community language must be a fundamental part of any constitutional journey. What would be the point in gaining independence only to throw away the very things you were hoping to protect? We are duty bound to safeguard the language because it represents a way of life. It is a prism, through which a people experience the world. To put it plainly, by safeguarding a living language, one is safeguarding an essential element of the uniqueness of life on this planet – promoting diversity, and rejecting homogenisation.

After graduating at University of Wales Aberystwyth, I was elected president of UMCA, the Welsh language students' union. During this period, a new generation of students began to support the call for a *Coleg Ffederal Cymraeg, a Welsh Federal College*. As things stood, investment in Welsh language provision was shamefully low and we had no institution to champion Welsh medium education in our universities. We protested relentlessly, taking part in numerous acts of civil disobedience. We lobbied and met with our own politicians and we held a national rally outside the Senedd in Cardiff Bay.

For me, a few crucial things happened during this period that would shape my views about activism and the nature of civic movements. I began to truly understand the important role of collective action in society. Our campaigning had demonstrated how it was

A few years later, in my late twenties, it became apparent to me that Wales was still in a truly confused state. On the one hand we were re-emerging as a nation, our Senedd in Cardiff Bay was a constitutional testimony to our collective efforts. But on the other hand, we were in a state of malaise.

possible for a large group of people to harness a dream and actively change policy.

I also developed a clear sense of how important it was to have a compelling narrative. During those years of campaigning, we had a story to tell. We had clear objectives and we knew that we were fighting injustice. We also saw our struggle in a much wider context, as part of an international struggle for freedom and equality. We became confident, too. Firstly by politically educating ourselves and then by taking our message to the people of Wales, gaining support amongst Welsh and English speakers alike.

During those crucial years of campaigning, the collective imagination of hundreds of students kicked into action. We began thinking independently, calling on the establishment to put in place new structures. Over the coming years Cymdeithas yr Iaith, Cylch yr Iaith, Plaid Cymru and many prominent academics rallied around the cause and further developed the case. As a result, today we have our own Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. Thinking independently had meant that we had created a different future for ourselves and our country. We were being the change we wanted to see. We were being independent people.

I was in my twenties when the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol came into existence. It felt as though democracy in my country was coming of age, the collective imagination I had seen in 1997 had been reignited once again. Only this time, it was my generation at the helm.

A few years later, in my late twenties, it became apparent to me that Wales was still in a truly confused state. On the one hand we were re-emerging as a nation, our Senedd in Cardiff Bay was a constitutional testimony to our collective efforts. But on the other hand, we were in a state of malaise. Like so many countries across the world, we were the victim of a great modern disconnect brought about by capitalism. While we were busy re-building Wales, our communities were increasingly under siege.

Everything about the modern way of life encourages us to abandon our sense of community, threatening to undermine everything that is unique about us. The neo-liberal project has allowed large multi-nationals to threaten our local businesses taking money out of Wales. Schools are closed or privately funded in the name of modernisation and Wales's natural resources are exploited in order to benefit a few multi-national conglomerates. All around us, a familiar pattern is re-emerging, one that is all too familiar in Wales.

But despite these unrelenting factors, Wales's demographic realities remain and what some people deem to be our weakness might actually be our one great strength. We are a community of communities, diverse and awkwardly spread out across a mountainous land. Perhaps it is time we made these factors work for us, manipulating economic structures to suit our people rather than allowing the free market to manipulate us, thus allowing Wales to plan for a more sustainable future.

Allowed to continue, the current model would see our communities completely engulfed by an Anglo-American culture, leaving us unable to access our own heritage. Even today, we are very often taught another people's history, while our own goes unexplored.

Our minds are still being actively colonised. While this is certainly impacting on Welsh speaking communities, its effects are felt deeper still in English speaking Wales. Under-represented on television and radio, it is no surprise that some English speaking Welsh communities have become disconnected. Economically and culturally, they are being ignored. Programmes about Welsh politics are given graveyard slots and 'network' television and radio often disregard the constitutional changes that have come about in Wales, not to mention a distinct lack of English television comedy and drama, holding up a mirror to Welsh life. These issues are a matter of cultural and political life or death and we must be prepared to address them if we are to ensure that we live in a healthy, well-scrutinised democracy.

Despite the fact that S4C, our Welsh language television station was established in the 1980s following years of campaigning, and that during the same period, there was a huge increase in the call for Welsh medium education throughout Wales, there still remains a distinct lack of discussion regarding our linguistic and political identity at grass-roots level. Amongst the vast majority of the Welsh population, there is little or no debate about bilingualism. Even in schools where Welsh is taught, we do not allow pupils to fully engage with what it means to live in a bilingual Wales.

Everywhere you turn, a number of factors are making it impossible for us to explore the complexities of Welsh life and culture. When they are discussed they are either polarised or pushed to the sidelines. Creating, and sustaining a permanent national dialogue on these matters is by no means an easy task but it is a necessity in order to maintain our democracy.

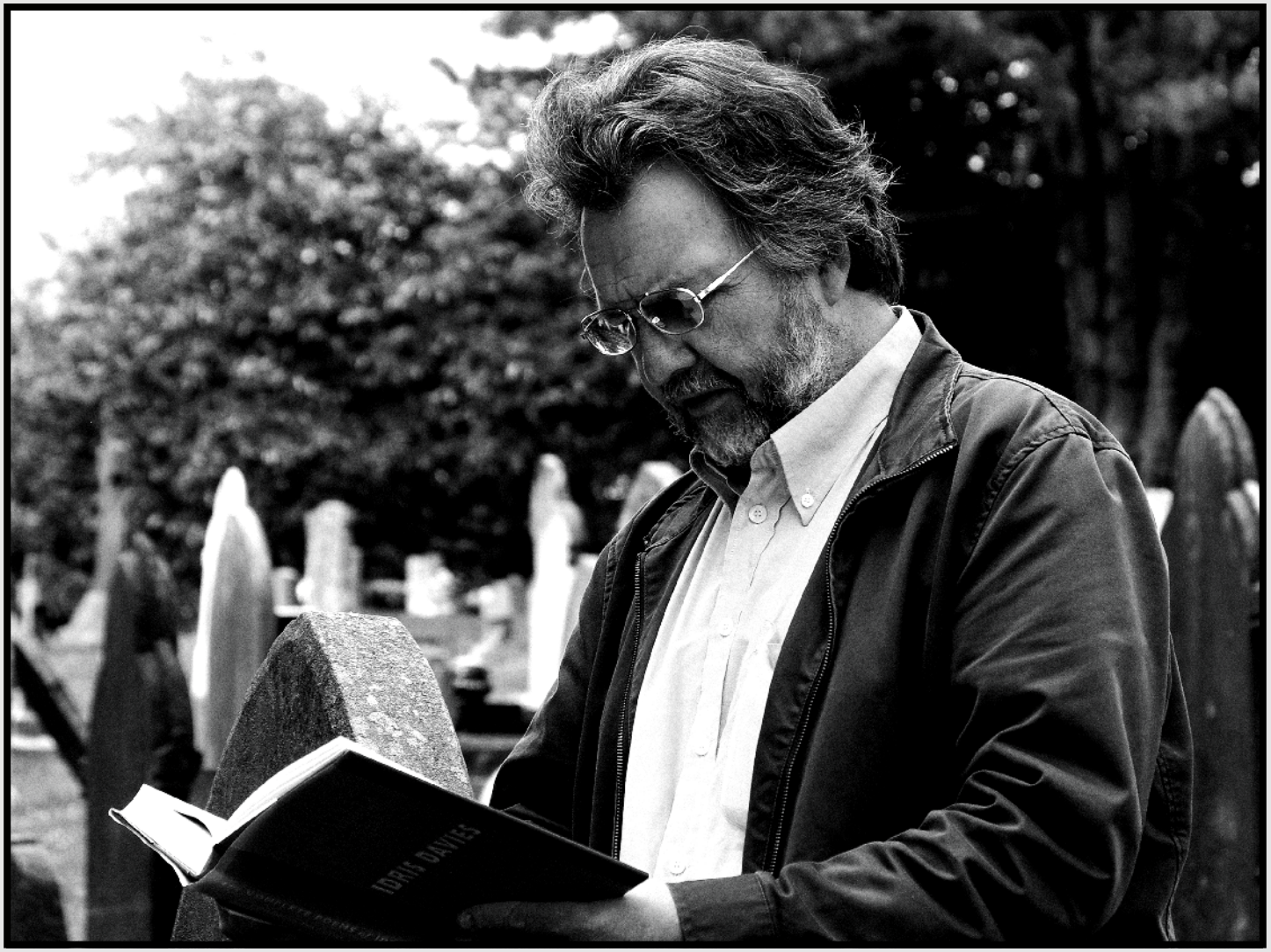
So how are we to get to grips with this malaise? How are we to transform our communities culturally and economically? In my view, the secret lies in our minds. Over the next decade, we must develop and encourage an independence of thought. We must encourage Welsh communities to think for themselves and we must engage with them in discussion about the type of economic and cultural future they wish to see. We must also do all that we can to hone the Welsh imagination, encouraging collective creativity with a view to developing Welsh ideas that will address both Welsh and international issues.

The Welsh imagination has already proven invaluable to our cultural and political survival. So much of what we have achieved has been born out of creative thinking, stemming from our understanding of the nature of community. It has always been through people's imaginings of a different Wales that a new Wales has emerged. Many of these radical, progressive ideas, based on creating more equal communities have chimed with people across the world. After all Wales has been the inspiration for Robert Owen's co-operative enterprises, Lloyd George's contribution to the creation of the Welfare State, and Aneurin Bevan's National Health Service. We have always been a small country with big, progressive ideas. It is time we re-connected and built on these ideas for the future in order to harness the potential of our vast natural resources, boost our creative industries and improve our economy.

Without a doubt, our new constitutional framework is bound to have a colossal impact on our nation's behavioural and psychological patterns. Hopefully with time, and as we gain greater fiscal autonomy, we will be able to shape our own economy as we see fit. Perhaps one day, even within my lifetime, we will live in a Wales that recognises its place in the world. We will become a people who know that they have an important contribution to make, both at home and in the world at large.

The same problems faced by Welsh communities in the 1980s, when I was running around the school yard in Ysgol Gynradd Gwaelod y Garth threaten us today. Capitalism endangers communities the world over in order to profit the few. The real question for us is whether our emerging democracy will be able to shield and protect our Welsh communities from these factors and develop an economy that will benefit all the people of Wales.

The Senedd in Cardiff Bay will be as progressive as we, the people of Wales demand it to be. We must be ready to hold our governments to account and each of us must be prepared to play our part in full, as citizens of this country. It is our collective imagination that will shape our future as an independent people and that future will only come about if we behave independently today.



Nigel Jenkins,
Grave of Idris Davies, Rhymney, 2011

3 Blindfold in the land of our birth

Nigel Jenkins

"Wales," Harri Webb declared in *Planet* in 1976, "is marching backwards to independence, everybody desperately pretending that we are going somewhere else." Although this pronouncement was typical of the extravagant optimism to which Harri was sometimes given, I hoped he might be right. Then came the crashing disappointment of the four-to-one defeat for devolution in the 1979 referendum, which stunned many a patriot into numb silence. Wales didn't seem to be marching anywhere, but lurching blindfold in ever-decreasing circles. "No day like this for 700 years," lamented the poets Jon Dressel and T. James Jones, raw with political grief, in a poem which compared the outcome of the 1 March referendum with the murder of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282 and the snuffing out of Welsh independence.[1] Yet here we are in 2012, getting used to mouthing deeply satisfying expressions such as 'the Welsh government' without needing a reality pinch to wake us from idle fantasy. What has happened in little more than thirty years? What in our present 'interesting times' might be going to happen?

The poet John Tripp spoke for many when, in an interview in December 1979, he declared:

> "What happened on March the first is a tragedy. It's not a hiccup as Harri Webb said ... It's awful what happened on March the first, and you can't expect your poets to be the same again. You spend ten or twelve years of your life working up to something, with all the irony and cynicism, with all the beating of breasts, you've had these great hopes for your country ... It's ridiculous." [2]

Some more or less gave up on a Wales that seemed bereft of backbone. For instance, the political commentator Patrick Hannan suggested that Wales no longer had a politics worthy of comment. But certain "tired old valiants", in the words of Tripp's poem *1.III.79*, refusing to be defeated by defeat, came

> *limping through the smoke,*
> *[got] patched up and mended,*
> *then [went] back up the line again.*

What beckoned for some was, in Dafydd Elis-Thomas's words, "the long march through the institutions", an unglamorous but necessary engagement with the nation's policymakers in the fields of business, economics, local government, education and the media. Two of the most resourceful and energetic activists on that front were the writer and journalist John Osmond (who has been Director of the Institute of Welsh Affairs since 1996) and his friend the journalist Robin Reeves (1941–2001). Shortly before the foundation of the IWA in 1987, they launched the St David's Forum which in many respects anticipated the purpose and functions of the IWA. "I was prompted to embark on the initiative by a trip I went on to speak at a conference in Quebec in the wake of the '79 referendum," John told me. "The conference was organised by the University of Quebec at Montreal to debate their forthcoming referendum in late 1979. I struck up a conversation with some people from the Parti Québécois and they asked me whether the business community had been supportive of the Welsh referendum ... ! Ah, they replied, you'll get nowhere in Wales until you mobilise a significant section of the business community."

With sponsorship from business and industry, John and Robin organised two or three forums a year, in large hotels in different parts of Wales and on various themes. I attended several of these well-fed and bibulous gatherings as the forum's official scribe. My job was to turn my wine-splashed shorthand into a 5,000-word summary of the discussions – which participants were assured would be non-attributable, to encourage 'a frank and unfettered' exchange of views. *Y Cynefin*, that numinous and untranslatable term meaning, roughly, 'native ground', was the topic for the inaugural St David's Forum, held at the Bulkeley Hotel, Beaumaris. It involved contributions from several authorities steeped in the matter of Wales, among them the author and chief executive of Gwynedd County Council, Ioan Bowen Rees (1929–99) and the scholar Bedwyr Lewis Jones (1933–92). But there was also a sprinkling of lost souls, chiefly from the world of business, who had hardly a clue where they were. If they thought of Wales at all they thought of it as some western county of England. There was almost 'an international incident' at the Friday night dinner when the assembly was invited to stand and raise glasses to Dewi Sant, rather than the Queen. Who or what was this Dewi Sant, a couple of flustered businessmen angrily enquired, fearing that they were being bamboozled into toasting Meibion Glyndŵr, the arsonists of holiday and second homes who were much in the news at the time.

The St David's Forum continued to meet until the mid 1990s,

when it ceded the field to Geraint Talfan Davies's slightly younger but professionally staffed and funded IWA. By then, thanks in part to the lead taken by the think-tanks, talk of such entities as 'the Welsh economy' had become normal, whereas a decade earlier such particularisation would have seemed to more UK-centred sensibilities both eccentric and strange. Similarly today, thanks to the strengthening of national civic identity and to the development of a new corpus of Welsh law, we are beginning to talk of a Welsh legal system.

The be-suited revolutionaries embroiled in 'the long march through the institutions' have been acutely aware of the inadequacies of both the education system and the print and broadcasting media in nurturing a sense of Welsh citizenship. Most Welsh people have a poor grasp of their history and, given the shortcomings of the media, few are prepared to invest the conscious effort that is necessary to keep abreast of Welsh current affairs. "You would say / this place deserved better / if you knew ..." wrote John Tripp in *The Province of Belief*. With an understanding of both past and present largely beyond their reach, many of our compatriots are unlikely to make a sufficiently informed contribution to the construction of a national future. It is gratifying, indeed, that under such circumstances a comfortable majority voted, in March 2011, in favour of law-making powers for the National Assembly. With 21 out of 22 local authority areas voting yes, the Welsh showed themselves united politically for the first time in centuries.

Whenever I'm in Ireland or Scotland I find myself casting an envious eye over national newspapers such as the *Irish Times* or the *Scotsman*, which hum with brio and bristle with an intelligence sadly lacking in our own distinctly provincial 'national newspaper'. Why are the weak-beer Welsh so fond of watering down ambitious projects? Another nation-building venture of John Osmond and co., alongside his promotion of a thoroughgoing Welsh Baccalaureate (which would eventually suffer a thorough drenching by the champions of mediocrity) was *Wales on Sunday*, launched in March 1989, which everyone was expecting to be a Welsh *Observer*. Invited to be the paper's literary editor, I spent several months leading up to the paper's launch preparing dummy versions of a books page. What the paper as a whole looked like the workers were not allowed to know. Presumably to foil any attempt at industrial sabotage, the dummies were kept largely unseen in a safe in the then-editor John Humphries' office. When the first edition eventually appeared, those of us who'd imagined, with mounting excitement, that we were preparing a Welsh Sunday broadsheet of substance were sorely disappointed. But still, we thought, it's a start: onwards and upwards from here. But downwards dumbingly *Wales on Sunday* slid, getting increasingly superficial and excitable by the week.

Why, I wondered after months of declining standards in pursuit of rising sales, did they still want a books page? Then came a coup at the palace. I picked up the paper one Sunday morning to find my choice of books and reviewers replaced by books I'd never have chosen, by reviewers I'd never heard of, on footballers, pop stars, showbiz and war, and nothing whatsoever from or about Wales. It was Thomson House's way of telling Jenkins he was sacked. More recently, Ned Thomas's bruising experience of trying to launch a daily newspaper in Welsh, *Y Byd*, underlines the difficulties facing those who aspire to publish an intelligent, properly national newspaper in either language. With almost all newspaper sales declining sharply, it seems that we must look for compensatory developments in radio, television and online services. Yet how specifically Welsh news and cultural debate might thrive in such media remains to be seen, unless the issue is taken more seriously by the Welsh government than it has been so far.

If you knew, if you only knew ... Education, the media, canny networking: how are the people of Wales to *get* Wales – or to *want* to get Wales? I know from my own experience what a long and difficult journey it can be from Welshness by default, because you were born in Wales but don't know or care much about it, to an informed engagement with the country. I want to see Wales break free from its stifling dependency on England, to use its abundant talents and natural resources to transform the lives of its people, many of whom live in appalling poverty, and to engage directly, on its own terms, with other nations, making itself useful in the world.

It was as an adolescent, at a horse trials event on the estate of Captain Peter Francis near Llandeilo, that I first caught a glimpse of Welsh nationalism. "See that man over there?" the host's daughter asked me. "That's Cayo Evans. He believes Wales should be an independent country." This struck me, as an apolitical hedonist in the making, as the strangest of strange notions. I had never heard of the Free Wales Army or Plaid Cymru or Saunders Lewis or R.S. Thomas. Dylan Thomas ('Land of my fathers – my fathers can keep it') was my poet, not that I could understand much of his arcane word-spinning. Welshness, I'd probably have thought, was a retarding affliction best left behind in the 19th Century. Most of my family had been in anxious denial of their Welshness for two generations. The Meurigs, Eluneds, Eiras and Dilyses of my grandparents' era had given way in my parents' time to names such as Ian, Roger, Noel, and Rowland, as chapel and the Welsh language had been abandoned for church and English. The farmers and steelworkers of the family's past had magicked themselves into white-bread bourgeois with a penchant for the English public school.

I had never heard, either, of Meic Stephens, Harri Webb and others who, around that time, at Garth Newydd in Merthyr Tydfil, were busily hatching *Poetry Wales*, the magazine that would spearhead a radical redirection of the literary climate. And it was literature, poetry above all, that would eventually hand me the key to Wales. Other factors also played a role: living and working (as a newspaper reporter) in England, and looking anew, from a distance, at a Wales I'd barely begun to comprehend;

the questions asked me about my country by Americans, Canadians, Greeks, Italians, Germans, Spaniards, Moroccans as I bummed and odd-jobbed my way around mainland Europe and north Africa for a year or so; the questions I asked myself about Wales as I skimped my official studies at Essex University to immerse myself in the Welsh magazines, especially *Planet*, and the writings of Gwyn Williams (Trefenter), Idris Davies, David Jones, Harri Webb, John Tripp, Tony Conran. I even wrote an essay on Dafydd ap Gwilym – of whom no one in the Department of European and Comparative Literature had heard.

We are used to Wales being invisible in the wider world. But it's Wales's relative invisibility to large numbers of the Welsh themselves that has been so impoverishing of both individual and civic identity. I speak as one of the many – perhaps the majority – of those born thus blindfold to the land of their birth, its history and culture, and I am all too aware of what a strenuous and convoluted effort it took to peel that blindfold from my eyes. It was most revealing, during the 1997 devolution campaign, how the 'Yes' camp was able to draw on contributions from any number of poets and musicians to hearten and entertain the devolutionary troops, whereas the joyless 'No' moaners, seemingly bereft of any cultural underpinning and ignorant of their country's arts, could call on no choirs, rock bands, bards or folk singers to support their curmudgeonly cause.

By the time I graduated in 1976, I knew, after the best part of a decade in 'exile', that I wanted to return not simply to live in Wales but to inhabit Wales as fully as possible and to make some kind of contribution to Welsh life. Not all patriots have enjoyed the luxury of a long period of literary and historical reflection to wake them up to Wales. For some in the early 1960s it was the high-handed flooding of Cwm Celyn by the Liverpool Corporation that alerted them to Welsh impotence. For others it was Margaret Thatcher's nasty and brutish 1980s which, as things turned out, would prove the making of Welsh devolution. It's presumably why a giant tin portrait of the woman hangs in the Senedd in Cardiff Bay. Similarly today, David Cameron and co. are making an invaluable contribution to the maturation of Welsh nationhood.

Most of my family, although content to call themselves Welsh, remain vague about national specifics, and can be relied upon to vote no – if they vote at all – to any measure that might advance the cause of Welsh autonomy and self-respect. They didn't join me on my protracted and intriguing journey of Welsh discovery. On the other hand, my two daughters are inheritors of some of the treasures I picked up along the way. They have the courage of an informed, bilingual, easy-going Welshness which fits them to embrace with enthusiasm the prospect of a Wales at last free, in the foreseeable future, after more than 700 years of being England's first colony.

I have not expected to see an independent Wales in my lifetime, even when most extravagantly 'surprised by wine'. But these 'interesting times' could surprise us all. It's not impossible that by the time of their independence referendum in 2014 the Scots could summon the gumption to vote Yes to regaining their independence. The consequent shock to Wales of finding itself more outnumbered than ever by a congenitally Tory-voting England in the rump state of 'Little Britain' could concentrate Welsh political thinking dramatically, offering definitive proof of the folly of remaining in a grotesquely unequal union with a polity fundamentally at odds with Welsh communitarian practices and aspirations.

The vote of confidence in devolution delivered by the electorate in March 2011 suggests that already the Welsh are beginning to get that message. Although at present fewer than 10 per cent of the population, according to the polls, favour independence, growing numbers of people seem increasingly receptive to greater self-determination for Wales, as they appreciate the improvements made in their lives by high-profile Welsh Government measures such as free prescriptions and safeguarding the NHS, bus passes for the over-sixties, and subsidised education for students. As more people wake up to the fact that Wales is energy rich, with abundant natural resources, particularly water, the prospect of detachment from a spendthrift and deeply indebted state that wastes billions on nuclear weapons, illegal wars, a parasitic monarchy and bloated sporting circuses, may not seem such a romantic and unfeasible indulgence.

Whether or not Scotland votes to regain its independence, the process of Welsh devolution will continue. Europe, in spite of the constant anti-EU propaganda of the media and many politicians, is likely to become increasingly important, as will our relationships with neighbouring Celtic countries and other members of the European Free Alliance who aspire to full national self-determination. The relationship with England will sooner or later need to be 'reset'. Much will depend on how England's regions negotiate their own democratic deficit and how England, long blinded by the dazzle of empire, reawakens to the particularities of its own nationhood. Let's hope that the version it chooses for itself is the England of Shakespeare, the Levellers and the Diggers, Tom Paine, William Blake, Charles Dickens, the *Guardian*, Adrian Mitchell and P.J. Harvey, rather than that of the football hooligan, the English Defence League and the British National Party.

Until Wales regains its long-lost independence we should live the Wales we want. The socialist republic of Cymru is the land in which I and many others have been living for years. Come and join us.

Notes

1 The poem, *Ianws*, came close to winning the Crown at the 1979 National Eisteddfod, but was disqualified when it was revealed that the poem had two authors. Some have claimed that while this was the official reason for the poem being denied the Crown, the real reason was that the poem bristled with too many painful home truths.

2 Quoted from 'An Interview with John Tripp' conducted by Nigel Jenkins and edited for *Planet* 60 December–January 1986-87.

Menna Elfyn,
Llandysul, Ceredigion, 2012

4 Serenity amidst the chaos

Menna Elfyn

It is fifty years since the ground breaking radio lecture by Saunders Lewis *Tynged yr Iaith* (Fate of the Language) was transmitted in 1962. Whenever I hear the word 'tynged' I'm back home - an eleven year old listening to my father telling us at the dinner table all about Saunders and 'tynged' and that the language could die. The word feels strangely un-Welsh, or else too much like an echo of the English 'tongue'. And yet, my mother instilled me with informal lessons in Welsh. She would bring out the book of easy grammar each evening called *Help Llaw* (Helping Hand), and I learned that Welsh and English had very different foundations. For example, *plas* (mansion) in Welsh was not to be called *palas* (palace) because we had no palaces in Wales.

I came to realise that Wales was a pretty poor country not to have such opulence. Yet what many of us did have were two tongues. I spoke Welsh in chapel and at home, (and 'proper' Welsh at that being a minister's daughter), while English was for school or for playing with my Welsh-speaking friends. But whenever I spoke one language rather than the other, there was always another' voice at my side', if I can borrow R. S. Thomas's words. And that voice was later to be recognised not only as *Cymraeg* (Welsh) but also as the voice of a *Cymraes* (Welsh woman).

Around the same time too, the word 'Tryweryn' cropped up and the whole injustice of the drowning of the valley for Liverpool's water weighed heavily on me. If 'Keywords' was an inquiry into language, as Raymond Williams asserted, then the words that unsettled me were – *tynged*, *Saunders*, *Tryweryn*, and another called *Waldo*. My elder sister bunked off school one morning to greet the poet Waldo (another very strange name to me in my early teens) from Swansea prison. This too seemed to me puzzling, for poets and prison didn't really sit together to a twelve-year-old's mind. But on hearing that he was a pacifist and refused to pay part of his income tax as a protest against the war in Korea, I realised that being Welsh meant to make a stand, a reminder of the *annibyniaeth barn* (independence of mind) that Waldo wrote about. By the time I was fifteen, I too had become a pacifist, joined CND, wrote a few poems and protest songs about the Vietnam war at the same time as campaigning for the language. A decade later, I became the subject referred to by Saunders Lewis in his Foreword to the second edition of *Tynged yr Iaith*, where he states:

> *Y mae'r tair merch sydd heddiw,a minnau'n sgrifennu, yng ngharchar Bryste wedi eu rhwystro rhag siarad eu mamiaith wrth eu mamau, yn pigo cydwybodau hyd yn oed Aelodau Seneddol Cymreig y Blaid Lafur'.*

(As I'm writing this there are three women today in Bristol Prison being refused the right to speak in their mother tongue to their mothers; they are pricking the conscience of even the Welsh Labour Members of Parliament.)

One of the most memorably painful events of my life was trying to talk to my parents in English after being imprisoned for contempt of court during the first conspiracy trial against leaders of Cymdeithas yr Iaith (Welsh Language Society) in Swansea Crown Court in 1971. Perhaps my defiance of authority was nurtured in my schooldays. My mother would always write an absence note in Welsh as it came naturally to her. Yet each time I'd hand the note to the teacher I awaited the admonishment, "Tell your mother not to write in that language". I never did, for I knew full well that she would have complied.

To be a member of Cymdeithas yr Iaith in the seventies was so much more than being part of saving a language. Many of us felt we were part of changing the world as we emulated the civil rights movement in America and read about Gandhi's non-violent strategies. I read Martin Luther King's works believing that we too were "prisoners of hope" as we displayed solidarity with other campaigns. The seventies was a decade of being involved in direct non-violent action: road signs campaigns, television protests, car discs removed. Even going on the train from Carmarthen to Ferryside and refusing to pay the fare seemed a daring act. Quite a few of those protests didn't cause much of a stir or even made it to court, for the authorities did not want the exposure of court proceedings. Today I get a certain *frisson* when I'm standing on a platform whether it be in Cardiff or Carmarthen and hear announcements made clearly in both Welsh and English.

But my need for solitude in order to write was hard. I struggled to write daily as that made me feel in tune with Charles Simic's belief of poetry as "serenity amidst the chaos". However, my early attempts were lyrics for songs and playing the harp and guitar in a folk band. We won the 'pop group' competition at the National Urdd Eisteddfod in 1967, appeared in concerts and on television, and even made a record with Recordiau'r Dryw.

But song writing was a poor substitute for the voice I wanted to be heard. Merely writing about *yr achos* (the cause) seemed futile as we felt unease at 'armchair revolutionaries' (another keyword) with their easy poems. To believe in the language one had to be prepared to act and not seek comfort in some Plato's cave. And yet, and here's the rub, I never felt comfortable in the role of a political activist even though I embraced the belief that the existing order could be overturned if we strived long and hard enough. I entered the eighties unable to leave activism and yet not quite comfortable as a campaigner or organiser.

As Status Officer for *Cymdeithas yr laith* in the mid-eighties, my role was to raise awareness about the dismal status of the language. A national conference was arranged to discuss a new Language Act that would give the Welsh equal status with English. We even appointed our own Ombudsman as a forerunner for the possibility of some kind of Commissioner (little did we believe in the eighties that this would happen in 2012). We met with the then Minister of State for Wales Wyn Roberts who dismissed the idea outright - so we left the meeting abruptly.

Later, Dr Meredydd Evans and I met in Morgans' café in Aberystwyth, enamoured with a blueprint law drawn up by a well-known Welsh judge and patriot Dewi Watcyn Powell. It was the starting point of the Colloquium of eminent citizens such as Lord Gwilym Prys Davies. With the help of their consistent deliberations we achieved the momentum needed and were, for once, on the right side of the law. Indeed, the authorities began to listen and take heed of the inadequacy of the David Hughes Parry Language Act of 1967.

It was at this juncture that I realised how little I relished politics with its need for patience, persuasion and compromise. It was also the time when I began to channel my full energy into writing with invitations to write libretti in the US and appear at festivals abroad. It was in the early nineties that I realised that if my work was to be understood then I would need proper translations in English. In reading to audiences that did not understand Welsh, such as the Miners' strike events, Friends of the Earth, CND and Anti-Apartheid readings, I found myself making quick versions in English. These readings I relished, believing that *Cymraeg* belonged to all. It's worth noting that we also campaigned for an English language channel for Wales, one that would not then portray a regional view of Wales. One of our failures was not to continue with this demand once the Welsh television channel was realised. Alongside campaigning for the language, I was also involved with other causes as is echoed in a poem *No 257863 H.M.P*:

I'm here for a cause,
But found new causes.

After all, wanting the language to survive and flourish was only one part of my identity. As a young girl, I discovered the remarkable hymnist Ann Griffiths whose work was only published posthumously. A woman who wrote hymns, a female poet? It was my epiphany. If she could, so could I. I was already drawn to the poetry of Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, Emily Dickinson and later Adrienne Rich and others. Slowly, another political consciousness was emerging within me—the need for a Wales that was not based on patriarchy or dependent on the stereotypical 'Welsh Mam'. Again, though I campaigned and voiced feminist values, I still relished the solitude of being 'the other', distant and aloof. Once again, women have travelled a long way since those decades. How gratifying it was that the first members of the National Assembly were equally divided between male and female AMs.

However, writing Welsh language poetry in the seventies was a lonely activity, as I had no female role model. But being near the edge and alone has always been part of the poet's domain. I took refuge in the sideways wit of the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska who, when awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1996 said that poets must always say 'I don't know'. This is so very different from the kind of assuredness of the bardic tradition whose work it is to say they know this and that, Indeed, *cynghanedd* demands such precision and know-it-all. My voice seemed in comparison 'husky - but hopefully 'vibrant' as echoed in R. S. Thomas's translation of a poem I wrote after speaking in Welsh one morning to a BT operator. Though the opening of the poem is rooted in the 'local' its ending recognises the diaspora of all people, as with the plight of the Kurds driven from their lands in the early nineties, following the first Gulf War:

Speak up is, of course,
the command to speak English.
I sentence myself to a lifetime
of sentences that make no sense.

The vulnerability of the opening is overtaken by its strident ending:

I will suggest, the superfluousness of barbed wire,
since our language has berylled wares.
I will sing and make contact
In cynghanedd, as the small nations do,
a people in counterpoint
to the leit-motif, dominant
though its pitch be,
ending each time on the same
obstinate monotone
with the same passionate concern
though mortally muted our metrics.

Song of a Voiceless person to British Telecom,
trans. R. S. Thomas

As a child I saw the tinplate stacks being blown up near the canal in Pontardawe, an omen of the de–industrialisation that was to follow. We saw new schools, overflowing with those wishing to give their children another language alongside English.

Thankfully, today this poem is less meaningful as I can now ring BT, if I so wish, and speak in Welsh to an ever-helpful team of Welsh language operators. Once again, due to campaigning, a new element of respect for the language seems to be in operation. Likewise, a poem such as *Will the Ladies stay Behind* written for a feminist production *Rhyw Ddydd* (Some or Gender Day) in 1984, is also now the subject of embarrassment when deacons or ministers have this announcement to make as they always apologise by way of the poem.

So much has changed in the second decade of the 21st Century as I straddle two languages, moving between both as the occasion demands. The Wales I grew up in, bilingual but set apart for a time thanks to the negative views of mainly Labour MPs (the kind who'd say that northern and southern Wales wouldn't understand one another because of different dialects) has long disappeared.

As a child I saw the tinplate stacks being blown up near the canal in Pontardawe, an omen of the de-industrialisation that was to follow. We saw new schools, overflowing with those wishing to give their children another language alongside English. I still remember being invited to conduct a poetry workshop at a new comprehensive school in Swansea and a young mother telling me nonchalantly, "I'm poor, a single mum, but what I can give my son for free is another language". That is the change in attitude that has pervaded Wales in the last fifty odd years. It is for the likes of such women that I cherish all my bilingual poems. It's with the hope of reaching her son that I want to continue as a poet who writes between languages. In this, I am grateful to the faithful team of translators: Tony Conran, Gillian Clarke, Nigel Jenkins, Joseph P. Clancy and Elin ap Hywel for allowing me the 'space' to continue to write poetry solely in Welsh. I'll leave critical essays to others to ascertain how critical this was in the eighties in blending together Welsh language poetry through English translation.

The South African poet Antjie Krog, an ANC activist whom I met at the Rotterdam International festival in 1990, says in her book of essays, *A Change Of Tongue*:

> "Within English a new South African literature was being formed for the first time. Writing from all backgrounds, languages and cultures started to come together in English. Those writing in Zulu, Sepedi, or Afrikaans simply became voiceless in the cul-de-sacs their languages had become in a country where people were desperate to find one another after so many years of being kept apart. To stay in your language meant to stay apart."

She then goes on to say:

> "Despite wanting to be a part of the new, I wanted to make it clear where I was coming from. I didn't come from nowhere. I carry a past with me. I do not want to become English but stay Afrikaans within a new South Africa milieu which happens to be English. In English I wanted to stay the other."

That generosity of spirit in wanting to keep one's identity but at the

And the language? If we are losing three thousand people every year, as is believed, what of those we win? Do we count the newborn in Wales who might speak the language?

same time share with other cultures and peoples is at the heart of what I also believe. Walter Benjamin portrays an image of people in a forest, their sounds reverberating to others, not unlike Robert Frost's poem, *The road not taken*. We may never know exactly what the other road has to offer but when we arrive at the crossroads we can surely share our differences in retelling what we witnessed and the other voices heard. I have resisted the desire to say what kind of future Wales should have. However, whenever I read to the various ethnic communities in Wales, I always murmur the words of the great Marxist historian Gwyn Alf Williams who said in *Radical Wales*:

> "There is a higher law than the law of the market; it is the law of survival, of communal survival. We have a border in Wales (Act of Union). No one proposes to make it a Berlin Wall but it exists. Everything west of that line is Wales, everyone west of that line who commits herself or himself to Wales is a member of the Welsh people. I don't care what language they speak, I don't care what colour their faces are, and I don't care where they come from. If they live in Wales and commit themselves to Wales, they are Welsh people.

This is the kind of Wales of which I too want to be part. I hope that tribalism doesn't persist in Wales and that we will find within the democratic system a plurality of ideas and voices, including that *annibyniaeth barn*, that independence of mind embraced by Waldo. And the language? If we are losing three thousand people every year, as is believed, what of those we win? Do we count the newborn in Wales who might speak the language?

During my lifetime, I have seen a kind of familial evolution happening in my family? My father, who saw the ministry as his vocation was also a renowned hymnist (Bryn Terfel recorded one of his hymns), and was an occasional satirical poet. He was brought up at a time when the chapels were full and ministers were also leaders (another kind of minister has now taken over the light). He was also an ardent pacifist and radical socialist who believed in a 'free Wales' without quite knowing what that would mean in realistic terms. For a time I, his daughter, became, a language rebel and campaigner for women's rights, went to Greenham, broke a fence at Brawdy, and marched in London against-apartheid and other causes before realising that writing too was a vocation requiring total dedication. My solidarity turned into solitude. Octavio Paz says that being a poet is to be

> *not the voice of history*
> *or the voice outside history*
> *but the voice within history*
> *which is still trying to say something different.*

I like to think of myself as a non-conformist who is, at times, an anarchist. And so, I turn to my daughter Fflur Dafydd whose path seems to reflect again the era into which she was born. As singer-songwriter, novelist who writes in both languages, in Welsh and

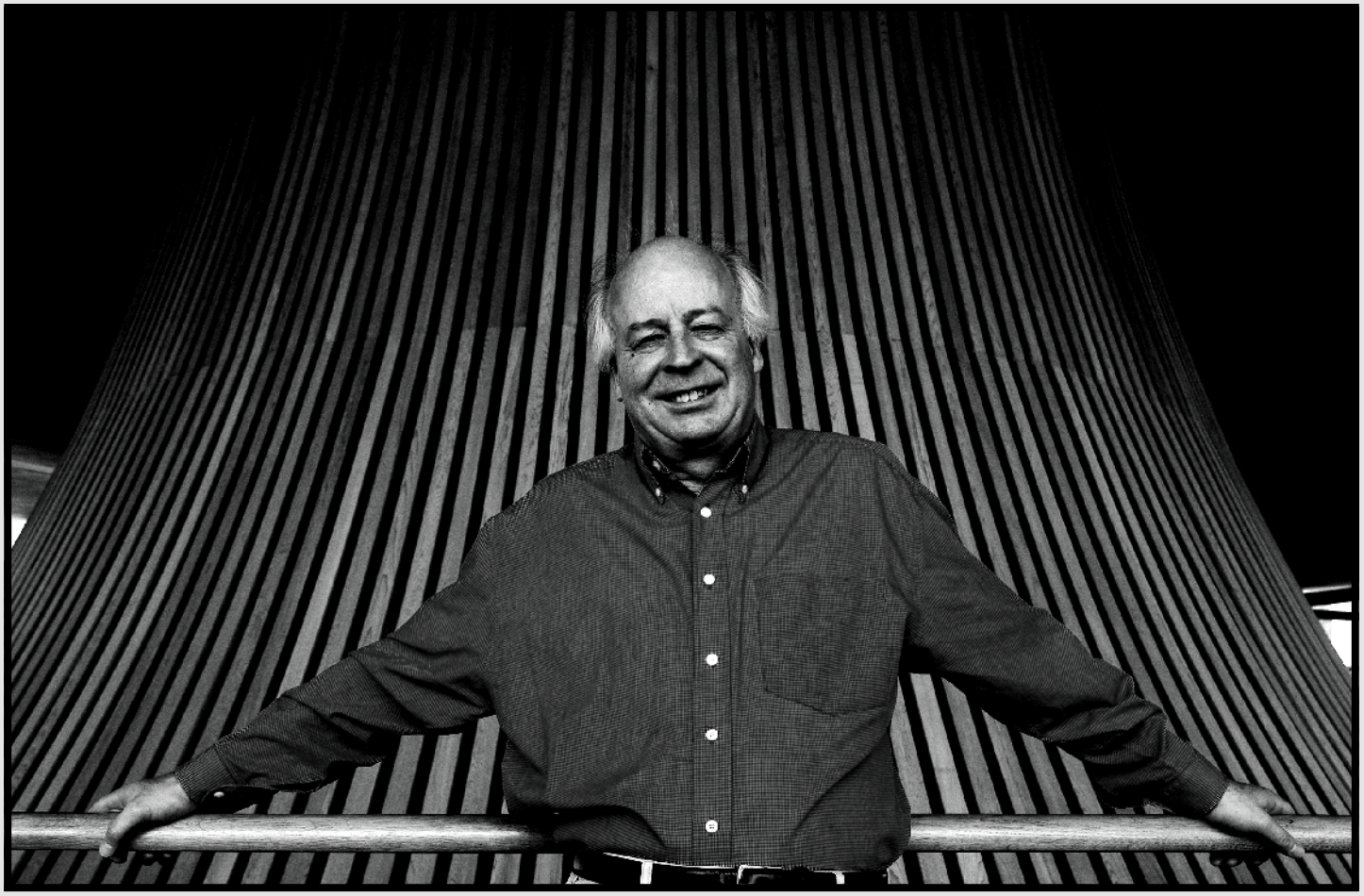
English as the case may be, it seems to me that she has extended and enhanced the aspirations of both language communities in Wales. She has bridged the gap left by her Welsh language grandfather, and bilingual-only-in-name-mother. Interestingly, her novel *Twenty Thousand Saints* is an arresting parable of Wales as it moved from the failure of the early devolution to the one we now experience. Little did I think when she was three months old visiting her father, Wynfford James in Swansea Prison for conspiracy to damage Blaenplwyf mast in the campaign for the television channel in 1978 that she, too, would be watching with her daughter children's television programmes in Welsh decades later.

Walter Benjamin writes of tracks left by different storytellers as stories are passed on. I daresay that the story of Wales is still evolving. The recent accomplishment of completing a footpath around the whole of Wales seems a pertinent metaphor. We are indeed a small country, but with a large track. It is also a plucky rebuke to the eradication of our railways. 'Beeching' is another keyword I grew to loathe when growing up. But as I write this, passengers are alighting at Fishguard and Goodwick for the first time since British Railways closed it during the Beeching cuts 48 years ago, in 1964. The tracks, be they for feet or trains is another metaphor of evolution and change. It does indicate that Wales is constantly on the move and the notion of 'Welshness' has a new journey.

Whenever I'm invited to readings outside of Wales, I always begin with *Handkerchief Kiss*, a poem which resonates with all people who feel the need to share their identity, and to seek a new kind of confidence and self-worth. It also alludes to the secretiveness of the past in terms of the Welsh language and the way we've kept ourselves in the dark, fearful not only of 'the other' but 'the others':

> *Let the poem carry a handkerchief*
> *And leave on my lip*
> *It's veiled kiss.*
> Handkerchief Kiss, translated by Gillian Clarke

On hearing me read poems about such subjects as Harlem and Broadway an Afro-American observed that we spoke the same language in terms of connection and ideas and asked me, "What's Welsh about your poetry?" I answered that only the 'tongue' is different and that poetry (pretty much like humanity) probably begins as a stirring that does not discriminate towards any language. Instead, it starts with the heart palpitating, willing its recipient to sing. And only then does it arrive in the language of my imagination. And then I'm back to *tynged* again, with fate and tongue being ominous siblings.



John Osmond,
Senedd, Cardiff Bay, 2012

5 A ribcage for the nation

John Osmond

Some time in the mid-1980s, after spending a night at the Salutation Inn in Felindre Farchog, I woke early and found myself drawn outside to the morning air. I ventured upwards into the Preseli hills and was entranced by the earth seemingly coming alive around my feet. A low-lying mist was disappearing in the gathering warmth, while a slight breeze in my face still felt chilled. High above the sky was azure blue but around were colours of green and yellow. The gorse was in full Spring bloom, emitting its harvest like scent, and contributing to a swooning haze. The sound of robins and blackbirds completed a reverie of motion and I seemed to float above the ground.

It was a kind of epiphany, a moment that remains with me down the decades, but suggesting what? I had no words to answer, but perhaps the inarticulate feelings the experience evoked reflected my pondering at the time on the meaning of what was becoming known as the Gaia hypothesis. This is the notion, associated with the work of James Lovelock, that the planet should be regarded as a single living organism. It had developed out of the first space programme in the 1960s when astronauts were able for the first time to look back at earth and take their famous photographs of the blue and white planet floating in the endless blackness of space.

Lovelock's theories included detailed studies of the way the biosphere seems to keep the chemical composition of the air and the temperature on the surface of the earth, influenced by air and oceanic currents, at optimum levels to sustain life. Thus, for example, the stabilisation of the oxygen concentration in the atmosphere at 21 per cent is just the right level for the maintenance of life. A few per cent less and the larger mammals, birds and flying insects would not have enough energy to survive; a few per cent more and even wet vegetation would burn well.

It seemed a fantastic idea, but the more I thought about it perhaps it was not so far-fetched. Certainly, it provided an intellectual under-pinning for the ecological movement that was then gathering pace, the need for greater balance between our behaviours and their impact on the environment. It seemed to me, as well, to touch something elemental in my Welsh experience, which was the sheer physicality of the country in which I had been brought up.

Among my deepest experiences as a young boy were spending hours walking in the Black Mountains above Abergavenny and then, as darkness fell, descending the sleep slopes, back to the town, with its glittering lights, enfolded by the hills. Later, I took to my bike and travelled further afield across Wales, to the west and the north. In my early teens I cycled on what is now the A470, heading for the fastness of Gwynedd and the pass that climbs past Cadair Idris towards Dolgellau. I remember my first impressions of the height and scale of the mountains as overwhelming, and nothing like I had seen in southern Wales.

Such sensations and engagement with the landscape is where I begin in thinking about who I am. Closeness to the land and the people who share the same horizons seems to me to be the beginning of Welshness. Later I discovered it was a starting point for others living close to the edge of the British Isles.

For writers, artists and intellectuals living in Wales in the 1980s a preoccupation was coming to terms with the 1979 referendum when the Welsh people seemingly decided to vote themselves out of history. If this was the case what was the point of writing or being concerned with any artistic expression in relation to the country? For my part it quickly became obvious that we would have to do more to understand the place of Wales within Britain. Certainly, the British dimension of Welsh identity had played a critical role in the 1979 referendum. In common with many writers in Wales in the 1970s, I had tended to focus on the Welshness of the people, somehow taking their Britishness for granted. Now, however, it was clear that if we were to understand Wales we should have to understand Britain.

A first foray into this territory was a book I edited, *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s*. It was planned in 1977 but only eventually published in 1985. A more systematic attempt occurred in its wake when I became involved in *The Divided Kingdom*, a ten-part television series for Channel 4 that was broadcast in 1988. Ambitiously, this set out to examine the inter-relationship of identities across the whole of the United Kingdom.

How do you present such a conceptual set of ideas on television? The series Director Colin Thomas came up with the solution of identifying four representative personalities in the four territories. Each would visit another's patch and debate what they found. We found it relatively easy to find such characters in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. However, England was a different matter. To begin with the English people we lighted on were not especially enthusiastic to talk about their Englishness, which in itself was a reflection of their identity. We went through four or five possibilities, with some first agreeing to take part and then withdrawing.

In the end we solved the problem by acknowledging that, given its complexity, a single person could not reflect the essence of Englishness. Instead we had recourse to two spokespeople, Beatrix Campbell the radical

writer from northern England, and the late Julian Critchley, Conservative MP for Aldershot, who represented the south.

In Scotland we found Margo MacDonald, a former SNP MP and today an independent Member of the Scottish Parliament. Northern Ireland was represented by the late A.T.Q Stewart, a Reader in History at Queens University, of Presbyterian background and described as Northern Ireland's leading public intellectual during the Troubles. He was the author of a number of important books on the identity dilemmas of the Province, including *The Narrow Ground: Patterns of Ulster History* (1977).

In Wales we chose Kim Howells who had recently become prominent during the 1984-5 miners strike. In the course of the dispute government legal action against the NUM and its assets, known as sequestration, bizarrely extended to preventing leaders of the union being interviewed on the media. This flouting of free speech did not extend as far down the ranks as the Research Officer of the South Wales NUM, with the result that Kim became a regular figure on the BBC's Newsnight and other programmes. His engaging, articulate Valleys presence, coupled with the reasonableness of his arguments that infuriated spokespeople on the other side, had turned him almost overnight into a celebrity in Wales.

In the opening programme of the series we asked our presenters to talk first of all about themselves and their own sense of identity. Those from Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales all followed a similar path, describing their relationship with the territory where they were from. Margo Macdonald took us up in a helicopter so we could see the broad sweep of Scotland, from the Firth of Clyde in the west to the Firth of Forth in the east. "This is my country," she said.

A.T.Q. Stewart took us to the seaside town of Donaghadee on the Ards Peninsula east of Belfast where he had spent a good deal of time as a boy. He recalled going to sleep at night to the booming sound of foghorns. Kim Howells took us rock climbing on Dinas Rock in the Neath Valley. He told us that he identified first and foremost with the land of Wales, with the feel of the rock in his hands and under his feet, and how climbing had led him to discover the mountains of Snowdonia as well as his own southern Valleys.

All of this seemed pretty straightforward. But when we came to the English presenters it was entirely different. Beatrix Campbell took us to Carlisle where she was brought up and insisted we film in a council estate on the outskirts of the town. Her family of four had moved there when she was four or five from a one-room flat nearer the centre of town. At the time it had been a liberating experience. "But look at it now," she said, pointing to the three-bedroom council house. "Its everything, and nothing."

Julian Critchley took us to a village of Wistanstow in Shropshire where he had been evacuated to live with his grandparents during World War II. He showed us the primary school where he had been sent and where, he said, he was placed in the girl's half of the school to prevent him being beaten up by the other boys because of his London accent. "Very quickly I discovered a Shropshire burr," he said. But later, when he was sent to Shrewsbury's public school he was beaten up again, this time because of his Shropshire accent.

So rather than land or territory being at the core of English identity, on this evidence, and in contradistinction to what we found in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, a sense of class relationships came first.

Englishness seems to me to be different in other ways as well. When identifying nationalities across the world it is commonplace to think in terms of three defining characteristics: territory, language, and a sense of the people as being the essence of the nation. Certainly, this works in a comprehensible way for Scotland and Wales, though with obvious problems occurring in the contested 'narrow ground' of Northern Ireland. For England, however, it is a different matter. In distinct ways English nationality does not fit the commonplace pattern.

Take territory in the first instance. How many primary school, or for that matter secondary school, children in England could accurately draw a map of their country? The English imagine their territory as being either something much smaller, or much, much bigger. Their 'real' England is either the significantly named 'Home Counties' extending to Oxford and Cambridge, or otherwise the whole island of Britain, or, indeed, all those red bits across the globe that were formerly part of the Empire (especially Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and which today constitute the Commonwealth.

The issue of language might be considered more straightforward, but again it is complicated. On the one hand, in its home territory English is highly regionalised with a wide variety of accents, while on the other it has become a world language that ranges, rather like the Empire of old, across the globe.

As for the people, in strict constitutional terms there are none. That is to say, within an ingrained monarchical culture the English class system rules. In England the people are still subjects under the Crown. The 18th Century revolutions that launched people-centred democracies in America and France simply by-passed England. Instead, following the 1832 Reform Act, and in a kind of anti-revolution, democracy was slowly dribbled out over more than a century in England – and by extension in the rest of the UK as well – so that change could ensure things stayed the same. Plainly as the 20th has given way to the 21st Century much of the hierarchy and deference associated with all of this has broken down and a real citizenship has emerged, constitutionally reinforced by the European Union. But it is still refracted through the English class system.

It is worth dwelling on these characteristics because they describe the peculiarities of the dominant people of the British Isles. Inevitably, the identities of the Scots, Irish and Welsh are to some extent defined in opposition to them. And this is especially so with the Welsh who, of course, live closest to the English. Superimposing a sense of Britishness above the whole only makes the resultant mix more complex, especially when there are so many competing senses of what it means to be British. For instance, while it may be said that the Welsh have a clear sense of duality in their Welsh and British identities, and may be perfectly comfortable with them, can the same be said for the English? For them are they but two sides of the same coin, with Britishness simply a matter of being English in the world, as

demonstrated by the British passport?

There are no definitive answers to such questions except to say that to be Welsh entails living alongside a dominant and, in identity terms, rather odd neighbour and is inevitably shaped by the pressure of that experience.

Against this background, the existential question of what it is to be Welsh in our generation has been how far that can be understood in relation to the whole of Wales, rather than being merely connected with specific localities within it. In short, to what extent is it possible for us to feel solidarity in common as Welsh citizens?

The answer given by the 1979 referendum appeared to be not very much. Indeed, at that time the notion of Welsh citizenship, bound up as it is with institutions of a state, was largely incomprehensible to most Welsh people. Such institutions as we had – notably the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency and other similar organisations – were invisible to most people because they lacked any meaningful democratic accountability.

The mystery of what happened in the nearly two decades that followed 1979 is to explain why there was a Yes vote in 1997. Many explanations have been put forward and doubtless all played a role. Most obviously, 18 years of Conservative rule up to 1997 did a lot to persuade a reluctant Welsh Labour Party that there were advantages in having democratic institutions that could defend Wales against the depredations of any future such occurrence. Mrs Thatcher delivered devolution.

Most remarkably, this view was often articulated in terms that suggested that Conservative rule of the Welsh Office by the likes of John Redwood when he was Secretary of State for Wales, was somehow illegitimate. Of course, this was to say that the results of a UK-wide election were only acceptable if they were also replicated in Wales, essentially a nationalist position. It was one adopted by Ron Davies after the 1987 general election when he pointed to a piece of graffiti daubed on a railway bridge in his Caerphilly constituency which declared: "We voted Labour, we got Thatcher!"

Then again, by 1997 a new generation was on the scene, for whom the certainties of 1979, such as the experience of the Second World War and an economy dominated by British nationalised industries, were all in a distant past. As a result, although they still felt both Welsh and British, they felt them in different ways, with a newfound confidence in the Welsh part of that duality. Somehow connected with this, all the tensions and often bitterness that accompanied debates over the Welsh language during the 1970s had melted away by 1997. Suddenly it was 'cool' to be Welsh, and even if you did not speak the language it made perfect sense to send your children to Welsh-medium schools. Bilingual signs even appeared in Tescos.

Underlying all these changes, I think a more fundamental psychological shift took place during the 1980s. And the hinge around which this turned was the miners' strike, which was experienced differently in Wales from elsewhere in Britain. At the start the Welsh miners were opposed to the strike, correctly identifying the poor timing and Arthur Scargill's weak strategic leadership. However, once called the south Wales miners became the spearhead of a British NUM movement to ensure solidarity with the strike across the English coalfields. An estimated four to five thousand south Wales miners (about 25 per cent of the workforce) were permanently mobilised throughout the coalfields of Lancashire, Nottingham, south Derby, Leicestershire, and Stafford. They were also picketing 26 nuclear, coal, and oil power stations and manning six regional centres in England. Commanded like a military operation from the NUM's Area headquarters in Pontypridd, the insurgency cost more than £1 million in the first six weeks alone.

The effort was doomed. Because of Scargill's failure to allow a ballot, the miners were on the back foot from a moral point of view from the start and, of course, Mrs Thatcher's government was well prepared. But the important question for the future was how the south Wales miners responded when it became clear that they could not rely on the richer coalfields of the English Midlands and Yorkshire where many miners continued to work under the banner of a breakaway union. They looked inwards and set about ensuring as far as they could, the survival of their families and communities, and ultimately the NUM itself.

In the process they forged a new style of politics. This was one essentially led by women who were at the heart of the support groups that sprung up in every village and town in the south, and eventually across the whole of Wales. This became for a time a powerful national movement, the Wales Congress in Support of Miner's Communities, involving Labour and Plaid Cymru, the churches, the Wales TUC, Cymdeithas yr Iaith, groups for peace, lesbian and gay rights, and others. As Hywel Francis, who chaired the Congress, put it, looking back 20 years later, "The Congress was born out of a realisation by large sections of Welsh people that the miners were struggling for the future of Wales."[1]

The eventual defeat persuaded many Welsh people that ultimately they could only rely on their own resources and those of their communities. The experience of living through the strike also demonstrated the possibilities and life-enhancing qualities of community solidarity, of connecting class with nation, and of forging a new kind of nation in the process. These were hard lessons, dearly paid for, but they opened the way for the making a different kind of Wales. Its shape is being forged now, in the early decades of the 21st Century.

Because, of course, what we are building in our new institutions in Cardiff Bay - the National Assembly and Welsh Government - is a ribcage for our identity, as Prys Morgan has so memorably put it.[2] Institutions of government are the essential component of citizenship, and the required mechanism to enable a nation to participate in the world in a normal way.

Notes

1 Hywel Francis, *History on Our Side: Wales and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike*, Iconau, 2004.

2 Prys Morgan, 'The Creation of the National Museum and National Library', in John Osmond (Ed.), *Myths, Memories and Futures – The National Library and National Museum in the Story of Wales*, IWA 2007.

Jane Aaron,
The Old Bridge, Pontypridd, 2012

6 Easing up on our identity crisis

Jane Aaron

There were quite a few of us packed into the upstairs room of the Cŵps in Aberystwyth on 18 September 1997, listening with increasing anxiety to the referendum results. As each county's figures were read out and the 'Nos' mounted up, some left to lick their wounds alone, while others started to talk bitterly about their plans to quit this abject country. When the Carmarthen result came through at the last minute, a tsunami wave of relief and communal joy quite flooded the room. People cheered, wept, hugged and kissed one another, as if all of us in one instant had been 'saved' in a religious revival, or had suddenly fallen in love. On the television they were responding similarly in Cardiff and throughout Wales, and a message from Scotland sounded the same note: "We waited for you through the long night: at last, you joined us."

It was about four o'clock in the morning by the time the Cŵps crew tumbled down the narrow stairs and started driving through the quiet streets, calling out to curtained windows, "Aberystwyth, awake! You are free!" We drove past the houses of long-dead poets, friends and relatives, and slowed down to tell their ghosts the good news. Up and down the prom we drove, shouting at the sea to tell Ireland at last Wales too was free.

Fifteen years later and it's clear that it was not exactly freedom that was won that night. But it was a new beginning. If not 'freedom' per se then at least it brought a freedom from the identity conflicts that have bedevilled the Welsh since at least 1536 when Wales was formally "incorporated, united and annexed to and with this realm of England." For the first time Wales was a nation with a border marking out the fact that those living to the west of it had a straightforward civic identity separate from that of England.

No longer would we have to struggle to differentiate ourselves from England by an ethnicity unrecognised by the 40 per cent of the Welsh population who first and foremost see themselves as British rather than Welsh. No longer would we have to agonise quite as much about an identity based on a language that three-quarters of our population do not share, or a history and culture not taught to most of our schoolchildren and university students. Since September 1997 it has become a great deal easier to be Welsh.

Since May 1999, and the first election of members to the National Assembly, it has also become easier to be a Welsh woman. In 1996 only one of Wales's 38 Westminster MPs was a woman - Ann Clwyd, the Labour MP for Cynon Valley - though the 1997 general election saw that number increase to four. But with the National Assembly election, women's long-standing substantial involvement in grass-roots political protest in Wales was at last translated into substantial representation in parliamentary politics. Women won 24 of the 60 National Assembly seats, and so far women have featured prominently in the Welsh Government's cabinets. Moreover, two of Wales's four party leaders now are women.

Of course, these gains are vulnerable, dependent as they are on parties adopting such easily reversible procedures as 'twinning' and 'zipping' when it comes to electing candidates. Nor has there been a significant effect outside the Assembly on such key issues as unequal pay for men and women in Wales, childcare, and the greater precariousness of women's position in the job market during cutback periods. But at least Welsh women now know they have a more or less equal voice in the shaping of the Wales of the future. No longer have they grounds for feeling that contemporary Welsh culture, generally, is more determinedly patriarchal than that of its British and European neighbours. In 1999 that change also felt like a new freedom, a freedom from internal conflict between one's gender and national loyalties.

In Pontypridd we celebrated that May 1999 election in Clwb y Bont with the customary Friday night sing-along. Long tables were lined up in a long room, and seated around them were members of the Pontypridd male voice choir with a couple of guitarists, having a drink after their weekly practice, and joined by the rest of the Friday night regulars and a few visitors. The repertoire is unchanging: Welsh hymns and folk-songs, Irish ballads, Afro-American spirituals and blues, and popular songs, mainly from the 1960s. Some of the regulars offer solo numbers, sung on seamlessly long into the night until the whole room is mellow with old melodies. A visitor stands up to say he last sang these Welsh hymns at his wedding forty years ago and it's a great joy to sing them again in such company. "It's magic, isn't it, magic, magic," whispers one old regular, who lives in a farmhouse on a neighbouring hillside dating from the end of the first millennium. That was nearly a millennium before the rest of us – or our ancestors – got here, arriving from the rural counties of Wales and England, and further afield from Italy or Ireland, to join the industrial revolution in south Wales. It's as if Clwb y Bont every Friday night is a time-capsule swinging low through the changing history of Wales and the world.

The Cŵps crowd in 1997 and the Clwb y Bont regulars differ in many ways – in the age of the majority in each group, their language

and class. Yet both gatherings effectively merged the various individuals present into one Welsh 'we'. At times, though, during those Friday sing-alongs in Pontypridd, which have now in recollection merged one into another, discordant notes broke the flow. Clwb y Bont had a great Millennium's Eve party, but one participant did not feel very celebratory. She told us that she'd failed to get a place to train as an English teacher, though she was doing well at university, with good predictions for her degree result. The reason given for her failure was that her spoken English was not sufficiently correct: "I spoke like I usually do," she said. "Nobody told me I had to lose my Valleys accent before I could get a job teaching English in the Valleys."

Social mobility is more difficult to achieve now than it was fifty years ago, under the 11+ system, when grammar school children were prepared for the professions with a regime that standardised both their spoken and written English. Of course, the greater egalitarianism of the comprehensive school system is to be welcomed, but little has been done to change the class prejudices of the professional job market. The irony is that if that Pontypridd student had been sent to a Welsh-language school and had tried for a post teaching Welsh in the Valleys, any dialect features in her Welsh would merely have denoted her locality, not her class, and would probably have been considered an asset, adding authenticity to her speech. It's a form of persistent neo-colonialism, to discredit Welsh dialects in English. It's as if the only English valued is that of the Home Counties, and every other accent, though it may sound appropriately warm and friendly in a television comedy or a call centre, is sub-standard for the professions. Schools throughout Wales should teach their pupils to understand and appreciate Wenglish dialects – how they evolved, and in what ways they are particularly expressive – as well as teaching them the standard form of English. English teachers should be well acquainted with local language use.

Nothing has improved either in terms of teaching schoolchildren Welsh history and culture. At a recent south Wales study day for sixth formers, none of the half a dozen or so schools which had sent students to the English literature workshops were teaching any Welsh authors at English 'A' level. One teacher explained that she felt she would be disadvantaging her students if she chose to offer them a Welsh writer for study, as she had no expertise in that area herself. She was well aware that the examining board would expect an understanding of the context in which an author's work was written which she felt she could not adequately provide, or not at least in comparison with the wealth of critical and contextual material she had at her disposal in the case of the more familiar non-Welsh authors on the syllabus.

The fact that one of the optional Welsh authors on the syllabus came from the same south Wales valleys town as that in which she taught, and in which she, and her pupils of course, had been reared, was not enough to make her feel confident of taking that step into the 'unknown' world of Welsh writing in English. The Welsh Government could be much more pro-active on this issue, and make the teaching of at least one Anglophone Welsh text compulsory at English 'A' level, a step which the Scottish Parliament took with regard to Scottish literature and the sixth form English syllabus some time ago, in the early months of its existence.

Pressure should also be brought to bear on the universities of Wales to encourage research in the subject and the publication of more contextual and critical materials. Students planning to become teachers of English in Wales should acquire the necessary expertise in Welsh writing in English as part of their literature degrees. The present higher education cuts, along with HEFCW's decision to stop subsidising the University of Wales Press's publication of Welsh studies volumes, mean that currently the universities are going backwards rather than forwards in this respect. Discussion programmes on the recent 'Story of Wales' TV series indicated that similar problems beset the teaching of Welsh history. It does not feature on the school curriculum sufficiently to produce new generations equipped to understand their present in the light of their past.

The Welsh school curriculum needs radical revision, a cause for which some of us went to prison back in 1993 and 1994. Ten school-children, ten parents, ten school councillors and ten university lecturers took part in a Cymdeithas yr Iaith campaign against the National Curriculum promoted by the Thatcher government, arguing instead the case for a system of community education in Wales in which "the content and nature of education would be based on the experience of the community".[1] We broke into education offices throughout Wales, left calling cards, and were duly charged, fined and sent to prison if we refused to pay the fine. That brief prison interlude in August 1994 also stands out in my recollection as an experience in which the personal and political were significantly fused, though it necessarily took place in England, there being no women prisons in Wales.

Sitting in the back of a police car on the way to Pucklechurch Remand Centre near Bristol, handcuffed to another female felon convicted by the Aberystwyth magistrates, the whole thing seemed a bizarre game. Once in the prison, the game became yet stranger. After the compulsory bath, we had to wear a long t-shirt, with a teddy-bear playing a trumpet emblazoned on its front encircled by the words 'Let's Make Music'. We were also escorted to the cells in transparent plastic sandals, such as children wear on beaches. When we protested the guard said, quite kindly, "Don't worry, you'll be able to put your own clothes on as soon as you get to your cells. All the prisoners have had to wear these clothes on their first entrance, they'll expect to see you dressed like this."

Her words made it clear that the infantilising clothes, like the unnecessary handcuffs, were intended as ritualized badges of shame, like the Victorian schools' dunce's cap or Welsh Not, or the 17th Century

scold's bridle, to teach you your place in the new order. But because in this game these badges were applied to all the prisoners alike, as a group, the experience was not so much one of personal humiliation as of instant bonding with the other prisoners against the system and its representatives, the police and the prison guards. It created a strong 'us' and 'them' group formation, which freed the individual prisoner all at once from self-consciousness and the fear of the 'other'. After that it was inevitable that all the interest and energy of the experience seemed embodied by 'our' side, the prisoners' side, which did a good job of maintaining our spirits under difficult circumstances. For long hours after nightfall the prisoners called out to one another across the exercise yard from the narrow slits of their barred cell windows, entertaining the captive audience with quips and jests and witty repartee. All the while, the prison guards stood around rigidly, their blank faces immobile except for their perpetually shifting watching eyes. They seemed robotic, barely human, and more imprisoned than the prisoners. Of course, this impression was an effect of the fierce 'us' and 'them' divisions created by the prison's systems. The officers were so evidently not 'one of us' it made it difficult to relate to them as anything other than alien.

Each of the personal episodes described above – the two pub nights and one in prison – featured the undoing of 'I' in a strong experience of 'we'. In all three cases the group bonding included a sense of liberation. Yet thinking and feeling in terms of 'we', particularly in a national context, is often described as dangerous and potentially regressive. It is said to create primitive and simplistic 'us' and 'them' divisions, tribal loyalties which cut off all fellow-feeling for 'them', the 'others', and can be destructive, even deadly.

Because of the strength of the identification with the prisoners, those guards in Pucklechurch did, indeed, seem inhuman, though they were only doing their job. But it was the system in which we were all imprisoned which created the strength of that antagonism, not so much the group identifications themselves. The system absurdly exaggerated differences, making one group bad children and the other the embodiment of law and order, preventing any kind of humane communication between them. The solution resides not in resisting identifications, which leads to aridity and paranoia, but in encouraging multiple identifications, across established groups and communities, both within the nation and in its relation to its others.

Looking forward to the next twenty-five years, the prospects are certainly more hopeful and open than hitherto. Before 1997, because of its minority position and without any institutional means of establishing its difference, Wales had to maintain defensive group boundaries in order to survive. To form identifications with the 'other' in national terms was then to disappear as a separate people, to become part not of a 'we' but of the 'other', like an unequal wife who takes on a husband's identity and gives up her own at marriage.

The formation of a Welsh civic identity under the governance of the National Assembly frees the energies previously spent on maintaining a self-willed, self-policed Welsh identity. Maintaining and increasing that civic autonomy by further moves towards independence makes good sense. Given what is happening in Scotland, it is possible to imagine Wales achieving full independence within the next 25 years by democratic means. Before then, of course, we need to strengthen the economy and energize the various communities of Wales by removing the barriers currently limiting our horizons. We need to make it easier to form multiple identifications, and multiple group formations of 'we' across language, class, gender and ethnic barriers. The preliminary steps that need to be taken to achieve this are, in no particular order:

- The Welsh-language community needs its future secured in the short term by a housing policy in the core areas which would not price out the local population. In the long term we need an education policy to gradually build up the numbers of Welsh-medium schools, in accordance with local demand, with the aim of making Wales fully bilingual. Once that is achieved, it would be only reasonable to require that all incomers who wish to settle in Wales and gain Welsh citizenship should also commit themselves to learning Welsh.

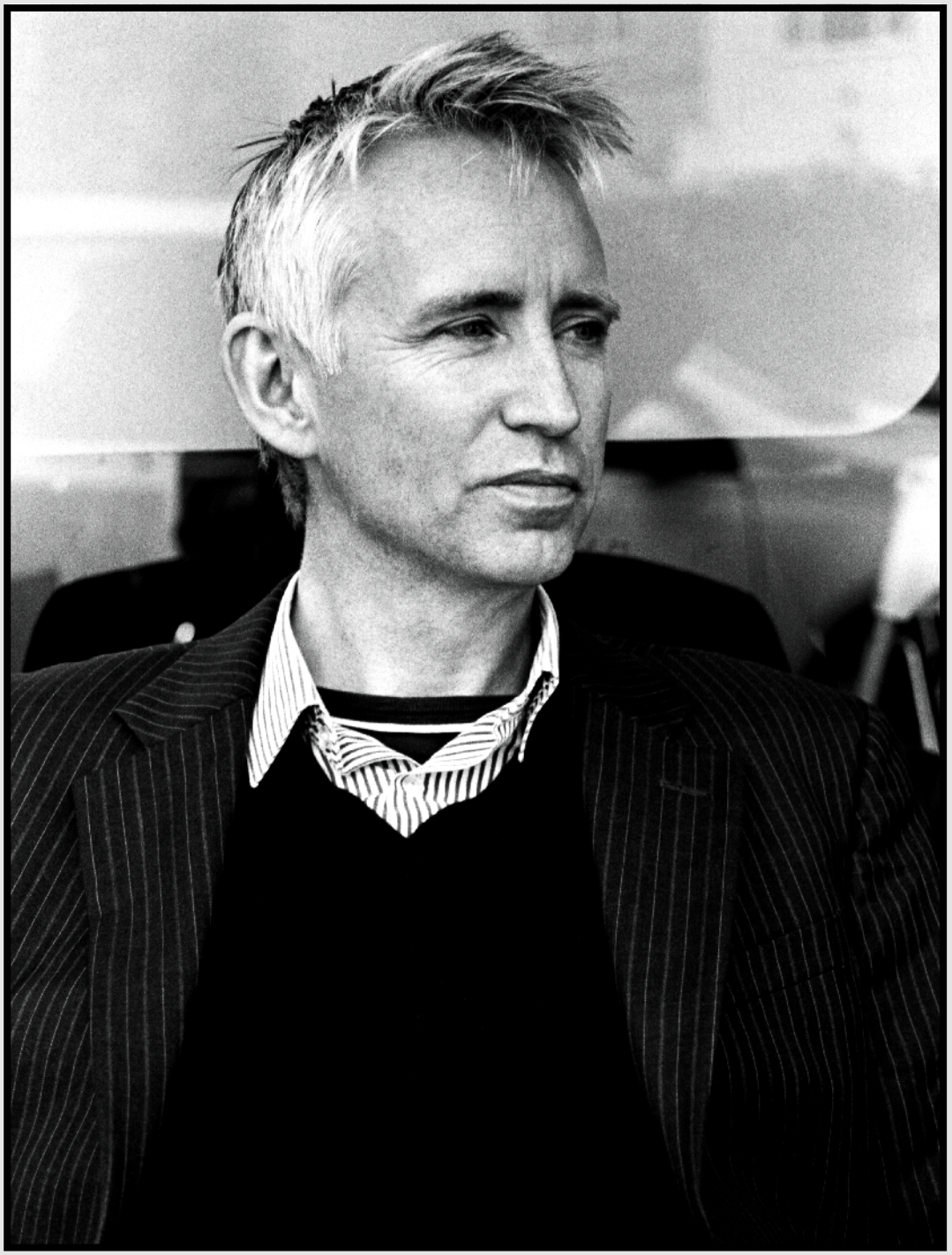
- Given the history of modern Wales, it is startling that the destructive artifice of class difference is still tolerated in this country. A free Wales should teach Welsh history and culture in its schools, fund co-operatives, defend Welsh industries through re-nationalization if necessary, strengthen the NHS, and work by democratic means towards an egalitarian class-free society with as little a gulf between the richest and the poorest as possible.

- The establishment of better, cheaper systems of childcare and the eradication of unequal pay for men and women should be further priorities, along with promoting the recognition that all of Wales's inhabitants, whatever their ethnic origin or their sexual orientation, are equally 'one of us'.

Is all that achievable in 25 years? Well, we've come a long way, against the odds, in the last quarter century. Why not surprise ourselves and progress an even longer way in the next?

Notes

1 Siân Howys, *Education for a Free Community or a Free Market?*, C.Y.I.G. Education Campaign Group, 1992.



Grahame Davies,
Pontcanna, Cardiff, 2012

7 Everything must change

Grahame Davies

It was 2001, and I was on the train to London on my way to do a reading at the Royal Festival Hall. As often happens on journeys, the enforced inactivity created an opportunity for some long-delayed creative impulse to finally find its expression. I soon found myself writing a poem in Welsh which had long been incubating in my mind.

The idea for the poem had come to me some years previously when I was looking after the house of a friend in north Wales. He was a great traveller, and had shelves full of *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guides* to everywhere on earth. While browsing through these, I found myself suddenly struck by the fact that my reading had a distinct pattern - a tendency which said something significant about my cultural expectations. I realised that, no matter which country I was studying, I was drawn irresistibly to try to discover which were its minority groups. In France, I looked for information about Bretons; in North America, it was Native Americans; in New Zealand, Maoris; and so on, country after country. I knew this would one day make a poem.

It took some time in coming, but when it did, it came easily. By the time I got to Reading, it was done: an ironic, self-mocking reflection on this compulsive need to ignore the majority culture and to identify instantly and instinctively with the underdog. It ended:

> *... as I wander the continents of the guidebooks,*
> *whatever chapter may be my destination,*
> *the question's always the same when I arrive:*
> *'Nice city. Now where's the ghetto?'*

That evening in the green room at the Festival Hall, while waiting to do my reading, I translated it into English, and I read it that night. I called it *Rough Guide*. It proved popular. It was published in *Poetry London*, and then in many anthologies and collections, and was even quoted in *The Times*. It soon became a habit for me to read it at all my events, as I knew it would be well received. I soon found, too, that no matter where in the world I read this poem, I would almost invariably be approached by someone afterwards who would tell me that it had described their own experience.

Usually these people were members of ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities. However, members of even substantial nations, like the Poles, said that this was exactly how they felt too. In Bulgaria, interviewed on live television (via an interpreter) I was asked: "Have you found the ghetto in Bulgaria, yet?" Most surprising was a young American woman who approached me after a reading in London to say the poem had expressed just how she felt. As she was telling me of her experience, I was trying to imagine why she should feel this way. She was blonde, attractive, had a higher degree, a good job, and seemed to be a well-spoken native English speaker. I ventured to ask her why she felt the need to identify with minorities. "Because I'm from Kentucky," she answered simply. She explained that, in the hierarchy of American belonging, her roots in that state meant that, no matter what her accomplishments were, she would always be, in other people's eyes, and, more importantly, in her own, a hillbilly.

The idea of being a member of an embattled minority, an outsider shut out from the privileges of life, is a common one, and can provide a vital core for a person's identity - us against the world. Certainly, I shared that view myself. Ever since I had become acutely conscious, at sixteen, of the endangered, marginalised state of my own Welsh-language culture, that oppositional, defensive, minority worldview seemed the only appropriate response. Such a view has its ironies, as the poem highlighted, but it seemed an inevitable, unquestioning condition nonetheless.

That is, until someone - Niall Griffiths, at the Hay Festival - questioned it. We had just performed a reading, at which I had, of course, read *Rough Guide*, and he told me matter-of-factly that he didn't like the poem. I was mystified. He didn't like my most popular poem? Everyone else seemed to. What was wrong with it? He told me I was endorsing a culture of victimhood. I'm not, I answered, I'm *satirising* a culture of victimhood. No, he said, you're being ironic about the effects of having a mindset of victimhood, but you're not questioning whether such a mindset is justified. You're accepting that such a worldview is valid. No, I said, with certainty, no, that's not right. No, not right at all.

But he was right. Some months later, the truth of what he said struck me with sobering clarity. Of course, he was absolutely right. I was going to have to rethink some long-cherished beliefs.

I had formed my views on Wales in the early 1980s. They had provided me with a way of making sense of an equivocal inheritance. Growing up in Coedpoeth, a former coal-mining village in the hills west of Wrexham, I had ambiguity as a birthright. The village was on

a topographical borderline. It was built on the first substantial hill the traveller meets after leaving behind the expanse of the Cheshire plain, and the slightly higher apron of land on which the town of Wrexham stands. Immediately to the west of Coedpoeth stood the brown heather-covered wall of the Berwyn hills, behind which, we knew, was a Welsher Wales than ours, the place from which our ancestors had migrated to this exposed industrial outpost on Wales's eastern front. Concealed behind that barrier to the west lay our roots, our history, the past. To the east, though, an unbounded panorama stretched across Shropshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, and continued unbroken, as far as the hills of the Derbyshire Peak. That way lay endless opportunity, the future. Our vicinity was Wales, our vision was England.

The village was on a political borderline, too. It stood literally on Offa's Dyke, which formed the eastern border to the community. One part of the village, where the main A525 road crossed the ancient earthwork, was called *Adwy'r Clawdd*, literally, 'the gap in the dyke'. Crucially, it was also a linguistic borderline, with around a quarter of the population Welsh-speaking, but with the vital process of language transmission between the generations beginning to fail. Welsh was becoming the language of the older generation. My own parents, Welsh speakers themselves, had spent formative years in England where their parents had temporarily migrated for economic reasons. English became their common language, and the main language of our home. I only got my Welsh by the skin of my teeth. My grandmothers, good friends who lived within a couple of doors of one another, looked after me as a pre-school child. From them, I picked up Welsh, later strengthening my grasp on the language when I moved to the village's new Welsh-medium primary school Ysgol Bryn Tabor, at the age of about eight or nine, and then on to the secondary school in Wrexham, Ysgol Morgan Llwyd.

During the late 1970s, the time of the Winter of Discontent, and the 1979 devolution referendum, I had chafed at Morgan Llwyd's nationalist ethos. I had wanted to join the army – my father had enjoyed his national service in the Royal Engineers, my grandfather had served through the First World War, and I had grown up with a great inherited familial respect for the ideals of the armed services. But the school had told me they would give me no help in joining the forces of the English Crown. I decided not to stay on for the sixth-form there, opting instead to go to the local English-medium sixth form college. There, as the only boy from a Welsh-speaking school, I suddenly found myself in an instant linguistic minority. This unexpected status, combined with the need for definition and belonging common to any disaffected teenager, combined also with the febrile politics of the period. Together they became the basis of a new-found identity which I fed by devouring the periodicals and seminal texts of the Welsh-language movement. It was also the period when, through a serendipitous apprenticeship to the distinguished Welsh-language poet, Bryan Martin Davies, who was one of the college lecturers, I started to become a poet myself.

The views I formed in those intense years carried through into adulthood. However, I was never active politically, as my choice of journalism as a career meant that impartiality had to take precedence over commitment. Therefore, although a great deal of my literary work has been about social matters, the factual books and articles, where the voice must be that of the writer himself, have been characterised mainly by academic commentary rather than committed advocacy. In the creative work, however, where the voice need not be identified with that of the writer, I was able to use the multiple personae available to the poet and the novelist to explore more fully the shifting energies of commitment, passion and belief in the context of a changing society and nation. Those personae can express states of feeling as contrasting as hope or despair, faith or nihilism, tenderness or bitterness, approval or irony, without obliging the author to live out any of those perhaps momentary states in the real world.

For example, after the publication of *Adennill Tir*, some of whose poems had given expression to intense religious doubt and scepticism, I can recall having a conversation at benign cross-purposes with a very distinguished author and minister of religion who had assumed on the evidence of the poems that I must be a despairing atheist in need of consolation. I was unable to convince this well-meaning would-be comforter that, despite the faithless poems, I am actually a lifelong practising Anglican. Although I may have moments when belief seems absurd and life a bitter joke, and although those intense moments may produce poetry, the poems are not actually the person; the literature is not necessarily the life. In my case, it happened to be tensions, questions and ironies that produced creative work, but that does not mean that my life is always characterised by those conditions. Conformity, contentment and convention are not known for their potency as drivers of literary creativity.

Adennill Tir was my first book. It came out when I was 32, and after I had spent the previous 11 years living in Merthyr Tydfil, where I had come in 1986 in the immediate aftermath of the miners' strike to work on the local newspaper, and where I had stayed ever since, albeit commuting to work in Cardiff after the first few years. As the remaining mines gradually closed, these were years of unemployment and economic depression in the Valleys, and of a painful transition between an industrial and post-industrial economy. For me, this encounter with unexpected and troubling poverty and deprivation was a culture-shock. Although I had come from a former mining community myself, I had enjoyed a comfortable middle-class upbringing – my father was a quantity surveyor and my mother a journalist – and Coedpoeth itself had not seemed to display the kind of hardship I now found in the Valleys.

This unexpected meeting with a harsh reality found its outlet in poems which dealt with the history of the Valleys and their current

social and economic conditions by means of liberal use of the language of social justice, and also – although few commentators noticed this – the language of religion. Many of the poems were written in the assumed persona of a native of the Valleys. The book's title, which roughly translates as 'Reclaiming Land', was taken from the Welsh Development Agency's bilingual hoardings which, with the greening of former mining areas, were a feature of the Valleys at this time. "We are reclaiming this land for new use," they proclaimed. I used the title to refer to the gradual resurgence of the Welsh language and of the campaign for Welsh political devolution, which were a feature of the politics of the period leading up to the referendum of 1997, which took place only a couple of months after the book was published.

At a stroke, the result of that referendum turned the social and political poems of preceding decades, my own recent contribution included, into museum pieces. A commentator at the time described the moment well, saying that Welsh political activity now had to move from protest to process. With the emergence of a national democratic forum, Wales, and its authors, had to adapt to a new reality.

By the time of that referendum, I had already been adapting to a new reality of my own. In July of 1997, I had moved permanently to Cardiff. We bought a house in Pontcanna, and instantly found ourselves part of a privileged, thriving Welsh-speaking urban middle class at a time of unprecedented opportunity and optimism. This was a culture shock of a different kind. In Merthyr I had felt a kind of vicarious solidarity with the social conditions which characterised the community. Now, however, there was no escaping the fact that I was living in a very comfortable enclave within a country which I knew had many areas of real poverty, and in a wider world where even greater poverty was rife. These feelings of guilt and tension produced a new body of serio-comic poetry which highlighted the ironies of this fortunate but fragile lifestyle. The volume concerned, *Cadwyni Rhyddid* ('Chains of Freedom'), which contained poems such as 'Blues Pontcanna', appeared in 2001.

Looking back now, what strikes me is that material which felt daringly iconoclastic at the time of writing was in reality unquestioning of the fundamental assumptions of an influential stream of Welsh-language literary output of the previous few decades on social and political subjects. The assumptions were that Welsh speakers should instinctively identify with disenfranchisement and poverty, that they should be anti-establishment, and that it is deeply suspect for them to enrich themselves and succeed.

Well, *Cadwyni Rhyddid* certainly succeeded, selling out two editions and winning that year's Book of the Year award. It was very much a book of its period, recording the collision between the pre-devolution conditions of assumed disadvantage, and the post-devolution conditions of new opportunity. However, with the wisdom of hindsight, it is clear that, whatever the external novelty of its subject matter, it was actually far from daring in its assumptions, which were firmly rooted in the pre-devolution anti-establishment tradition.

It was this assumption that Niall Griffiths rightly awakened me to. His comment came at a time when other circumstances and life experiences were teaching me the same lessons. No sooner had I finished reading the reviews of *Cadwyni Rhyddid*, than I was asking fundamental questions of the mindset in which that book was rooted. This process of revision was prompted by a number of circumstances, not least the well-trodden path of finding the indignant idealism of youth being replaced, in mid life, with compromising acceptance. The journey was further accelerated by some specific experiences, and some personal choices, which distanced me from the community of opinion within which I had previously operated.

In 2004, this journey found its literary expression in *Rhaid i Bopeth Newid*, ('Everything Must Change'), my first novel, which portrayed a lifelong language activist being confronted with a series of challenges to her oppositional, marginalised worldview. This was followed in 2005 by a volume of Welsh-language poetry, *Achos* ('Cause'), in which the same process was examined in the same kind of serio-comic verse as had been used in *Cadwyni Rhyddid*. Finally, in 2007, the English version of the novel, much revised, expanded and improved, was published as *Everything Must Change*.

Everything had changed for me. And everything has changed in Wales. The pre-devolution conditions that formed centuries of political and artistic commentary on public affairs, and which were the background to the first thirty-five years of my own life, are now a slowly receding memory, along with the attitudes, the symbols and the mindset that had done service under those previous circumstances. The conditions for the second half of my three score years and ten will be radically different. Of course, as with all transitions, there will be overlap. Communal beliefs can outlive the experiences which caused them, as was seen in my own immediate post-devolution work. Attitudes can have an afterlife. But there is no point living on past energies. For a writer interested in the developing identity of this nation, there is now a chance to rediscover a changed and changing country as it redefines its place within what T.S. Eliot called the "constellation of cultures" in these islands. The territory has changed, and so must the map. Previous guidebooks are passé Routes are redrawn, new destinations defined. That old rough guide will have to go. Nice ghetto. Now where's the city?

Rhian Edwards,
Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, 2011

8 Microscopic Wales

Rhian Edwards

My vision of Wales is microscopic and microcosmic, abbreviated to a small market town called Bridgend, Pen-y-Bont ar Ogwr. It no longer has a discernible market, certainly not the livestock market that defined its original affluence or the ye olde market where the cow was slaughtered and butchered on the steps of Bridgend town hall, wrapped in newspaper and ready to go. In the past 25 years, the all-defining cattle market has upped sticks and relocated to the swankier des res of Cowbridge. The monolith of Tescos has since taken root, which in itself has been supersized and surpassed by the megalith Tescos down the road.

But Bridgend is where I was born and for the most part bred, reared under the auspices that, "You have everything here, so why would you want to go anywhere else?" This is perhaps not the mantra you would expect from a Welshman who joined the merchant navy at 16 and travelled the world eight times over, before jumping ship at Santra Pe and returning to Bridgend to commence his apprenticeship as an estate agent. Nonetheless, that is what we did or at least didn't do. We never went anywhere apart from here. This is the only Wales I have ever known, hence the myopic vision of Wales that is about to ensue.

For geographical clarification, Bridged is also a county in its own right, shaped like a kidney and tucked between the more desirable destinations of Swansea and Cardiff with the blue vein of the M4 running through it. You could drive through Bridgend without knowing and for the most part few would blame you.

Bridgend also has more roundabouts than sense. I should know, I keep failing my driving test on them - five times and still counting. Each roundabout has been baptised with my tears, a near-death experience and the cross of an examiner's biro. It is my belief a malevolent town planner dropped a fistful of Walkers crisps onto a local plan over lunch and took divine inspiration from it. Driving around this town is like riding on the Waltzer at Coney Island. Not the one in New York, the fairground in Porthcawl.

Yet five years ago, my hometown was placed firmly on the map, or at least a black cross was inked against it on the Atlas, when an inexplicable spate of suicides took place within the borough. Between January 2007 and February 2009, 25 locals, mainly teenagers killed themselves and all but one died from hanging. Still nobody has the faintest clue why.

Admittedly Bridgend has never enjoyed the finest reputation. At one point, it had three psychiatric hospitals, Parc, Glanrhyd and Pen Y Fai, all satelliting the main town centre. Consequently the phrase being 'sent to Bridgend' became synonymous with being institutionalised. And confessing to being 'from Bridgend' equated to being a complete and utter nut job.

Despite this sinister backdrop which makes my hometown sound more like a *League of Gentlemen* sketch and its tabloid rechristening as 'Britain's Bleakest Town', 'suicide town', and 'death town', this is not how I perceive the town where I grew up and currently live. ("But for how long?" one asks, casually lassoing a noose).

You would think this would be literary fodder to a poet, a native, who resisted the Sylvia Plath epidemic that was suddenly plaguing her home. I can't deny a poem did come out of it, which was later published in the Spectator. My father was livid when he read it. His response was "Thank God nobody in Bridgend reads the Spectator or poetry for that matter..." I wish I could have defended at least one of these statements; sadly I could only shrug and nod in acquiescence. Nevertheless, he continued to mail me newspaper cuttings with my hometown being re-branded with another morbid headline.

The truth is my father loves this town and will die by the sword of it. He spent his summers here as a child, made his fortune here. He has his golf at Southerndown, his family at Ogmore Farm, his favourite restaurant on the Old Stone Bridge and his favourite butchers, *Tudor Morris*, in spitting distance of the office he has run for nearly 45 years. He will defend it to the ends of the earth, which he frequently does in the Glamorgan Gazette, usually accompanied with the strapline 'local estate agent horrified'.

Like most Bridgenders, I was born in the Princess of Wales Hospital. That was nearly 35 years ago. My early years were spent living in Heol y Bardd, which literally translates as the 'road of the poet'. Our back gate led directly onto Newbridge Fields, a sweeping sprawl of rugby pitches, cricket grounds, Eisteddfod standing stones, swings, slides, see-saws, the roundabout that nearly killed my brother, the brook that introduced me to the word, the river Ogwr, the wooden bridge that rumbled when we cycled over it and the old sewage pipe that we tightroped across to get to the woods on the other side.

My friends Eve, Vicky, Lizzie Ellis and I fancied ourselves

as characters from *The Goonies*, constantly on our BMXs, pedalling through the bull and sheep fields, over the Dipping Bridge, through the lanes and thatched cottages of Merthyr Mawr, a village more akin to something out of *Miss Marple*. From there, we cycled over the swing bridge, through the horse fields, over the Stepping Stones to Ogmore Castle where we played Mob and climbed the castle's ruins.

Across the road was Ogmore Farm, where the sheep dogs barked bloody murder and where Uncle Malgwyn showed us the newborn lambs. Aunty Anne would give us a glass of squash and a slab of cake, but first we had to pass the fox heads nailed to the wall, either side of the kitchen door. Both their mouths were sculpted into a growl, their small pink tongues protruding while their severed bushy tails hung under their throats. They guarded the pantry like hellhounds.

Other days, our bikes took us to the derelict Prisoner of War camp at Island Farm. Even my father remembers when in 1945, 67 prisoners escaped through a tunnel which made it one of the biggest escapes ever documented. Allegedly they were all recaptured. Apparently, one of the escapees stopped to assist a woman whose car had broken down by the side of the road. There was always something so wonderfully Welsh about that *Great Escape*: the ridiculous number of prisoners that managed to tunnel out and the chivalrous German who came to a damsel in distress.

My brother Rhys being older and famed for leaping off the highest diving board at Swansea leisure centre before he could even swim, lived Bridgend far more dangerously. He and his friends from Wildmill used to slide down the River Ogwr in the inner tube of a lorry tyre, dressed only in their pants and a pair of black pumps from *Woolworths*. The current would take them 3 miles down the river to the estuary at Ogmore, washing them up, soaked to the bone with an epic walk home. And more often than not, they would wander back to town and dare each other to do it all over again.

They also explored the old underground munitions arsenal in Brackla. During the Second World War, the factory hired over 40,000 workers, making it the largest factory ever in the UK. This should have made Bridgend a prime target for the Luftwaffe, however it was never blitzed, probably due to the proximity of the POW camp, as well as the area's air pocket, which made it extremely dangerous for incoming planes to bomb. In the past 25 years, the access-ways have been blocked and Brackla has since developed into the largest private housing estate in Europe. My father became the prime estate agent in the area and I proceeded to pencil the poem *Dracula lives in Brackla* in my *Rainbow Brite* exercise book.

Given the age gap of five years, it was rare that my brother and I ever occupied the same space in time, unless of course he was bored and wished to torment me. My sheer adoration meant that I was easy prey and frequently found myself locked in wardrobes and Ottoman chests, doors slammed on my fingers and grass snakes wriggling in my bed.

It was only on Friday nights that we were bundled off together and went roller-skating at the YMCA. Rhys had roller boots and a PhD in breakdancing. He skated like a swan on wheels, sailing across the wooden floor to the poptastic sounds of Wham, Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder and Phil Collins. The disco searchlights never failed to find him. It was *Saturday Night Fever* meets *Starlight Express*.

I, on the other hand, tottered lamely in his wake, plastic skates strapped to my daps, free wheeling like an AWOL shopping trolley, floundering for the crutch of the opposite wall. Occasionally I would try and halt on the rubber stoppers at the toe of the skate... futile! This inevitably loosened the buckles and had me dragging the offensive item across the dance floor like a clubbed foot.

One evening, I remember sitting at the tuck shop of the YMCA, sucking on a turquoise Tip Top that you had to stab your straw to get into. That night I witnessed my first crinkled chip. Words cannot describe the awe I felt, as I pinched that chip between my fingers and marvelled at its ridges.

Naturally my childhood wasn't all a Spielberg adventure, a candy-coated compound of *Cider with Rosie* meets *The Famous Five*, with lashings of rose-tinted nostalgia, callow mischief and capturing smugglers in Pen y Fai. In fact it was around this time that it all began to falter. Twenty-five years ago my parents separated and I came to witness another side of Bridgend, the less affluent, the less idealised version, the hidden track. Suddenly our back garden that once led to fields was replaced with an endless stretch of brown, pebble-dashed council houses.

My mother, brother and I went to live with my grand parents in Cefn Glas, which sits on the crest of a hill, lurching over Bridgend town centre. My grandparents were the matron and headmaster of a reformatory, a borstal, called Ysgol Castell Newydd. We moved into the main house on the school grounds, while my grandparents moved into a flat that led off one of the dormitories. It was always something of an obstacle course getting to their apartment, weaving through the stacks of bunk beds, past the wallpaper that was a psychedelic army of the same striker kicking a football.

My brother and I were still allowed to roam freely. I played tennis against the wall of the generator room or chatted to the dinner ladies in their fag-filled staff room. They even let me play in the pantry amongst the bucket-sized tins of Green Giant Sweet Corn. There I composed conversations with an upside down mop, rather unoriginally called Mrs Mop who had the voice of Margaret Thatcher.

I also made friends with a girl from the Estate called Erica who let puppies lick *Monster Munch* off her tongue. We usually walked to the sweet shop and bought rainbow sherbert, taking a detour

The older I got, the less Bridgend and I had in common. It could have been my age. I seemed far less mature than my Bridgend counterparts in terms of sexual rites of passage, drinking, makeup and clothes.

through the graveyard of Newcastle Church where she told me ghost stories, the plot of *Nightmare on Elm Street* and the legendary tale of the babysitter. I once went to her house for tea, which stunk of chip fat and fried eggs. I remember thinking this is what a council house smells like. This is what being poor smells like.

After two years of living at Ysgol Castell Newydd, we moved to Derbyshire in the Midlands and I lost my Welsh accent by punishment of playground lore. We started taking the bus for the first time and with that I knew that we were poor as well.

Every school holiday I returned to Bridgend to see my father and my best friend Eve faithfully moved into the house. We resumed our previous adventures, cycling to Ogmore Castle and the Farm or trampolining at *the Rec* (The Recreation Centre). We spent the summer days down at Southerndown beach or up at the golf club, filling in the divots on the course or hunting for lost balls. Otherwise we were in the house, peeling potatoes for the deep fat fryer or raking up leaves for bribes. We had clearly reached the chore-worthy age.

During the Christmas holidays we religiously went to the pictures at the Embassy. For years I had no idea what a cinema was, it was always the pictures.

And then there was the annual pilgrimage to the pantomime at the Grand Pavilion in Porthcawl. Without fail, my Dad would tell the parents in the queue the story of when I first came at the age of six and was invited onto the stage. The dame asked me whom I had come with. "My daddy..." I replied. And "Where's your mother?" the dolled-up man enquired. "Sitting down," I said, "having a divorce". Allegedly the auditorium fell about laughing and I alighted the stage, cradling an armful of sweets. Even as a writer and performer, little has changed, remuneratively speaking.

The last time I went to the panto, there was hardly an audience there. It had always been packed to the rafters but not today. I had won the tickets through a Spot the Difference competition in the *Glamorgan Gazette*, a clipping my father had sent me in one of his letters. The star of the show was Welsh actor Tony Adams who had starred in the TV series *Crossroads*, which had been discontinued some years earlier.

That year, I also discovered I was too old to be called up onto the stage. I wasn't a child anymore. I never went again.

The older I got, the less Bridgend and I had in common. It could have been my age. I seemed far less mature than my Bridgend counterparts in terms of sexual rites of passage, drinking, makeup and clothes. Though this may have been attributable to my more rustic upbringing across the border. After all, at the age of 12, I was still playing with my *Sindy* house and holding my mother's hand when I walked with her. But in my mind Bridgend was markedly changing.

Visiting my father became more of a perfunctory chore. The Embassy Pictures became a bingo hall, the YMCA became a rotting scout hut. The boutiques, the bookshop, the toyshops, the music shops, all closed. Pound shops and charity shops swiftly replaced them, as did bars, bars and more bars: *Monroes, Benz, The Roof, The Welcome, O'Neills, the Princess Victoria, The Three Horseshoes, The Wyndham Arms, Barracuda, the Lyton Tree, The Railway*. Even a Baptist chapel was converted into a public house.

An underbelly to Bridgend began to emerge. Maybe it had always there and I had merely been cotton wool-cladded, wilfully oblivious. Yet it seemed the town I used to wander around freely during my salad days was now decidedly unsafe.

The Friday before Christmas became known as 'Black Friday' and most Bridgenders avoided Town like the plague. That was the day all the factory workers were given half-day leave, thereby flooding the pubs of Bridgend by midday. There they drank till they dropped or were floored by another's hand, usually a work colleague or someone tasty in Town looking for a scrap.

Even the last weekend trains from Bridgend were terminating earlier because of the late-night vandalism and drivers fears for their safety. Taxi drivers were starting to insist upon payment upfront,

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particularly to areas such as Wildmill and Sarn. Not only were drivers not getting paid, they were getting beaten up once the passengers reached their destination.

One evening I arrived at Bridgend train station where the platform railings were elastic-banded in countless bunches of flowers. Apparently some poor sod had been stabbed one Friday night. And to add insult to the most absolute injury, it was later revealed that it was a case of mistaken identity.

After ten years in Derbyshire, which in truth never felt like a home, I went to university in London to study law and that's where I remained for the next 15 years. Although Bridgend appeared to be splitting at the seams and had quickly acquired the reputation, as a bit of a shit-hole, it always remained my Great Escape, the place where I felt safe, where I knew I belonged. There was always Ogmore Farm, the Stepping Stones, the Castle, Southerndown Beach, and my father, the faithful constant.

On too many occasions, my poor father picked up the phone to me sobbing at Paddington Station, begging to come home. Between the sniffs and the tissue wipes, I would usually crowbar in a request that he reimburse me for the price of a return ticket. You could almost hear his eyes roll but like most fathers, how could he possibly refuse.

I always got a little excited when the train arrived at Cardiff station, as that meant there was only one more stop to go. The journey's novel would be set aside, as I followed the flick-book of images flashing past my window, the trusty, familiar clues that I was nearing my conclusion of home.

Despite the crumbling artifice of this town, it has always commanded a gravitational pull over me. Maybe it's just the black hole of familiarity or 'hiraeth', the Welshman's burden and nostalgic longing for home. I was always convinced that people got where I was coming from, no subtitles or prologue necessary. There was always that warmth, that spiritedness and hwyl. People wore their hearts on their sleeves and didn't just present themselves as some kind of cryptic code to decipher. Relationships could accelerate to the point of actual friendship in the course of a single meeting, without it constituting a subliminal leap into over-familiarity. I could skip the guessing games, by-pass the water testing, and just traipse blindly into a conversation without having to temper myself with a dose of false modesty.

And there was always that peculiarity of 'Welshness' that I missed over the border, the Welshness that probably makes me the writer I am: that pure revelry and indulgence in storytelling, the mimicry of accents to bring anecdotes to life, the puppetry of language for humour's ends and that flagrant abuse of exaggeration to magnify a punch-line into a heavyweight humdinger.

Back here, I could be gregarious, loud, outrageously frank, all without arousing suspicion or causing offence or inciting the apologetic sigh and eye-roll of "Don't mind her, she's just Welsh".

Furthermore, my father used these visits as an opportunity to convince me to move back home, to turn my hand to the business and meet a "nice Welsh, white Presbyterian". Usually he would sweeten the deal with the promise of buying me a house. Still it was never enough to entice me out of London, where I was trying to carve

out a career and failing miserably.

It had never been my ambition to be an estate agent nor to live in Bridgend. And once my literary aspirations kicked in, the mere idea of moving to Bridgend felt tantamount to a death sentence, an admission to dropping off the ladder of ambition entirely.

Three Christmases ago, I returned home in time for my father's annual office party. The previous day I had quit my job, I was between homes and in the dying throes of another relationship. By Boxing Day, the thought of scouring *Loot* for another house share and applying for every arts job in the Guardian ether, filled me with absolute despair. Thus I found myself uttering the words I never thought I would. I told my father I would come back to Bridgend and work for him.

I found a three bedroomed terrace in the centre of town, costing only £500 per month. I would have paid this for a box room in Bethnal Green. The address was Sunnyside Road, which had to be a good omen. And much to my amazement, I discovered I was considered something of an asset in my father's business, my Jill-of-all-Trades skills had finally come to fruition.

I still live in my lovely house in Sunnyside Road, which I now share with my Labrador and husband. I never did meet that white, Welsh Presbyterian that my father longed for (on my behalf obviously). Instead I am married to a Minnesotan country singer who I met in a poetry venue in New York a year earlier. Rather cruelly I made him leave his home of Manhattan and move to Bridgend, as I was adamant that this was where I wanted to start a family.

Since moving back to Bridgend, things have slotted unexpectedly into place. My first collection of poems, *Clueless Dogs*, finally found a home as well, with the Welsh publisher *Seren*, which ironically is also housed in Bridgend, just around the corner from my Uncle Ronny's law practice. And there was me, dismissing Bridgend as a cultural wasteland when one of Wales's biggest publishers was within spitting distance of my father's office. I later discovered Seren was established by Carey Archard, an English teacher at the local comprehensive school, Brynteg, who in turn inspired many of his students to take up the poetry quill. I have recently been teaching at the same school trying to accomplish much the same.

Last November, I won the John Tripp Award for Spoken Poetry 2011-2012, winning both the Judges Award and the Audience Award. My first collection has since been shortlisted for the Forward Prize for First Collection. Recently, too, I was awarded a Literature Wales grant to take time off work and embark upon my second collection of poems, which will be about the history of Bridgend.

For the first time in my life, I'm actually living and truly living as a freelance writer. I finally have the life I have been chasing for years; a life I never imagined possible and certainly not here in my hometown.

Since moving back to Wales, I have become involved in projects I could only have ever dreamed about, from being commissioned to re-write one of the Arabian Tales with a composer for a performance at St Davids Hall, to being asked to write a poem that will be forged into a two sculptures in Bridgend town centre.

In the case of the latter, this is all part of a mass regeneration scheme to improve Bridgend both culturally and aesthetically. In fact most of the town is undergoing a cosmetic face-lift. Many historical shop buildings are being stripped of their 1970s cack-handed veneers and being restored back to their chocolate box Victoriana.

However, last summer the old art deco Embassy cinema was torn down. This in turn attracted its first audience in well over 20 years. The back wall was gouged out, making Bridgend its backdrop, the real-life town taking the place of the screen and the action, no 3-D spectacles required.

It was strange seeing the old floral interior and the tattered flip chairs again. There was an uncomfortable silence as we all stood there, watching and listening to the building's swan song. And although it had been derelict and a pigeons' playground for many a decade, there was an undeniable sense of regret, a collective guilt amongst its onlookers.

It was like witnessing the beating of an old friend, someone you once loved, someone who went off the rails, you lost touch with, someone you chose to ignore rather than save.

This is why I will not give up on my hometown. Where Bridgend will be in 25 years is anyone's guess. This is an ailing town, one that has depreciated, degenerated, lost its way, its identity and sense of purpose, the market town with no market. And this can happen to any town, it seems, in next to no time at all. And sadly, it often takes an entire age to replenish and breathe new life back into bones.

However, this resuscitation does seem to be happening. You can see the kernels of it in the proliferation of music, art and food festivals cropping up in Town, the commissioning of public art, the regeneration of the Grade II listed Elders Yard, Nolton Street and the British Telecom site. There are even plans for a multi-million pound sports village on the old Prisoner of War camp.

Call it hiraeth, the black hole of familiarity or naïve optimism but few people leave here or wish to and I seem to have become one of them. I am strangely hopeful for Bridgend, maybe because I still recall its former opulence, what it used to be, my old friendship with the place. Maybe I will die by the sword of it, championing it to the hilt in the *Glamorgan Gazette* with the accompanying strapline 'local writer gratified'. Nonetheless, I aspire to still be here in 25 years, sitting pretty in the cheap seats while witnessing my old market town phoenix from the ashes.

Ifor Thomas,
Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff, 2012

9 Walking on air
Ifor Thomas

When I was eight I saw my father walk on air. He was the assistant borough engineer of Pembrokeshire Council and he was responsible for supervising the construction of hundreds of council houses. He took me to a site on the St David's Road and there I watched him walk on air.

The next week in school, on a quiet Friday afternoon and when he was obviously filling in time, Mr Griffiths told us that we were lucky to have our whole lives ahead of us. Did we know what we wanted to do with those still unstarted lives? I remember Haydn Curran looking puzzled. He was already doing what he wanted to do, run faster than anybody else in Wales, and would continue to do for the next twenty years. Only two of us put our hands up – Sidney Rees and me. He wanted to be a pilot and I wanted to be a writer. A writer, I figured correctly, could walk on air. Sid 'Slash-Back' Rees went on to grow a fine handlebar moustache and to fly V bombers. Slash-Back's encounters with air were jet engine assisted.

What my father had been doing was walking over first floor ceiling joists before the floorboards had been nailed on. To him the 450mm gaps were nothing, to me it was Grand Canyon after Grand Canyon. He took my hand and I joined him, balancing precariously in the ether.

By the mid-eighties I had decided to single-handedly improve the Welsh Health building stock. I joined the NHS as an architect in what was the in-house estates department. Ten years later Thatcher would have us privatised but then we operated as a branch of NHS England. Health building was still operating a soviet style centralised planning approach. The big district general hospitals of the time looked more like nuclear power plants and indeed the names of the planning and building systems sounded like nuclear buildings too. Harness was replaced by Nucleus. Health departments were cruciforms that joined together to form grids that marched over the countryside.

The worst of these in Wales is Morriston hospital, a grim fortress that, to my regret, I spent time on. I had part-trained in the Welsh School of Architecture, heroically led by Dewi Prys-Thomas. His lectures were legendary and inspiring. "Architecture," he would intone in Senior Service smoked gruffness, "is a synthesis of the Vertical" – at this point his hand described a horizontal motion in front of his waist, "and the Horizontal." At that point his hand came down through the air like a priest bestowing a blessing. I think he mixed up his verticals and horizontals to add interest and make sure we were listening, although that, with a Dewi Prys-Thomas lecture, was never a problem. We were, indeed, blessed.

About then I joined Chris Torrance's creative writing class. I had always chugged away writing prose but with no success. Chris opened the poetry door and I stepped through. The mid-eighties in Cardiff were a vibrant period for poetry. Poets had always read their stuff but usually in a boring way with no joy, no élan. We wanted to do it differently, the performance was as important as the poetry.

I started to pick up pointers from the poets I came in contact with. People like Chris Torrance, Peter Finch, and my close poetry compardré Topher Mills introduced me to Bukowski. Pete had actually published this legendary American poet in his *Second Aeon* magazine. Pete also arranged for us to see Bob Cobbing perform. His booming sonorous voice confirmed my change of opinion: the performance wasn't as important as the poem, it was more, it was everything.

I couldn't get enough and soon a group of us was performing regularly in Gibbs jazz club. The drunks who hit the club in the early hours were as likely to be witnessing Clive reading incomprehensibly in a gas mask as hearing Coltrane on the sound system. My performances were taking off. I read a Severn Bridge poem balanced lying flat between two chairs. I cut up books with a chainsaw and I covered my naked torso with cling film.

When Diana Davies had the temerity to write a critical review of something of mine that the group had actually published, I celebrated by borrowing a resuscitation doll from a friendly nurse and used it in a special Diana Davies performance whereby the doll, aka Diana, was lynched from rafters on stage, run through with a sword and definitely not resuscitated. The poem was just the station from which the train departed, the journey was what it was all about. On stage I was walking on air, although a visit to the Tunnel Club brought me crashing down.

The tedium of doing room layouts for Morriston was leavened by the opportunity to do other smaller projects. William Simpson, the Chief Architect was a humane man with a skeletal defect that caused him to walk with a pronounced stoop and gave ammunition to his detractors, of whom there were few, except mechanical engineers whom he described as pipe stranglers (expletive deleted). He entrusted his young architects in a way that is unthinkable now. The first project

I completed in my own right was a dental outpatients building at Moriston. Relieved to be released from work on the fortress I let rip with a whimsical approach that incorporated exposed timber laminated portal frames, big timber arches in effect.

Mr Rowse was the maxilla facial surgeon who would be one of the users and the man who would nearly bring about the end of my fledgling career. At a meeting called specifically to address his concerns he declared the completed building to be unusable. The meeting was attended by Mr Button, the Health Authority chairman, a big ape of a man whose hairline almost touched his eyebrows, and Tony Hartley, my boss and another architect with posture problems. The swoop of the timber arches meant it was impossible to walk around the perimeter of the first floor without bumping your head. Rowse wanted me reported to Stasi central and the building demolished and re-built by a proper architect. The performance in architecture, I thought, is not always more important than the content. We moved the cupboards around and reconfigured the dental chairs. The building is still there and, I'm told, held in great affection by the users. If you go to Morriston, check it out. There's a big exclamation mark formed in the brickwork of the rear elevation. Mr Rowse hadn't spotted that.

The audience of the Tunnel Club in Greenwich held me in no affection at all. Malcolm Hardee was the MC. He is credited with creating alternative comedy but he was also an individual who ruthlessly belittled and humiliated any acts he considered to be not good enough to be on his stage. That was the real fun for him and most of the audience.

"What do they like here?" I asked, eyeing the first open mike spot with eager anticipation. Anything but juggling and poetry, he replied. I wasn't keen on juggling myself and as I distanced myself from poetry in favour of performance, I knew I would be all right. The barn of a pub was stripped of all furniture and the howling mob devoured me. After only one poem, *I think of Julie Walters when I scratch my ears* the sound of the crowd imitating sheep was louder than mart day in Llangadog. Was this overt racism? I didn't have too long to consider that question before Hardee turned off the microphone and I was lost in a blizzard of plastic beer glasses. "Well he was shit, wasn't he?" was how he summed up my brief tenure of the stage. Some years later, after he drowned whilst making his way to his riverboat home, I allowed myself a little smile. I stayed on to watch the stand ups. If they were bad they were treated ruthlessly by the crowd. If they were good - David Baddiel was on the bill which was topped by a black comic called Felix - they were lauded to the rafters. A good lesson: respect the audience and what they want. I was so late leaving the Tunnel Club that I missed the last train home to Cardiff and ended up sleeping on Bristol station.

I got back in time for work the next day. And a significant day it was too, since we were getting our CAD lessons. I was reluctant to get into computer aided design, when I'd started some of my older colleagues were still using pencil – and the drawings they produced even working drawings, details, were works of art. My era was ink and I can recall even now the rush of sensuous pleasure as you smoothed the creamy tracing paper before drawing a precise ink line – precise to a tenth of a millimeter, as long as your pens were working, which, if I'm honest, was not very often. Black ink on a clean sheet of tracing paper – anything was possible. I was tired, I hadn't slept very well curled up on station bench, and it was dark in the computer room and very warm. When I awoke it was too late, I never became a CAD architect, something about which I'm secretly proud. Poetry, or at least the attempt at performing poetry in a comedy venue, had saved me.

There were many eccentric characters in the NHS then. I had the pleasure to work with Dr Blackwell, on a GUM clinic at Singleton. That's a clap clinic in common parlance. She cast an eye over my drawings and I could see she wasn't happy. "Is this my consulting room?" I nodded. "Far too small," she waved dismissively, "you need a lot of room to look up a woman's vagina, you know." One way or another I tried to work these into my performance material, however obliquely.

My poetry friends led me to not only read new stuff, but to attend readings by Miroslav Holub, Les Murray, Ted Hughes, R.S. Thomas, Sorley Maclean, John Ashberry and Robert Creeley. There was more to this poetry lark than I had envisaged. All this triggered a change in my approach. It's not enough just to write stuff that is bad and perform it well, nor is it acceptable to read what other poets are writing.

Very rarely did my poetry life and architecture criss cross, although on one occasion it did when I was asked to read to a cancer care ward in Ysbyty Glan Clwyd. The hospital itself was another architectural disaster, one that was replicated at Prince Charles hospital in Merthyr. However, the cancer unit was one that a colleague had designed - by now this was the 1990s - and it was a beautiful building. Some of the patients were terminally ill. I selected my material accordingly. My reception was muted and I put that down to how poorly some of them were - there were actually beds in the audience. Then I overheard two old ladies speaking as we walked out – "He was boring wasn't he? I thought Ifor Thomas would liven us up a bit."

Bill Simpson turned a blind eye to our acts of undermining the edicts of central DHS architectural policy. We tried to dress up the grim Nucleus buildings, put them in different skins. The Royal Glamorgan Hospital is probably as good as we got but it is still a Nucleus hospital. Materials were advancing, vapour membranes replaced roofing felt and trade names usually had a 'tech' in there somewhere. On the Royal Glamorgan hospital we had big problems with water getting in through the roof when the building shell was finished. The roof was leaking or rather the condensation was unmanageable. It turned out that the Gortex like material was working in reverse until the pressure gradient and the temperature inside got warmer than outside. Unfinished buildings are

as cold as fridges. The issue wasn't helped by the roof tiles. I sat on the roof with the old clerk of works as he sagely turned one of the roof tiles in his gnarly hands. "It's porous," he announced. I took the tile from him and couldn't quite understand what had led him to the conclusion. He elaborated, "Yea, poor as piss."

By the time we were sold off to the private sector in the mid nineties, the yoke of standard health buildings had been broken, and like a panto villain, PFI arrived. The Private Finance Initiative, was, we were told, the only show in town. Well, if it was a show it was an expensive ticket that got you in. After a short spell with a big Scottish consultancy, I left and with a friend formed my own company. By now I was project managing and my days as a hands-on architect were behind me. Architecture is the hardest art form. It demands creativity and yet that creativity must overcome the restrictions of planning, building regulations, fire regulations, health and safety, cost, the requirements of the DHS Health Building Notes and technical memoranda. It was beyond me. My career moved to project management. Nobody knew what that meant so I thought it a safe career option.

Moving from practising architecture, to managing those that do, and the responsibilities of running my own company had an effect, or perhaps it's just a natural career trajectory, on my writing. I rejected the chain saw, cling film, bucket of water and other props. Perhaps I should try and be a real poet after all.

My skills were in demand and although the first PFI hospitals I worked on Swindon and Marlborough was back in the mid-80s whilst I was still in the NHS, it was not until a decade later that PFI really got into full swing.

Wales was wise enough to generally stay clear of PFI, with a few exceptions, the hospital at Baglan in Port Talbot being one of them. I was the project manager. The job finished 38 days early to get everybody in before Christmas. The hospital itself is very successful, with a dramatic entrance and atrium and then some ordinary clinical accommodation. But that's not all bad. Generally clinicians are not over impressed with sweeping architectural statements. They want places that are functional both for them and for the patient. Good design can often be unobtrusive and quietly elegant, but always let there be natural daylight in bedrooms and a view of a tree is a great bonus.

Is PFI bad? It is expensive. The public sector was poorly advised by the lawyers and financial experts it hired on those early deals. They were wolves who devoured the fat public sector lambs. One thing PFI did do was ensure that the building was cared for throughout the life of the asset, something that the NHS had manifestly failed to do. But public money is always cheaper than private money, so which ever way you look at it, the NHS was getting ripped off.

The last 25 years have seen the greatest period of health building that Wales has ever experienced. Just take the M4 corridor. New Nucleus hospitals have ben built in Llantrisant, Bridgend, Morriston, and Llanelli. Significant additional building work has taken place at West Wales General and Singleton. A new PFI hospital appeared in Port Talbot.

Hospitals along the M4 are like rats, you are never far away from one. The last few decades have been a hugely ambitious period, but from today's vantage point, hugely inappropriate, a massive waste of money. Health building in Wales seems to have been guided by geography rather than outcomes. What politician would stand on a platform of 'vote for me and I will shut our local hospital?' Spending a great deal of my time in the far west of Wales, this debate is not entirely academic. Yet I would travel 50 miles, even a thousand miles, if I thought that was where my best chance of treatment lay. It's as if we want our local hospital to have an eye department that is as good as Moorefield's, a cardiac facility as good as Papworth and health delivery for our children that is as good as Ormond Street. The European working time directive has, quite rightly, restricted the number of hours that our doctors can work, the cuts are restricting the number of medical staff that can be employed, and yet we still want everything to be local. When will a politician have the courage to say, 'I'm going to shut your local hospital, because I want you to have better healthcare?' Now more than ever we, in Wales, should be looking harder at health building.

Upwards of £150 million, a huge slice of the health budget, will be going into pulling asbestos out of Prince Charles in Merthyr, when the decision should have been made to demolish the place five years ago. Our politicians have always gone for the short term, easy decisions, winning cheap votes and easy plaudits. There is not much money available now.

What we need is firm central planning. What we need is a plan. But this time one developed by the Welsh Government, not London. What we need is politicians with courage. The M4 corridor should have one hospital. Worried about relatives visiting? Then have free accommodation for visitors. Worried about accidents? Have a proper helicopter service. Worried about local care? Increase the number of clinics, empower GPs but don't pay them anymore – they get paid enough already. On one occasion I was in the University Hospital Cardiff and ended up pushing a patient in a wheelchair from Trauma to X-ray, since there was no nurse or porter available. Whilst I didn't mind, this is unacceptable. Our hospitals need to be fully staffed, from porters to consultants. This can only happen if we rationalise the service.

The poetry world changes and doesn't change. Exciting new faces have appeared on the scene – people like Rhian Edwards - but at the core it is still the same. You get up on a stage and you read your stuff. If there are more than ten people in the audience then it's a good gig. Good gigs are hard to come by but sometimes, just sometimes, you know what it is like to walk on air.

Rachel Trezise,
Hay-on-Wye, 2011

10 Citizens of the world

Rachel Trezise

It was a cloudless Berlin night, the dolphin constellation almost visible above the point of the television tower. I'd left the green room bar and walked alone along the path towards the portakabin lavatories set up several yards away. Sure, I'd drank too much wheat beer, but in a scarce moment of utter clarity, the kind that's impractical and impossible while stony sober, I was, for one fleeting moment, able to see the whimsical engines of destiny turning, and for once in the right direction. In reality it was nothing more than a rare sense of accomplishment, a chance to congratulate myself on becoming a published writer, but there and then it felt like so much more, like *my* star was ascending and my country was coming along for the ride. Everybody knows that you can take the girl out of Wales, but that you cannot take Wales out of the girl.

It was September 2002, the last night of the *Internationales Literaturfestival* Berlin. I was twenty-three years old, there as a participant of *Scritture Giovani*, chosen by the Hay Festival for a cultural programme designed to promote young European authors - the first writer to represent Wales. That day, over lunch, I'd listened to Peter Florence waxing lyrical about having to put Bill Clinton up in his own home, and the wheat beer I'd drank too much of I'd drank in the company of Richard Ford. Along the way I'd had the opportunity to inform David Lodge that not everyone in Wales spoke Welsh, and told an audience in Northern Italy that quite a few of their countrymen had ended up round my manor. At home construction was beginning on the Senedd and Millennium Centre buildings in the recently developed Cardiff Bay – at long last our own government, our own opera house. A political voice and an artistic voice, albeit small talk for the moment.

At the airport the next morning, worse for wear and struggling to read an article about a group of amateur stuntmen/ pranksters calling themselves 'Dirty Sanchez', I received a text message from my agent. An editor at Italian publishing house *Einuadi* had been in the audience at my Mantua reading. They'd bought the translation rights to my debut novel.

'No great shakes', one might think today. But only fourteen years earlier the thought that those events might even become possible would have been laughable to my ten-year-old self. Back then my only connection to Europe came in the form of free EEC tinned food. My mother, in receipt of Income Support, collected her allocated share of the food mountain from our local community hall each fortnight, a staple in our family diet, even if the dog ate most of it. I can see the tins now, piled on our shelf, their navy blue labels decorated with the starry yellow emblem of the EU. The contents were pot luck. It could've been stewed steak, corned beef, occasionally pear-halves in syrup.

The worst year of my short life coincided with a desperate period for the former coalmining valleys of south Wales. By 1988 Thatcher had gone out of her way to fulfil her earlier promise to rid the UK of the 'creeping cancer of socialism'. For the Valleys that meant being cleansed of the only political standpoint it had ever known. It also meant unemployment, and on a massive scale. The fly-by-night factories initially tempted to the area by grant funding fell short of replacing the jobs lost in the mine closures. Very quickly the Valleys became an economic and cultural no-man's-land. The people of the coalfields had been struggling with poverty for centuries. Now they'd lost their entire raison d'être, whole villages full of people with no means to support themselves. Personally, the sexual abuse I endured at the hands of my then-stepfather (an alcoholic and redundant miner), had left me with as much confidence as an autumn leaf. Myself and my place of birth were as one, alive but with our lives suddenly taken. Aimless. Voiceless.

Though I didn't chance upon them until after I was published, there were writers like Gwyn Thomas and Alun Richards who had dealt with the south Wales Valley industrial experience throughout the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s and early 80s. Ron Berry was still alive, going about his business four miles away in Blaencwm. I'd discover later that I'd shared a classroom with his basketball-fanatic grandson my whole school life, but Welsh literature was not a subject that ever came up there. We read English writers like George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Jane Austen. In history lessons the Norman Conquest was taught from an English point of view, with no utterance of the industrial revolution or the hand our own country had in shaping the rest of the world.

Throughout the 1990s, with our morale at its lowest ebb, it seemed south Wales had nothing to say. If we spoke, we did it *sotto voce*, amongst ourselves. There was no room for us on the world

I know my narrative voice comes straight from that long and quietly desperate decade in the Rhondda Valley. I didn't make it that way purposely. I didn't realise that my writing was even slightly political. That is just the way it transpired, with realistic dialogue and simplistic observation.

stage. We daren't open a newspaper lest we be faced with A.A. Gill referring to us as "pugnacious little trolls". Our economic quagmire, our cultural void, the linguistic schizophrenia caused by Anglicisation had become a vicious circle, an inconsolable wound. My overriding memory of that era is the haunting six-octave-spanning voice of Kate Bush with Peter Gabriel singing a duet called *Don't Give Up*. BBC Wales used it against advertisements for a disastrous Welsh Five Nations campaign. We were expecting the wooden spoon. Even rugby was in the doldrums.

I know my narrative voice comes straight from that long and quietly desperate decade in the Rhondda Valley. I didn't make it that way purposely. I didn't realise that my writing was even slightly political. That is just the way it transpired, with realistic dialogue and simplistic observation. My themes almost always involve poverty, injustice, moral dilemmas, lightly dusted with freckles of hope and gallows humour. Where the courage to use it came from, I'm not so sure. Maybe America. I'd been reading a lot of American literature before I embarked on my first novel in 1998. I'd also been listening to The Manic Street Preachers, who in turn had been listening to a lot of American music in the late 1980s.

In any case the narrative voice surfaced. By the time my second book had won the inaugural Dylan Thomas Prize in late 2006 Wales had got something of its groove back. The National Assembly had been in place for eight years and won enhanced legislative powers a few months earlier through the Government of Wales Act 2006. Political confidence was burgeoning, and that confidence was reflected in the arts. The new series of *Doctor Who* was filmed in Wales and produced by Russell T. Davies who also produced *Torchwood*, a spin-off series featuring a cast of Welsh characters played by Welsh actors alongside household names. Wales boasted three international arts competitions, Singer of the World in Cardiff, The Artes Mundi, *and* the Dylan Thomas Prize.

The reaction to my work differed according to geography. Rights to my short story collection were bought by Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Italy and eventually Macedonia, the translations published to high acclaim. That readers ten thousand miles away could even understand my prose and, in particular my dialogue with its tendency to towards *Wenglish* came as a wonderful shock to me. But that notion was galvanised at a creative writing workshop at the University of Texas where a student from a small town eight miles west of Austin told me that reading my stories about bored, disillusioned teenagers living in the 'ass-end of nowhere', was like reading back his own thoughts. There was a hint of universality to the way I'd portrayed the Rhondda Valley, my own little world, the only world I knew.

Of course, that opinion was juxtaposed with resentment and

confusion from Wales and the UK. My local newspaper *The Rhondda Leader* took great exception to the expletives in my work, a reviewer professing he'd rather read *Lorna Doone*. The general feedback from London was that it seemed ludicrous to award a Welsh writer with £60,000. And this attitude was ratified four years later when, after a reading at The Oriental Club in London, I was pulled aside and complimented by the actress Sylvia Syms, who'd thought Wales was all about "tedious, sweaty-smelling men in stained suit jackets".

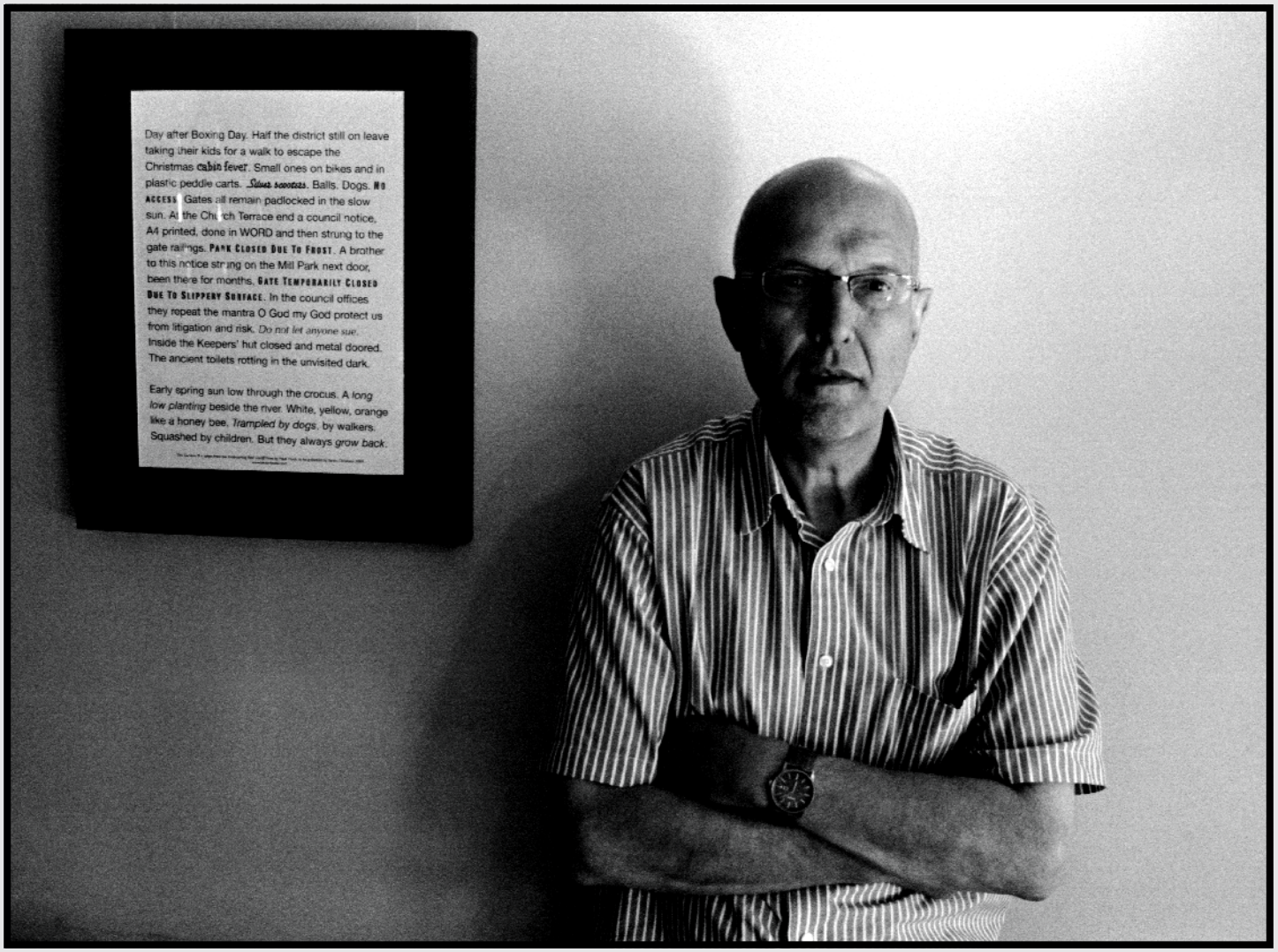
Perhaps most baffling was the reaction from my driving instructor who after reading the collection asserted that I could "*do* the valleys" very well. I'd never tried to *do* anything else. Nevertheless, it appeared, to some people at least, that Wales remained closemouthed, incapable of creating literature that could stand up to the 'real world'. According to this outlook, Welsh characters and their trials and tribulations were simply irrelevant outside of Wales itself.

Observing the English-language Welsh arts scene over the past decade has been a little like watching a foal standing on its long, lumbering legs for the first time. I've lost count of the number of occasions a chairperson has begun a discussion about my work with a question like, 'So, can you explain what it feels like to be a Welsh female writer?' It is obvious to me that I cannot, because I've never been anything else. If I rephrase the question, replacing 'Welsh' with 'English' or 'American', and perhaps 'female' with 'male', it immediately becomes clear how preposterous and insignificant that line of enquiry is.

Our tendency to overanalyse our nationality is testament to our recent lack of self-belief, but thankfully that attitude seems to be on the wane, our confidence immeasurably fostered by an abundance of recent successes in the arts. Michael Sheen and National Theatre Wales dared to use Port Talbot as the setting for a secular retelling of the Easter story and were rewarded with the best audience figures and broadsheet reviews imaginable. Joe Dunthorne's debut novel *Submarine* and the film adaptation of it turned the tables on all of our previous attempts to apologise for ourselves, presenting itself as a story about teenagers who just happened to live in Swansea, rather than a story about Swansea, narrated by teenagers. Likewise, Marc Evans' latest film, *Hunky Dory* where the emphasis is on the drama, not the setting. Of course, seeing ourselves in theatre and on the big and small screen has a huge impact on how we perceive ourselves and our abilities. However, if the intonation is placed on our nationality, as it was with the stuttering 'Cool Cymru' movement, it only smacks of tokenism.

The landmark Library of Wales series should ensure that writers like Gwyn Thomas, Alun Richards and Ron Berry are not overlooked in the future as they have been in the past. Meanwhile, John Davies' *A History of Wales* gives us our first comprehensive history from our earliest settlements to present day, and *The Encyclopaedia of Wales/Gwyddoniadur Cymru* celebrates our achievements in every field. It is sometimes a long way from *one's* world to *the* world but our internal analysis is complete. We know who we are, and we know what we want.

My hope as we move into the next quarter-century is that the Welsh arts will continue to thrive, claiming the empty space waiting for us on the world podium alongside Ireland and Scotland. There is no accounting for taste or for trends and there are times when we'll be out of favour. Also if there is such a thing as national character ours is composed with a large percentage of modesty. It is an admirable quality but one we must overcome so that at least when we speak, we speak clearly enough for the rest of the world to hear. Not because we are a minority, or because we are the class clown, begging for a little mercy from the bigger, louder colloquium as we so often have been in the past, but because we are good at what we do, because we are citizens not only of Wales, but of the world.



Peter Finch,
Waterloo Tea Rooms, Cardiff, 2009

11 Boyos meet the bechgyn

Peter Finch

In Malang, on Java, almost as far as I can get from Cardiff, capital of the land of drizzle and song, the guy driving the taxi asks me where I'm from. I tell him. Wales. Walles? You know, next to England. Ah. I know that place. Ryan Giggs. He fills the cab with smiles. We've made it then. Wales the nation, known across the world for its Lothario footballers, its ball-kickers who shine bright in the night for Manchester United, its men of the green sward. Sport, the world's obsession. Sport, the validation of Wales.

It wasn't always like this. It used to be worse.

Twenty-five years back we were in the heart of Thatcher's industrial re-write. Pits were closing, steel works were being abandoned, docks shut down. Half the population were sitting at home staring at their hands. Heavy toil was over. This was a land of crumbling brick and broken windows. In the streets there was darkness, among the population desperation and despair.

In the middle of all this was there an idea of Wales worth latching onto? The 1979 referendum appeared to have flattened all hope. Wales, my Wales, was so exciting that most of Cardiff had their TV aerials pointed at the Mendips, news from Taunton being more acceptable than any small talk from here. Gwynfor's hunger strike might have changed media attitudes to the language's direction, but it cut no ice whatsoever in the suburban reaches of the city that dominates us all.

As yet to be repackaged as the glittering Bay, Cardiff Docks was such a significant place that even the most fervent of Cymdeithas green paint sprayers ignored it. *Welcome to Independent Tropical Wales* ran a graffito on the side of Bute Street's Taff Vale Railway embankment. A better future prospect than the one in the hands of cottage-burning Meibion Glyndwr, or the malcontents who poured metal-glue into the locks of the Halifax Building Society because their deposit slips were only in one tongue.

Amazingly this was the moment that Cardiff chose to go bilingual. This was no reaction to politico-linguistic pressure nor any kind of realisation that a country's capital should represent the entire nation, all sides, all divides. It was in response to a tourism survey that had discovered foreign visitors to be far more likely to select Cardiff as a destination over, say, Bristol, if they thought that they might be entering a different land. *Croeso i Gaerdydd* went up at the bus station. *Heol y Frenhines* is now said on Queen Street. I met the great Anglo-Welsh poet Harri Webb at the Hayes Island Snack Bar. "I'm never speaking to you in English ever again", he said. I shook my head.

The Wales I came from was one which barely understood what nationhood meant. Down here in the south's dirty industrial cities culture, ill served by the state as it was, barely bubbled. Life was what it was. Hot spots in the Welsh music box were still Shirl, denying her Welshness at a rate of Tiger Bay knots, and Bonnie Tyler, sounding like a Neath man's Rod Stewart. They were the kind of singers who leading politicians would say they listened to, when pushed. They did this when they wanted to appear populist. The reality was that at that time our politicians listened to pretty much nothing at all. They were too busy doing what they could to prop up the socialist old guard in the distant palaces of London. Being Labour. Towing the party line. Did anyone in the capital read? Some did. You could tell from the English bestsellers in the windows of Lear's Bookshop. But material from Wales? Why would anyone bother?

The literature of Wales was completely seized with its past. It looked inward and backward and celebrated its ancient-lives and all its losses. In both languages, it resembled nothing less than that famous engraving of Archdruid Dr William Price, torch of burning rope aloft, head dress of fur, beard flowing, incantation on his tongue. Any attempt to innovate, modernise, or show influence from the overseas' avant gardes were met with dismay, distrust and rejection. Amazing, when you look back it. At a time when the world's literatures were spinning with change those of Wales remained resolutely the same.

I couldn't get a handle on how things worked. Maybe they didn't. Hunting for evidence of our difference was so hard. On the one hand this place felt nothing like Gloucestershire or Avon. On the other our daily concerns seemed to be much the same. A proposed anthology of poetry from Wales was rejected by its commissioning American publisher as being indistinct from any similar collection of verse emanating from England. Our Welshness appeared to reside in our ability to slip the odd gair Cymraeg, *hiraeth*, *bwythyn*, *bach*, in among our traditional English cadences. See, *cariad*, we're Welsh really. We are.

"How can Finch represent Wales at Poet's Conference, the international union of new generation verse practitioners? He doesn't speak the language." So complained an arts administrator at a meeting in Cardiff's Central Hotel. He had a point. So I set to and learned the language. Some of it. Wrote concrete poetry in the ancient tongue and was roundly ridiculed by *Lol*. Was told by Meic Stevens, the singer, that

he would always be a better poet than I, because, although I might have acquired the language, he'd been born with it. It was in his blood. Deeper than mine. Wales, the linguistic nation, the secret society with no conversion route. Like Judaism once was. You could become a righteous gentile but that's as near as you'd get.

Was I typical, not caring enough about my origins? Certainly beyond our borders I was always greeted as some sort of foreigner and hailed by the Irish and the Scots as a fellow Celt. But I came from the city and how Welsh those places felt was demonstrated by their continuing indifference to Welsh ideals. Wales and the West Television: Regional HQ Bristol. "I'm flying home to England". Western Mail versus Daily Mail: no contest.

Why was the idea of Wales so significant and was it worth sticking with? Wouldn't the world be a better place if we ceased this tribal rivalry and joined a homogenous conglomeration where all were equal and looked unthreateningly the same?

But out there in the heartlands was a gathering storm. The feeling that somehow we were being done down, managed at a distance by outsiders who had objectives other than ours was growing. Could it be that this ancient nation meant more to the south east than many who lived here actually imagined? Could it be that this place was not actually a branch of the English empire or even an extension of the County of Avon but somewhere with its own identity? A place we could love.

Post modernism was all about minorities and the end of the nation, about identity and retreat from the state. Ned Thomas's new map of Europe which showed the lands delineated not by political boundaries but by linguistic ones began to acquire value. Down the pub John Tripp declared that Welshness was the most important aspect of his writing. In his religious gloom R.S. Thomas had already made the same point on the international stage.

In 1985 *Cabaret 246*, the Cardiff-based poetry troupe, right there at verse's cutting edge, travelled to perform at the London Musician's Collective in Chalk farm. They were advertised as not coming from the provincial city of Cardiff, which might have distinguished them from others arriving from Birmingham or Bristol, but as coming hot foot from the land of bards, from Wales. London declaring Wales to be valid generator of the avant garde? Who would have thought of such a thing?

As the brighter nineties arrived you could sense the impending shift. The arts emerged from a decade of under-funded negation with new strengths. Suddenly it was acceptable for those other than the traditional well-off élite to engage in them, to follow them round. The recently formed Manic Street Preachers, a band from the south Wales valleys, rose in popularity on a wave of politicised and intellectual lyrics combined with driving stadium rock. Others followed in their wake. English-medium Welsh writing rebranded itself as *Welsh Writing in English* and began to lose its suspicion of its Welsh-medium fellow traveller. Anglo be buggered. This was Welsh literature we were talking about. It was delivered through both languages, sometimes simultaneously, in one rainbow trawl.

In 1993 the UK Conservative government passed the Welsh language Act which gave everyone the right to engage in court proceedings through the language and obliged public bodies to present themselves in both. In 1997 the devolution referendum finally went the Welsh way. The deal was sealed, just. The new age had begun.

Two years later at the Assembly-establishing celebratory concert in Cardiff Bay, new centre of the Welsh universe now that development money had started arriving by the shed load, Shirl appeared on stage before Royalty. She did so wearing a draped dress made from the Welsh flag. She was now no longer Splott Anglo or a docklander dispossessed. She was a Welsh singer for the land of song - Wales was on the up. The idea of it anyway. Around her a roaring crowd carrying small replicas of that same flag all agreed.

Across the country businesses began to adopt a more forthright Cymric identity. Things could now be sold on the back of being Welsh. Head offices relocated to Cardiff, to Newport and to Swansea. Start-ups labelled themselves accordingly. Dragon Tyres, Dragon Cabs, Dragon Financial Advisors, Dragon Milk, Dragon Drain Unblockers, Dragon Tree Surgeons, Dragon Insurance, Dragon Agricultural Supplies, Dragon Martial Arts, Dragon Clothing International, Dragon Fires.

We wanted to be a part of this Wales. Unswamped, individual, bright and thrusting. Cardiff Council's boosterist approach to marketing the city and its valiant attempts at connecting the Capital with its life-blood valleys began to bear fruit. Europe's Youngest Capital, a centre for the country, its governance and its culture, became an accepted trope. There might still be the small problem of the rest of largely rural Wales being somehow divided from this Anglicised south eastern corner, a feeling that governance from afar might not work the way the people wanted it. But we could overcome such things. Couldn't we?

For the great state opening of the brand new National Assembly, hastily bolted into what was once a dockside set of offices built for the NHS and named after the former Secretary of State for Wales, the Conservative Lord Nicholas Crickhowell (née Edwards), giant TV screens were erected across the country. In a shot I saw of the example outside Caernarfon Castle, the ceremonies were being watched through imminent drizzle by a single man and his dog. Maybe there was a way to go. The Assembly's policy of a Wales of the regions stepped in. Governance may be centred on the glittering Capital but discussion, consultation, and most importantly, the now heavy volume of the Welsh Government's support administration would be scattered across the land. Everywhere from Merthyr to Llandudno. And it was.

Welsh literature, stuck in the slow lane for decades, did a few spins, revved its engines and began to take off. One Wales was what we now were. This meant a melding of irrevocably opposed linguistic factions – the English-stuckists and the insular Cymrackers. The boyos and the bechgyn. The merging of the traditionalists with the reformers. The new with the old. Tours went round the country pairing authors from either side of the divides – Jan

Morris with Twm Morys, Grahame Davies with Lloyd Robson, Ifor Thomas with Ifor ap Glyn.

Mirroring Scotland's earlier example, the first National Poet was appointed in the shape of the thoroughly bi-lingual Gwyneth Lewis. A slice of almost concrete two language verse got slung in metre-high letters across the front of Wales's new world-beating iconic building, the Wales Millennium Centre. The sales of books from Wales turned a corner and began an irrevocable rise, despite a more recent failure to get properly to grips with the digital revolution. It became commonplace for music and writing to share the same platforms and to flicker between one language and the other. Writing as a branch of the entertainment industry became the norm.

Backed on the one hand by serious prizes for the best of work (Wales Book of the Year, The Rhys Davies Short Story Award, the Dylan Thomas Prize, The Cardiff International) and on the other by new platforms for the experimental and the untried, literary events involving a considerably expanded range of hard-core practitioners erupted across the land. Gone were the days when you got a book launch a month if you were lucky and a poetry reading every quarter. Attendance three ladies and that Caernarfon man with his dog. Now a week spent in most larger centres of population could involve activities almost every night. Writing in Wales looked up and then looked outwards. Owen Sheers, Gwyneth Lewis, Menna Elfyn, Robert Minhinnick, Stevie Davies, Joe Dunthorne, John Williams, Robert Lewis, Gillian Clarke, Des Barry, Catherine Fisher and others emerged as names that actually meant something beyond our borders. They'd heard of Menna Elfyn in Bratislava. Owen Sheers and Gwyneth Lewis commanded decent reading fees in Alabama. The work of John Williams was translated into dozens of languages.

After centuries of Shakespeare-led derision and Encyclopaedia Britannica put down, coming from Wales was once again something of which to be proud. The number of those claiming to speak the language rose and it became commonplace, in the cities at least, to hear Welsh and English in the bars, on the buses and in the streets. Suspicion that the Assembly, together with the rebranded Welsh Government, would become nothing more than Glamorgan County Council on stilts proved unfounded. If there was no actual great love out there in the land of sheep and rugby, at least there was tolerance. Cardiff was still too distant. But it had always been thus. Did I care? Not much.

Where next? For the country we've got the All Wales Footpath running right round our coastline and, despite its compromises, it makes us open and free. No one has yet had the courage to instigate that straightening of the A470, the only thing we have in Wales that truly united the north with the south, that the IWA proposed so many years ago. Communication remains a Welsh issue. We have no effective air transportation, no railways that do anything other than sliver in from England. Meanwhile, travelling by road involves using up more of the planet that a whole field of wind turbines can put back. When I began working as a literary administrator way back in the 1970s the rule was equal misery. Wales-wide meets would take place somewhere in the barren heartland, in the creaking Metropole at Llandrindod perhaps. Two hours at least from Cardiff, and more from Bangor. Everyone would be put out. Forty years on little has changed, even allowing for the impersonal crankiness of video conferencing.

Writing can expect the rate of transformation it has been engaged in over the past decade to continue. Creativity involving words is at the heart of the global information revolution. Despite statistics that often point in the other direction literacy, or at least a truncated text-message form of it, is on the rise. Despite what you might read elsewhere the book as we know it will vanish. The hard copy, paper printed version, beloved by almost everyone will wither. Driven by the unstoppable growth of digital publishing and the sheer economic obviousness of dealing with niche and minority concerns by e-book, the Welsh world will embrace irrevocable change. The tipping point will be reached when those brought up using keyboards and reading on screens outnumber those who were not. That point will be reached sooner that we think. Instant access to our entire literary culture at the press of a screen, the dream of Andrew Green's National Library, will be ours.

Authors, bowed down by centuries of neglect and rejection will have no further excuse. They will not be able to deploy any of the following arguments to explain their lack of success: because I'm Welsh, I'm not friends with the editor, have the wrong colour hair, am irrelevant, do not subscribe, went to the wrong school, spoke the wrong language, come from the wrong place, have written about difficult subjects, am politically incorrect, haven't joined, do not know the right people, vote for the wrong party, do not belong, have only just arrived, don't live here anymore, am soon to leave, am male, am middle class, am a woman, am too old, don't use a computer, have run out of paperclips. The only thing that will drive readership will be public acceptability. How good you are. If you've bothered to use an independent editor. If you haven't drowned your own market by over exposure. If you have anything interesting to say. If you are worth spending time on. Writing will be judged by quality alone. In the media-merging digital age to come this is a possibility. Already the video platform, e-book and on-screen text are starting to merge.

It'll all happen, too, in Wales, the wonderful future place, shining like a national guitar. Assuming the present economic disasters can be truly averted and the planet can be saved around us. To get there we might have to make some rather untypical compromises: wind farms in the National Parks, a built Severn Barrage, new nuclear power stations, a reduction in our bilingual obsession in order to make regulation easier. Fewer local authorities. Greater centralism. The discovery of new coal measures. Full pelt fracking in the Vale. And maybe even a Celtic oilfield in the Bristol Channel.

Might I still be around to tabulate the change and turn the results into sound poetry? Who knows.

Charlotte Williams OBE,
Llandudno Pier, 2012

12 Just a normal place will do

Charlotte Williams

The relationship between race and place has always fascinated me. When the politics of belonging rose to ascendancy in the 1990s, with all the associated paraphernalia of identity rhetoric and neo-nationalist revivalism, I had long been puzzling my fate as a Black (*sic* brown) woman in a small seaside Welsh town, trying to find a language that spoke to my predicament. What the heck was I doing here? Why? What god or gods had thought this one up?

And then came the 2000s when the preoccupation with heritage, graveyard script and family history gripped us all. Constructing family trees and making Facebook connections became the nation's favourite pastime. I hold my hands up. I was amongst those who sought to find some kind of answer to my place conundrum, to question my ancestry. In doing so I hoped to etch my name on the nation's skull and jog the memory of its multicultural past. I wrote a book. It was a bittersweet book, full of the uncertainties of a new venture. Who could blame me? We all yearn to belong, to belong to something, and by then that something was happening Wales-wide. If the collective had been ruminating on Welsh identity since forever - or at least since the Act of Union - the turn of the 21st Century had us shouting 'Welshness', whatever that was to be, from the rooftops. Something very old was being reshaped anew and *we* (those suddenly bonded now by the policy terminology Black and Ethnicity Minority) were in the business of staking a claim in this great re-nationalism project.

But back in the 1980s the connection between race and place was a very different matter. We weren't Welsh, we were 'local'. We weren't *ethnic* minorities, we were 'Black'. We weren't a collective in any Wales sense, but scattered, largely invisible peoples. We were the dispossessed. Back in the 1980s, if asked, one of our number might say something like: I'm a Mardy boy or I'm from Butetown or I live in Llanrhaeadr, Llanrumney, Llangollen. None of us were prepared to say "I'm Welsh", even if we knew it somehow in our private lives. We wouldn't have publicly claimed Welshness because that would have been far too risky. We were not simply local but *localised* by a powerful set of assumptions that determined where Black people could or couldn't be.

Back then I was Black full stop, despite the fact of my mixed heritage and despite my sense of place. When the city streets of Liverpool, Bristol, Nottingham and London burned with racial fury and we heard regular accounts of police injustices against Black people, these race stories - albeit at some distance from us - awkwardly determined the shape of our identities and experiences. The racial landscape of 1980s Britain was English not Welsh. If Wales had had its moment in racial time it was long buried and forgotten. By the 1980s the only racial language we knew was deployed toward Welsh language/English animosities. Remember the White settlers, the house burnings, the student protests, the Seimon Glyn affair? There were clearly other battles being fought. It's not that we were too busy for race. On the contrary, we just didn't need to worry about it because some innate genetic propensity provided the comforting story of Welsh tolerance that in the national script reads: *there's no problem here*.

That's the point about multiculturalism. It has its very own particularities. If it has lost favour in the 21st Century it is simply because this catch-all term has so many meanings, so many inflections, and it can be deployed for so many purposes. For who could fail to acknowledge the buzz of multiculturalism as a description of the streets of contemporary Wales? Set aside Cardiff as the Rainbow city and go and stay in the Metropole in Llandrindod Wells or the Belle Vue in Aberystwyth and very likely you will be served by a Lithuanian, a Pole or a Bulgarian. Pass through any small town or village and you'll find a Chinese family running a restaurant, an Indian GP, a Filipino nurse or perhaps even a South African dentist, imperceptibly going about their business.

Stand on the pier in Llandudno any Saturday afternoon and listen, look around: a family of Hasidic Jews, an elderly Muslim lady, a couple of Eastern European hotel workers having a smoke break and, some of us plain home grown *Browns*. And who could fail but now notice the efforts of state orchestrated multiculturalism that has laid down the principles of inclusion for the nation post-devolution. These include a range of policy measures such as race equality duties, community cohesion, ethnic minority consultation and multicultural education as part of the national curriculum. But it is that other meaning of multiculturalism that has engaged me; the one that challenges the national psyche, that unsettles the nation's understanding of itself, its anxieties and its aspirations, its family portrait. Its meaning demands a rethink of who we are, what we want and where we are headed.

It's a messy multiculturalism that we live with in Wales, one characterised by awkward intersections: Black/White, English/Welsh, ethnic Welsh/Welsh ethnic minority, Welsh speaker/not, full of crossed wires, doubletalk and mixed messages but most of all characterised by the fact that we largely choose not to speak about it at all. It is somehow both

known and disavowed.

In the summer of 1998 my dad died. I was in the Caribbean with him, and in that same summer, that same week, my first granddaughter was born in Wales. I was writing that book, betwixt and between, somewhere over the Atlantic, somehow paused between generations, a good vantage point for thinking about belonging. It was a book about me, which was really a book about Wales in the disguise of being a book about me. I chose a literary medium to have my say because I thought that in itself this would say something about the nation and its literary outputs. I knew that the reach of this type of book might just be greater than the standard academic output I was used to. These days, in academic circles we call this a crossover text.

"I'll write it for my mother in law", I thought, "and then it just might be of interest to my neighbour". The book was actually a political statement communicated through a genre that was very new to me. As an academic I had been 'writing race' for a good while when it struck me that I could use a creative medium to make a forthright political commentary with perhaps far more impact. There are, of course, many cautionary notes to be sounded in relation to this ambition, not least that which was very quickly pointed out by my then teenage daughter's best friend, Dion. "What's your mum doing?" he asked. "Writing a book", says my daughter. "I'm not being funny like," Dion says innocently. "But who'd be interested in her?" It was a pertinent and sobering question.

Not long after the book came out I was in conversation with one of the top literary figures of Wales in which she quite inadvertently said something along the lines of "Funny isn't it – if you'd have been brought up in Cardiff you'd most likely have been a *nobody* – there just wouldn't have been a story there..." I doubt she meant any offense, in the same way that Dion didn't, and I didn't take any. However, I did reflect on a number of messages this casual remark signalled to me about *race think* in Wales – about race and place.

I suppose Dion is right. There are issues to resolve with the writing of self despite the fact that it has a long pedigree within the Black Movement as a mechanism for critically restating a collective experience. I suppose this is best exemplified by those ancestral slave narratives. I was writing myself into being, demanding engagement with the nation. I wanted to speak to Wales about a particular experience that I felt was missing from its literature, its thinking about Welshness. It was an experience that was not being culturally reproduced in any way. I was telling an individual story, in order to raise an issue about a more general one. I can't put this better than Louis Gates has done when he remarks on this form of writing:

> "The narrated descriptive 'eye' was put into service as a literary form to posit both the individual 'I' of the black author and the collective 'I' of the race".

Looking back I guess this was a bold ambition in a country that had cooked up such a convincing official story of comrades beyond colour, no more neatly put than in Paul Robeson's famous riposte in the film Proud Valley: "Dammit, man, aren't we *all black* down that pit"? What chance would such a counter-narrative have?

The book told its story. It served a purpose; I'd had my say. It took its place alongside a plethora of small acts of cultural expression being asserted within the ethnic mosaic that is Wales. Some space was gradually being opened up in the new Wales for these cultural agents to contribute and shape ideas about national identities and belonging beyond their local community. Perhaps serendipitously, my book resonated with a wider angst and ruminating over Welshness and identity in a Wales that was in the process of reinventing itself post-devolution. My own ruminatings concluded with an observation about:

> "... a future Wales where the search for one voice gives way to a chorus of voices that make up what it is to be Welsh. I know why it is that I like Wales. I like it because it is fragmented, because there is a loud bawling row raging, because its inner pain is coming to terms with its differences and its divisions, because it realises it can't hold on to the myth of sameness, past or present. I ponder what is to come. I hope for a place where we won't be just a curiosity to be tolerated like the Congo boys, or somewhere where we are paraded as a quirky interest like the black person who speaks Welsh, or a team of black mountain climbers or a black ballerina. Just a normal space will do."

But how does such a country become conscious of and reflect its multicultural present when it has not been subject to the mass migration familiar to major English cities? How does it engage when the controversies of riots, shootings and racist murders mean that race rarely makes the headlines? How do you provoke a debate when there are just too few political spokespersons signalling diversity through their presence? Where do you begin when the Robert Earnshaws, Colin Charvises, Colin Jacksons, Shirley Basseys and all of us other Browns provoke no greater a reaction than 'of course they're Welsh'? Are we even noticed as anything different?

The contemporary *rise of the Browns* that has attracted so much debate elsewhere in the UK could have happened in Wales long ago, given that we have a significant population of fifth and sixth generation mixed descent. Meanwhile, a widespread if subtle discrimination persists: '*If you're Brown stick around*'. I grew up with that unfortunate little ditty ringing in my ears and the promise of the access to privilege a hint of whiteness just might bring.

Not so. Whilst the inequality statistics paint a national picture in which we are not as unequal as our nearest neighbours, it is even more significant to remember that within Wales, people living in Black households are estimated to have the lowest equivalent incomes, whilst those living in Asian households also exhibit incomes that are significantly

lower than those of White households. These lower levels of income translate into significantly higher levels of poverty in Wales within Black and Asian households compared to those in White households. Those of Asian ethnicities, such as Bangladeshi and Pakistani are by far amongst the most disadvantaged in our nation, experiencing poverty rates twice that observed amongst White people and more than twice the UK average.

And what can be said about those measures of belonging and integration that have so much currency in public policy speak of late? Let's try you out on the citizenship test. Leave aside the predictable citizenship stuff – do you know the name of the First Minister? When was the Welsh capital established? Who was Hywel Dda? What is an Eisteddfod? Let's cut to the chase and answer me these:

1. When did you last sit and eat with (not be served by) a Black/ethnic minority individual?
2. Name me three people from ethnic minority backgrounds who hold influential positions in Wales?
3. Name a celebrated Welsh author/poet/book by a person from an ethnic minority background?

It's all a bit Slum Dog Millionaire isn't it? It depends where you're standing. As we all know there is all too big a gulf between legal and substantive citizenship for some.

Well my story was done and I thought the job finished, yet the book itself held a little bit of magic I hadn't anticipated in terms of my thinking about race and place. In my naivety what I had not so fully understood was the process itself of becoming seen as a writer. I was wrenched out of the cosy world of the academy and the confines of my quiet writing room at home. I was obliged to enter a very public arena with this little book in hand with its kind of challenging national flag on the cover. I hadn't anticipated the public stage of my work, the challenge of having to account for it, analyse it, *perform* it – to *be* the book so to speak, or indeed that the book itself as artefact could have such a presence.

And so I stumbled into another very Black literary tradition: the 'voice of deliverance'. The talking of the book, which itself acts as a powerful metaphor of countering the deafening silencing of any discourse of difference. Making the text speak became a responsibility I couldn't shirk as part of the process of signalling visibility and inclusion.

In March 2002 I launched the book in my local art gallery in Llandudno. It happened to be St David's day so bunches of daffodils had been placed on the tables and a Welsh harpist played a melodic greeting to welcome the guests. I invited along all my family, friends, school friends, workmates, townspeople and every Black person I knew. I'd hired an African drummer to play alongside me as I read aloud the rhythms of the text. The sounds intermingled and reverberated across the space and out into the streets. It was an open and inviting event. I introduced the themes of *Sugar and Slate* as a juxtaposition of the sugar country of my father and the slate of the quarrying village of my mother – an inextricably mixed history, personal and national. And so my presence, book in hand, was producing a type of '*creolisation*' of a cultural space in Wales, reshaping and reordering expectations of the patron Saint's day.

John McCleod has written about this very thing, describing the way in which the Caribbeans in postwar London appropriated public spaces such as the cricket stands or the spaces outside the cricket ground with their noisy celebrations, liming and dancing. These were the pitches for what he called '*spatial creolisation*', for the claiming of space, for articulating a voice and shifting the boundaries of the nation.

In presenting the book I realised the potential to rework this psychogeography of nation, the relationship between race and place. And so began my reading tour. The National Library of Wales, the National Museum, the Dylan Thomas Centre, Butetown History and Arts Centre to name but a few venues, a tour that ultimately took me one fine May day to the stage of the literature festival in Hay on Wye. It was Wales Book of the Year and I was up for it. "*And the winner is...* (big pause)", Rhodri Morgan announced, as we, the finalists, in those long moments drifted away into the limbo of our own self-conscious thoughts.

I let myself imagine what might happen if I was called. I imagined if the end of that sentence just might be '*henceforth known as Williams the Prize*'. I imagined a tumultuous cheer and then glimpsed something of the accolade of winning such a prestigious national prize. I imagined I heard the audience call out in one huge collective whoop: '*She belongs! She belongs!*' which echoed beyond me outward to a much wider appreciation of a multicultural Wales. It was Glenn Jordan who later reminded me of that popular insider joke – "but Charlotte, everyone knows Black people don't buy books".

So what is the contemporary multicultural settlement? If 25 years have seen some movement from the margins toward a recognition of the multiple and diverse identities of Wales, to a point where you do hear Black and minority ethnic schoolchildren in Wales say 'I'm Welsh' or something much more like 'I'm a Muslim Pakistani Welsh boy' or deploy any of the said variants depending on who he is talking to, perhaps there have been some gains. But were we winners of the new politics?

In that well-established trinity of multiculturalism, *Rights, Recognition, Redistribution*, I fear we may have gone for the easy win. The identity rhetoric has wooed us all and yet its relevance will be short lived amongst a generation for whom these ethnicity claims appear traditionalist, the concerns of mum and dad, a transient preoccupation of the nation-building project. When these cultural entrepreneurs express their identifications it is in much less uniform and static ways, creating shifting solidarities and alliances beyond the boundaries of nation. They are in the business of creating new spaces in which those given factors of faith, class, place, gender and race form a complex and interwoven matrix with the more pressing concerns of a digital age, but don't determine them. As my daughter frequently reminds me, "Mum, we don't do politics".

Patrick McGuinness,
Hay-on-Wye, 2012

13 Overcoming a history of failed nerve

Patrick McGuinness

I arrived in Cardiff in 2001, moving first to a flat on Romilly Road in Canton, and then to a house on Clive Road. I had been in Oxford for eight years, the longest I had spent anywhere, first as a graduate student and then as a lecturer. The man to whom I sold my two-up two-down in Oxford was called Peter Jones, a Welshman. "Oxford to Wales is it?" he asked, "That's a one-way move that is!" He was talking about the property market, but twelve years and two children later, I realise he was right in all sorts of ways.

It had started, if it started anywhere I can pinpoint, at Jesus College Oxford, where I'd just got my first job as a Fellow in French. I met a Welsh girl who was working on Austrian poetry and was lecturing in German. I found her accent hard to place. When I asked her – with the assumed cosmopolitan air I thought befitted a new university lecturer in French – where in Austria she was from, she replied, "Caernarfon". That's how much I knew about Wales. Fifteen years later, I'm writing this in Caernarfon, I conduct most of my daily life in Welsh, the language I speak to my children in, and no one mistakes me for an Austrian.

My first visit to Wales, not long after meeting Angharad, was the journey from Oxford via Birmingham to Bangor, and thence to Bethel, a village outside Caernarfon. That first journey was, in its understated, clattering, overcrowded way, a revelation, and not just because it showed me how bad Welsh transports links were and remain. Moving from Britain's second city through the Shropshire countryside, along the urbanised north Wales coast and then reaching Bangor without changing trains, taught me a lot about people and place. I noticed, for instance, the change from Midlands accents to something more Cheshire-esque as we passed Wrexham and headed into Chester. At Chester half the train got out and was replaced by a different mix again: Welsh speakers dotted among Mancunian and Scouse-sounding Welsh and English. It was a blisteringly hot summer, and when we arrived in Bethel, most of our time was spent in or by the sea. I remember an outdoor festival of some kind, and a Super Furry Animals gig in Bangor. I remember, too, realising that I was in a different… well, *country*.

It was clear that Angharad wanted to return to Wales after years of travelling and living abroad. That suited me. We moved to Cardiff, where I did two things that have defined my time in Wales. I became involved in the literary 'scene', and I changed my politics. Actually, I didn't change my politics at all; rather, I changed my party. I had been a member of East Oxford Labour party, and was, in the ill-fated 1995 election, council candidate for central Oxford. I'd always thought of myself as a pragmatic centre-left party member, though I had never been much interested in politics at university. I found the dead-eyed ambition of student politicians nauseating and predictable, and my time in Ceausescu's Romania killed my political enthusiasm. I was especially attuned to the movement from self-righteous leftier-than-thou student politico to Blairite lobby fodder, something I saw among several contemporaries at university who are now well-known politicians. However, I could live with a certain amount of selling-out, because, after all, we had won the 1997 election, and then the 2001 election, and I was a pragmatist. By the time I moved to Wales I was ready for what I thought was real Labour, or true Labour, so I arrived with high hopes.

I became interested in Anglo-Welsh literature too, something that the English don't know about and the Anglo-Welsh weren't told about. Being in Cardiff in the early 2000s was invigorating. It was a heady time in many ways – in any given week you could attend a poetry reading of a book written in Cardiff dialect (Kairdiff) and one written in Welsh. One of the best things about the last ten or so years has been the modest but undeniable growth in Anglo-Welsh literary consciousness. In schools, universities, but also among a general readership, the English-language literature produced in Wales holds it own.

It wasn't always thus. "You might as well study writing from Yorkshire," was the view of a senior Cardiff English academic, fresh

from post-colonial studies, and treating Wales and the Welsh with such intellectual and actual disdain that I was amazed he got away with it. I remember thinking that the Scots would never put up with this. So why did the Welsh? Another senior academic form the same institution who had been in Cardiff for 30 years proudly told me that they had never once been to Cardiff market. I was sure that if the name had not already been taken by the ex-Bristol Polytechnic, Cardiff university would have called itself the University of the West of England.

That was in 2001, and the invisibility of Welsh writing in English was shocking to me. Now it's possible to study Welsh writing in English as a module in several Welsh universities, including Cardiff. So things have changed in some respects. This fear of being oneself seemed to me to be at the heart of what held Wales back. I still think it haunts Welsh institutions in general, from universities to health and education boards to the National Assembly and its civil service. In fact, I think it's been written into the devolution settlement Wales was given in 1997, and again into the referendum we had in 2011.

I joined Plaid Cymru in 2002, as a direct result of the collaboration between parts of the Labour party and the Welsh Mirror in one of the most vicious anti-minority campaigns I had ever come across. The campaign was against the Welsh language, but also and very clearly against those who spoke it. This seems to me one of the ugliest chapters in modern British politics. Anyone who dared raise the issue of demographic and economic pressure on Welsh, or who suggested that people who moved to a Welsh-speaking area should actually learn some Welsh, was branded a 'racist'. I wrote an article for Planet magazine about the way in which the term 'racism' had been hollowed out and was now being used in Wales essentially to attack Plaid Cymru, Welsh-speaking communities, and anyone who raised their heads above the parapet. It was a proud day when the Editor of the 'Welsh' Mirror rang up Planet and threatened legal action, then disappeared.

Needless to say, the Labour government of the day was taking increasingly authoritarian measures against immigration, arguing for compulsory English tests, and so on. As a friend visiting us in Cardiff asked. "If 'racism' is the word they use for someone who wants incomers to Welsh communities to learn Welsh, what are they going to use for the BNP?" It was a good question. Not only was the word 'racism' and its cognates being hollowed out and rendered meaningless, it was thereby devalued for anyone who might need it to describe genuine racism. My reading of the Assembly's debates, as well as the Welsh Grand Committee (what a grand guignol of tribalist bile that used to be!) revealed that the word 'racist' was only ever used to attack Welsh speakers and Plaid Cymru. I wrote to my AM Rhodri Morgan about this mentioning the role of the Welsh Mirror. He was responsive and sympathetic. It was clear he was uncomfortable with the antics of some of his party. Yet it has to be said that immaturity is at the heart of intra-party political discourse in Wales. All sides are responsible for the country's seeming inability to discuss questions of identity and governance in meaningful ways.

In a lecture a year or so later, Carwyn Jones would allude to the same episode when he admitted that the Labour party had often confused attacking Plaid with attacking the language. The classic mode of attack also involved fake class politics. While, with their connivance, Blair chased the middle class English vote, Welsh Labour politicians attacked 'middle class' Welsh speakers. Its plain they've never been to Caernarfon, Amlwch, Blaenau Ffestiniog, or even the Aman Valley. I think this is the only example in modern UK politics of a political party actually trying to foment rather than heal class division. It could only happen in Wales.

Mike Parker's defining article in Planet, *Loaded Dice*, which led on to his definitive *Neighbours from Hell*, showed me that some other English incomers to Wales felt the same as I did. We were ashamed not just of the political posturing on our behalves, as if we needed defending, but of the overwhelmingly *de haut en bas* attitude of many of our compatriots, They not only held the Welsh language in contempt, but the Anglo-Welsh too, though they often used the Anglo-Welsh and their alleged difference from the Welsh speakers as alibis to avoid learning Welsh, or to feed their own sense of superiority. 'Colonialism' was not too strong a word for what many felt was happening in Wales. The 'C' word was one you often heard back then, as used not just by Cymuned but, increasingly, by academics and writers working on Welsh literature in English. It was one of the few places where politics and literature would meet.

For a lively debate involving politicians, academics and editors, see New Welsh Review numbers 65, 66 and 67. I thought the Welsh have just as much right as the English to expect integration, respect and cultural sensitivity, and I think it even more now. I am always struck by how Wales seems to be a place of destination for people who have, and often want, no knowledge of it, or who have outright contempt for its people and history. What has given my time in Wales meaning has been a sense of engagement, and, frankly, a belief that I would get more out of being here if I learned about it and became, in my small way, involved in it. The belief that when one moves to a new place one adapts, adjusts, learns about it and if one can contributes, is one I learned in England, though not, I admit, from the English. So it seems fitting to keep it in mind.

As for the realpolitik of selective minority-bashing as practised by some of Wales's politicians, the evidence suggests that much of this is now confined to the extreme edges of the political arena, to UKIP, True Wales, and other grievance-randy outfits. There is a new consensus about Wales's political direction, but it remains

What, if anything, gave that book its value, was triggered by moving between languages: French, my mother–tongue, English, my daily language, and Welsh, which I began learning on an Wlpan course. I remember playing with words, enjoying their odd consonances and cross–language meetings.

defined by timidity, and by what I think of as a history of failed nerve. In the years of relative plenty, post-1997, we had opportunities to grow and develop, to invest in an infrastructure that was as much cultural as practical and economic. We didn't do that, and the times to come look pretty inauspicious. In Wales we have a tendency to oscillate between irrational self-laceration and equally irrational bouts of boosterism. The truth of what lies ahead is probably to be found somewhere between the two.

I began writing my first book of poems *The Canals of Mars*, in Cardiff. Looking back, the book has a definite shape. At the back are four pages of gristly apprentice-poems written as I drifted around Oxford. What, if anything, gave that book its value, was triggered by moving between languages: French, my mother-tongue, English, my daily language, and Welsh, which I began learning on an Wlpan course. I remember playing with words, enjoying their odd consonances and cross-language meetings. Here's the start of a poem called *Cwlwm*, which is about learning Welsh and at the same time learning something else, the resources of the other languages, French and English, which I thought I knew. It started with my pleasure at finding that *Calon* ('heart') in Welsh can be rearranged to make *Canol* ('centre'), which is, in a way, the same thing. *Canol y dre*, City Centre, could easily, poetically, be, *Calon y dre*, heart of the city. Then *Cwlwm*, knot, becomes *Cwmwl*, cloud - a different kind of knot, and so on. I even enjoyed the way in which Adar/ Aderyn (bird/birds) reminded me of the French aviation pioneer, Clément Ader. A poem was being given to me from the interstices of language. Here it is:

Cwlwm was the knot the language had me in,
the tangle-throated syllables of villages and streets;
I saw double before I learned to see them twice.
Then the roadsigns started to take root,

The place-names lifted off the letters
that composed them as in films the spirit
leaves the body. Calon into canol
heart into centre, fluent as a stencil

Peeling back to leave itself behind.
Adar, aderyn were the birds Clément
Ader's aeroplane translated – the word's
Idea of flight joined coast to coast

In the dangerous, sustaining air.
Now from the geiriadur the words take off,
the dictionary empties page by page
letter by letter, column by column.

I don't have an especially strong view on Independence, though I believe it's a good thing to want, and wanting it is a reminder that there has to be something more to us as a nation than the passive-aggressive defeatism of many of our parties and institutions.

Without making any great claims for the poem, it's clear that it inhabits a terrain in which one language enriches another. It's also about the difference, here expressed in the conceit about seeing double and seeing twice, between being confused and alienated by unfamiliarity and realising that unfamiliarity is an enriching part of experience. Difference is part of the landscape, not an obstacle on the path to comprehension. It is also, of course, about bilingual roadsigns, which have, as we know, a totemic value in Wales as markers not just of place and language but of politics and demographical balance.

That poem expresses what Wales has given to me. I might have had a version of it from my own Belgian-Irish-English childhood and from my own peripatetic upbringing. But what is clear is that this way of thinking came to me as a result of profound emotional as well as intellectual involvement with living in Wales. It's something you see among poets, such as Gwyneth Lewis in Welsh and English or Paul Muldoon in Irish and English, whose work moves in those interstices and is happy to inhabit them. It's a kind of seam that has given its riches both to Anglo-Welsh and Cymraeg literature.

It's equally important to realise that plenty of good literature doesn't do that. It's rooted in its place, culture, language and history. One of the dangers of the kind of slippery pseudo-cosmopolitanism of the kind I practice (that looks sophisticated but isn't) is that it can be construed as more authentically 'global' or 'representative' or even (that useless word) more 'modern' than other kinds of writing. It isn't. It's a convention, like any other. When we remember that most of the world's movement between places and languages is caused by forced dislocation, poverty and refuge-seeking, it seems pretentious, not to say unsavoury, to admire the 'aesthetics of liminality' (as the academics call it) from the point of view of first world writers. The fact that much of the poetry produced according to these principles reads like the kind of mandarin scrabble that's more fun to do than to read, and is done with the pseudo-political alibi of revealing the coercions and presumptions of language doesn't help either.

What also needs to be valued in Wales are those perdurable literatures of time and place and context - Kate Roberts in Welsh or Gwyn Thomas in English - or those extraordinary writers such as Lynette Roberts and Caradog Pritchard who seem to combine a deep sense of rootedness in culture and location with a radical modernist displacement.

I live in the same house, see the same views, drive the same car and take the same children to the same school as Angharad Price, whose two novels *O! Tyn y gorchydd* (2002) and *Caersaint* (2010) are expressions of people and place, of Welsh life rooted and uprooted but always itself. What struck me about the responses to the English translation of her first novel by a major London publisher (as *The Life of Rebecca Jones*) was the way it was – rightly – held to express not just a national and historical experience, but something universal and

applicable to all sorts of countries, places and peoples. It has been called the first Welsh classic of the 21st Century, but the reviews in the UK press (not to mention the translation offers from other countries) make clear that the experience it depicts has a universality that is achieved precisely because the book is rooted in its place, time, people and language. That universality is achieved through complete and concentrated specificity. I've thought a great deal about this paradox, until I realised it wasn't a paradox. To have something to say to others you first of all have to be yourself, and at the point where you are most yourself, you realise that you are most like others too. That is true of writers, but also of countries.

That journey from Oxford to Caernarfon I first took back in 1996 has become a twice-weekly commute - down on a Monday, back on a Friday. I'm more inured now to the variations of accent and voice I once found exotic, though I have noticed - and this is perhaps more symbolic than a sign of things going backwards - that the journey takes longer now and involves more changes than it did in 1997.

I don't have an especially strong view on Independence, though I believe it's a good thing to want, and wanting it is a reminder that there has to be something more to us as a nation than the passive-aggressive defeatism of many of our parties and institutions. I'm impressed by various thinkers in the Assembly who have considered the issue of how the various gradations of devolution – from something like devo-max to federalism – might affect us: David Melding among the Tories, Adam Price in Plaid, Leighton Andrews in Labour.

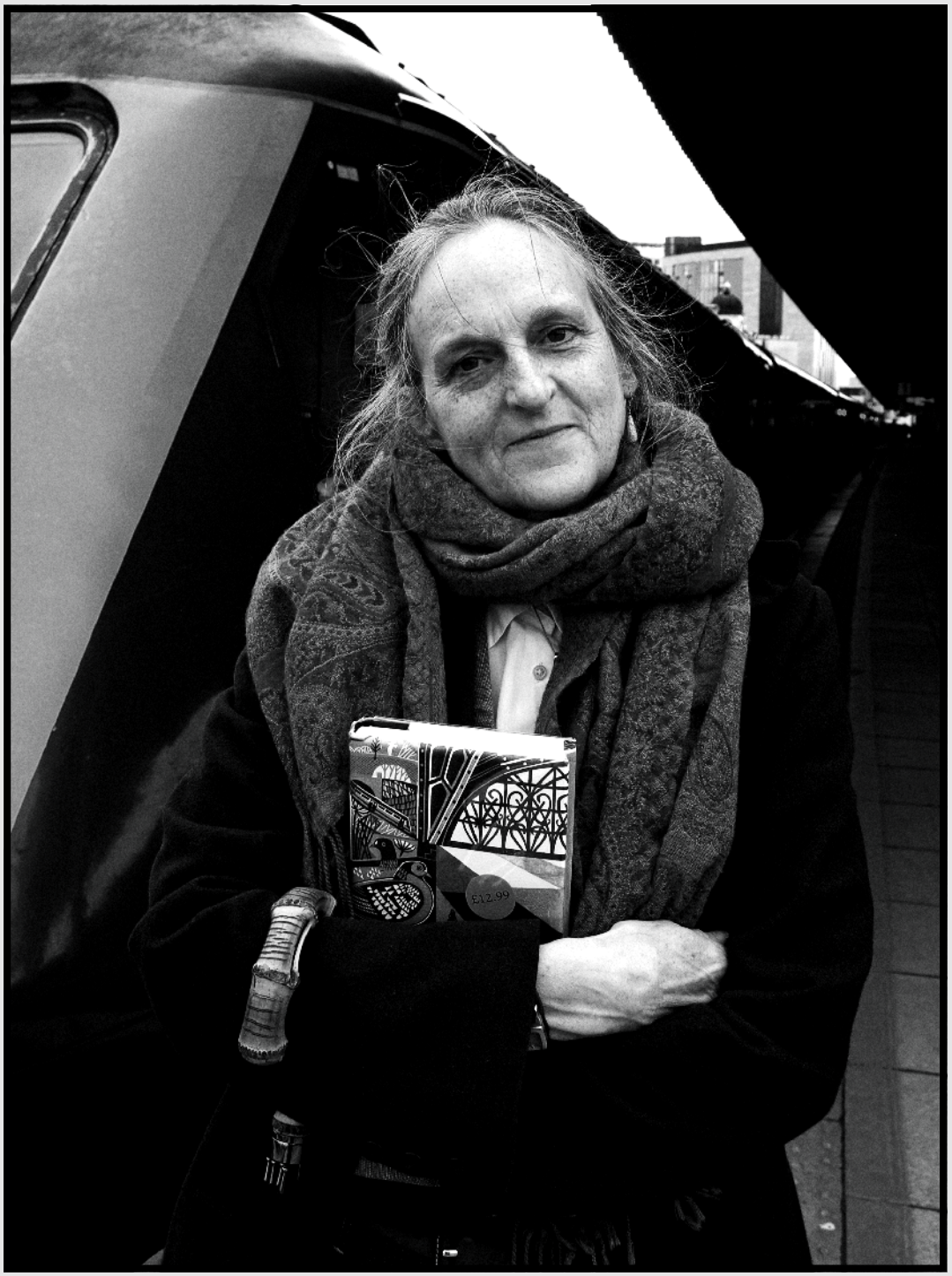
My feeling is that there's enough common ground and that the best of our political class is actually becoming sharper and more focused and more conscious of the specifically Welsh issues at stake than before. I think tribalism is dying down, or at any rate you find it where you expect it: in elections and not (or not so much...) in governance. I am sure there is a place called Wales, and that its future lies in being different not just from its neighbour but different from the way it has been until now.

I know that we will never be taken seriously until we take ourselves seriously: learn our own history, teach our own languages and literatures, learn to steward our own resources (and ask to control them where necessary), nurture not just what makes us different from others but also what makes us different from each other. I think that a bout of unashamed nation-building is necessary; one that covers everything from transport and utilities infrastructure to educational and cultural institutions.

I don't have any predictions for 2025, but I can certainly tell you what I'd like to see: a nurturing of Welsh difference and exceptionality, especially insofar as English politics are concerned. Britain is currently the most unequal society in developed Europe, and shows no sign of becoming less so, or indeed wanting to. Inequality has been factored into the British way of doing politics, because inequality is talked about as if it were a natural fact, a sort of Act of God, which the state has little to do with. The motor for this comes, as we all know, from English politics where, in the Major-Blair-Brown-Cameron political continuum (and it is a continuum) inequality has risen. Rampant privatisation, begun under Thatcher and extravagantly perpetuated by Major and Blair, has been accompanied by an ever-increasing gap between rich and poor and the lowest social mobility in Europe. Class is still with us, though it is now more nakedly based around money than it used to be. Wales is less class-ridden, less unequal, less interested in fostering divisions, and has an opportunity to choose a different and less negative path. We have, in Wales, something I consider to be the best of a range of political traditions across the left-right divide. I believe that the way forward is to resist the toxic politics of the last fifty or so years in Westminster. I favour, also, a kind of federal UK, and a Wales that gets its bearings as much from Europe as it does from Britain as currently constituted.

Another desire is tied less to a national vision (there's a phrase that should be in inverted commas) than to a vision of what I mean by community. I believe that people who move to Welsh-speaking areas should learn a respectful amount of the language. This seems to me to be a community's inalienable right: to be respected. We English ask for no less; indeed, it's a common-sensical way to proceed with everything from social integration to personal fulfilment. But at the same time we mustn't mistake having debates about identity for actually getting on with having an identity. There's nothing more dull than the reams of social-scientist prose about what different kinds of Welshness constitute, or the endless letters pages where people engage in games of competitive Welshness.

I wrote earlier that there was more consensus. There is, of course, but consensus can often be a problem: it stuns us, takes the bite and urgency out of our priorities, and makes us forget that, historically, in Wales as elsewhere, what is worth having always has to be fought for, argued for, and won at cost. Devolution so far has been inadequate: without the economic levers of power, the Welsh Assembly will have little chance either to change people lives in material ways, or to fire their imaginations in ways that might make Wales what it needs to become in order to remain itself.



Tessa Hadley,
Cardiff Central Station, 2012

14 Perched on a creative fault line

Tessa Hadley

I came to Wales in 1982 by accident – and it wasn't even my accident. My husband Eric (who is from Birmingham) had been training teachers at the Department of Education in Cambridge. His contract came to an end and he needed another job. After a number of interviews in various places where fate might have taken us instead, he got a job at the university in Cardiff, and later moved to work at UWIC, now Cardiff Metropolitan University in Cyncoed.

Although I was born and grew up in Bristol, just across the water, and although I'd been taught by so many Welsh teachers at school, and had holidays in Wales as a child, I'd never even visited Cardiff before. We've lived here ever since, except for this one last year (2011-12) when we've lived, experimentally, in London (more of that later). We arrived in Wales with a two-year-old son, and went on to have two more boys. The oldest now works in London, the second works in politics in Cardiff, and the third is at university in Liverpool.

It was a lucky accident, I think. Cardiff has suited us. And of course it's formed us too (I was only twenty-six when I came). Most of my adult interactions have been with its particular forms of life, its culture, its ways of doing things. I suppose I've walked more often up and down Albany Road than any other road in the world: first with a pushchair to the shops, then back and forwards to the school, and nowadays to read the *Guardian* over a cup of coffee after a day's writing, or on my way to walk in Roath Park.

I've worn my own personal groove in Albany Road's pavement, or it's worn its groove deep in the under-layers of my imagination. It's not a beautiful road: wide but treeless, low-rise late Victorian, bodged over with a patchwork of tatty shop facades. These days it looks run down and poor. It used to have good individual butchers and greengrocers and hardware shops – there's just one greengrocers left, and the stall by the church. (I saw a last funeral procession wind out from that church, years ago; today it's a pound store and you can poke around inside where plastic buckets and flip-flops and bubble bath are piled up alongside pews and a lectern and organ pipes.) Now the road is shabbily colonised by the supermarkets and other chains, which multiply like diseased cells.

The junior school presides austerely over the street. It's tall, stone-built, slate-roofed, built for the not unanimously grateful working classes of the burgeoning city in the 1890s, when education was a frowning entrance into higher things. In 2012 it's a visionary place, with a wonderful headmistress and a progressive ethos. All my boys went there (and then to Cathays, the local comprehensive). Cardiff children - whose backgrounds are Welsh, Somali, Bangladeshi, Czech Roma, Russian, English and more - are encouraged and cherished and inspired at Albany school, taught to be imaginative and kind. When I try to work out just why I attached so readily to Cardiff (I'd been miserable in Cambridge), the school seems to have something to do with it. It represents the best of what's characteristic of the place. South Wales's culture, the way I tell it to myself, is a rich hybrid. It begins with the old ingredients of native Welsh history and English entanglements, distorted under the extreme pressures of change in the industrial revolution. It is layered by the successive waves of immigrants who came to the mines and the steelworks and the port, from England, Ireland, Poland, Norway, Ukraine, Somalia, Yemen, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and so on. Into the mix go the traditions of industrial community solidarity and radical politics, the force of nationalism and the strong survival of the Welsh language, the discipline of non-conforming Protestantism, a spice of Catholicism, and Islam. For as long as we've lived here there's been a mosque at the end of our residential street, where the community gathers for festivals and the children go in the evenings for Quran school.

What we attached to, when we arrived in Cardiff in 1982, were I suppose the consequences in everyday culture of that turbulent history and that mix. The most ordinary interactions on the street or on the buses or in the shops seemed to have a distinctively different tone and a flavour. It's so difficult to characterise the spirit of a place without seeming to sentimentalise. And, of course, it goes without saying that there are as many surly – or wheedling, or vicious, or whatever – individuals in Cardiff as there are anywhere. However, after Cambridge, with its thousand-year-old traditions of hierarchy, it felt as though someone had lifted the lid off.

Something in the Cardiff air felt egalitarian, assertive, witty, jaunty, uninhibited, resistant. The city seemed to belong to everyone, not simply to a dominant middle class. We found this Cardiff air very congenial – but I've always known that I'd never completely belong to it (or is it that it doesn't belong to me?). That doesn't matter to me very much. I'm English in Wales, and I sound English and probably if I could

see myself I would see that I look and behave somehow in a way that's English too. I can't imagine trying to change that. But there's a way of submerging in the life of a place and participating in it wholly without belonging in it (or owning it). Hybrid cultures are always dissolving and re-making themselves around their edges, anyway.

In my writing I aim for exactly this same balancing act of submersion without belonging. I want my fictional worlds to be rooted in the local and particular, and yet I want my take on them to come as if from outside the tribe, from a clear distance. Perhaps fiction and poetry at their best are always global and parochial at once. I'm using 'parochial' idiosyncratically here, in a sense that's wholly positive, to stand for the substantial particular furniture (things, words, habits, beliefs) of any given place at any given moment. Think of the minute inventories of the rooms in Balzac, or the textures of local politics in Winifred Holtby's *South Riding*, or the distinctive idiom of social intercourse in Margiad Evans's *Country Dance*. Or for that matter – because it's not only true for realism - the particularity of Kafka's airless apartment in Prague; or the flight of steps down which a Beckett character is perpetually being kicked, hanging on to his very particular kind of hat.

In a sense a writer is parochial - fixed in time and place - the moment she or he uses one language and one idiom rather than another. And yet fictional and poetic language also liberates us from the particular. The very act of describing anything (or embodying it, or realising it) is both a homage to a particular form of life, and in the same moment a liberation from its limitations. Describing the thing, we acknowledge implicitly that it could be otherwise. Elizabeth Bowen writes brilliantly about the shock of coming to England from Ireland as a child. She places the beginning of her writing life there, in the revelation that forms of life which had seemed universally true were only after all one way of arranging things. Not only was England strange, Ireland became strange too. And 'strange' became the writer's subject.

Cardiff sometimes seems perched on just this creative fault line in Wales, between the fixed forms of a coherent identity and something more fluidly shape-shifting. I'm carefully talking about Cardiff because that's where my home is. I feel less confident, speaking of my relations to a wider Wales. I know that there's something that puts Cardiff in a different relationship to Dolgellau than to Minehead. Yet I find it difficult to describe what it is that connects them. I don't know quite what a nation is, or what it feels like to belong to one – though I'm not a sceptic either. The idea of a nation, I suppose I would say, is a working hypothesis. It is an idea of a collective which becomes real and has its meaning through individuals using it and living into it - alongside all the other complex collectives we inhabit, of state and community and language. Various different shapes of identity, and forms of belonging, seem to circle and overlap one another in Wales at the moment.

What I do feel unequivocally is that there's a precious opportunity just now for Britain, in a fresh focus, after devolution, on the distinctive identities of Wales and Scotland. What British culture needs most urgently, it seems to me, is some counterpoise to the distorting effects of centralisation and the sheer drag on our collective culture of the wealth and scale and power of London and the south-east. In the old days of industrial power, Wales and Scotland and the regions in England pulled back, with all the gritty dirty real force of coal and steel and manufactured goods, against that proneness of the centre to swallow everything. Now - with the shift of power in the last decades into the financial institutions, and more recently into opening up the service industries to privatisation via government – it sometimes feels as if nothing is pulling back, against London.

This is not an anti-London argument. I love London – as I mentioned at the outset, we are living there for a year, as an experiment. My husband's retired, the children have more or less left home: I can write anywhere. And the great metropolis is beautiful, thrilling, dynamic, bottomless. I have always been published there. It would be an adventure to move our lives in London more permanently, and we do talk about it. But loving London is perfectly compatible with anxiety about how lopsidedly it sometimes seems to make and consume, here in Britain, our way of seeing things and saying things.

At a distance, from this temporary perch, I seem to appreciate even more clearly how devolution in Wales opens up new freedoms: to re-define a collective life at arm's length from the metropolis, and according to different lights. Politics in Wales is beginning to *sound* very different to politics in Westminster. This feels particularly urgent, as the present UK government empties out, in one area after another, our best traditions of mutuality and shared social democracy. Intrinsic to this ugly politics is the purging of our public rhetoric, emptying good words of meaning, replacing substance with lego-brick bland euphemism. There's no shortage of spirited and focussed resistance to the euphemism, coming from all over Britain and of course from inside the metropolis itself. But what we need is an elsewhere (or many elsewheres); not just abstract spaces of debate and criticism, but actual places on the map, and on the earth, where things are done differently, where there's something different in the air. Welsh difference feels very necessary, at this moment, to our collective imagination.

Unlike politicians or social theorists, fiction writers and poets can't contribute to this necessary difference in any calculated or programmatic way. A writer's responsibility is a slippery thing, not straightforwardly to the general good or anything so fine. Sitting in front of the screen - reaching for the next sentence or the next line, fumbling through possibilities, combing the conscious mind for the right words, counting on what looms through the fog of the half-conscious – one's responsibility is at once very precise and very small.

Writers have to persist until it's right, to be faithful to their intuition, to get the thing said truly. It isn't the writer's business, if he or she wants to write well, to think about writing for the nation. Although they might sometimes want to write *about* the nation, or about the idea of the nation. I suppose Yeats really was writing *for* Ireland. But that was then, and there – and him. The highest thing the nation can require of a writer is that they write well, and find the truth they're trying to tell, whatever it is. A national literature in one sense is no more than the work of a heterogeneous bunch of individual writers, each pursuing his or her own vision.

At the same time all fiction writing and poetry, everywhere, grows out of the ground of the parochial, as I've called it – out of the particulars of language and landscape and mind-set and manners. In this sense then, in its aggregate, Welsh writing does add up to something with a distinctive identity. Welsh writing is a baggily capacious category, and full of internal contradictions. Individual writers may move in and out of it, and may also be counted inside other categories. But nonetheless the best fictions and poems written in or about Wales at this beginning of our 21st Century must between them help to define, even unknowingly, precious differences between what's in Wales, and what's elsewhere.

There are some things, finally, that I can't write about Wales, though I wish I could. This is because I don't belong. When we first moved to Cardiff all those years ago, we lived for a few months in Dinas Powys, in a rented flat in a big Edwardian house opposite the church. For the historical record, our elderly landlady, who had been born in Wales and lived there all her life, identified herself as English and said she'd given us the flat in spite of our little boy, because she'd liked our English voices. She was a beautiful old lady, always elegantly dressed. She left me a note once, warning me that "Andrews and his man" were coming to trim trees. She advised me to wipe the picture rails twice when I cleaned, once with a damp cloth, and afterwards with a dry woollen one. They don't, I think, make landladies like that any more. I still have her recipe for caramel shortcake. We knew rather quickly that Dinas Powys was wrong for us, and that what we wanted was to live in the city proper.

On the train one morning, on our way from Dinas into Cardiff, my husband and I sat eavesdropping. We were still recent arrivals from Cambridge, trying to learn the shape of this place we'd accidentally fallen into. A boy in his late teens was talking to a man he hadn't met before, but who turned out to be a friend of his grandfather. They were from somewhere in the Valleys. The boy was full of respectful interest. The elderly man talked with no presumption that because he was old he would be disregarded, or that because the boy was young he was threatening or alien. I enjoyed their dry humour, the way the old man made the boy laugh, the way the boy said goodbye when they parted.

When we got out of the train, we knew there was something we liked about Wales. But because I'm not local, I can't find the right words for the conversation, writing it. I can't do justice to it because I can't catch the intonation truthfully, the music of their exchange. Probably the boy didn't actually say 'goodbye'. What did he say? If I tried to put this scene in a story it would only sound fake, or sentimental.

Watching Michael Sheen's Port Talbot *Passion* on the television, what moves me are those same qualities we intuited from the conversation on the train. There was an openness in the people performing and the people watching, something old-fashioned in their courtesy, some unprotected emotion, some dry wit, some lack of inhibition, some sceptical politics, some bold grasp of values (and all the rest of the muddle of life along with that, of course.)

Whatever they are – those qualities that characterise some of the best of Wales – another writer will be able to catch them, if I can't. Michael Sheen and Owen Sheers caught something of them, in Port Talbot. That's part of what a national literature might be for, even if no writer ever sits down thinking they're participating in it. Between us, we ought to be able to build a record of the distinctiveness of the place: what it inherits from the past, what it is in the present, what it can communicate to the future. And in building the record, the writing becomes part of the story.

John Williams,
Canton, Cardiff, 2012

15 Inside the forbidden city

John Williams

I can't speak for Wales. I'm not sure what or where it is, or when it was. Cardiff: that's as big a place as I think I can presume to speak about with even a smidgeon of authority. So here goes. Me and Cardiff, over the past quarter century. And looking back it's plain to see that twenty-five years ago, Cardiff hit a watershed. The city was at a low ebb then, a fading port, a declining Victorian industrial city buffeted by Mrs Thatcher's new broom. It might have given up and gone into terminal decline. It could, if you like, have become Newport. But it didn't. Instead it started to morph into the city we see today, a modern British urban hotspot, a shopping mall by day and a hen-and-stag drinking destination by night. A triumph of sorts. And a quarter century on is a good time to reflect a little on how that change began, and what was lost along the way.

In 1987 an organisation called the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was set up. Its mission was to do something with Cardiff's increasingly derelict docklands, the remnants of the city's glory days as the world's busiest port. That was in the years before the First World War, when shipping ran on coal and Cardiff was the place to refuel. The Docks, though, had been in steady decline since the 1920s when ships switched to oil, apart from the brief boom occasioned by World War Two. By the 1980s all that was left was a handful of working docks on the further flung reaches of the bay, and a whole lot of post-industrial wasteland. Oh, and the remains of the oldest multi-racial community in Britain. This community used to live in a grid of Victorian slum terraces, known to people who didn't live there as 'Tiger Bay', and to those who did simply as 'the Docks' or, if you were being formal, 'Butetown'. These terraces were torn down in the sixties and replaced by a shoddily built housing estate, which remains there today. Some of the former inhabitants left the area then, moved out to housing estates on the edge of the city, but a fair number remained.

The Corporation came up with an ambitious plan. They would build a barrage across the mouth of the Bay, turning it from a tidal basin into a marina. Then they would redevelop the commercial part of the Docks, the southern tip, into a spanking new waterfront destination with restaurants and a shopping mall. It was a plan loosely based on that enacted, with some success, in Cardiff's twin city of Baltimore, Maryland. 'Waterfronts' were becoming fashionable, while 'Docks' were history. The Corporation envisaged a bright new development full of yuppies shopping and eating out, before going off to sleep in their loft-style apartments.

It was a plan that showed a notable lack of interest in the people who were already living in the Docks. The Corporation put up a huge poster in the town centre advertising the regeneration project. There were lots of happy smiling faces on the poster but not one of them black, no acknowledgment of the multicultural population who lived in Butetown, nor the Docks' multicultural history.

But then Cardiffians always had an equivocal relationship with their maritime heritage. On the one hand, we were proud of the Docks, to have been the world's foremost port during the days of empire was quite something. On the other hand, there was also something slightly shameful, for a dour protestant city, about a past full of sailors and slums, prostitutes and opium dens. When I was growing up the contradiction was generally dealt with by reducing a complex, still evolving history into a bland formula. Cardiff had a wonderful maritime tradition, but it was all in the past.

The fact that its legacy was still there, if you just headed south beneath the Bute Street railway bridge, was ignored. During the sixties, when I was a child, respectable Cardiffians never went under the bridge. There be dragons and so forth. Occasional references to colourful old Tiger Bay were permitted, and then people would say, with a sigh, what a shame it was that it had all been knocked down. Progress, you know. Again no mention of the fact that much of the Bay's 'colourful' population was still there, living in the newly built housing estate. Of course, it was easy to ignore this inconvenient fact, as back then Docks people were still rarely seen, and not entirely welcome, in town.

I first became aware that the Docks really were still there when I was seventeen and living in Splott. A band we knew called the Young Marble Giants announced that they were playing a gig at a club called the Casablanca, down in the Docks. So one evening we took a number 9 bus heading for the city's hidden past.

The bus took us through the housing estate and dropped us off by a big Victorian dockside boozer called the Big Windsor which had once housed a French restaurant my grandparents frequented. The Casablanca turned out to be a converted chapel on the edge of this grand Victorian square.

Inside there was reggae on the sound system and the smell of dope in the air. I felt, with a sense of relief, that I'd walked through the

And so to today. Cardiff Bay has become part of the fabric of the city. The old Docks are history while the city's redevelopment rolls on elsewhere.

green door and found the forbidden Cardiff. I loved it. After that, I spent a fair bit of time in the Casablanca and the other Docks pubs and clubs over the next year or two, mixing with hippies and hookers, sailors and rastas. Then I moved to London and eventually started writing for a living. At the back of my mind was the idea of writing about the Docks, this hidden history. Meanwhile, the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation had been formed and new plans were being laid, plans that threatened to finally obliterate the last traces of this community I'd glimpsed.

In 1988, I found my subject. On 14 February that year, a prostitute called Lynette White was murdered in a flat in James Street, just round the corner from the Casablanca Club, which was hosting a Valentines Day dance. The police proceeded to spend a year failing to find the killer. The Development Corporation was less than thrilled. Their grand plans were predicated on the fantasy that the docklands were abandoned territory, ripe for reclamation. The idea that they were actually inhabited by prostitutes and murderers was bad for business. In particular, an unsolved murder was terrible publicity for the grand project. So, under pressure to get results, the police picked up five local black men and charged them with the murder, never mind the lack of any real evidence against them. The case was tried in Swansea, where an all-white jury found three of them guilty.

It was a blatant miscarriage of justice. The killer's blood was all over the room in which the murder had taken place and yet it didn't match any of those charged. I ended up writing a book about the murder case and the subsequent campaign to free the Cardiff Three, as the men became known. In researching it, I got to know something of the Docks community, the friends and family of the men inside, and the pimps and prostitutes who had worked alongside the dead girl. It was not any kind of a respectable community but neither was it a lawless one, as the prosecution had suggested. Instead, it was a place made up of people – black, white and in-between - who had grown up with the knowledge that their city cared little for them. If they wanted to make a living they would have to improvise, and live by their own rules.

The campaign was run for the most part by Lloyd Parris and Malik Abdullahi, brothers of two of the men convicted. Lloyd and Malik were not activists or politicians but hustlers, and somehow they applied their skills to the job in hand. They were good at it. Soon they had the UK press and an assortment of TV shows, culminating in the BBC's Panorama, coming down to cover the case. The Panorama film was pivotal. Soon afterwards the case went to appeal and the Cardiff Three were released after four years in prison, left to pick up their lives as best they could.

I wrote my book, and got sued by the police for my pains. The media moved on to other subjects, as did I. Malik and Lloyd went back to their former lives. I had hoped that my book, which gave a picture of life in the Docks, might help persuade the new overlords to think twice before doing their best to erase the local community from history. Instead, the Development Corporation got back to work, knocking down the old and ringing in the identikit new. Though now there was at least a semblance of acknowledging the past, as the Corporation funded the setting up of the Butetown History and Arts Centre.

By the turn of the millennium the shiny new Cardiff Bay was a reality, with its shopping mall, five-star hotel and cinema complex. Soon the opera house followed, and then the Assembly building – proud symbol of a new Wales. Meanwhile, the last bastions of the old Docks quietly closed their doors. The pubs and clubs went down like dominoes: the Big Windsor, the Glendower, the Custom House, The Crown, the Baltimore, the Paddle Steamer, the Avondale, the North Star, the Casablanca, the Casino, not to mention the many no-name shebeens.

Before long, the physical redevelopment was backed up by a

linguistic one. Suddenly no one mentioned the Docks any more; instead, people would talk of going down 'the Bay'. The sixties' estate which still housed a few thousand remaining Docks people, buoyed somewhat by a recent influx from Somalia, was now always referred to by its formal name of Butetown.

And so to today. Cardiff Bay has become part of the fabric of the city. The old Docks are history while the city's redevelopment rolls on elsewhere. The city centre has been rendered fit for 21st Century commercial purpose with the building of the St David's 2 shopping centre. Each year the city becomes shinier and less individual. Those of us who crave the weathered and the distressed, the places with the patina of history still visible, have had to look harder for our meeting places. For a while some of us favoured the Vulcan, a pub on the edge of the city centre and on the edge, too, of the old docklands. The Vulcan was the last place where you could live and breathe something of the culture of the old docks pubs. Three years ago it was threatened with closure. We protested and achieved a temporary stay of execution was. But in mid-2012 Brains closed the Vulcan, without warning, for the last time – though it is to be resurrected in St Fagans.

Neither the decrepit but characterful old pub nor its equally decrepit but characterful clientele seemed to have any place in the new Welsh capital city, the showpiece city centre. There's not much call for the real history of our city, little acknowledgement that this was once a rambunctious port long before it was ever the Welsh capital. That distinction was only granted in the 1955. At the time there was much outrage that a more traditionally 'Welsh' city like Swansea wasn't given the honour, rather than a multicultural sailor town like Cardiff.

No use to complain, though. The money has been spent and Cardiff is every inch the modern-day Celtic capital, with its opera house and its flagship branch of John Lewis. And we continue to rake over the traces of our real history. Just how thoroughly was made clear to me recently.

In 2010 I published a biography of Cardiff's most famous scion, Dame Shirley Bassey. Around that time, I was commissioned to write a travel piece for the Independent, offering a walking tour around Shirley Bassey's Cardiff. When I came to write it I realised that virtual every landmark of her life in the city, from the thirties to the fifties, was long gone: the flat above a brothel on Bute Street, where she was born; the terraced house by the Splott steelworks, where she grew up; Curran's factory, where she first worked; the pubs like the Bomb and Dagger and the Quebec, where she started singing. None of them are left.

Yet, in the end a city is defined not by its buildings but by its people. And these people have found new homes, new places to trade and to socialise. If you're looking for the old multicultural Cardiff of the Docks, then today you have to head west to Cowbridge Road, or east to City Road. Eat in Falafel Wales or KBS kebab house, neither of them with a slice of bara brith in sight, thank Christ. Drink in the social clubs, The Park Cons or the Canton Liberal, or find the nearest Wetherspoons (one chain, like it or not, that does fit into its surroundings rather than overwhelm them).

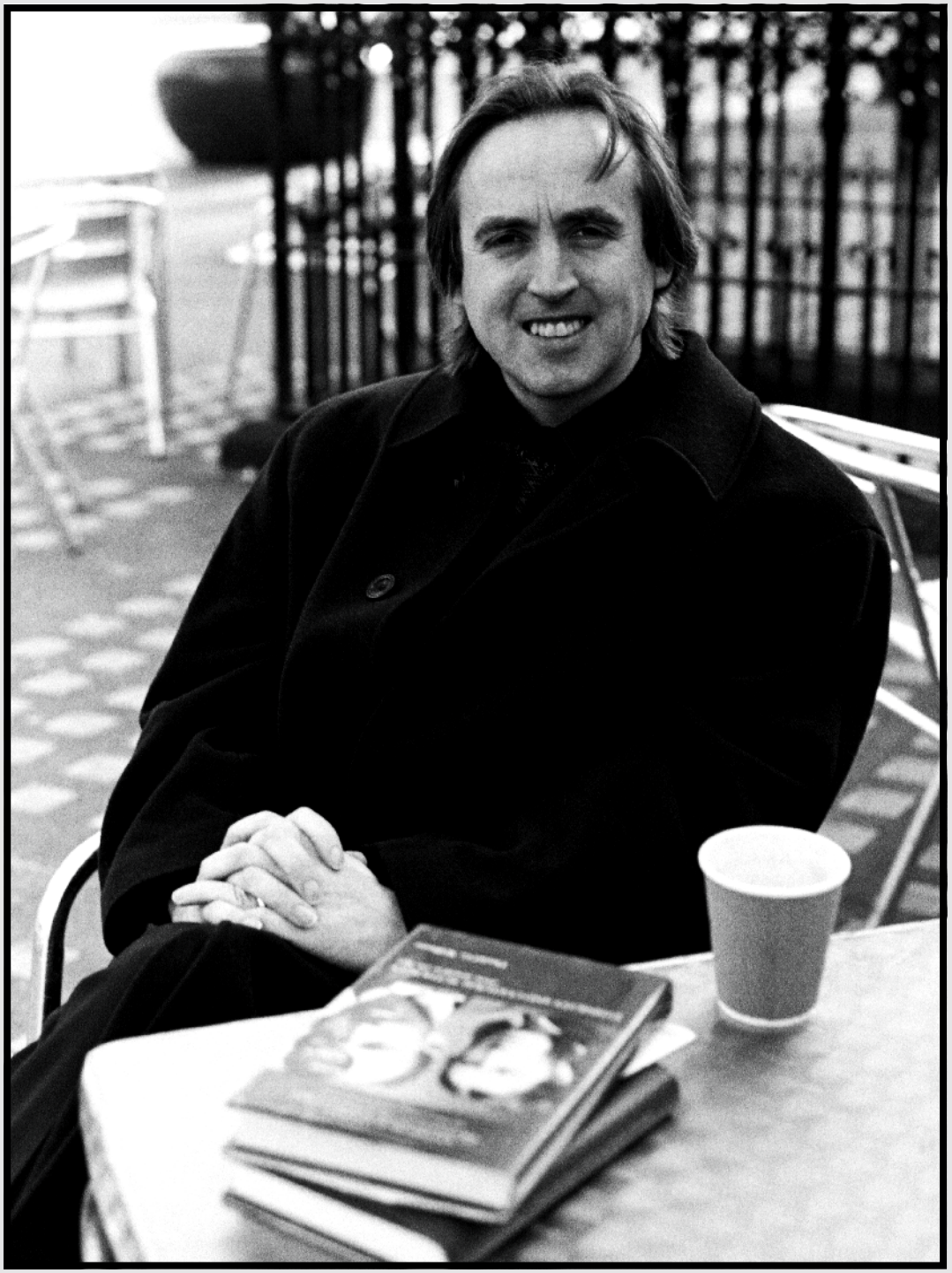
The real Cardiff, I'm afraid, is an unsentimental place. It doesn't shed too many tears for the Vulcan or the Casablanca of blessed memory. It quite happily goes on drinking in ugly modern pubs like the Admiral Napier on Cowbridge Road, where I had a drink the other day with Meic Stevens and Mike Santos.

How about that? Meic Stevens and Mike Santos - two seventy-year-olds, one white, the other black, both of them wearing berets. One from the Pembrokeshire fishing village of Solva, and the most famous of Welsh language singer songwriters, the other from the Docks, the veteran vocalist of a million R&B bands that never made it far below the bridge. In the Napier no one gives either of these two old fellers a second glance. And that's as it should be. Who wants to be bothered when they're having a quiet drink.

But the Cardiff I would like to live in - and by extension, if you like, the Wales I would like to live in - is one that acknowledges its debt to both men, and to the traditions they represent. Meic S who helped bring Welsh language culture back to the capital in the 1960s, and Mike S who played the blues and jazz that gave the city its soul, its multicultural heartbeat. Here's to the two of them, here's to Cowbridge Road and to City Road, and here's to a future that can't be planned.

For the Wales I hope to see develop over the coming years is a forward-looking one: one that is not in thrall to a largely imaginary glorious history, one that takes it easy on the Celtic myth-making, one in which the Welsh language is supported and treasured but not artificially boosted to become the definitive indicator of Welshness. It's been a good thing, in recent years, for the people of urban Wales to learn to respect and cherish the culture of the rural west. However it's important, too, that the culture of Cardiff, and urban Wales generally, should be similarly respected in return. For Cardiff was ahead of its time, a multicultural city for well over a century and, overall, a remarkably harmonious one. The people of Cardiff have consistently adapted to their city's ever shifting population, have fashioned their own polyglot Welshness, one which offers useful pointers to our common future.

Finally, then, I hope and expect to live in a Wales that sees itself as a thoroughly modern place, one small enough to be able to adapt nimbly to the hurtling pace of modernity, one that looks outward rather than inward and one that continues to welcome newcomers. I expect to see Wales engaged in developing a culture that we cannot yet imagine, and not stuck in trying to recreate one that is rooted in a much romanticised past. In the end the legends of Glyndŵr's republic or old Tiger Bay are where we come from, not where we're going.



Daniel G. Williams,
The Hayes, Cardiff, 2012

16 Cultural connections

Daniel G. Williams

The poet D. Gwenallt Jones suggested that "having turned fifty a man can see pretty clearly the people and places that had molded his life". Having just turned forty, I'm still pretty unclear about those things. In my academic life I'm a cultural critic rather than a creative writer, and feel somewhat uneasy about relating my own personal experiences to those of Wales, or anywhere else. I prefer, in public at least, to interpret other people's stories rather than my own, placing them in their historical contexts, exploring the political values that they may consciously or unconsciously espouse, evaluating their symbolic and aesthetic effects and significance.

However, the opportunity to think self-reflexively about what I do and why I do it is welcome. In his *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), the American critic Lionel Trilling offered a useful account of what he saw as the role of the literary critic. He argued that any political world view (he might have said 'ideology' if writing in a Marxist idiom) gives rise, and is informed by, imaginative articulations of its beliefs. Dominant movements are often blind to this process. Trilling suggested that a powerful Liberal tradition in the United States should be especially self-critical, for

> "... in the very interest of its great primal act of imagination by which it establishes its essence and existence - in the interest, that is, of its vision of a general enlargement and freedom and rational direction of human life - it drifts towards a denial of the emotions and imagination."

The danger that the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of human experience are forgotten by those in power confers considerable responsibility on the literary critic whose role it is "to recall liberalism to its first essential imagination of variousness and possibility, which implies the awareness of complexity and difficulty". Trilling's essays in *The Liberal Imagination* focus on topics and texts which are seen to reaffirm this fundamental liberal belief in social complexity and pluralism.

By the time I went on my first formulative period of study in the United States in 1992, 'Liberal' had become a perjorative term. Trilling's 'complexity' and 'difficulty' had given way to the binary terms of 'good' versus 'evil' in which the 'culture wars' which raged during the late 1980s and 1990s were being waged. Debates regarding the English canon - those books that could 'stand the test of time' and speak to 'universal truths' - expanded to include confrontations on the rise of ethnic and gender studies and their place in Faculties of Arts and Sciences.

The Republican National Convention had taken place a week prior to my arrival. Lagging in the polls by double digits behind Clinton and Gore, and facing a possible challenge from the maverick millionaire Ross Perot, the Republican Party worked hard to rally its conservative base. In his opening night speech Pat Buchanan, who had challenged for the presidential candidacy from the far Right, argued that:

> "... there is a religious war going on this country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America".

Humorist Molly Ivins quipped that Buchanan's 'Culture War' speech "probably sounded better in the original German", but the notion that a great battle of values was taking place in the United States was widely embraced. Dinesh D'Souza, one of the more powerful polemicists of the cultural right, had urged his fellow conservatives to emulate the moral intonations and 'righteous indignation' of the Left, and by 1992 President George Bush was warning against the rampaging threat of 'political correctness' as cultural debate descended to the level of playground posturing. What was most bemusing for a Welshman who'd been brought up during the Thatcher-Reagan years and had just witnessed with some incredulity, earlier that year, the final defeat of Neil Kinnock at the hands of John Major, was the claim that political correctness was having a pernicious and widespread effect on the cultural and political life of the nation. As far as I could see, the cultural Right were in a position of ascendancy in the policy establishments on both sides of the Atlantic. While there's no doubt that the Left is as adept at creating oppressive orthodoxies as the Right, it was difficult not to dismiss 'political correctness' as a chimera, a conspiracy in which powerful right wing ideologues were representing themselves as being

somehow under threat in order to attack those fighting for the rights of women, ethnic and sexual minorities, and so forth.

Upon my return, a year later, the Cardiff buses with adverts claiming that "BBC Wales speaks your language" served as a reminder that dismissive attitudes towards minority cultures were characteristic of Welsh cultural life too. When I began to engage with and contribute to Welsh cultural studies in the mid 1990s a form of historical revisionism - characterised by a belief that the decline of the use of Welsh was solely the result of democratic choices, and attempts at reinforcing the language were the delusional dreams of nationalist mythologisers - was influential in academia and in the media.

The New York Times could reported in 1977 that Michael Hechter's *Internal Colonialism* and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* were selling well in Aberystwyth as people prepared - prematurely - for political devolution. However, by 1987, the year in which the IWA was founded, nationalist accounts of the cultural, linguistic and economic repression of the Welsh were being replaced by nuanced (and some not so nuanced) analyses of the willingness of the majority of the Welsh to abandon their Celtic language as they became more secular and democratic. At the same time an account of Welsh history was emerging that was not a teleological story of repression and rebirth but rather characterised by fractures and shifts, none more dramatic than the cultural and demographic revolutions resulting from industrialisation.

The resulting sceptical reading of nationalist formulas was both necessary and generally convincing. However, Welsh revisionism soon established a series of repeated mantras of its own which were themselves based on a crude and misleading binary opposition between a 'privileged minority' of 'self-blinded visionaries' who espoused a 'linguistically exclusive Welshness', and a 'collectivist, universalist' working-class promoting 'an inter-meshing of class and community solidarities whose horizons were truly international'.

Much of the revisionist debate took place within the discipline of history, and if the 2012 BBC series *The Story of Wales* is anything to go by, historians continue to have a privileged position in narrating the Welsh 'story'. Part of the reason for this is that the past 25 years have seen the closure of important departments of sociology and philosophy at Welsh universities, severely undermining and narrowing the study of our nation (which, in any case, is a 'minority interest', struggling to attract financial support from the British funding councils, in most departments of Welsh universities). The same period has, however, seen significant developments in the fields of Welsh literary studies in both main languages, in music, film studies, art criticism, law and in political science. Welsh studies is a diverse field and part of what we've seen beginning to emerge in the past few years is an increasing dialogue between disciplines in the development of inter-disciplinary and multi-institutional projects.

One of the paradoxes faced by a young cultural critic wanting to write about Welsh culture in the 1990s was that a measure of self-government was being fought for at a time when to speak of 'the nation' or of 'the Welsh' in many academic circles was to be accused of, at best, a romantic nostalgia, or, at worst a reactionary politics. While the tendency to talk of national and ethnic identities as if they simply existed became outmoded as cultural critics and historians began to discuss nations as 'invented traditions' or 'imagined communities', there was now a tendency to discuss cultural identities as if they had no specificity or content. Instead, the nation should be regarded as a vessel in which any plurality of cultural voices could co-exist with equal validity.

This was certainly generously accommodating in theory, but such a view had fairly obvious limitations in practice. For any attempts at forming distinctive policies for Wales, perhaps especially in the field of education, clearly entailed some notion of a distinctive Welsh culture. Henry Louis Gates Jr., with whom I studied African American literature at Harvard, described a similar problem for African American critics in the same period when he asked us to "consider the irony" of the fact that just as black critics obtained

> "... the wherewithal to define our black subjectivity in the republic of Western letters, our theoretical colleagues declare that there ain't such a thing as a subject, so why should we be bothered with that?"

At the very moment where a more inclusive and varied American literary canon was being formed and taught, Gates noted that attempts by critics to define and articulate a distinctive African American canon, characterised by its own "themes, topoi, and tropes", were "decried as racist, separatist, nationalist or essentialist". Most minorities, having had to define themselves against the hegemony of a more dominant tradition, will have witnessed a version of this tension between universalism and particularism.

In the case of Wales, we might generalize by saying that cultural theory, having seemingly deconstructed the nationalist cause, at least in academia, began to strike a chord with critical nationalists. In Welsh, initiatives such as the journal *Tu Chwith* (Left Turn) stimulated a dialogue between cultural nationalism and critical theory. Raymond Williams was a key figure in enabling this shift in English, a tendency that I tried to foster in collecting and editing his largely neglected writings on his native land in the collection *Who Speaks for Wales?* (2003). In engaging with the question of Wales, Williams sought a place for the nation and the myths and dreams that had historically informed that 'imagined community' between

The tendency, shared by virtually every intellectual grouping in Wales, is to view its opponents as 'establishment voices', while discovering 'anti–establishment dissidents' when gazing in its own mirror.

the local and global collectivities which were themselves being transformed in an age characterised by the transnational character of modes of production, social movements and informational exchanges.

Coming from outside the debate in Wales itself, and speaking with the authority of an internationally recognized cultural critic, Williams acknowledged the 'two truths' (socialist and nationalist) which he saw as legitimate "prologues to the action of modern Wales". The tendency, shared by virtually every intellectual grouping in Wales, is to view its opponents as 'establishment voices', while discovering 'anti-establishment dissidents' when gazing in its own mirror. Williams sought to engender a compromise between intellectual traditions and formations, emphasising the complexity of the Welsh experience and the elements which diverse groupings on the political Left actually had in common, despite geographical, linguistic and political divides. It is easily forgotten that intellectual and cultural thought in Wales is generally practiced by reasonably well to do middle class people, who typically share a great deal in common. The sibling commonalities between nationalists and revisionists, post colonialists and feminists, Welsh and English language academics, include similar modes of education and professional training, shared forms of cultural taste and cultural capital, and a shared structural positioning and vantage point within the larger social system conferred by their occupation as workers in intellectual fields. These shared experiences and interests surface in similar modes of argument and analysis, repeated re-workings of relatively small sets of key authors and topics, and a tolerance for certain areas where ignorance is acceptable or is not noticed.

There is nothing unique to Wales in this, but there are some distinctive aspects to the Welsh situation. In the case of academic work in the English language, the most obvious form of licensed ignorance across the intellectual field relates to the Welsh language. A reading knowledge of Latin or French, or both, as well as English and Welsh would be regarded as part of the normal professional competence of any historian or literary critic working on Wales in the medieval period. However, the same standard of competence in the Welsh language is not always required for scholars in these disciplines working on the period 1600 to 1800, and often isn't deemed necessary at all for the period 1800 to 1900, even though Wales remained predominantly Welsh speaking until the end of the 19th Century.

Moving into the 20th Century, work concentrating on Welsh speaking areas, on religion, on the history of Plaid Cymru, has been carried out by academics with no knowledge of the Welsh language. It's fairly common to encounter sweeping, usually dismissive, generalisations about figures such as Saunders Lewis or Ambrose Bebb meted out by critics unable to read their work. The situation is somewhat similar to that in Don DeLillo's scathing satire on postmodern academe, *White Noise*. The novel's central character is Jack Gladney, "the most prominent figure in Hitler studies in North America". Gladney confesses that:

> "I had long tried to conceal the fact that I did not know German. I could not speak or read it, could not understand the spoken word or begin to put the simplest sentence on paper... I was living, in short, on the edge of a landscape of vast shame."

The corollary of this situation is deemed acceptable in the Welsh academy. While there's little overt hostility towards the language among those working on Welsh culture, no better reflection of

The advent of political devolution has resulted in a growing perception of Wales's place in the world, and during the past ten years I have thought of myself as part of a group of scholars in the humanities who have sought to understand the Welsh experience comparatively.

Cymraeg's status is needed than the ability of scholars and students to completely ignore its existence.

Unfortunately, the field of Welsh language cultural studies is a mirror image of its English sibling. If it seems clear that anyone writing on popular culture in 19th Century Wales would need to speak Welsh in order to study their chosen field adequately, then it should likewise be clear that any account of Welsh culture in the 20th Century would need to engage with English language sources. To read contemporary Welsh language authors solely in relation to other Welsh language writers is to ignore key lines of influence, and is to offer a disablingly narrow picture of the Welsh society in which authors live. Most accounts of the Welsh language novel, or analyses of particular writers, contain no references to the English language literature produced in Wales during the same period. Indeed, it is far more common to see Welsh language writers compared to their Irish Anglophone counterparts than to their Welsh contemporaries. This is a particular problem when a broad cultural analysis is attempted, claiming to explore the Welsh response to war, or secularisation, or to constructions of national identity.

There is a semantic issue here. A case might be made for thinking of the 'Cymry' ('Welsh') as 'Welsh language speakers'. This is still a common usage, and was the dominant definition of 'Cymry' until the 20th Century. The 'Cymry' in this sense are a linguistic minority in a nation where the majority are 'Welsh'. 'Cymraeg' culture is therefore distinct from 'Welsh' culture. There are sound methodological and political reasons for thinking in this way, for Welsh language texts will contain resonances, allusions, rhetorical tropes, and so on that are distinctive to the Welsh language tradition. Similarly, studies of a non Welsh speaking author need not engage with Welsh language culture. But at this historical juncture, where it is crucial for its future that the Welsh language be made a key component in the common culture underpinning the civic life of all Welsh citizens, it is surely imperative that some of us, on both sides of the linguistic line, follow the lead of critics such as M. Wynn Thomas and Jane Aaron in taking a holistic approach towards Welsh culture.

Such an approach would not seek to construct a false homogeneity or cohesiveness, but would attempt readings across the lines of language, ethnicity, gender and so forth, making connections and offering more nuanced, complex, and difficult, accounts of Welsh culture. Currently, the most distinctive, fascinating, and internationally salient, aspects of Welsh culture and history are being missed or distorted by the way we apply the disciplinary pastry-cutter to our complexly inter-related culture. It is surely now time for a fully developed, historically informed, linguistically rigorous, inter-disciplinary programme in Welsh Studies (pioneered at Trinity College, Carmarthen in the 1970s and 1980s and coming sporadically to life in research projects since then) to come of age. The increasing number of secondary schools who foster an understanding of the nation in which they are located, as a basis for understanding other places and experiences, are beginning to produce students who would be qualified to undertake such a course of study. That would be a significant step forward.

Moving into a slightly more personal idiom, my own work has been an attempt at constructing comparative methods of analysing and discussing Wales. The advent of political devolution has resulted in a growing perception of Wales's place in the world, and during the

past ten years I have thought of myself as part of a group of scholars in the humanities who have sought to understand the Welsh experience comparatively. Conferences have taken place, and studies have appeared, on Wales and the Empire, on Wales and India, on Wales and Japan, on the Welsh and our complicity in slavery and colonialism as well as forms of allegiance and identification with African Americans, indigenous peoples, Jews and European minorities.

For some, comparative approaches of this type amount to little more than an attempt at placing Wales 'in a glamourously international context'. It is, of course, rare to hear that transnational approaches to English or American cultures result in 'glamourisation'. The barely hidden assumption where Wales is concerned, is that an attempt is being made to put an attractive veneer on the disablingly drab world of the periphery. This resistance to comparison is intensified in cases where attempts at making connections between Wales and other minority and postcolonial contexts are seen to be little more than acts of 'self-aggrandising, self victimisation'. When asked to elaborate on his reservations regarding 'recent historical fashions', Britain's leading Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm drew attention to the rise of "fanzine history, which groups write in order to feel better about themselves":

> "Just the other day I noticed a new labour history journal which has an article on blacks in Wales in the 18th Century. Whatever the importance of this to blacks in Wales, it is not in itself a particularly central subject."

Such analyses are perhaps not 'central' in relation to global politics, but the historical presence of 'blacks' in Wales plays a key role in undermining notions of cultural homogeneity while also offering case studies of the experiences of cultural interaction, of acculturation, and of racialization, within a particular culture. Hobsbawm's comments reflect a wider resistance to historical and cultural analyses that aim to construct comparative methods calibrated to the conditions of European minorities. The fear is that a reactionary, atavistic, nationalism hides itself behind the 'trendy' desire to compare a minority European experience with that of 'oppressed' or 'colonial' peoples.

In Wales, the world continues to be largely seen through the lens of a Londoncentric press and media, and thus from Emrys ap Iwan in the 19th Century through to Raymond Williams in the 20th, many of those who have tried to conceptualise and discuss Welsh culture have attempted to break out of the perceptual confines of 'Britishness' to make a wider set of comparisons, in which 'England' itself becomes defamiliarised. This may explain why Raymond Williams was able to write a series of ground breaking studies on English culture and thought. There's nothing inevitably 'nationalist' about this process, although that's how it tends to be perceived by those outside the culture. Joe Cleary has usefully noted in relation to Ireland that if

> "... colonialism is conceived as an historical process in which societies of various kinds and locations are differentially integrated into a world capitalist system, then it is on the basis of the comparative conjunctural analysis of such processes that debate must ultimately be developed."

The point then is not to adduce whether Wales is 'just like' any other more unambiguously 'colonial' situation, but to "think of the ways in which specific national configurations are always the product" of the "dislocating intersections between local and global processes" that characterise the workings of capitalism. Today an increasingly wider set of comparative materials are brought to bear on Welsh culture and society. It's at the intersections between languages, cultures and histories, both internal and external, that we're likely to see some of the most exciting developments and insights emerging.

Having said all that, what effect any academic advances in cultural criticism will have is an interesting question. How do we measure the reach and impact of criticism? Academics, perhaps especially on the Left, tend to make grand claims as to the political efficacy and consequence of their work, but I'd be reluctant to make any large claims for the social impact of what I write - even if the government's Research Excellence Framework insists that I do so. What Raymond Williams did throughout his career was to speak of political matters from a cultural perspective, and from the early 1970s onwards the debates within Welsh culture formed a context for understanding both his own life and experience and of Western European politics more generally.

It seems to me that to speak of politics from a cultural position is a valuable and legitimate form of public debate, but is probably not the most important one if we are to alleviate economic inequalities or respond to the environmental crisis. 'Cultural criticism', whatever some of its more strident practitioners might say, is not particularly effective or influential in the realm of politics. But it may offer a reminder of values and considerations not sufficiently taken into account in the prevailing political discourse. Adapting Lionel Trilling, we might say that cultural criticism aims to "take the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity and difficulty". Its practice should ideally bring into public consciousness the kinds of considerations - emotions, imagination, empathy, identification - that have in the last 25 years been habitually neglected by the more socially and economically consequential processes that have underpinned the making of Wales.

Angela Graham,
Well-house at Shrine of Our Lady of Penrhys, Rhondda, 2012

17 A country in which we can breathe

Angela Graham

Living in someone else's country isn't easy, even when it's a pleasant place like Wales. This country is not, and never will be, my homeland although it has been my home since I married a Welshman in 1981. I became seriously ill on honeymoon and began my life in Wales in an isolation unit high up on a cliff of rooms in University Hospital, Cardiff. As I looked out of the window over the featureless view I felt that I had committed myself to a strange place indeed where the natives self-defined in puzzling ways. I'd been making conversation with a nurse:

> "Oh, no. I'm not Welsh," she insisted, amused.
> "But you said you're from Cardiff."
> "That doesn't mean I'm Welsh."
> "But you must be. What else can you be?"
> She frowned, perplexed, then offered, "I don't have an accent."
> "Yes you do."
> "Not an *accent*. Not like people from the Valleys. They're Welsh. And then people from...ooh, Carmarthen or somewhere, they're really Welsh; and then people from..." she paused, as though contemplating vast distances,
> "... north Wales, they're *thoroughly* Welsh." Having now classified everyone to her satisfaction she bustled around and asked, brightly, "From Canada, are you?"
> "No, Belfast."
> She made a moue of sympathy. "Pity," she said vaguely and left.

That was the year of the Hunger Strikes when Bobby Sands MP died after a 66-day fast, his death followed by those of nine other Republican prisoners and that of the Rev. Robert Bradford MP, assassinated by Provisional IRA gunmen, and of Belfast councillor, Lawrence Kennedy, shot dead by Loyalist gunmen. Politics, at any level, was a dangerous undertaking.

On the night of Bobby Sands's death my area rioted. When I set off for work in the morning my feet crunched over broken glass as I turned into the main road and there, skewed around a lamppost, was the milkman's float, in which he and his teenage son had just died. A horde of children had stoned them. They crashed. The children grabbed the crates of bottles, essentials for that night's petrol bombs. They stoned the firemen (dealing with a nearby blazing pub) who tried to free the pair. They stoned the soldiers who tried to help the firemen.

I came from one industrial, maritime city to another but how different Cardiff was. Cardiff was weird. The buses ran on time and were never hi-jacked. There were no soldiers on the streets, no security gates at every access point to the city centre, and no searches at the door of its every shop. There was not a single riot, no heavies shadowing politicians, no guns on the hips of the police. Those who left the house intending to go somewhere arrived as they'd expected and thought that was normal. They never encountered bombs or massive traffic diversions and they slept undisturbed by army raids. They didn't screen each new acquaintance by nuances of name, accent or a myriad other signifiers to establish what was safe to say or reveal. Didn't people get bored here, I wondered, not having any problems?

By the time 1987 arrived I had, of course, discovered some of their problems. During these years the miners' strike brought to centre stage a complex of social injustices and there were painfully high levels of youth unemployment. I worked on many documentaries that presented personal and communal crises. But I have never lost that initial sense of Wales being a place of tremendous potential. Its compact size, its cultural riches, its blend of agricultural and industrial nous, its generations of experience in the professions, its universities, its tradition of education in the labour force, and its irrefutable demonstration of the power of community action to reinforce dignity and self-respect – all of these, and others, excited me. Wales could do anything!

And yet. There was some sort of obstruction. The influential among the Welsh could only do so much before they came up against a power centre outside Wales that was benign but patronising. It might reward them but it kept them corralled within bounds considered proper. In addition, the Welsh-speaking Welsh influenced each other via a system of cultural loyalty which sometimes pressured them to toe a conservative line – and this despite the hard-hitting campaigns on behalf of the language.

From my delineation of my background you'll not be surprised that I tended to see life in terms of stark choices. The choices in Wales were not so clear. Only two years before I came to live in Wales the people rejected the possibility of an elected Welsh Assembly by four

to one. The Welsh were conflicted about what it meant to be Welsh and about how they should relate to being British. Fair enough. Life is complicated and the view of Wales from Wrexham offers a perspective different to that from Monmouth or Narberth. Class divisions also influence priorities but at least Wales was free from that terrible conflation of class and denominationalism that tore worker from worker in Northern Ireland and poisoned natural business competition among employers. Moreover – and I know I'm setting the bar low here – the Welsh didn't kill each other in the pursuit of political goals. Democracy in Wales was more stable all round. Nevertheless, despite this there was a constriction to Welsh life, as though it needed more oxygen.

Every society has things it does not want to see or say about itself – the ugly side of stability. In Northern Ireland it had been television and radio that had allowed me to see and hear my experiences of discrimination enacted in the lives of others. I was not alone. When, in the Seventies, my mother and I had heard Seamus Heaney read his poem, 'Whatever you say, say nothing' on the radio, we had stopped dead in the kitchen, listening with bated breath, because that was how we all lived, in a compact of not-saying what everyone knew to be true, because if it were said things would fall apart.[1] The very fact that he was, through a public medium, through the actual BBC, voicing an unacknowledged truth, freed us to acknowledge that some things ought to fall apart. The word was out. When I saw news footage of a policeman casually brutalising an innocent civil rights campaigner right in front of the camera, the injured man's howl was that of many decent citizens who had been denied a voice for decades.

What a nation sees and hears of itself affects every single aspect of life in that nation. The communications media are like the national imagination. Whatever is excluded from them becomes less possible to imagine and therefore less achievable.

I began my broadcasting career as a freelance at BBC Wales, moving to HTV the following year. Twenty-five years ago in 1987 I was producing a series for the ITV network. It was considered groundbreaking by the network centre because of the intimate nature of the relationships it examined which had seldom been covered in the medium. Since we were capable of doing cutting-edge material that was popular with the network audience I didn't see why we couldn't push for more network commissions, in other parts of the schedule and outside the quota system. I was ignorant of much, no doubt, but I felt there was a certain complacency or a fear that if we asked for more, please, something dreadful would happen.

But in any case the ground was shifting under the feet of television as the Thatcher government prepared to deregulate broadcasting. The Peacock report of 1986[2] and, an Inquiry report of June 1988[3] gave clear signs that there were plans to allow the market a much greater role in its future. However, I detected in these documents little understanding of the role of broadcasting in the life of Wales, indeed little recognition of life in Wales in general. In these visions of the future, there was a very Anglo-centric bias, and a London-centric bias especially.

In November 1988 the White Paper, *Broadcasting in the 1990s: Competition, Choice and Quality* came out and it was clear that under threat were those genres of television that questioned the status quo or created spaces in which viewers could critique why they were living as they did. A hard-hitting dissection of the document in *The Listener* rang so true with me that I contacted the author Stuart Prebble to express my concern that the Welsh perspective on these issues was being ignored.[4] There was no means by which proposals could be thoroughly analysed for their effects on Wales and creative ways forward debated, shaped and proposed to politicians. Nor was there any means for facilitating extensive public discussion. He was getting together the Campaign for Quality Television and, at his suggestion, colleagues and I set up a Welsh arm, CQTV Wales in December 1988.

The Campaign scrutinised all stages of the Licence Renewal for ITV and then the BBC Charter Renewal of 1996. It is recognised as having influenced the legislation away from the extremes of marketisation, particularly through the insertion of a requirement for a quality threshold for would-be ITV franchise-holders. The stark initial proposal had simply been to award franchises to the highest bidder.

In Wales the issue of quality was bound up with the potential of ITV to retain Public Service credentials in relation to a whole nation. Yet to many in power in Westminster that area west of the Severn was blank. It was assumed that Wales would cause no trouble and could therefore be ignored. From such a perspective, the creation of S4C in 1982, as a comprehensive Welsh-language television service, had drawn the sting of any serious further agitation about broadcasting in Wales. Unless Wales made very strong representations, its broadcasting needs, in English and Welsh, would remain invisible.

The Campaign demonstrated that the broadcasting industry can creatively analyse problems of structure and content to help politicians navigate the complexities of policy formation. It also showed that viewers in Wales were a force to be reckoned with and alive to their rights and preferences.

In a response to a Green Paper in the BBC Charter Renewal debate CQTV Wales stated that three key things were at stake, "Hours, Money, Power... greater control exercised in Wales over its broadcasting future."[5] That issue of power remains, 16 years later, as important as ever, indeed more so, because we are faced with complexities not only in television or in broadcasting but also in communications in the widest sense. One of the core components of that power is how adequately Wales is represented, or represents itself, in the UK media and to the world, and, crucially, to itself:

Human beings have a need not only to be seen but to be recognised. We value that moment when we perceive that another person has seen who we are.

> "How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation." [6]

Representation via the communications media is a key means by which we 'see' each other. In 1996 less than one per cent of the BBC's network factual programme output was made outside England, yet Licence Fee revenue from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland far exceeded one per cent of the total. This revenue/value imbalance prompted the BBC to revise its out-of-England production targets, aiming for 'full proportionality' of 17 per cent - the percentage of the population which lives outside England – by 2016.[7]

The BBC also sought to address its London-centric production bias by moving production centres to some other English cities and, in recent years, to Wales and Scotland. However, these well-intentioned and positive moves do not truly localise production unless they trust local talent enough to hire it. Wales putting itself on screen is more representative than 'Cardiff pretending to be London'.

Along with Scotland and Northern Ireland, Wales can never progress vis-à-vis England on the basis of rights per head of the population. Certainly, England has the largest population of the constituent parts of the UK. But in this United Kingdom the partners should be recognised for their own sake and not only for what proportion of power they wield over each other. Ideally, unity is based on mutual respect and knowledge, not on ignorance. In Northern Ireland a principle that came to the fore in the power-sharing process was 'parity of esteem'. Although this concept has been abused in the service of inter-communal one-upmanship (and worse), at its root is a crucial insight. Respect should be based on inherent value and not on the holding of power.

Human beings have a need not only to be seen but to be recognised. We value that moment when we perceive that another person has seen who we are. If the mass media do not facilitate our ability to see and hear each other properly they are complicit in a culture of disrespect which fosters a picture of who we all are which is unreal and leads to ill-informed legislative decisions.

For us in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland our problem is not the English in themselves. Our problem is access to respect. The will to power has its place but the will to respect – to respect others - is absolutely as important whether in a would-be United Kingdom or in any devolved variation on that.

In 1989, as CQTV Wales was getting off the ground, I left HTV and went as a freelance producer/director to Teliesyn, a co-operative which I joined in 1990.[8] I started by producing a documentary about the Chartists, presented by Professor Gwyn Alf Williams and directed by Colin Thomas, who, with Wynford Vaughan Thomas, had made their masterly history of Wales, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* for HTV and Channel 4 in 1985. As I write, in the spring of 2012, Teliesyn's former members have just celebrated thirty years from the founding of this innovative, idealistic company which closed amicably in 2002. As the compilation of programme clips rolled by I was impressed by the evidence of the respect these programmes exhibited for the audience, for their interest in their past and present and their willingness to be challenged as well as entertained. Firmly rooted in Wales, we saw the world as our market and we never hesitated to propose ourselves to the networks, believing that what was of interest to Wales could be of

Responsibility for broadcasting and the media is not devolved to Wales. Ways must be found to allow the Assembly and Welsh Government to have some purchase on these otherwise Welsh interests will continue to be compromised.

interest to the rest of the UK.

On the morning of our celebration an opinion piece in *The Guardian* considered another series on the history of Wales, *The Story of Wales*[9] in which I participated as Development Producer:

> "When the English think about their country in the world, there is a blind spot where Scotland, Wales and Ireland ought to be. In an earlier, more unified British era, perhaps this ignorance had fewer political consequences. Today, it feeds Britain's increasingly centrifugal politics, and means that the English are remarkably ill-equipped to understand or engage with changes in Scotland and Wales that are driving the future of the union.
>
> "This spring, for example, BBC Wales has been showing a remarkable series of history programmes. Presented by Huw Edwards, *The Story of Wales* consists of six primetime one-hour programmes on Welsh history. Polemical and romantic, the programmes have been phenomenally successful... The social media response has been explosive. Unfortunately, however, the series was shown only in Wales."[10]

The Story of Wales was a commission arising from BBC Wales. Its success with its home audience suggests that it has represented Wales as its people believe it to be: engaged, dynamic, adaptable and with new democratic institutions in which they can exercise responsibility.[11] The Welsh want to see their own history but they want it to be seen outside the country too. It is encouraging, therefore, that it will have a network transmission in the autumn of 2012.

The next few years will see a series of significant pieces of media legislation: the renewal of ITV licences in 2014; a new Communications Act in 2015; and the BBC Charter Renewal in 2016. They will shape the communications landscape for the next generation. We know from experience the vulnerabilities of Welsh media legislation, such as the fiat issued by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport which brought the present S4C/BBC relationship into being without public debate. In it S4C is no longer funded by the UK government but from the BBC Licence Fee. This revealed the power of the centre and the limitations to its understanding of Welsh circumstances.

The ITV system's ability to contribute to a healthy pluralism of TV provision has shrunk. HTV Wales, in that first (and only) franchise auction in 1991, undertook to produce twelve hours a week of local programming. Now its present incarnation, ITV Wales, produces four hours of news and only ninety minutes of non-news programming a week. Meanwhile the fate of Wales's English-language television programming in general is threatened by a host of pressures.[12]

The whole communications landscape shape-shifts as we

watch. If Wales is to have adequate media legislation and policies it cannot make do with anything less than a permanent, independent body to assist the democratic process by qualitative as well as quantitative analysis of the full panorama of communications. Only this will provide continuity and sufficient rigour, though I foresee that alongside this there will always be a role for pressure groups alert to nuances and new needs.

In the interim, the IWA set up its Wales Media Policy Group (of which I am a member) in 2011 to offer critique to policy-makers in a series of recent government media consultations. Amongst these was the National Assembly's Task and Finish Group on the future of the media in Wales to which it gave evidence. Gratifyingly, the resulting report's first recommendation is for the Welsh Government to establish an independent forum to advise on policy in relation to the media in Wales, drawing on expertise from across the media sectors.[13] Not so gratifyingly, the Welsh Government turned the recommendation down, one of only two out of 23 that it decided not to accept.[14]

Nonetheless, the very existence of this cross-party Assembly Group is evidence of Wales's growing determination to create an adequate future for itself in the communications area. Responsibility for broadcasting and the media is not devolved to Wales. Ways must be found to allow the Assembly and Welsh Government to have some purchase on these otherwise Welsh interests will continue to be compromised. The report's recommendations provide a springboard for a much deeper dialogue with the UK than was imaginable 25 years ago. As the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage put it in his oral evidence, "We are now in a position to truly start to construct consensus around what we are asking for, as a Welsh public community." It was significant, too, that he described himself as, "part of the lobby on broadcasting that Wales needs to construct."

The Welsh achieved their Assembly by democratic means, not by violence. Perhaps they take this for granted, but I don't. The people of Wales will continue to define who they are and what they want if they communicate well with each other and the world. Bad communication keeps us apart and we must always wonder whose interests that can possibly serve. I hope the next 25 years sees Wales develop an exemplary communications framework, one which respects the cultural as well as the economic value of the media. Raymond Williams, describing how he discovered the Welsh connectedness of his work had a lovely phrase, "...and then I was in a country in which I could breathe".[15] Good communications will make Wales a country in which we can all breathe more easily.

Notes

1 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', in Seamus Heaney, *North*, Faber and Faber, 1975.

2 The Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC.

3 The Third Report of the Home Affairs Committee's Inquiry into the Future of Broadcasting.

4 Stuart Prebble, 'White Lies', in *The Listener*, 17 November 1988.

5 CQTV Wales briefing paper, *Power To Choose: the Future of the BBC in Wales*, 1992, a response to the Department of National Heritage Green Paper, *The Future of the BBC*, 1992.

6 Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*, Routledge, 1993.

7 BBC, *Putting Quality First: The BBC and Public Space, Proposals to the BBC Trust*, March 2010.

8 Teliesyn Ltd., Co-Workers in Film, Television and Video, 1982–2002. Project Teliesyn at www.teliesyn.co.uk is an on-going study of the company undertaken by Aberystwyth University.

9 *The Story of Wales*, a series of six hour-long documentaries, presented by Huw Edwards and produced for BBC Wales by Green Bay Media, 2012.

10 Martin Kettle in *The Guardian*, 3 May 2012

11 The series gained an exceptionally high audience appreciation score. BBC figures showed that the Welsh audience ranked the series higher than any other programme on any BBC channel since January 2011, apart from *Frozen Planet*.

12 See Geraint Talfan Davies (Ed.) "English is a Welsh language: television's crisis in Wales, IWA, 2009.

13 National Assembly Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee: Report by the Task and Finish Group on the future outlook for the media in Wales, May 2012.

14 See also http://www.clickonwales.org/ 2012/05/dealing-with-the-crisis-in-welsh-press-and-broadcasting for an outline of other IWA suggestions which have made their way into the Group's recommendations.

15 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, New Left Books, 1979, pages 295-6.

Jon Gower,
Thompson's Park, Cardiff, 2012

18 Motherland
Jon Gower

It was a year fierce with matters of identity. In 1997 Wales took another slightly faltering step if not towards out-and-out independence, then at least towards a mature national confidence. That September's referendum asked the populace to decide whether or not it was in favour of an Assembly. It was a close-run thing, with less than a percentage point on the yes side, but enough to set in train the next stage of Ron Davies's famous "process". With a majority of a little over 5,000, equivalent to the population of the titchy town of Llandrindod Wells, it was not what you might call a resounding victory. Yet it was a sea-change from the dark days of the 1979 referendum, which saw Wales reject devolution four to one, with the difficult significance of Cardiff turning its back on the idea. Not exactly a capital idea.

That was a country and a time populated by what the effervescent historian Gwyn Alf Williams described as "a naked people walking under an acid rain". This was itself a riposte to the R.S. Thomas lines:

> *We are an impotent people*
> *Sick with inbreeding*
> *Worrying the carcass of an old song.*

The bitter despair felt by many after the 1979 vote – 243,048 for, 956,330 against and not a single Welsh county in favour – didn't register much with me. That year I had other statistics on my mind. I was just starting university, and I was quite literally the first man to attend Girton College, Cambridge. A man from the BBC *Today* programme nabbed me as I came into the porters' lodge for an interview. The vital statistics here were that there were seven women to every man. It sounded like the university of life. So events in Wales didn't loom large in my thinking.

I was back in Wales by 1997 and had been working in current affairs long enough to become a bit of a news junkie. When Huw Edwards announced the final result of the latest referendum on the TV a friend of mine, slightly the worse for wear, and marijuana, took all of his clothes off and ran out onto the Cardiff streets whooping and hollering. At least he gave me an image to compete with the politicians whose smiles competed with the TV lights. There they were, jubilant if erstwhile friends, drawn from both Labour and Plaid, sharing the victory platform and ushering in a new dawn. A dawn complete with a naked man running furtively between parked cars, eager to make it home.

It was hard to work out what sort of country Wales was exactly. Poor, certainly, and the ravages of Thatcher's neo-liberal experiments had been all too obvious to someone like myself, from a steel town, Llanelli, where the steel plants were all shut. When someone told me that she was the one who'd smashed up Duports I imagined her with a hardhat and rivet gun bringing the whole place down.

Yet, for all the profound ramifications of the result of the 1997 referendum it was my own identity that exercised my thinking, indeed my every waking hour. I was 37 years of age and it was the year I discovered I once had a different name: Ian Mathias. Ian Mathias?

In order to tell you more I'll have to claim a pretty Dickensian start to life, one of those foundling tales guaranteed to affect. It was Christmas Eve, 1959 and I'd been left, if not on the actual hospital doorstep, then in an ante-room not far from the main doors of what used be called the West Wales Hospital in Carmarthen, now called Glangwili.

My mother, a fifteen-year-old florist's assistant called Mary Martha Onwy Mathias had given me a name before giving me away but I had no inkling of the other name. Indeed, when I was given my birth certificate, having finally got round to the business of finding out who my birth parents were, I suggested they had the wrong one. The facts made things interesting. I had two fathers, one a farmer, the other a railwayman. And two mothers, too, one selling clothes in Marks and Spencer, the other once selling flowers somewhere in Carmarthen. And now two names. The one I'd grown used to fitted me. The other was made up of syllables of shock. I could barely say them. That isn't my name!

My adoptive parents, Morwena and Desmond, had tried to have children and failed. In a pattern that is almost classic, once the pressure was off, having adopted me, my brother was conceived, four years later.

For them the adoption was a matter of constant vexation and anxiety. They feared a knock on the door and the appearance of a strange woman coming to claim me back. To this end they kept all their savings in a drawer in the kitchen, having made up their minds that should this feared woman turn up the were going to run away with me. But it wasn't all fear. There was lot of love, from my mother at least.

The fact that the adoption papers used the word "rape" was ambivalent, even though it was considered statutory rape in those days to have sexual intercourse with someone under the age of sixteen. I couldn't be absolutely sure of that meaning, which added no end to the emotional turmoil. After all, I'd had almost four decades to grow into my name. My first names, David and Jonathan were chosen by my adoptive mother,

Morwena – a woman of strong honest Christian conviction – to give me inner strength, shored up by the bonds between the two Biblical brothers. Gower was a foreign implant, the name of Norman foot soldier, as Welsh as a motte-and-bailey castle.

I found out the actual details of the adoption in a family centre out in the eastern suburbs of Cardiff. There I had to sit on a chair meant for a very small child, underlining the strangeness of it all, Gulliver adapting to the scale of Lilliput. The adoption had been administered under the aegis of the St David's Diocesan Moral Welfare Committee. A part of me wanted to ask whose moral welfare exactly was the Church concerned about? Was it the deserter father or the young girl in a town more morally censorious then than now? Or was it society in general? I imagined the committee looking like characters in an Ibsen play, dark suited, heavy browed, seated in judgement.

So for a brief while in my life my official name was Ian Mathias. Before I was adopted that is to say. So, despite it's being the year of a referendum which served to adumbrate a new national identity, it was my own name that riveted my attention in 1997. In that year which had a litany of Tony, Cherie, Tim, Ron, Dafydd, Placido, Dodi, Ffion and William, the name that mesmerised me was Ian: Ian Mathias.

My quest to find out more about myself all started with a film, Mike Leigh's 1996 *Secrets and Lies* which I saw in the Chapter cinema in Cardiff. It's a film about a successful black woman, Hortense, who decides to seek out her natural or birth mother, the down-at-heel, on-her-uppers Cynthia. Emotionally it was like going ten rounds with Marvin Hagler, not to mention the shower of questions tossed up into the air.

No amount of booze in the Halfway after seeing the film could deal with the emotional upheaval. I was in the pub with my friend Emyr, who was also adopted, and this was probably one of the reasons we were such close friends. We had a few more extra-strength pints and decided that the next day we would go and look for our mothers.

Now the fact that I'd waited so long to find out was entirely out of character. I've always liked finding things out, and am an inquisitive as a field mouse, even if 19 stone heavier. But I didn't start the quest to find my mam because I didn't want my adoptive parents to think there was something deficient, something lacking in the life they'd given me (although life with a violent, alcoholic father wasn't a bed of roses, it has to be said).

I knew it wouldn't take long for me to track my mother down. After all I was a current affairs journalist, working in that far off age before mobile phones and Internet. Much of my working life was taken up with tracking people down, including those who didn't want to be found at all. But as I went through the various records the trail seemed to go cold, until I realized I'd made a wrong assumption. This was presuming my mother wouldn't have married very soon after having me. I imagined her traumatised. I was naïve, glib and wrong. As it happened she married twice.

In the meantime Emyr spoke with his mother when she was in the middle of writing a newspaper article for the *Times* explaining how she'd just decided to look for the baby boy she's given up for adoption. Her writing was interrupted by the phone and it was Emyr, who'd decided to break the rules about first approaches by third parties. They met and have since grown close in a fulfilling and mutually nurturing way.

It didn't pan out so well for me. I'd left it too late. Working my way through the records of births, marriages and deaths in Aberystwyth (where, ironically enough he scriptwriter for *Secrets and Lies* lives) I found that my mother had already died, of double breast cancer. I found this out from her second husband who was shrouded with grief, mourning the death of my half-brother who had died on the eve of his own wedding with no known cause.

In this day and age! Of no known cause! He showed me a photograph of him, reached it over through a fug of Embassy Regal. It could have been me. The same overbite of teeth, leading to a soft, fleshy lower lip. Talking to this grieving man it was hard to piece together a portrait of her. A wanderer. That's something I inherited. Always running away. True, also of me, but not in terms of going from place to place. But seen in terms of an unhealthy disposition when it came to drugs and drink, well in that sense I was like my dead mother. I've done a lot of that sort of running.

I rang my mother Morwena to tell her the news and I could hear, well relief and even a certain jubilance in her voice as well as a genuine compassion for the dead woman. It must have been a relief to her. The competition was ruled out. I put the phone down and looked out though the glass squares of the telephone box. Outside was an entirely glacial landscape, with powder ice curling across the cold glass. It was a very real manifestation of how I felt inside. I had never felt so alone. I was mourning a mother I had never seen and now never would. The ice might as well have reached all the way to the moon. And I might as well have not been wearing shoes to walk there. I felt more than loneliness. I felt an existential despair, cutting into me like a flensing knife.

While all this was going on my country was developing its own cultural identity, with attendant expression in the arts to mirror, and sometimes challenge the political advances. In my case seeing Ed Thomas' play *House of America* was enough to persuade me that I shouldn't join so many of my compatriots and stay working in London. Thomas's characters such as Boyo, Gwennie and Sid describing their besotted-ness with America made me feel better about my own cultural tastes. I had long been in love with American writers rather than homegrown talent. My teenage years had been filled with reading Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud and Saul Bellow, not to mention my literary super-hero John Updike. This was in the days before I discovered Annie Proulx, Alice Hoffman and Lorrie Moore. In music I chose Bruce Springsteen's tales of New Jersey teenage angst over anything by the Diliau or Dafydd Iwan. In part this reflected the usual rebellion against my parents but also because there was little that was dirty or seductive, or dirtily seductive about Welsh language pop music at the time.

Other writers, other than Ed, such as Ian Rowlands, were busy proving that the small country of Wales was subject matter enough. About then I must

have read my first essay by the Porthcawl-based writer Robert Minhinnick and realised that there was world class writing being hewn out of the Welsh experience and that you didn't always have to look to Maine or Montana for high octane prose. He's as good as Proulx in his way, though admittedly without the wide Wyoming vistas and the wolves at night. But a visit, in one of his prose pieces, to the Buccaneer pub, say, in the shadow of the Coney Island rollercoaster in Porthcawl, more than matches any crazy drinking clinic in the Wild West. He's a brave writer, as well as gifted. I wouldn't drink there.

Yet while writing was winning plaudits and delighting readers, the theatre world in Wales remained somewhat neurotic and nervous. I remember going to too many seminars and conferences where directors and actors bleated a mantra about underfunding, or the need for a National Theatre. Various models were mooted, but inertia, or a lack of o'er vaulting ambition usually won out.

This vexation and anxiety wasn't shared by all sectors of the artistic community. The visual arts had been confident for a long while, shored up by the small nation chutzpah of the Artes Mundi Prize and our presence at the Venice Biennale. In the background the Stakhanovite labours of the likes of Peter Lord revealed to us a visual art history that hadn't been on anyone's radar.

Anyone who thinks that conceptual art has shrunk down to the level of one-work-one-gag might gainfully have been directed to Cerith Wyn Evans' work which opened Wales' first ever showing at the Venice Biennale. They had to have clearance from Air Traffic Control to use a wartime searchlight to send a beam of light high into the sky above the Venetian lagoons. Hooked to a computer it shone the text of Ellis Wynne's *Gweledigaethau'r Bardd Cwsg* (Visions of the Sleeping Brad), converted into various languages, then into Morse Code and then into beams of light high into the Venetian sky. If art is, indeed, a sophisticated way of making a mark, of saying here we are, take notice, then Evans's work did precisely that. It had a certain chutzpah that had been missing in much of Welsh civic, political and sporting life.

And the same was happening in literature, with Welsh writers punching above their weight. The creation of the role of National Poet, with Gwyneth Lewis donning the mantle, served to underline the deep centrality of poetry in our psyche. Rachel Trezise winning the Dylan Thomas prize, and sixty grand to boot with *Fresh Apples* was another marker, as was the growing canon of novels by Niall Griffiths, who has described "books as psychic fuel for the living". He has created a great appetite for his visceral, supercharged creations in *Grits* and *Sheepshagger*. He is also a great example of an elective Welshman, someone who moved here and respects the native culture sufficiently to want to add to it. Peter Lord did the same. And Dave Berry, tireless chronicler of the history of Welsh cinema. White settlers, as the film maker Karl Francis once labelled English incomers, needn't always seem like a plague. Some bring us beauty and understanding, and a new perspective.

In music, too there was change in the air, not least when the effortlessly inventive Super Furry Animals released their album *Mwng* in 2000. This was noteworthy, not only for its musical fluidity and spark but for the fact that it was a Welsh language release, coming at a time when bilingualism was more of a commonplace because of changes in the education system. There were more and more bilingual writers. Gwyneth Lewis wrote sublimely well in English as well as Welsh, prose as well as poetry and there were others too, not least among the cohorts of the young - Fflur Dafydd, Llwyd Owen, and, among the older folk, I'd have to list myself as at ease with two languages.

But there was still that nervousness to dispel in the theatre sector. So it was a step in the right direction when money was found for the creation of a National Theatre in English to follow hard on the heels of Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru - argued for by Arts Council chair Dai Smith. Even so there was a residual nervousness remained about creating a big beast that would constantly need feeding.

Unlike the rash of new institutions created in the early 20th Century, such as the National Library and the National Museum, this was not a bricks and mortar edifice, but rather a commissioning company, eventually housed in a simple office in Cardiff's Castle arcades. Modelled on the National Theatre of Scotland, it was designed to be nimble, able to react to the times. It does not disregard the canon of theatre, though it does ask the necessary question whether or not we have a canon.

National Theatre Wales had a baker's dozen of events in its opening year during 2011, many of them site specific works ranging from Marc Rees's *For Mountain Sand and Sea*, a perambulation around Barmouth, and *The Persians* staged on the Army range on Epynt, to a series of beach games played on the sands of Prestatyn. I was living in the States when I read a review in the *Observer* of Michael Sheen in Owen Sheers' *The Passion* which suggested that there couldn't have been a happier place on earth during those three days than Port Talbot. It reminded me that the arts can be as transforming as the ballot box. They can hold up a mirror to our lives, singular and several, individual and collective.

In my 50 or so years on the planet I can't remember a more vibrant time to be going to the theatre, or visiting galleries, or reading books, and this despite the chill economic winds that blow. I'm justly proud of the nation that's been growing in understanding and depth all around me. The hope of 1997 was a quantum jump from the dismantling referendum result of 1979. Since then Wales has more than matched my own troubled complexity. We've had growing pains politically, it is true, but we are still working things through, and making sense of things.

I know who I am by now. I am a Welsh writer, interested in the world. My country has given me a richness of literature to explore, a wealth of friends, a good subject, natural beauty, a vivacity of art. I am also a father and I want to fashion a country that my daughters will want to live in and feel ineffable pride about, not to mention a delight in the extraordinary history concertinaed into its past.

As for me, I'll just keep on contributing, for their sakes, and for my nurturing country, my motherland: with words, and the beat of my heart.

Zoë Skoulding,
Bangor University, 2012

19 The borders inside us

Zoë Skoulding

The future, by definition, doesn't exist, at least not yet. For the economist, it's a mathematical projection vulnerable to changing political weather. For the advertiser or politician it's a dodgy promise. For most of us, most of the time, the future is a tangle of hope and fear that can only be approached through language, and even the future tense is often a precarious construction based on context and intention.

Statements about the future tend to be rhetorical: *The day of the Lord is nigh. I have a dream. What will happen to the polar bears? In the future, we will be planting cities*. The first two of those you've seen before, while the third was articulated by a small child in an excruciating advert about global warming played before every film in Theatr Gwynedd, Bangor, before it was demolished, and the fourth was part of an HSBC advertising campaign. The future tends to be a loaded question, which is why it is interesting to consider.

It's a question I have already tried to address in my 2008 poetry collection *Remains of a Future City*. It looks back to previous visions of the future, particularly the Situationist manifesto by Gilles Ivain *Formulary for a New Urbanism*, where he imagines the different zones and quarters of an utopian city in a life free from urban alienation. What is curious about his manifesto is that for all its emphasis on the future and the 'new', it was actually describing the time and place where he was, Paris in the 1950s. Turning it into an imaginary future was a means of enchanting everyday life and envisioning alternatives to the onset of postmodern consumer experience. Ivain's manifesto is not poetry as such, but it is a poetic text that finds the absurdity and paradox of the present and projects it into the future.

In its gap between sound and sense, poetry makes a parenthesis, a space for what is not yet possible. To that extent, I believe that poetry is always about the future. In *Remains of a Future City* I was responding to the environment that was around me in the present – the built spaces and wild landscapes of north Wales – but imagining them as a future through the lens of the past and through other places.

Bangor, where I have lived since 1991, seems to be hurtling into a particularly brutal future, since aggressive redevelopment combined with economic decline has left the town centre with so little sense of community that under-16-year-olds have, recently and controversially, been placed under curfew, prompting UK newspapers to ask if this is north Wales or North Korea. When I first lived in Bangor, a friend who had just come back from working in Nicaragua told me that since the 1972 earthquake in Managua, two decades previously, nobody knew how to give directions round the city. Typical (and somewhat unhelpful) advice to a lost stranger might be something like 'Turn left where the hospital used to be, go up the road past what was the church and turn right by the ruins of the old cinema.'

We give directions like that in Bangor too, because it's been bulldozed and rebuilt so repeatedly that no-one knows where they are any more. The giving of directions past ghost buildings has become a wry joke that emerges every time a new 'development' crushes another part of the town's increasingly fragile sense of itself. Over the years, my poems have become preoccupied with built spaces and how they fall down, how language falls down with them, and how it can be rebuilt but still trembles. And what it is that survives of places, perhaps only in our heads, how we carry them with us through all the wrong turnings, missed turns and surprises of unfamiliar landscapes. This is a well-known story all over Wales – but it's well-known in other places too.

The answer is not to give in to this, and neither is it to hold on to an ossified past, but to recreate localities and communities through new sets of connections. The arts are a vital aspect of this process, and writing in particular, since in this bilingual landscape a colonial past and continuing inequalities in the present result in complex linguistic situations. I live and write in English (and was born in England) but all my writing life has been in Wales, and I have always appreciated the ways in which English in Wales is knocked off-centre by its relationship with Welsh.

Within the devolving politics of the British archipelago, English is not just a global language that slips around the world as easily as toxic debt, its flexibility and placelessness the ideal vehicle for capitalist expansion. In Wales, English is neither 'English' in the sense of belonging to England, nor is it the English of US American cultural domination. It trips and stumbles, becoming a site of tensions that are unique to this area because every bilingual situation is different, emerging from a different set of power relations. I've appreciated the thoughts of the Canadian poet Erin Mouré, whose

Sometimes it just takes a few individuals to create a distinctive community. It's these, rather than the abstract collective of nationhood, that define where we are. But 'community' can also be an exclusive and reductive term. That is why Mouré's image of the border inside the citizen is so powerful in thinking of any future collective as it prevents it from closing off.

2002 collection *O Cidadán* imagines the border not as a line running between different territories or groups of people, but existing within each citizen. The result is that citizenship itself is 'enactment ==> to cross a border', an active state of connection that acknowledges the distinctiveness of locality but also the responsibilities that we have to others in the world whom do not know and with whom we are alive. The linguistic borders within Wales, are, by that account, a stepping-off point for connection across many others.

I arrived in Wales just before the Maastricht Treaty ushered in a new, borderless Europe. Consequently, I have always thought of Wales as being a European country before I've thought of it as part of the UK. Whatever the economic difficulties of Europe at the moment, I still believe that the bilingual nature of Wales connects it more closely with the long histories of migration and multiculturalism that characterise the continent, than the small island of which it is a part.

The centrality of poetry in Welsh culture is inseparable from a past in which language and identity have been variously threatened, and this is a situation reflected across Europe. The Romanian poet Radu Vancu has suggested that poets are like anti-bodies: poetry intensifies in language's woundedness. The work of organisations like Wales Literature Exchange, Wales Arts International and Literature Across Frontiers has been enormously important in reframing Wales's relationships and international significance. This is work that needs to continue in the coming life of the nation. Editing *Poetry Wales* over the last few years has been a means of exploring some of those connections, as my predecessor Robert Minhinnick did, but also of becoming aware of the different pockets of poetry activity within various parts of Wales. Reading the submissions pile and hearing readings all over the country, it's evident that what's happening in Aberystwyth, for example, is quite different from what goes on in Abergavenny. Sometimes it just takes a few individuals to create a distinctive community. It's these, rather than the abstract collective of nationhood, that define where we are. But 'community' can also be an exclusive and reductive term. That is why Mouré's image of the border inside the citizen is so powerful in thinking of any future collective as it prevents it from closing off.

Looking back, I can see that what I think of as 'Wales' is an assemblage of chance connections and changing communities. I first moved to Bangor to do a postgraduate teaching course. I'd been doing voluntary teaching in India after university and East Anglia, where I'd grown up, seemed too flat, in all senses, after the Himalayas. It was a choice made almost at random, and with no expectation of staying so long, though it is true that I wanted eventually to be a writer and, as Wales seemed to be full of them, it seemed like a good place to go. My first friendships were not the whole connected with literature but revolved around the burgeoning music scene of the 1990s, particularly through Alan Holmes, now my husband, who as well as playing in the post-punk group Fflaps, then Ectogram, produced

Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and spent hours laboriously drawing the covers of their albums.

I first encountered Gorky's singer Euros Childs wandering about in the mud of the 1993 Builth Wells Eisteddfod and enthusing to Alan about arcane and eclectic lists of records. We saw Catatonia's first gig the same weekend. 'Cool Cymru' hadn't happened yet but we knew Catatonia as the reincarnation of Y Cyrff from Llanrwst, which had featured Paul and Mark minus Cerys. The Super Furry Animals had not yet metamorphosed out of Ffa Coffi Pawb.

Looking back, it seems that a whole set of factors had collided at one moment. Tony Schiavoni was among those organising gigs for Cymdeithas yr Iaith, with what I remember as a warmly inclusive approach to promoting Welsh that also allowed for cross-currents of influence and enthusiasm between languages. Yr Anhrefn and Fflaps had toured Europe in rusty vans, connecting with counter-cultures from Amsterdam to Ústí nad Labem. Geraint Jarman was involved with others in directing *Fideo 9*, which not only gave Welsh groups their own version of MTV on a Saturday morning but also paid them enough for S4C appearances to generate a sense of confidence and worth. I even once had a small part myself as an extra (as a beret-wearing, baguette-wielding *Parisienne*) in a video Alan made in Paris for Rheinallt H. Rowlands, the fictional quarryman turned singer who was operatically voiced by the much-missed late Owain Wright. The song was *Simone*, though in fact it wasn't about a French woman but a cat belonging to Dewi Evans the keyboard player, who lived in Llanfairpwllgwyngyll.

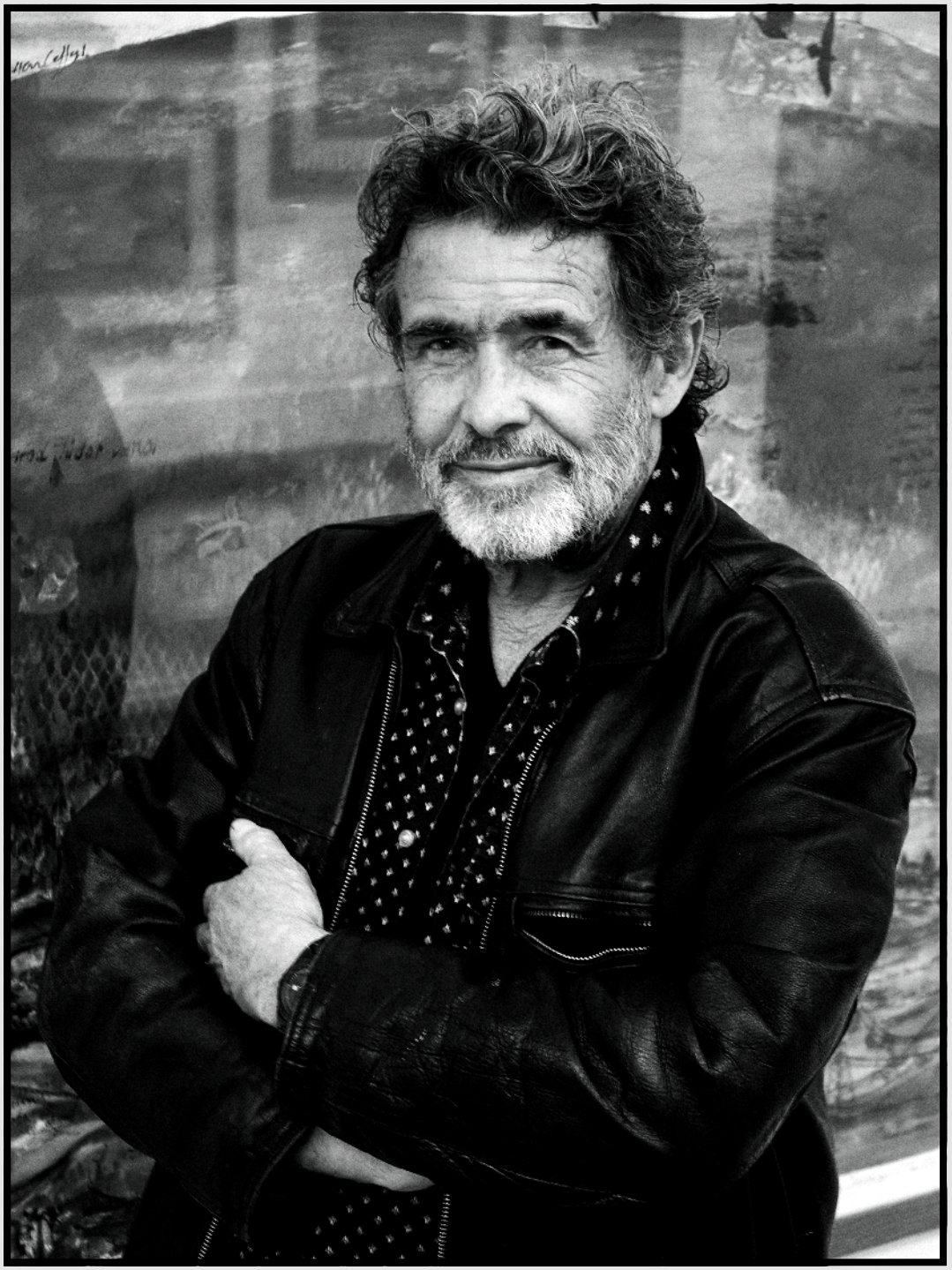
A London music magazine took Gorky's Zygotic Mynci to Gorky Park in Moscow for a photo shoot, so Ectogram called their next record *Svalbard* in the hope of a trip to the Arctic Circle. That didn't work, but nevertheless the future seemed to hold great promise. At a memorable gig in Swallow Falls, Betws-y-Coed, a representative of Mercury Records turned up to see the Gorkys and wanted to sign them there and then. His mobile phone wouldn't work, so at each stage in the discussion he had to walk across the road to the phone box and call Mercury. Or possibly New York, though the two were equally remote to us in those days.

The reality of the future that emerged was perhaps not quite what we had imagined, and the Gorkys' brush with corporate glamour has long since given way to a range of richly idiosyncratic solo trajectories. But that moment of confluences remains important to my vision of Wales. It involved both languages, but the issue of choosing one language or another didn't seem as important as what was happening in it. The music itself was exciting because it was happening a long way from London. It wasn't bound into fashion like identikit bands from Camden and could make its own connections across different times and spaces that were relevant to what it felt like to be in Wales then. Of course, this wasn't only true of that time and the same could be said of now, but that was the significant moment for me. When a culture is alive, it's changing and connecting, and it generates confidence.

The sense of cultural vibrancy I encountered inspired me to try to create the kind of communal optimism in writing that I saw in music. In 1994 I made the first issue of a local literary magazine with some illicit office photocopying and a long-armed stapler borrowed from Emyr of Ankst Records, and wrote a letter to Tony Bianchi at the Arts Council asking for support. He has recently confirmed, as I had feared, that the letter was written in green ink, but I will always be grateful to him for taking it seriously and I wonder whether that would have happened anywhere else. The steady trickle of support for that magazine, *Skald*, which later came from Peter Finch at Academi, was probably what eventually led to my current editorship of *Poetry Wales*, but most valuably it made me feel part of a wider community in Wales that cared about what I was doing. If, as has often been the case in Wales, arts funding organisations put personal engagement and knowledgeable expertise before over-reliance on bureaucracy, they can have far-reaching effects.

While all of this was happening, I continued my day job as a teacher of English, first in Fflint and then in Colwyn Bay. That was a job requiring a daily commitment to the future of Wales in rather more concrete terms than I have been discussing so far. Indeed, it was my extra-curricular life in poetry and music, which I took into my job as far as I could, that gave me the energy to do it for twelve years. It's an experience I don't regret, but the slow strangling of creativity in secondary education, which is happening here as much as anywhere else, must be reversed if Wales is to make the most of the cultural life that is its greatest strength.

When I began teaching, Wales seemed to be full of inspiring examples of poets who combined classroom practice with their own writing – John Davies and Christine Evans were striking examples but there were many more. It is hard to imagine now how secondary teaching would combine with anything else, but it once did. Making all schools into environments where the arts can genuinely thrive would be the Welsh Government's most magnificent achievement. That's not because of the possibly dubious benefits of a 'creative economy', but because the capacity to write imaginatively or to create in any artistic medium involves thinking otherwise, and is a way of sustaining a vision of a here and now that is simultaneously an elsewhere, a past and a future.



Osi Rhys Osmond,
Rhondda Heritage Centre, 2012

20 Development from within
Osi Rhys Osmond

The last quarter of a century began immediately after the City of London's 'Big Bang'. It marked, if not the beginning then certainly the rapid acceleration of post-industrialism, the embrace of de-regulation, and the complete transformation of society and culture. Everything was to change, including the landscape, industry, financial and commercial life, social policy and agriculture. In Wales the moment was also marked by the start of the re-development of Cardiff Docks.

The Wales I had experienced up to this period was largely that of the south Wales Valleys, where I grew up and attended school, followed by art school in Newport and university in Cardiff. I taught in secondary schools in Newport and the Rhymni Valley and in higher education in Newport. Subsequently, after our first child arrived, I began teaching in Narberth, Pembrokeshire, where I established my family home and studio in 1970.

Like a lot of my fellow south-Walians travelling outside their familiar comfort zone into the mysterious Welsh interior, in moving west I was about to experience the extraordinarily vibrant society of Welsh Wales, a part of the country very unlike the one I was leaving. As we may know, much of Welsh life lies hidden beneath the surface, like the ice of an iceberg. The people of Wales seem to live regionally, and quite often in ignorance of the realities of life in the rest of their country. In thinking 'I am Welsh just like other Welsh people' there is a certain taking for granted. In a sense, Wales is like most countries, I suppose, a different experience for each of its inhabitants. However, we lack a coherent national perspective that inhibits any real sense that we are a people living as a nation.

There were (and still are, of course) huge areas of collective invisibility. But by now the activism of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg had brought questions of identity and language to greater prominence in the public debate, even in my eastern redoubt and I began to examine my own response to this. The provision of Welsh language education was sparse. Newport had an Ysgol Feithrin, the result of many Welsh speakers moving east to work at the Llanwern steelworks. However, in my village the language was only spoken by the elderly. So I headed west, with the ambition of living in a community where Welsh was widely spoken, where I might be able to develop a life of some self-sustainability, raise my children as Welsh speakers and become Welsh-speaking myself. I was reasonably successful in the first aim, successful in the second and have eventually become fluent in our first language.

For my job interview in Pembrokeshire I travelled from Newport to Narberth on the train, the first time I had been west of Bridgend. Port Talbot was a revelation, breathing fire, steam and smoke and at the time employing over 20,000 steel workers. Changing trains at Swansea we proceeded west in a small two-coach affair that even today ambles casually along a single-track line, following the most dramatic of coastal fringes, with towns, steel and tin works, tidal creeks, mud flats, sand dunes, wading birds and military ranges. Since that time industry is sparse. Most has disappeared to be replaced by coastal paths, golf courses, wetland centres and caravans.

Approaching Ferryside I saw across the water the village of Llansteffan, where I now live, the outline of the castle dominating the skyline. Leaving Ferryside my eye was caught by the sight of two old men scything hay in a steep field adjacent to the line. The year was 1970. What was this new world I was entering? Well, as I was to soon find out, it was a world that in the next twenty years would begin to change dramatically and irrevocably.

Leaving the train at Narberth I encountered a landscape of old villages, small fields and overhanging hedges. It seemed a place locked in an historic time warp. Bizarrely, perhaps the most visible and immediate surprise, on moving to this rural community after teaching in the urban east was dental. Probably as a result of all the milk being produced and drunk locally the pupils had healthy teeth. They were also better behaved, happier and at ease with themselves and others, something that could not be claimed for many of the pupils I had taught in my previous schools. That said something important about the social and economic conditions that had formed both groups.

After an interview with the headmaster I was given a lift back to Carmarthen by Dai Williams Geography, an ardent patriot who enthusiastically pointed out the Plaid Cymru posters all along the back road from Narberth to Carmarthen. They were everywhere. It was a different political reality to the one I was familiar with, although Gwynfor Evans lost that particular election.

Since then I have travelled frequently and regularly back east visiting my parents in the lower Sirhowi Valley, where most mines had closed by the late sixties. Much of the evidence for their existence had been destroyed in a frantic blitz of post-industrial botox. I look back now and realise that I was leaving the land of coal and the English language for the land of milk and the Welsh language and that both these societies and the

values they espoused have since changed beyond all recognition, from black to white to grey.

Pre-devolution laws and directives passed outside Wales, with little or no Welsh input have had huge and unforeseen consequences as the coal and milk industries entered the late 20th Century.

Since 1933 the Milk Marketing Board had controlled the production, distribution and the prices paid for milk, guaranteeing farmers a regular income. This was one of many features of what was referred to as a command economy. The government decided what the country needed, legislation was passed and organisations established to ensure that it happened. Miners never enjoyed these certainties although coal itself was subject to similar regulations after nationalisation in 1946, and before privatisation under the British Coal Corporation in 1987. But now only open cast and drift mining remains.

After the fuller implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy the local dairy industry began to expand enormously, although when I moved to west Wales small farms were still the norm. Most farms were 30 or 40 acres, with 15 to 30 milking cows, a Morris 1000 van or shooting brake, small tractors, and with equipment and harvesting shared between neighbours in what seemed an almost idyllic rural scene. This was soon to change as milk production went into overdrive. Favourable subsidies encouraged larger units, bigger machinery, more fertiliser and chemicals and the noisy, isolated industrial tedium of silage making replaced the easy camaraderie of the hay field.

The introduction of the quota system in 1984 attempted to put the brake on this excessive production. Yet the rapid influx of cash and improvement grants into the farming economy meant that at one time Haverfordwest could boast five kitchen design shops, even an expensive German one, as the old slate tops were torn out and farm kitchens were revamped with bespoke plastic, steel and marble.

As economics of scale dictated farm amalgamation a financial necessity, redundant farmhouses became the sought after dwellings of the big money incomers. This coincided with the City of London's Big Bang. Commuting became easier and comfortable retirement earlier. Easy wealth be-sported itself in the purchase of Welsh farmhouses and holiday homes. Ironically the new ex-metropolitan owners were soon raiding the salvage yards to recreate in retro the rural peasant chic that had been so carelessly discarded by the previous owners. Estate agents prospered and proliferated, new firms moved in to cater for an insatiable demand, prices rose and in a very short time most locals were effectively priced out of the housing market.

In a rural setting it does not take many people to create massive changes. A hundred or so new families can make a huge difference over quite a big area. One of the ways this plays out is in the changing faces of the small market towns of rural Wales. I used to think I could interpret the social health of a rural town by the number of ancient ironmongers. Other shops were also important indicators - bakers, chemists, butchers and haberdashers. Now the bakery has become a boulangerie, the butchers a boutique or delicatessen, the local a gastro-pub, and the post office an art gallery. Sometimes this is done with the blessing and enterprise of local traders. Generally, however, it is the life changers who are looking for a novel way to live, often after selling at great profit in one of the periodic property booms that afflicted the commuter constituencies of post Big Bang Britain.

Our former market towns have now become complacently bijou. All along the western roads of desire, from the borders to Llandovery and on to St Davids there is a high street look of conspicuous affluence polished by a thick veneer of self-congratulatory nostalgia. Discrete colour schemes and Victorian typefaces on refurbished shop fronts spell out the constructed authenticity of the new old. There are Emporiums even. In towns like Narberth, hailed as an economic miracle and as the way ahead for the west, the sheer amount of unnecessary goods on sale panders to an obscene and unquenchable consumerism. As in the farmhouses, Formica is now torn down and replaced with the genuine article. Brass, wood, glass and pewter signal the ancient pedigrees of the new goods. Packaging and image is everything here and a very effective marketing tool it turns out to be. These small towns are busy and prospering as organic, fair trade, local products, farmers' markets and continental delicacies pander to expensively acquired tastes. Discretion is all. The clientele is not the lower order natives - they shop at Lidls'.

On the positive side it is wonderful to have such a range of foods available, even if at a price beyond the average wage. Expensive kitchen shops catering to metropolitan expectations have replaced ironmongers who are now in serious decline as the superstores lay siege to the old towns. Farmers supply stores are now more likely to cater for the horse and dog brigade, than cattle, sheep or pigs. In Carmarthen Country Stores the clothes department, selling upmarket wellingtons, Barbour clothes, riding habit and helmets ensures the sartorial decorum of our new squirearchy.

Redundant farmhouses were usually sold with a meadow, allowing horses to safely graze. One result was that the look of the countryside began to change dramatically. The scruffiness of rural Wales was one of its great joys for me, the sheer untidiness of many farmyards a testimony to head down hard work, with no time to bask in the reflection of acquisition. But now old farm buildings become neat, clinical, smug barn conversions, in good suburban order. The new name is often English. Sheep Barn and Dairy Barn are two examples close by. Many farm and house names are becoming Anglicised, as well, something that planning departments should prohibit. The naming of a landscape and its buildings that has taken centuries of living and generations of meaning to acquire can be wiped out in a flash by the careless renaming of culturally insensitive new owners.

All these and many other changes have occurred because of the economic vagaries of agricultural production and the increasing power of supermarkets. Global markets have distorted local economies and created

vacuums which have been filled by those with more purchasing power. Rural Wales does offer an attractive lifestyle, but only if you have the money to ease its many discomforts. Invisible under the shiny new surfaces is a deep and long-standing deprivation among the residual population, which also now affects those workers from English cities who have followed in the wake of the wealthy, often to work on major construction projects or in Housing Association transfers. Meanwhile, the Welsh language is in flight.

The demise of the dairy industry has devastated regional employment prospects. The huge dairies that sat strategically on the railways passing all large towns between Llanelli and Haverfordwest and beyond, have all but disappeared. Similarly, the variety of work was extraordinary, the drivers of those ubiquitous milk tankers, the mechanics who serviced them, the operatives and engineers, the management, laboratory and office staff, the social clubs and opportunities for meaningful employment and training. All have gone the way of the mines.

The social problems that beset west Wales' towns now are the same as those of the former mining districts. Rural poverty is on a par with the Valleys and many leave, the army being a popular choice. Drug and alcohol abuse is rife while employment in the bourgeoning tourist industry is low paid and seasonal. The landscape in south Pembrokeshire has been mugged by mega attractions, magnets for the unimaginative. Bluestone Park and Oakwood dominate. They are the contemporary castles of the new invading forces, proudly English in name and philosophy and heavily grant aided. Tourism is taken to be the great redeemer. It will save us all.

In the Valleys the story is different. Here the industry that created these communities no longer exists. It hasn't just disappeared; it has been obliterated. The one memorable exception to the planned decline was the success of the Tower Colliery miners in buying and saving their pit in 1994, proving the sceptics wrong and handing on a legacy of hope to the local community, although closure finally came in 2008. The Valleys are now much greener, although some of the people in many ways remain traumatised.

In certain areas many are too young to remember mining at all. Mining exists only in memory and heritage museums, most of which are very good and will for a short time be staffed by knowledgeable ex-miners, although these like World War II veterans are dying out. The collieries which offer the underground experience are obliged by law to employ fully qualified safety officials and managers. Interestingly, the training of these personnel can be done only in the one deep mine left, the Big Pit Museum.

In reflecting on landscape and memory we know that sudden environmental change and associated memory loss have deep and profound effects on the surrounding population. My father, an ex-miner, found it impossible to reconcile the loss of familiar landmarks, the colliery and the spoil tips, as Alzheimer's gradually took him away. He was not alone in this dilemma. It affects whole communities as well as individuals - something I have termed 'Cultural Alzheimer's' in other writings.

As employment prospects faded many of my old friends began to emigrate or commute down the Valley to work in a variety of jobs. The diversity of colliery work is not generally understood and those who had requisite skills, such as electricians, fitters, mechanics, draughtsmen and compressed air engineers quickly found work. Hospitals, hotels, factories and ocean-going ships all welcomed their expertise. The labourers and unskilled workers found it more difficult. Skilled colliers found their proficiencies less in demand. In one humiliating irony of black to white some of them found work in a new talcum powder factory, now closed, wheeling materials around at the behest of the female operatives.

The geography of the Valleys means that the more remote and isolated communities have the greater number of problems. Of course, there are areas where life is much more comfortable. But that usually depends on transport, employment, extended family and accessibility to services, including sports and the arts. Those that remain isolated are often sick, out of work and yet resilient in the most extraordinary ways. Houses and gardens display imaginative improvement schemes complementing the almost continental social dynamic of Valleys life, lived out of doors wherever possible.

The comprehensive landscape amelioration process offers many more ways of spending the increasing amount of leisure time that unemployment and part-time working allow. The extensive afforestation of the Valley hillsides, along with the rivers and remaining natural features enabled many former colliery sites to be modified to provide lakes, fishing ponds, mountain bike trails and nature walks. There is certainly a veneer of beauty here and there, but beneath many hastily transformed sites one sees the dark oily film of coal industry detritus seeping through the make-up. The changes are often shallow and cosmetic. Some locals will complain that they were left out of the decision making process and from the physical work of making this new world. Like much in Wales it happened to them and was not something that they initiated or about which they have a feeling of ownership.

Name changes undermine history, creating less Welsh realities. Near my old home Raven's Walk is a new name for a new ridgeway path, although there are plenty of wonderful local Welsh names, descriptive and historic that might have been adopted. Flatwater Meadows replaces Coed Ffraith. These names will become contributory elements in an adjusted history. This is not just cultural carelessness. It is a pernicious attempt to whitewash over a people's story.

Perhaps one of the most interesting questions about the recent past of post-mining Wales is why more attention has been paid to the landscape than to the people? The local authorities and the regeneration agencies have made a huge effort to remedy the damaged post-industrial landscape, with great effect in some cases. There are wonderful success stories and areas where all seems well, with golf courses and walkways, people out enjoying nature, history and each other. Of course, the physical

environment can become a commodity. It can be parcelled up, re-branded and sold in the global tourism market.

But that is not the case for the people. They have their uses but these are limited and there is in some areas a pervading sense of redundancy. Nature returns, the Valleys are green once more, but people are different. They need much more support and much more consideration. It is understood that a pleasant environment is conducive to social and human health. In many places this has been achieved. The amelioration of the human landscape remains to be done and should have been attempted much earlier. This should be the priority of strategic decision makers over the next twenty-five years.

The physical, urban and cultural landscape of Wales, has been reformulated dramatically during the last 25 years. New roads pierce Snowdonia and the west. Cardiff Bay and its barrage celebrate a new impetus in the arts, government and leisure, and even if much of the new commercial architecture is third rate, there are exceptions. The Senedd, the Millennium Centre, and Craft in the Bay are buildings of which we can be justly proud.

Like other fading former industrial and dockland towns, Swansea and Newport have also used the arts and architecture to put on an attractive new appearance, although serious deprivation lies under the mask. They have attracted new investment. Swansea even has a nascent financial industry, which is offering opportunities that formerly existed only in London. Hopefully, this will keep many of our brightest and best where they can most benefit our emerging country. In the north the demise of nuclear power generation has been a bitter blow for employment, but if as Scotland intends, we aim to function solely on renewable energy sources in the near future, these losses can be mitigated by imaginative and appropriate strategies. We need to make it happen by our own will and not allow it to happen to us. Caernarfon and Wrexham have also used the arts to create new social dynamics and the university towns all make increasingly important contributions to local, national and even international cultural provision.

In the arts the international profile of Wales has never been higher, but there is more to be done. The Cardiff Singer of the Year, Artes Mundi, Wales in Venice and the Cardiff International Poetry Prize have brought our cultural enterprise to the world's attention. Poets, writers, artists; dance, drama and music companies tour the world.

Young people can now aim to be dancers, actors, artists, musicians, singers, filmmakers and performers and have a realistic expectation of fulfilling their dreams. There are huge changes for the better in scientific research, medicine, design, engineering and digital technology which offer opportunities across a range of disciplines. I have ex-students working in almost all the major European cities, and hopefully many of them will return to help make the new Wales a success.

So in spite of my disappointment at aspects of the situation in the rural west and the Valleys I am ever the optimist. I believe Wales will wake up and reinvent itself. My observation of moving from a black to white experience east to west, no longer holds.

While declining in the west, because of population movements, the language has blossomed in the east. So there is a worrying, yet pleasing flattening out of language demographics. The coming of the Senedd in 1997 means a better future is ours to create. It needs more powers. But it is us, the people of the new Wales, that must make our future happen.

When thinking about the way the future of our country might be shaped we have tended to look north, to take as our exemplars the liberal social democracies of Scandinavia. After all those countries bear some similarities to Wales, small populations, difficult geography, a strong sense of social justice and a popular desire for a more equal society. However, they are beginning to lose their appeal in the face of the unrelenting march of neo-liberal economics. We might now be better off looking south to rather more exotic locations where these ideals are still upheld and even expanded in the quest for a decent, just, economically and environmentally viable social and political framework.

I anticipate the next quarter century and what it may mean to Wales, with a great deal of trepidation and, paradoxically, an even greater sense of optimism. We will need to think in radically new ways. The old political, social, cultural and economic solutions simply will not work. The future will be very different. Some of my proposals may seem far-fetched, but now is the time to dream, to speculate on what our country might be if we as a people reach our full potential.

It is beyond dispute that Wales is a country and that we are a people in every sense of the word. We have been here a long time. We have a history, we share two common languages, one of our own making. We have clearly defined borders. We have cultural distinctiveness, and a particular geography. We have a land and are a people. But the question is, can we be a nation? More critically perhaps, do we want to be a nation? The questions are important because the time is running out for us to surmount and overcome the challenges that face us in the establishment of a functioning Welsh state.

The institutions that apparently bind us together as Britons have been under vigorous and persistent stimulation since Gordon Brown's first crude attempts to brush up the British project as his government faltered and sunk to its ignominious end. Wagnerian moments from the coalition government of Clegg and Cameron have recently seen even more spurious and frantic attempts to inculcate a firmer sense of a unitary British identity.

Following England's poor, but better than expected showing in the European Championships, a number of carefully orchestrated events, the Jubilee, Wimbledon and then the London Olympics with its Team GB mantra, allowed the '*Nation*' to come together in an orgy of red, white and blue flag waving and bunting hanging. The force of organised propaganda in Britain - with the BBC leading the charge - passes over the heads of

most people who fail to see the manipulation involved as their brains are effectively washed. Those who dare ask the questions that need to be asked are seen as spoilsports and party-poopers. It is a given that the status quo is representative of public common sense in celebrating all that is best, and that all is well in this implementation of a pernicious mandatory patriotism.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with the meticulously stage managed repatriations and demonstrations of localised military might, as troops, all labelled heroes, parade through major towns and cities have acted as a long drawn out and sentimentally propelled social adhesive. The definition of heroism has changed. Heroes are now the victims, the sacrificial lambs of a deceitful and belligerent foreign policy. These continuous and growing acts of reinforcement enable a moribund and ineffective system of governance to continue dominating British public life.

Meanwhile, time and again during the last century and the beginning of the 21st, the British establishment has shown itself incapable of reform. The gains that were made in the post-war consensus are rapidly being eroded as neo-liberalism runs its ruinous course. We are still a part of that apathetic culture. We need to remove ourselves and begin anew.

The critical questions for me as we look to our possible future as a nation, are these. Can we learn from the previous 25 years and are we able to think for ourselves about the place we inhabit? Or are we completely under the sway of a London-based media that pays little or no regard to Wales? The answer to the last question is clearly yes. But I hope that will change, although the Welsh media does little to remedy the situation, even if people can be bothered to read Welsh newspapers or watch Welsh television.

However, I believe we can learn important lessons from our recent history. Additionally, the demographics of Wales are never fully considered in any analysis of the political choices facing Welsh voters or the way those choices play out. For the other crucial question is, who are the people of Wales? On a closer analysis we find that in the year 2012 they are not perhaps, the people that we once thought they were.

The one fundamental and potentially embarrassing consideration omitted from almost all discussions on Wales, its demographics and what our future might be is the fact that more than 30 per cent of people now living in Wales were born somewhere else, the vast majority in England. A similar movement into England would result in a non-English born population of about seventeen million. What would the Daily Mail have to say about that? And imagine what they would think if that influx was replacing an outward movement of the equivalent number of young people, generally between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. That is what has happened to Wales and strangely passes unremarked upon. At the moment we can do nothing about it, and yet it is among the most serious and irrevocable problems facing contemporary Wales. The Channel Islands have control over population entry, for business reasons, why not Wales for cultural reasons? Can't Wales itself be protected as a world heritage site?

The people of the earlier large influx during the industrial revolution came with nothing. They were the dispossessed and rapidly thought of themselves as Welsh, in the same way as immigrants to America quickly become Americans, no matter what their origins. In my mining village no one went back to a lost home or identity in England or anywhere else for that matter. They all soon felt fully Welsh, albeit in a new way.

The concerns and values of our new cross-border populations are different. They have possessions and property, are often well provided for in pension terms and can rarely be persuaded to consider the idea of Wales as a nation, although there are notable exceptions. That this group is often politically active, but conservatively inclined, having the time and resources to enthusiastically engage in constituency politics also reduces the likelihood of any radical changes in the way our nation represents itself in the near future. Their influence at present is limited to the more attractive parts of the country. Nonetheless, they have changed the political map of the west, north and some of the border areas. These contain the constituencies that return what are now called Welsh Conservatives.

With its proportional system, a system the Welsh Conservatives fought vigorously to undermine, the Senedd has given them a foothold in our political life that they could only have dreamed under the old system. Any consideration of Wales and its future must take into account the demographic make-up of the country. For if changes occur at the present rate, Wales as we know it will cease to exist within fifty years simply as a result of natural wastage and population exchange.

Talking recently, as I do, to taxi drivers in Cardiff, I asked them what they felt about living in Wales. Did they feel at home? Was there a difference, being in Wales? The general response was positive. Most of the men I spoke to had only arrived within the last ten years but they had an affirmative feeling about Wales and what the future held. They were happy to praise their reception here. In some cases they were thrilled their children were learning Welsh. They often came from challenged minorities enmeshed within the power plays of larger forces, Kurds for instance or members of minority branches of Islam. This gave them an understanding of, and sympathy for, the problems of Wales. They often seemed better informed of our dilemma than many of our deracinated natives.

I sensed that they saw Britain and the UK as representing a powerful and remote officialdom. The correspondence confirming or questioning their right to be here came from London where the heavy hand of authority was raised. They felt that Cardiff and Wales represented freedom from bureaucratic persecution.

When I asked one about his children he told me his three girls were at the Urdd camp in Bala. He was proud of their embrace of the language and of their enthusiasm for the culture in which they now found themselves growing up. He even volunteered that he was beginning to feel Welsh himself. Pre-devolution Cardiff and the then educational curriculum may not have offered these opportunities for cultural assimilation, so we can see that

progress is being made, albeit discretely and incrementally.

These men's wives and daughters might have had a very different story to tell. Nonetheless, these newcomers and their families will eventually integrate themselves into the society in which they now live. Their children will expand the process. Of course, it may not happen overnight, and we will need to be patient. Tolerance, social confidence and familiarity, education and acculturation will allow this to happen, but it will be a slow process. It can only be accelerated by acceptance and not by legislation.

If we are to see our country in a new way perhaps we should give some thought to the idea of adopting a new name to celebrate the birth of our infant nation. This will create an opportunity for all who live here to recalibrate their identity and become full citizens of the new/old country. After all, you do not have to be an Apache to be American and not being a Griffiths or a Llewelyn shouldn't be an obstacle to feeling at home here.

I have never been happy with the appellations Wales or Welsh, as they are someone else's idea about who we are. Although they suit me, the words Cymru and Cymreig are unfortunately equally unsettling for some of our English only speakers. Why not inaugurate a big change, make a radical difference, use an old name that is ours and refer to our country as Cambria. Cambria will be a much more effective chant at sporting events than the old 'Wails! 'Wails!' The word has no cultural baggage to offend the sensitive amongst us. And it is a name we can all embrace with no advantage to any special interest group. We can still maintain those other identities and as our educational and cultural ambitions bear fruit we will almost all eventually, become naturally fluent in both our languages and others. We will in future be Cambrians living in Cambria, whatever our surnames and whatever languages we speak.

But how will we manage? People find it difficult to see national economics as being different to household spending. They imagine the 'authorities' whoever they are, digging up the roads and knocking down the hospitals and schools as we default on our bills. Everything would disappear before our eyes. There is a tendency to misunderstand how national economics function, seeing the country as a grocery store, thanks largely to the grocer's daughter. What will we do without raw materials, what will we live on if we go it alone? How will we pay our way?

This terror of leaving home, not even a particularly good home, is crippling any hope for a brighter future. At the moment all the things that make that home worth living in are being rapidly sold off, if there is profit to accumulate, or wound down if they simply perform a valuable social service. The practical reasons for staying in the Union are being undermined by the government of the Union itself. Although the Senedd has put some distance between us and some of the more immediate threats from Westminster, many of the people of Wales are generally unaware of the importance of this, dismally seeing the institution as the legislature, rather than the politicians.

Much recent economic thinking has been posing similar questions. Why are some countries successful while others with similar recourses and circumstances fail? The general conclusion suggests that success has much less to do with resources and climate and is much more reliant on governance, rule of law, political freedoms, infrastructure and good institutions.

Other attributes are desirable, but not always necessary. Access to the sea is useful. Certainly, an appropriately educated population is critical. So is flexible and timely training, an effective transport systems, high quality applicable research and design, high-tech communications, a population enjoying authentic lives with clear opportunity to flatten social inequalities, adequate space in a variable geography, a diverse agriculture, fisheries, a technological and industrial base, independent, trustworthy and prudent financial institutions, a strong and diverse cultural foundation with wide access for the whole population, less elitism, greater self-knowledge and appreciation of place, history and others, opportunities for self questioning, self-expression and participation, an alert and critical broadcast and print media, a socially just welfare system, and good universal health care. The list goes on. But it is clear that all these necessary attributes are either present and under-achieving, or attainable with more effort.

However, there is more to it than that. The central and most pressing question our new nation faces in the future, as does the whole planet, is that of energy resources and their effective use. Again this is both a challenge and an opportunity. The construction of new ecologically-sound housing stock and buildings will create openings for research, design, innovation, employment, training, manufacturing and employment, and provide much needed affordable homes.

Many of our traditional communities straddling the narrow Valleys, like the slate towns and former industrial areas of the north-east lend themselves to communal and neighbourhood energy schemes. Partly because of the geography, but equally importantly because of the people, the social dynamic in these communities is conducive to energy sharing opportunities. As a child I cherished the idea of the high south facing hills behind my house being utilised for the growing of food crops. I could never accept the fact that we should be poor and short of basic foodstuffs, which we often were. We still need to develop an agricultural and food policy that is not reliant on the supermarkets and that can enter and leave the global market, when appropriate, but not be at its mercy.

Now those hills offer even more enticing prospects, the generation by non-carbon means of heat and power. The newer highly efficient photo-voltaic systems, wind turbines, water, bio-mass and heat exchange technology all lend themselves to the closely packed linear communities. But they need to be for the people and run by the people, in properly organised communal schemes. We should promote mutualisation rather than state supported capitalism allowing every citizen to have a genuine stake in energy generation and the accompanying economic activity.

And we must reactivate the radical communitarianism that was

such an important part of our former industrial communities.

The other fascinating aspect of this is a moral one. After all, there is a moral component to the acceptance and development of ecologically sound practices. Although all of these aims cannot be accomplished in the immediate short term, we should set in motion the means to achieve them in the foreseeable future, by developing through debate a public philosophy that embraces them. Politicians will have to accept that the old notions for economic recovery no longer hold true. Regeneration usually means more of the same. Many of them will find this difficult. Effective pressure will be needed to shift the emphasis to the new realities, and above all it must be something the people want.

In a similar way industrial, agricultural, financial and commercial services need an ethical base. It is certainly desirable in the light of recent revelations in the banking and investment industries, not simply in terms of behavioural issues, but in terms of efficiency. How can transactions be beneficial to society as a whole, not just to the manipulators of capital? A reputation for financial probity is like the ecological dream. It is something that will take time to establish but there are gains to be made both in the process and in the realisation.

With the adaptation of a moral green philosophy underpinning our economic activity and society, we can build a new way of living, while simultaneously establishing an enviable reputation for creative reconstruction.

For those cynics who have little faith in human nature and the possibility of improving our social wellbeing, look south to Costa Rica. It is a country of 4.3 million people. Lying on the isthmus linking the Americas you might image it as a country with many problems. In 1949 there was a coup by army officers, who declared free elections and dismissed the military. Costa Rica remains without an army, or any intention to establish one. Instead it formed an army of teachers. Territorial disputes with its sometimes aggressive neighbours, are referred to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Its environmental and social policies have made it a leading country in renewable energy, eco-tourism and sustainability. Recently it has become 80 per cent carbon neutral and aims to be completely carbon neutral by the year 2021 – as, so it happens, does Scotland. Life expectancy is higher that in the USA and education and health care are universal. There is much more to say, but only on this evidence this small country shows what can be done. We do not need to copy, but we need to look at good practise across the globe and adopt what will be useful to us in Cambria.

Those of us who want to see better prospects for our country must make ourselves the masters of our own destiny. Too much that occurs in Wales happens to us, it does not come from within. And we are embarrassingly grateful for the crumbs that are tossed our way. The giant wind turbines that stab the spine of our country are like the picador's sharp darts, weakening the bull. Spurious claims are made, reinforced by a compliant media, that the latest batch will provide "enough power for the whole of Welshpool". The reality is that it will enter the national grid at great profit to the developer and the landowner and great cost to the integrity of our upland landscape.

In the next quarter-century we must legislate for a more community-based approach to our problems, particularly energy. In France recently I saw Electricity Communal schemes where the government invested and the local community was provided with low cost power, while surplus profits were directed to socially beneficial schemes. To persuade our people to embrace these ideas may be a difficult task, but it is a task the politicians, public intellectuals and media must espouse vigorously.

I see an ethical future for our country, a future where everything we and others across the world associate with Cambria guarantees green, organic, sustainable and ethical products, whatever form they take. The niche marketing and value added products of resourceful producers could place our agriculture on the world stage. Exploitation of new and old technologies can do the same for manufacturing.

We will need to plan for what some are referring to as the post-work world. In this new age there will be much less of the old form of work. What work there is will need to be shared and working lives shortened to generate a sense of self worth and to enable elements of personal fulfilment to be fully realised. The national conversation will need to be intense and well informed, and the arts will play a large part in this.

Our artistic production is a huge part of our national dynamic. Certainly, we out-create similar sized populations in neighbouring urban centres. Poetry, film and the media, music, opera, the visual arts, drama and literature are all flourishing in both our languages. They will play a critical role in our ethical future.

My long held dream of a Blaenau Ffestiniog Guggenheim has yet to be realised. But I still believe we need a new gallery for our contemporary art and where better. We understand the power of the cultural engine in revitalising exhausted societies and this former slate town deserves the boost to its fortunes that a new National Gallery would bring more than most.

The well-established ideal of world peace is still strong in Wales and we should extend this as part of our ethical philosophy. We should rid our soil of weapons of war, establish a peace academy and work internationally to resolve conflict and enable reconciliation. As well as becoming carbon neutral, we should become militarily neutral.

And when we Cambrians have begun to achieve our dreams we must use our all resources much more efficiently. One way we can do that is to turn off all the lights at night, signalling to the universe that our country is at once the darkest spot on the planet, while at the same time, the brightest.

Bethan Gwanas,
Dolgellau, 2012

21 Wales belongs to me
Bethan Gwanas

Twenty-five years ago, I was in my twenties. I was full of energy and enthusiasm, armed with an Aberystwyth French degree and no overdraft. Those were the days of full grants for students. I had just come back from Nigeria, where I had been teaching English with VSO for two years. But before packing my bags for West Africa, my world had been almost exclusively Wales and all things Welsh. Being asked questions like, "What do you miss about England?" by my VSO co-workers used to drive me mad.

"I don't miss a thing about England! I never go there! I live in Wales!"

I didn't expect Nigerians to know much about us, but these were English people, our closest neighbours. I was shocked. How could they know absolutely nothing about us? My protests labelled me as an ignorant 'Nationalist'. They even thought I was rude speaking Welsh to my father (whom I hadn't seen for over six months) when he was invited to Lagos for the St David's Day celebrations. Yes, there's a Welsh society there, too, and my father is a sheep farmer who can sing like an angel. Let's face it, you can't get much more Welsh than that. A stereotype perhaps, but also a fact.

I, however, have the singing voice of a frog and have been a great disappointment to the family (and myself) because of it. That's the one thing people associate with Wales, isn't it? "Go on, you're Welsh, give us a song." Just typing those words makes me feel sick. I re-live the nervous rash, the dry mouth, the left leg shaking uncontrollably. I blame Shirley, Tom and Harry and all those bloody male voice choirs.

Nevertheless, I was once described as being "terribly Welsh" to some Irish people. "Sounds like a disease," they said. And 25 years later, I realise there's an element of truth in it. Didn't the poet and priest, R.S. Thomas say the Welsh were:

> *Sick with inbreeding,*
> *Worrying the carcase of an old song.*

Those lines always annoyed me, and they still do. But I have to admit that being Welsh and speaking Welsh makes me a rather sensitive soul, perhaps a touch too obsessed with our history and culture. I'm a bit touchy and tetchy when somebody attacks my country, my people or my language in any way. However, the worst insult of all is not knowing we exist. "But Wales is just a region in England isn't it?" an unfortunate German girl said that to me once. I'm afraid she was left with the impression that the Welsh are a tad unfriendly, alright then, downright stroppy.

Returning to Wales from a village in Nigeria meant dealing with culture shock. It was not just a matter of coping with all that choice on supermarket shelves and the fact that most of my friends were hooked on (English) TV soaps, but trying to work out what to do with the rest of my life. After a few months on the dole and helping out on the farm I had managed to get a job as a researcher with Radio Cymru in Cardiff. So in 1987, I was officially a 'Cyfryngi', a Welsh media type. S4C was only five years old. The BBC and HTV were still prime employers of young, enthusiastic and talented Welsh speakers, and the capital was full of media types earning good money. It was a good time to buy a house in Cardiff – if you had the money. I didn't.

It was also a good time to be Welsh. Wales were in the Rugby World Cup, flown into Auckland in economy class, despite the fact that some were 6'6" and 6'7". Pete Thorburn's kick put us in the third place play-offs, our best result ever. Radio Cymru had a large audience. We had our own television channel at last and it was doing well. There were plenty of jobs for everybody: actors, writers and all those behind the cameras. In 1988, *Cmon Midffild*, a comedy series about a village football team hit our screens for the first time and was a roaring success. It remains cult viewing for all ages and backgrounds. But no Welsh language comedy series has managed to capture that kind of audience since.

The National Eisteddfod at Porthmadog that August was wonderful. Margiad, my sickeningly talented friend from university won the prose medal – the youngest winner ever, and it was for a work full of humour for once. Eisteddfod winners were usually so very literary, so I felt that the literature scene was finally coming out of its strait-jacket.

The Welsh language was being respected within Wales at last. In 1987, a planning application was turned down at Llanrhaeadr, Clwyd, on the grounds that it would be detrimental to the Welsh language. It was the first time such a decision had ever been made. In 1989, newly qualified doctors were allowed to take the Hippocratic oath in Welsh for the first time. In 1986, Gwynedd County Council was found not

Holiday homes were a burning issue in the 1980s – literally. A group which called themselves 'Meibion Glyndwr' (Sons of Owain Glyndwr) had been burning holiday homes since 1979, the year Margaret Thatcher was made Prime Minister.

guilty of racism for refusing to employ two non-Welsh speakers in an old people's home. The Judge remarked that he didn't think anybody thought law students from Africa were being treated in a racist manner because they had to master the use of English before working as lawyers in England. And after all, in the 1980s, the vast majority of older people in Gwynedd were Welsh speakers and wanted to live out the rest of their lives in that language.

Move on some twenty years and Mair Jones, my grandmother's best friend spent her last years in sheltered housing in Dolgellau where she was the only one who could speak Welsh. She would shuffle her Zimmer frame up the steep hill to my grandmother's home to be able to talk to someone in her own language, someone who shared the same memories. When she could no longer walk that far, her health deteriorated rapidly. Well, it would wouldn't it? A telephone conversation is not the same as a chat over a 'paned' and a Welsh cake. Why was she the only Welsh speaker? Because Dolgellau is a pretty town in a pretty stunning part of Snowdonia and people flock here for their retirement years. I suppose I'd do the same.

Holiday homes were a burning issue in the 1980s – literally. A group which called themselves 'Meibion Glyndwr' (Sons of Owain Glyndwr) had been burning holiday homes since 1979, the year Margaret Thatcher was made Prime Minister. They were never caught, and Thatcher didn't resign until 1990, the very year that North Wales Police made complete and utter fools of themselves by arresting three popular actors on suspicion of being members of Meibion Glyndwr. Mei Jones (creator of *Cmon Midffild*), Dyfed Thomas, Bryn Fôn (who also had his own rock band) and his partner Anna were released without charge. Bryn Fôn's concerts had always been popular but they now became enormous, packing halls all over the country. And in the same year, R.S. Thomas himself called for a campaign to deface English-owned homes. I can't remember if anyone took him seriously.

Holiday homes are fairly safe now, especially since insurance companies started cottoning on to the fact that some cash-strapped owners had set fire to their own properties.

In the 1990s, attitudes towards us changed. The Welsh had become prime targets for English comedians and writers such as A.A. Gill who in the *Sunday Times* described the Welsh as "loquacious, dissemblers, immoral liars, stunted, bigoted, dark, ugly, pugnacious little trolls". He also described the English as a "lumpen and louty, coarse, unsubtle, beady-eyed, beefy-bummed herd", but nobody seemed to notice that bit. In the Evening Standard, A.N. Wilson stated that:

> "The Welsh have never made any significant contribution to any branch of knowledge, culture or entertainment. They have no architecture, no gastronomic tradition, no literature worthy of the name."

A distinct lack of knowledge on his part, there. I won't bother listing the names that make a complete ass of him. In 2001, Anne Robinson appeared on the comedy show *Room 101* and made derisive comments about Welsh people, such as "What are they for?" and "I never did like them". Well, we never liked her either.

The unkind comments seem to have disappeared by now and I'm not sure what happened. Maybe because we now have our own Assembly which called in 2000 for an end to "persistent anti-Welsh racism" in the UK media. However, I think its because we now have a new brand of Welsh comedians and writers: Rhod Gilbert, Rob Bryden, Ruth Jones as well as dozens of others coming through fast and furious. They have made being Welsh quirky and fun. They revel in their Welshness and people love them. Apparently, the funniest of them all, Tommy Cooper, was Welsh too, but we never knew. We only found out after his death. Maybe he wasn't brought up to be proud of his roots, and that's sad.

We're reasonably cool as a nation these days. We have our own Assembly, our rugby team is respected all over the world and the football team is improving. Our singers, musicians and actors are fêted, more people seem to know who and where we are and we're proud and confident.

But as a Welsh speaker I'm not as confident of the survival of the Welsh language. Yes, more and more schoolchildren speak Welsh in school, but only in school. Some switch to English the second they leave the building. Most don't realise they're doing it, and they certainly don't do it because they hate the Welsh tongue. They love it, and intend to send their own kids to Welsh schools. They just don't use it with their mates, and if they come from monoglot homes, they obviously don't use it there either. In some areas, children from Welsh-speaking homes speak English to each other just because it's 'cooler'. Just like they did in the early 1900s, some parents decide to bring their kids up in English, but this time round, the reasons are not as clear. Back then, Welsh was seen as an obstacle to getting on in the world. And now? I have no idea. But that's where minority languages live or die – at home, on the 'aelwyd' (hearth). Welsh would still survive as an academic language in schools, but not as a natural part of every-day life.

That's why I started writing books. My friends weren't reading Welsh novels because "They're boring," "I keep having to look for a dictionary" and "There's no sex in them." There were a few exceptions, but Welsh novels did tend to be very worthy and literary. There was a definite need for a raunchy page-turner. I gave it a go, had a whale of a time writing about a women's rugby team, and was published in 1997, at the National Eisteddfod in Bala. Some were horrified, but more were amused and it sold like hot Welsh cakes, fresh from the griddle. People who hadn't looked at a Welsh novel since their 'O' level exams actually bought it. And they're still the readers I aim for. Literary types will always read each other's books (and write about them). But if you want to truly keep a language alive and relevant, you need the 'werin,' the people who go to the Royal Welsh show every year, not just the Eisteddfod.

All kinds of novels are published now, trendy Cardiff-based ones, rougher ones full of dope-heads, gentler, more old-fashioned fare too, which is great. But the traditional readers are dying away and the young prefer DVDs and computer games. It's the same all over the world. Yet when it's a question of a minority language, the effect is greater and more immediate.

The Basques have roughly the same number Basque speakers as Welsh speakers in Wales and they have a thriving daily newspaper. We tried, and failed. Partly because of lack of confidence on the part of the Assembly Members but mostly because of lack of interest on the part of the Welsh public. We left it too late.

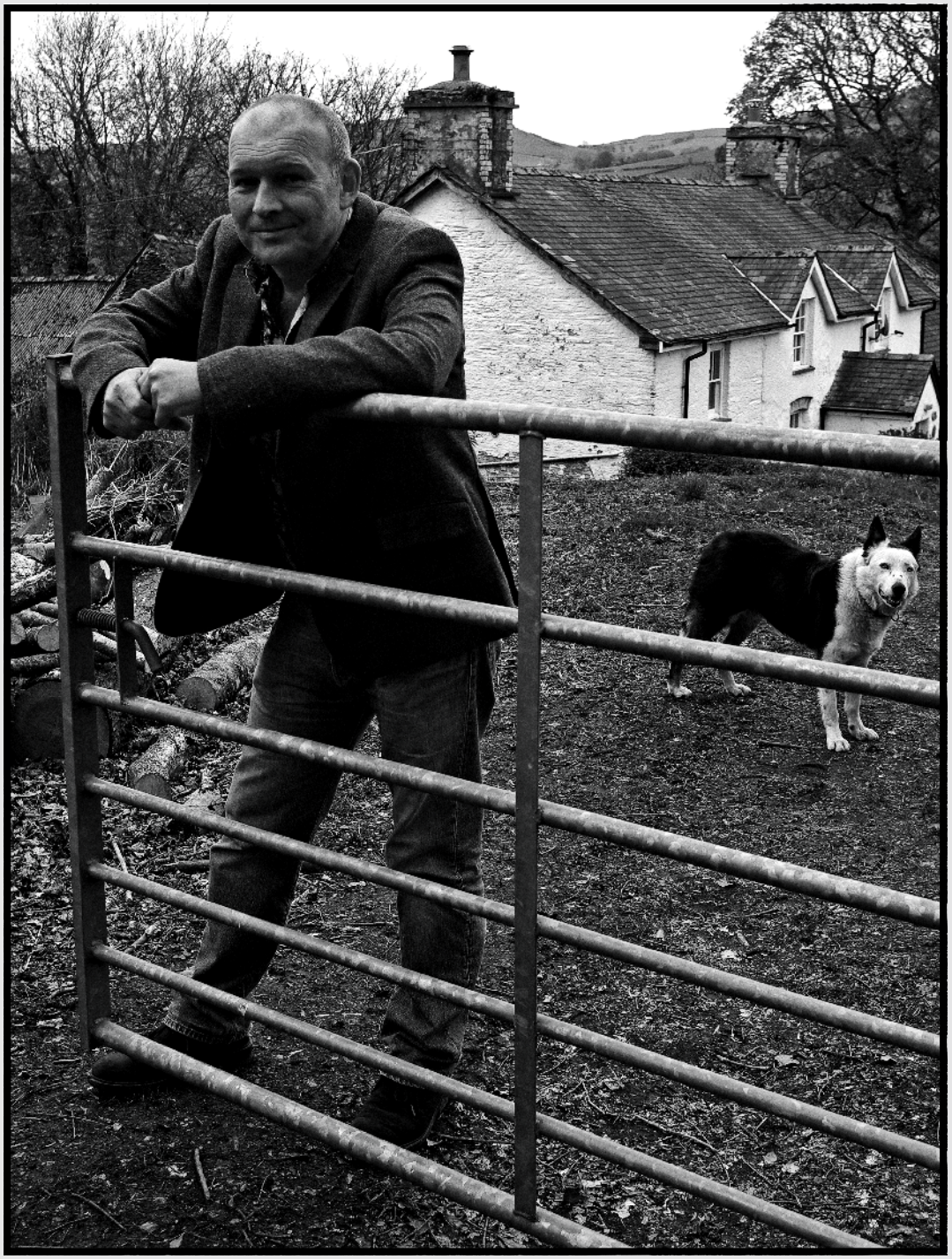
So does this mean we've left it too late for the Welsh language? I don't think so. I certainly hope not anyway. It's too precious, but mankind often doesn't see the value of something until it's disappeared.

Since only a quarter of us, if that, speak the language now, Wales can survive without it. But wouldn't we then be just another region with a funny accent? We would be watching the same programmes, listening to the same tunes, and reading the same papers as everybody else, apart from the token "and now for the news in your area". It would be back to 'For Wales, see England' – unless it's a question of rugby. That would be tragic.

I wish I had a crystal ball; then again, maybe not. What I wish for and what will actually happen may not be the same. I hope Wales grows up over the next quarter of a century and realises what actually is important and what isn't. I hope people who move here realise that there's more to us than pretty scenery. I hope they try to become part of our community and our culture instead of trying to impose their culture on us. I hope we learn to welcome and encourage them instead of letting them be swallowed up by the English ghettos. You can't force people to use a language. They have to want to use it. It has to be fun, something they don't want to miss out on. And language is a tool for something else – a way of life, a way of thinking, in short our culture. And although it may not be perfect, I think our culture is pretty amazing. So I hope money will be spent on Welsh tutors and courses: daytime, night time, intense, laid-back, whatever works.

I hope the organisations which have been formed to protect the landscape and wildlife realise that the people and language need protection too. That means getting the balance right between keeping the scenery picture-postcard-pretty and making sure the locals remain local with decent incomes. The brain drain to Cardiff and over the border is killing the rest of the country. Meanwhile, the bat and badger population is thriving. Work it out.

I've travelled a lot over the years, and I've seen what happens to people who have lost their culture and language. They become heart-breakingly lost and depressed. We all need an identity to belong. I belong to Wales, Wales belongs to me. I love this place, warts and all, with all my heart.



Mike Parker,
Melinbyrhedyn, Powys, 2012

22 Polls apart
Mike Parker

The early hours of Friday 12 June 1987:
Cricklewood, north-west London, in a shared student semi on the wondrously-named Clitterhouse estate. On a heady cocktail of cheap wine and youthful infallibility, a gang of us are hurling abuse at the television. The Kinnock government we were so hotly anticipating, and so resolutely sure of, is evaporating before our eyes. And we're not the only ones to be caught napping. At the outset of the evening's psephological marathon, even the BBC had hedged its bets. "It looks as though it's going to be a close-run thing," trumpets Dimbleby in the opening moments. They predict a slender Conservative majority of 26 seats. That's easily enough, within the margin of error, to tip it into hung parliament territory. We lap it up, top up our glasses, and hope.

It soon becomes horribly clear that they, and we, are wrong; wildly, catastrophically wrong. The Liberal-SDP Alliance collapses like an over-egged soufflé. Neil Kinnock's Labour party has ironed out its Michael Foot creases with the slickest campaign on record, but the voters haven't bought it. There are stuttering swings to Labour in Wales, Scotland and northern England, albeit from the Tory high water mark of 1983, but the Midlands and south turn out in their droves for Thatcher. By daybreak, she has a majority of over one hundred.

1.30 a.m., and Ted Heath is in the middle of a glacial interview with Robin Day in which he is refusing to congratulate his successor on her third election victory, nor even to utter her name. Fittingly, he is cut off mid-huff as we are whisked live to Hendon Town Hall for the Finchley declaration. Margaret Hilda Thatcher, Conservative, twenty-one thousand, six hundred and three votes. A majority of nearly nine thousand over her Labour challenger. Tory cheers ring out, though they are swiftly drowned out by a chorus of "Fascist scum! Fascist scum!" from one corner of the room. There is a scuffle, and people are ejected. Thatcher's face is impervious, imperious. "It is", she declares, "a privilege to be elected once again to represent the people of Finchley." Someone shouts back, "Not for us it's not."

In our student house, we are very drunk and increasingly maudlin. As the flashbulbs explode on the TV, we see Thatcher whisked away from her count in a cavalcade back to central London. Someone – me, I think – points out that she'll probably go down the Hendon Way, passing only yards from our sour lair. Someone else – or perhaps me again – suggests that we pile out on to the main road and, as she passes, pick up the chants of "Fascist scum!" where our comrades had been forced to let off. Getting a dozen pissed, pitiful students out of an acrid bedsit and up to the Hendon Way takes some effort, but eventually we're gathered at its side, ready for her.

No cavalcade appears, so we take to shouting abuse at any car that passes – well, you never know. The security services might have ordered her out of the Daimler and into a less conspicuous Nissan Micra. Even a lone cyclist gets hollered at, making him wobble nervously. After a fruitless half hour, the need for more wine overtakes the imperative of haranguing the Prime Minister. So we retreat back indoors, just in time to see the live TV footage of Margaret Thatcher being ecstatically welcomed at the Tory HQ in Smith Square. A braying crowd of yuppies are swigging from champagne bottles, waving Union Jacks and chanting "Five more years! Five more years!" Leaning out of a first floor sash window, Thatcher grins demonically and holds up three fingers, one for each election victory. We proffer two back and drain the last of the gut-rot wine.

At this point, I've never lived in Wales, but the country is exercising an increasing hold on my horizons. Although it is in a Labour rosette that I'd been pounding the streets of Hendon and Hampstead, one of my few cheers of the evening comes when a strip of green flashes across the bottom of the screen to announce that Plaid Cymru have taken Ynys Môn from the Tories. It's a gut feeling, an electric moment of connection, but with no real context as yet.

Wales is a small but crucial part of the 1987 campaign. At one stage during the evening's election broadcast, the panel of experts debate what has gone so badly wrong for Labour. The party's performance in Wales, picking up four seats from the Tories, is contrasted sharply with their miserable showing in London, where they have failed to make any of the necessary inroads and have even lost seats to the Conservatives. "Neil Kinnock must wish that the Labour party was more like it is in Wales than it is in London," John Cole declares in his dense Ulster twang.

Indeed he must. The London Labour party, bolshy and indignant after the abolition of the Greater London Council the previous year, was a constant thorn in Kinnock's side. The media could never mention them without spewing out the words "loony left" alongside. Not just the *Sun* and the *Mail* either, for whom stories about one-legged

black lesbians being given trillions on the rates were the daily currency of life. Re-watching that night's BBC election coverage, I'm quite staggered by how aggressive, even abusive, were the interviews with new MPs like Ken Livingstone, Diane Abbott and Bernie Grant: "Are you going to form a caucus in the Labour party to push black rights?" and "Does your election make a difference to blacks?"

Two hours down the M4, it was all a much more carefully crafted, photo-friendly Kinnockland. Even with the open wounds of the miners' strike still suppurating in the background, Kinnock's own south Wales heartland had put on its Sunday best and was belting out a chorus of *We'll Keep a Welcome in the Hillsides* for anyone who'd care to listen.

This was the Wales of the infamous eve-of-poll Labour party election broadcast, a mini-epic directed by Hugh 'Chariots of Fire' Hudson, and swiftly dubbed 'Kinnock: The Movie'. Various elderly aunties and uncles, both family and party, extolled the virtues of Our Neil, who was, as he volubly reminded us "the first Kinnock in a thousand generations" to go to college. The only nod to the mining communities from which he'd emerged, but had so prevaricated over supporting during the year-long strike, was some footage of him singing in a male voice choir. Otherwise, Wales was just a stirring backdrop, craggy mountains, seagulls soaring, Neil and Glenys walking hand-in-hand across a sun-dappled Great Orme. This was, lest we forget, the first Labour party election campaign to be masterminded by Peter Mandelson. It was the first election where spin flattened substance, and left it for dead.

By 1992 and Kinnock's second stab at the premiership, this stock portrait of close-knit Welshness had become more of a hindrance than a help. However much Mandelson tried to buff him to a gloss, Kinnock's quick belligerence and verbal flatulence fulfilled many of Middle England's darkest suspicions towards the Welsh. During that election, I was still wearing my Labour rosette, though in Birmingham by now. I lost count of the times I was told on tidy suburban doorsteps that "I'm not voting for that Welsh windbag" Sometimes its "Welsh whinger", occassionally "Wanker". Alliterative racism appears to be much more palatable.

The election night was a re-run of 1987, but even worse. Predictions as polls closed were for a hung parliament, possibly even with Labour as the biggest party. Yet again, harsh reality peeled away from the script as the actual results started to trickle in. I was in a different city, in a different flat, with a different crowd, but the drunkenness and disappointment were all too familiar. Again, the only shaft of light in the gloom was when the screen told me that Plaid Cymru had vaulted from fourth to first place in Ceredigion and Pembroke North.

Between these two elections, I finally met some members of the party that had succeeded in stirring such distant emotion. A year on the national executive committee of NUS brought me to Wales on a regular basis, and it was always to the Plaid activists that I most readily gravitated. I was even invited to address a party conference on the subject of lesbian and gay rights, for – incredible though it seems now in what Rod Richards memorably dubbed "the poofs' party" – no card-carrying Plaidwyr were prepared to edge out of the closet far enough to do the job themselves. I had a fine old time at the conference, and even managed a bit of a fumble with a visiting Scot Nat.

Every time I came to Wales, it felt like a homecoming. I was hungry to be here. Leaving college in London, I got my local newsagent to stock the *Western Mail* every Wednesday, in order to search and apply for Welsh jobs. I didn't get so much as an interview for any of them. Instead, I landed my dream commission, to research and write the inaugural *Rough Guide to Wales*. I was off. Increasingly regular visits finally turned into me upping sticks and settling down in the hinterland of Machynlleth, Wales's soi-disant 'ancient capital'.

It is so long ago. Looking at the election footage on YouTube (yes, it's all there, and horribly easy to lose yourself in), the haircuts, shoulder-pads and brick-size mobile phones are comic enough, but the politics seem scarcely less clunky. From 1987 and 1992 the most easily recognisable narrative of them all is that of the Labour party, partly because of their dominance in Welsh political life, but principally because they have changed so little since then. It is one of the great ironies of modern Welsh politics that the party which finally delivered devolution has adapted least to it. Through four more general elections, two referenda and four Assembly elections, the Welsh Labour party has continued to mine the same rapidly depleting seams of tribal loyalty and knee-jerk anti-Tory assumption.

Hang on, you say, how can Labour be accused of complacency or failure when, here in 2012, they hold half of the seats in the Assembly and a full 26 of the 40 Welsh seats at Westminster? Isn't this evidence that the machine that has so dominated national politics for a century powers on and shows no sign of running out of steam? Perhaps so, though I have my doubts. There are many signs that Welsh Labour has hollowed itself out from within, has become a machine without a reason, save for its own continued existence. Should the larger British, European or world narrative fail to go according to plan, the thin shell might just crack and give way.

Much as it pains an old Labour activist to say so, that this should happen is, I think, nothing less than essential for Wales' future. By any definition, it cannot be said that a century of Labour domination has left Wales in good shape. And the further into history the heavy industrial age recedes, the inevitability of that domination is going to crumble too.

With the almost perfect storm of global recession, implosion

of the Euro zone, the rise of Eastern economies at the direct expense of the West, the growing exhaustion of the 'war on terror' and the constitutional questions hotting up towards the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, I suspect that quite profound change is going to come sooner rather than later. Should the Scots vote to go their own way, then the landscape will alter irrevocably. A rump UK will be a troubled, fading entity. Its days will be numbered. After much fierce and often histrionic debate, Wales will eventually follow suit and become an independent nation. My guess is that this will happen between 2025 and 2030.

I cannot wait. The night of the successful independence referendum will, I am sure, prove to be one of the best parties of my life. Ideally, I'd like to be celebrating it with my comrades and fellow AMs in Plaid Cymru, for by then, this son of Swydd Caerwrangon (Worcestershire) would love to be in his second term as Plaid AM for Sir Drefaldwyn (Montgomeryshire). You're scoffing, I feel sure. What parallel universe am I living in to think that Plaid, which generally gains between 5 and 15 per cent of the Maldwyn vote, could ever take this seat? I have no very good answer to that, save for an unshakeable belief that the traditional Liberal vote here is as soft as Montgomeryshire rain, and that now the longstanding habit has been broken, it is all up for grabs.

Then there is the unstoppable force of the winds of change. Not for a moment do I think that Welsh independence will come thanks to the brilliance of Plaid Cymru politicians. It will come because that is the way the western world is heading, into smaller, interdependent states formed around natural, historic or self-defined nations. It will come because the reasons for creating and maintaining an entity like the United Kingdom, largely military and imperial, no longer apply. Despite some sections of the population trying very hard indeed, Wales will be unable to resist a force far beyond its borders.

Of course, the central irony of Plaid is that, in direct contrast with Welsh Labour, its ultimate ambition is its own demise. Come independence, the different factions within the party are likely to coalesce into new political groupings. This process will be well under way before the referendum, as distinctive conservative, socialist, liberal or green parties, for whom Welsh nationhood is a given, emerge and grow.

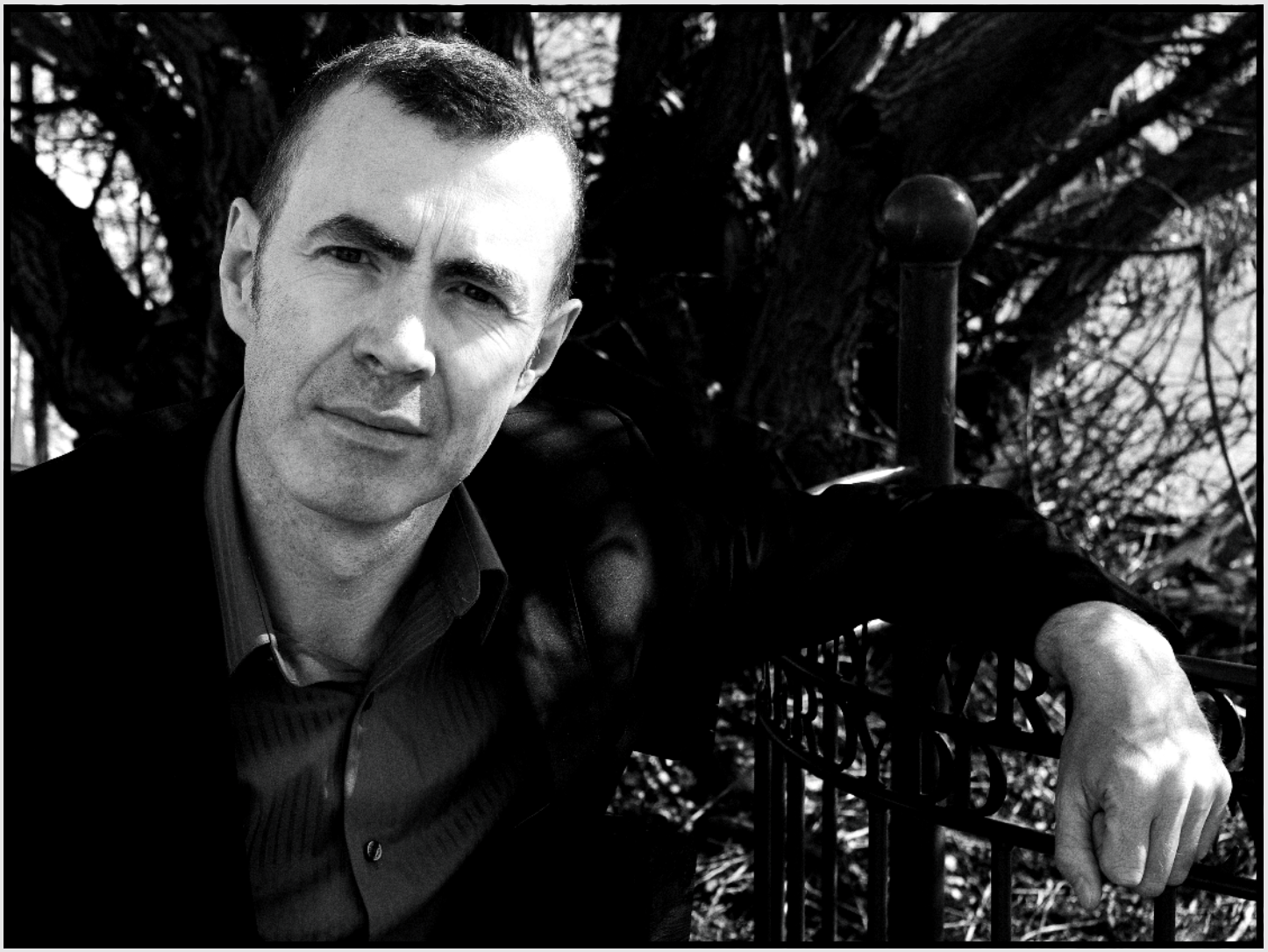
Even writing this, there is part of me that cannot quite believe it. The very concept of Welsh independence has only been part of mainstream Welsh politics since Gwynfor Evans' by-election win in 1966, the year in which I was born, and here I am boldly stating that it will have succeeded by the time of my sixtieth birthday. Furthermore, like many who believe in this cause, I have internalised the brickbats and insults, the doubts and the scoffing to such a great extent that I can recite by rote the arguments and rhetoric against it perhaps more easily than I can those in its favour.

And there's more. That frisson of youthful, romantic joy that coursed through me on seeing from afar those lone Plaid Cymru successes on election nights in the last century has inevitably coagulated into a far more complicated, and often considerably darker, set of sometimes contradictory emotions. Do I really want to add another international border to a world already so heavy with them? Can I honestly stand on a hilltop in my much-loved Marches, and decree that Kington must sit on one side of the line and Knighton on the other? Isn't there a case to be made for the British state at its best? These are difficult questions, and there are no pat answers. All I can offer is a cold, hard certainty that Wales can manage its own affairs better than a London government of any political persuasion. Not just can manage, but *must* manage.

* * *

The early hours of Friday 12th June 2037:

I'm in a Montgomeryshire farmhouse. At seventy, my activist days are done, but I'm glued all the same to the screen, watching the results of the second general election since Welsh independence. The novelty of secession is wearing off by now, and the campaign has been far more about the economy and the energy crisis than about re-playing constitutional grudge matches. As on another night half a century before, right-of-centre parties are doing much better than expected, and I smile nostalgically at footage of young left activists in a state of utter desolation that they have found themselves on the losing side this time. Plaid Genedlaethol hold Ynys Môn, but lose Sir Ddinbych and Abertawe Gorllewin to the PRC (Plaid Rhyddfrydwyr Ceidwadol). There are two recounts in Sir Drefaldwyn, before it too falls to the PRC. Plaid Coch Cymru hold firm in Wrecsam and Merthyr, but lose Bridgend. The ragtag Bring Back Britain coalition are wiped out everywhere except Monmouthshire. The world turns, at once startlingly new, yet so utterly familiar. And by now, thankfully, I'm drinking a far better wine.



Adam Price,
Cardiff Bay, 2012

23 We are the ones we have been waiting for

Adam Price

From Berlin to the Baltic States 1989 was a time of revolution. For me this is the year that Wales too came in from the cold. I was studying in Germany when the Wall came down I saw tears on the eyes of my German friends as the news came in over the radio. I drank with them till the early hours as they hugged in a state of incomprehension at the utter magnitude of what was happening.

1989 was a hinge-point in our history, too, though by now one that is almost forgotten. The Pontypridd by-election, following the death from exhaustion of Brynmor John was held on 23 February that year. The poll was called unseasonably early – presumably to prevent Welsh Nationalism building up the same terrifying momentum that the SNP had displayed a few months earlier at Jim Sillars' great triumph in Govan. In the cold of a Valleys' winter, this was to be no Spring Awakening. Change was in the air, but then so was the snow.

I shivered from daybreak to dust. Sleeping on the floor with a Plaid family, I'd somehow become separated from my coat. Voters watched as words dripped like stalactites from my breath. A teenage friend from Richmond, Simon Brooks, a fellow Marxist and Welsh learner who went on to edit *Barn* and found *Cymuned*, lent me his jacket in a spirit of solidarity. We felt but didn't fear the cold, imbued with that strange passionate intensity you know when you are young and writing history. That didn't stop me being told off by the Plaid Women's Section when Simon was found hypothermic outside a polling station somewhere near Church Village.

Kim Howells, the Labour candidate, had warned of the danger posed by "students from Aberystwyth" being bussed in their hundreds, making us sound like some Peoples Liberation Army on manoeuvres – though the provisional wing of the Urdd would probably be more apt. There were sons of the Manse from the north here experiencing real Valleys life for the very first time. For us young partisans, canvassing was nation-building, one street at a time.

For me this election was infused with a totemic significance. The NUM had shaped my politics every bit as much as it had for Kim. The annual Miner's Gala was where I heard my first political speeches, where I bought my first political book (heavily subsidised, courtesy of Moscow). Though it was to Dafydd El's party that my family defected in the wake of Neil Kinnock's great betrayal, Kim remained something of a hero, an archetypal Valleys intellectual, proletarian and urbane. A passionate advocate for the Wales Congress – the National Assembly in embryo - he was like its founder and fellow historian, Hywel Francis, a card-carrying Communist, hence gratifyingly liberated from the granite-like grip of Labour's stifling hegemony.

I cannot even now quite express the depth of my shock and disappointment at Kim's swift descent from working class hero to career politician, plucked straight from the pages of *Fame is the Spur.* It was as if Gareth Edwards had 'gone north' after 'that try'. How had the leather-jacketed NUM official of *Ms Rhymney Valley 1984* morphed into this besuited Mandelson-approved mouth-piece for the rebranded Labour Party? The truth is, of course, that Kim was New Labour before New Labour even existed. Sharp as a miner's pick, he knew the British Labour Party needed to appeal beyond industrial workers in places like Pontypridd if it ever wanted to share the spoils of power again. It was a theme he'd first developed in John Osmond's 1988 documentary series *The Divided Kingdom*. The writing was on the colliery wall. Radical Wales had to be sacrificed on the altar of Middle England.

When Neil Kinnock described Plaid Cymru, in a missive to party activists at the beginning of the campaign, as a "puny force" he was exaggerating for effect. But at the preceding General Election the Party of Wales had indeed received just 5 per cent of the vote, behind the Alliance candidate and even the hated Conservatives. Plaid had been in continuous electoral retreat since 1979, Gwyn Alf Williams' *Blwyddyn y Pla* (Year of the Plague). Plaid's National Left had won every election internally – most notably the election of Dafydd Elis Thomas as President – but popular support had failed to materialise, Ieuan Wyn Jones' impressive victory in Ynys Mon in the 1987 general election notwithstanding.

By-elections in some ways are the lightning conductors of political history – and this was the election that inscribed within it the arc of our times. On the cusp of the campaign, sensing perhaps the improbable resurgence of Welsh nationalism, a creed he disdained like no other, Kinnock, the anti-hero of 1979, now suddenly declared a conversion to the cause of devolution every bit

as sudden as Saul of Tarsus to Saint Paul.

Only a week or so earlier he had talked about splitting Wales possibly into three 'administrative divisions', a Napoleonic proposal which the Chair of the Wales Labour Executive was forced to admit lacked the support of even a single respondent to the party's own devolution consultation. Plaid's Syd Morgan was instantly installed in pole position as challenger ahead of a youthful Nigel Evans for the Tories – and soon Neil Kinnock was announcing he had finally come off the fence (was he ever on it?) on the side of a democratically elected Welsh Senate, Plaid's tentative proposal just two years earlier. His deputy, that hoary old radical Roy Hattersley, went even as far as calling for a law-making and fully tax-raising Assembly, way ahead of official policy even 23 years later. Nevertheless, the logjam of Labour's opposition to Welsh self-government had, at long last, been removed.

In the event Plaid's support surged by 20 per cent, the best nationalist result in a by-election since Emrys Roberts' near-miss in Merthyr in 1972. I joined in with the dreaded Aber students in booing the newly-elected MP for Pontypridd, earning the disapproval of the leader writer of the South Wales Echo.

I was, as it happens, to see Kim a number of times over the years. The next time was at a party thrown by my first employer, another remarkable product of the Grammar Schools of the Cynon Valley, Kevin Morgan, a Cardiff academic recently returned from Brighton, who was later to lead the 1997 Yes Campaign to Victory. I told Kim, with all the precocious authority a young researcher could muster, "I'll see you in the House." I did, but we hardly spoke. We had, by then, little to say to each other.

Kevin and I first met because of my own first faltering attempts to get elected. I lost the Presidency of NUS Wales, that Plaid had held since a certain Alun Davies had stormed the barricades, by just one vote. Tony Benn – another of my political heroes – had even come down to the Aberavon Beach Hotel to expand on the iniquities of nationalism. Four weeks to go to finals and I was running out of heroes, and didn't have a job. But I'd heard about an exciting new research project involving Kevin and another of Wales' trinity of great innovation theorists, Phil Cooke, the third being their former student, now Professor Robert Huggins. If only we Welsh were as good at innovation practice as we are at theory, so the joke goes, we could be Singapore.

The project was a by-product of the Four Motors programme – a EU regional grouping of the four most dynamic regions in, respectively Germany, France, Italy and Spain – to which Wales had been granted 'observer status' in 1992. It all stemmed from the original agreement signed in March 1990 by Wyn Roberts and the magisterial Minister-President of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Lothar Späth. It was this – not as Rhodri Morgan later mused, the memorandum of understanding Jane Davidson agreed with the Cuban Government in 2002 – that represented the first piece of independent Welsh foreign policy since the Pennal letter. As Minister of State, or *Staatsminister*, in the Welsh Office, Stuttgart assumed the Welshman Sir Wyn, not Peter Walker, to be the more senior Minister. A delicious irony which meant it was a Welsh Christian Democrat – Sir Wyn could hardly be described as a Conservative in the narrowly British sense – who was the first politician in history to be flanked by motor-cycle outriders with a Welsh flag proudly emblazoned on the official limousine.

Each decade carries within the seeds of the next and the scars of the last. The Yes vote of 1997 was as much a rejection of Thatcherism as an embrace of Welsh self-government. Perversely, however, it was also fuelled by the very success of those definitely Welsh institutions, created or expanded by the Conservatives themselves – the pre-Redwood Welsh Office, the pre and post Gwyn Jones WDA, and the harbingers of the new language consensus, S4C and the Welsh Language Board.

The Nineties was our Decade of Late Expectation. A nation – or at least its intelligentsia, its civil society and the more nationally-minded of its political class that had for so long felt buffeted by the cruel winds of history, at long last felt that same wind in its wings. It was a time of plans and blueprints, a publishing energy every bit as electrifying as the age of the 19th Century pamphleteer. I spent most of the decade in Aberystwyth - a town which was to Welsh nationalism as Zürich was to the Bolsheviks, a great town of plotters, who would meet by day in the Cabin and by night in the Cwps. It still is the spiritual capital of Wales to me, to which all roads lead and beyond which lies only the sea. It was there in the heart of Ceredigion I toasted my native Carmarthenshire for giving us an Assembly in Cardiff, a panegyric to a pan-Welsh future. I would have kissed someone from north Wales, too, but they were probably all at the bar.

If revolutions devour their children, then devolution devoured its parents. That compelling critique of the Quango-State was the death-warrant of the WDA, and, later, the Welsh Language Board. Gone too are the Training and Enterprise Councils, most of the Local Enterprise Agencies, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Media Agency Sgrîn, ELWa, and soon, perhaps, the University of Wales. Of all the major public institutions, only the Arts Council has survived behind the protective veil of a Royal Charter. It is a strange quirk of history that the land so besmirched by the Blue Books should now be so fond of Commissioners.

It was, of course, always one of the peculiar features of Welsh public life, that we lacked the institutional richness of Scotland, or pre-independence Ireland with their separate legal jurisdictions, note-issuing banks, historic universities, discretely established Churches and flourishing national press. The oligarchitecture of the past has been removed, hallelujah. But we have been left with something no less troubling. Under devolution, the institutional topography of Wales has become depressingly flat.

The starkly centripetal forces at work in Welsh society mean radical dissent, in this nation of radical dissenters, is increasingly marginalised. Those few academics and others who are willing to challenge orthodoxy are soon sidelined and branded 'unreliable'. Contemporary Wales is thankfully a long way from Putin's Russia, but it is no gilded monument to Jeffersonian democracy either. The power of patronage in Wales is as strong now as it ever was, and the true public sphere, the agora of the mind, is correspondingly

diminished. Once the world's most Nonconformist of nations, we have become the Global Capital of Conformism.

I spent most of my most youth being heckled from the floor by the platform, usually by Labour councillors twice my size and three times my age. I see little in the culture of Welsh politics, or the politics of Welsh culture that has fundamentally changed. Welsh politics is still largely a series of power-plays in one act for an actor. Coalitions are the intervals when Labour has to learn not a monologue but to dance. When the music stops the New Politics dies. We are currently enjoying Neo-Tribalist Act Number Three.

In the creativity crushing environment favoured by the permanent inhabitants of Ty Hywel's Fifth Floor it should come as little surprise that just 7 per cent of the Welsh population want Wales to become an independent country. If independent thinking is vigorously suppressed, then so too is thinking about independence. What is more troubling is that the thumping 93 per cent thumbs-up for Wales' current subordinate status is such a massive source of pride to so many of our self-styled leaders. What other nation in history has wallowed so much in its own self-abnegation?

This could be dismissed as a spasm of regret from a member of a frustrated minority. But the reality is that our rejection of responsibility for our own fate has at its root the same debilitating self-doubt that blights all aspects of our national life. This poverty of aspiration is to be seen everywhere from our health statistics to our economy. They are to be seen on the faces of those that Wales has left behind – the higher numbers of NEETs (Not-in-Education-Employment-or-Training) in Wales now than before devolution who feel, with hearts of accepting darkness, that there is no better option, no better way.

For them the era of devolution, far from offering some economic dividend, has crushed their hope like the coal in their grandfathers' lungs. Economic inactivity – like political apathy – is in some ways a rational response to an irrational situation, a society that has been complicit in its own mis-managed decline.

Writ large, the history of Wales is a salutary case study in what psychologists have come to know as the phenomenon of learned helplessness. When a human being or a social group is subjected to repeated setbacks that are beyond their immediate control, a natural emotional response is to become resigned to one's fate. Passivity in the face of adversity becomes the primary coping mechanism in situations of increasing stress - even when means of escaping the current situation present themselves. Inertia – political, economic, social – has its comforts, as does the victimhood complex that is as much a feature of nationalist thinking as Labour's familiar Tory-baiting narrative.

The antidote to learned helplessness is learned hopefulness, and the key to changing the way we think is to change the way we act. Save the Welsh, wrote Nobel-prize winning economist Paul Krugman in his blog after a spectacularly inaccurate New York Times article on the Welsh economy. Well, I have news for the fact-checkers on the New York Times, and what is left of the newspaper industry at home. The only who ones who can save Wales are we, the Welsh, ourselves. There is no external salvation, no mythic Mab Darogan, and every leather-jacketed hero will one day let you down. We, here, now – all of us, each of us – are the ones we have been waiting for.

Sadly, the official ideology that history has bequeathed us will not be a light unto our path. Labourism, like most unchallenged hegemonies, has ossified into a defensive, monolith of a creed. It is a dead-zone of ideas.

Only the hopelessly deluded will think this power nexus can be challenged from the Right. What instead we need is some version of entrepreneurialism that is somehow consistent with the dominant Welsh values of equity and community. We need an economic autonomist movement that becomes as definitive to Welsh nationalism in the 21st Century as the language movement was in the 20th. This is not as hopelessly Utopian as it may sound. Antoni Negri, the theorist of *operaismo* – that wonderfully sonorous term for the workers' self-management movement in his native Italy – has talked about the way Italian Leftists post-68 moved their focus from politics to enterprise, both individual and social, seeding the economic dynamism of regions like Emila-Romagna. What else too was Mondragon but Basque political action taking economic form?

A similar process was at work among those Welsh 68ers who started businesses, proclaiming their independence in the here-and-now – the young Dafydd Iwan and *Sain*, Robat Gruffydd at *Y Lolfa*, as well as co-operatives like Carl Clowes' *Antur Aelhaiarn*. It can be seen in the decision of Dilys Davies, the clinical psychiatrist, not just to write about the need to raise Welsh self-confidence but to embody this in a business, *Tro'r Trai* (Turning the Tide), showing that Welsh culture, enterprise and tourism can be positively reinforcing.

Leanne Wood has called this approach "Real Independence", to contrast it from the rather abstract notion – to most Welsh people at least - of juridicial sovereignty. If independence is to be meaningful – particularly the 70 per cent plus of employees who work in the private sector and for whom the Barnett Formula is a rather distant concern – then the real battle for control over our economic future is one being fought in the present tense. It is not enough to propose Welsh solutions to Welsh problems. We need to find Welsh solutions to global problems and then sell them to the world.

To be truly radical in a nation that has mistaken steady decline for stability, and poverty as our birthright, we must become practical and prefigurative. We must create new enterprises and new communal and national institutions that cannot be swept away by bankers' fiat or political whim. We must awaken the spirit, of what Kevin Morgan and I have elsewhere called, *The Collective Entrepreneur*.

In Wales this will mean a revolution in our thinking, but more importantly in our actions. This may lead to creative tension between the dominant traditions in our politics, the red and the green. But it could also mean a new synthesis. Frankly, I am agnostic on that.

What is certain is that we now need a new inflection point in our history. How soon is now?

Owen Smith MP,
Pontypridd, 2012

24 Why Labour needs the nation

Owen Smith

A catalogue of British General Elections might usefully have two broad headings: 'Change' and 'Continuity'. 1987, year zero for the Institute for Welsh Affairs, would be categorised under 'Continuity' in most histories of Britain. Mrs Thatcher was returned to Downing Street with a powerful, 146-seat majority, and for the players in her neo-con story it was business as usual. The City, reengineered by the liberalising 'Big Bang' of the year before, was 'booming'. The Unions, undermined by de-industrialisation and assaulted by a hostile Government, were wilting. Meanwhile, the people, newly transformed from citizens to consumers, were busy buying stuff. Labour, feared by some to have been mortally wounded in 1983, was showing signs of life, but barely.

In Wales, however, the vital signs were stronger. Here, where memories of the Strike were still hot and fresh, the Tories' star, never burning too bright, was clearly on the wane. From an historic high point of 31 per cent of the vote and 14 seats in 1983, 1987 saw them back around their usual mark of 8 seats but with the slippery slope to 1997, and total, if temporary, eclipse, clearly beckoning. Perhaps in Wales, then, 1987 might not be labelled as continuity, but change. It was a moment when a Welsh, anti-Tory alliance, forged over generations, but tempered and edged in the heat of 1984-85 miners strike, struck its first modern blow at the ballot box.

The evolution of that 'national' alliance, and the consolidation of Labour's role at its head, in delivering devolution and governing for a generation, is the key political story of Wales in the last 25 years. And Welsh Labour's successful co-opting of Welsh Nationalism, the harnessing of patriotism if you like, in the delivery of traditional progressive ends, over that last quarter century, may hold the key to the revitalisation of Labour across the whole of the UK in the next.

The Welsh Nationalist politician, Dafydd Elis Thomas said, "1984 was when it all began", meaning, I think, the modern journey to Welsh Devolution. The irony, of course, is that it is Labour, not his Plaid Cymru, that has led and benefitted from the cause - though Dafydd Elis Thomas might have suspected and not feared too greatly that this might be the case. Why has that been the case in Wales, in sharp contrast to the fortunes of traditional parties of the Left when faced with similar nationalist 'insurgencies' elsewhere in Britain and across Europe?

There seem to me to be four clear reasons. Firstly, the 'institutional' strength of the Left in Wales, and the Labour Party as its principal expression, is part of the answer. Remember, 1997 and the routing of the Tories in Wales was no great surprise if one takes the long view. 1906 delivered the same risible return for the Right in Wales. By 1945 the Conservatives had climbed to just 4 seats, while 1966 saw Labour scoop the pool, with 32 out 36. Labour's self-characterisation as 'The True Party of Wales' is manifestly true.

In the 1980s, as the Thatcherite storm raged, tearing down traditional touchstones of British identity – 'national' industries (coal and car-making, the NUM and British Leyland), 'national' utilities (British Telecom, British Rail, British Airways) – Labour remained a 'national' brand, and one especially trusted in Wales. That traditional and contemporary strength made Labour the logical Welsh rallying point for anti-Tory sentiment in 1987. 25 years later, with the Tories back in Westminster, Welsh opinion polls show Labour on 54 per cent versus 10 per cent for Plaid Cymru in General Election voting intentions: This is clear evidence that, for many in Wales, what was true in 1905 and 1966 remains the same today.

Secondly, the authenticity of Welsh Labour has been another anchor in the confused and convergent politics of the last 25 years, particularly since devolution. The party has cleaved to its radical roots, even at the height of New Labour revision, for example eschewing private sector engagement in the delivery of public services and generally maintaining faith in collectivist, community and comprehensive models of service provision. At the same time it has become comfortable with the notion of designing and championing Wales-specific and radical policies, for example, the Foundation phase of primary education.

Thus, in an era in which the doorstep dismissal of 'you're all the same' has become the bumper-sticker slogan for political nihilism and mistrust, Welsh Labour has remained clearly distinct. Of course, that may have meant that some innovations and reforms have been foregone in Wales. Nevertheless, it is surely beyond dispute that the brand of Welsh Labour has grown in strength as a result. And that authenticity of policy has been mirrored, by accident and design, in the personalities at the heart of Welsh Labour. In Rhodri Morgan and Carwyn Jones, Welsh Labour has had two leaders who are, in instinct and action, undeniably Welsh and undeniably Labour.

Third and fourth, Labour in Wales has ridden two of the most

potent trends in modern European politics: Localism and Nationalism. Two sides of the same coin perhaps, depending on the size of one's nation, these trends might be said to be born of another vogue in our modern world. Globalisation, the creation of supra-national markets in goods, labour and capital, has generated a sense of lost control and impotence in countries and communities around the world, and a corresponding demand for greater local accountability and a re-enforcement of the nation-state. So, if the immediate catalyst for revival of the Welsh devolution dream in the 1980s was the local brew of anti-Toryism, bookended by the 1984-5 strike and early 1990s opposition to the Poll Tax, the longer-run fuel for the subsequent decade of semi-self-rule, may be commonly found across Europe and, increasingly, the entire Globe.

Perhaps even more so than in the past, in this new world people want their political leaders to understand their lives and to stand on their side. Throughout most of the 20th Century, Labour, forged in the class politics of the early decades, was demonstrably on the side of working people, both in Wales and across Britain. As that class-conscious identity faded in the closing decades of the millennium, to be replaced by more fragmented politics of ethnicity, gender, sexuality and place, Labour in Wales – or Welsh Labour, as we have become – has sat astride the most potent of those new identifiers, Welshness, and has forged a new bond with the people of Wales. We have been on their side in pursuing greater equality, social and economic justice but within, and energised by, the discrete boundaries of Wales.

So it can be said that in delivering devolution, Labour identified and responded to the popular renaissance of 'Welshness' that has since become so evident in our culture and society, and gave it institutional form. The National Assembly is the most evident legacy of that change, but another is the de facto federal structure that the Labour Party has adopted between Wales and Westminster. And both have allowed the creation of a new set of symbols and institutions of the new Welsh nation in a Welsh civic society, focussed on a Welsh legislature and thinking geographically and politically in terms of Welsh-shaped solutions.

All of these changes bear testament to the power of nationalism or patriotism as a catalysing and unifying agent. As does the positive coalescence of Welsh politics around social democratic policy prescriptions; the Welsh Tories (and, ironically, Plaid Cymru) rejecting the divide-and-rule tactic of regional pay, or cross-party support for industrial activism and Keynesian investment in infrastructure. This relative unity, across the political divides in Wales, is in part, of course, a product of the left and radical traditions and voting patterns described earlier. But it is also the product of a renewed sense of national mission – with Labour at its heart. And it is this fusion of progressive politics with national mission – this capture of patriotism from the right – that Labour needs to understand and adopt across the UK if we are to return to power and to shape the future of Wales and the other nations of the British state over the next 25 years.

Is that a realistic aspiration? In modern, multi-cultural Britain, where 'identity politics', compounded by immigration, devolution and political cynicism, seems to many to have fatally compromised the notion of a British 'nation', can Labour conjure and then command that patriotism? Perhaps in one country, as Wales may attest, but in all of the nations of the UK individually, while collectively, in Britain as a whole?

The answer is that we must. We must if we want to fulfil our mission of creating a more equal, just and fair society for all of the people of Britain. Because in the UK in 2012, as in 1945, or 1966 and 1997 – or 1789 in France, 1960 in the USA, and 1959 in West Germany - the lesson is that the Left needs the Nation if it is to galvanise its citizens behind a programme for national renewal through social and economic reform. We need the nation because without it there are no citizens, just consumers, clients, or customers. And we need the nation because it is the most effective means by which we enlist the majority of those divergent citizens to that uniting cause for egalitarianism, social and economic justice. As the American philosopher, Richard Rorty, has written:

> "National pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self-improvement."

For Labour, the party of hope and progress in Britain, a renewed national pride is a necessary condition for a call to action to rebuild our politics, our society and our economy – in the *national* interest of us all, not the *vested* interest of a few. And despite the manifest difficulty of calling 'the nation' to action in our nation of nations, there are reasons for Labour to be hopeful. And Wales's experience may show the way.

To begin with, we must recognise the great strength of our movement as a British Institution in our own right - a powerful and unifying institution. At our best, we remain a meeting place for people from across the classes, faiths, ethnicities and all other divides within British society. Our historical bonds with the Trades Unions anchor our party in practical terms alongside working people in modern Britain – irrespective of how, in class terms, those people define themselves today. Culturally, our connection to a liberal and progressive intelligentsia remains significant. And while those ties may stretch and groan from time to time, they persist in place, and they remain a great source of strength. Thus Labour remains the only British Party with meaningful representation in Wales, Scotland and England. We are the last 'One Nation' party of Britain, if you like.

Secondly, as in Wales, we must be authentic in Britain. That doesn't mean adopting old-style, or 'Old Labour' statist solutions. However, it does mean being explicit about the need to reform capitalism such that it acknowledges its co-dependence with the state

and its potential to damage the fortunes of the mass of our people, or limit their achievement, unless it is regulated and reformed. As such, it means recognising the authenticity and heritage of Labour as a party of the Left. The post-Thatcher coalescence of British politics around a centre ground, from which orthodox wisdom says elections are won, has diminished our authenticity, blunted our language and stunted our ambition. Labour has to be the party of hope, the party that believes we can be better, and that our nation can be made to serve the many once more - not just the lucky few.

Thirdly, we must combine these twin strengths in a new national mission for the *re-invention* and renewal of Britain – as the last 'One Nation' party of Britain, and the last 'Progressive' one as well, following the Liberal Democrats trading principles for power. That doesn't mean just recalling or celebrating those values, experiences or institutions - fair play, the War or even the NHS - that have defined Britain for previous generations. That isn't enough any more. Instead, it means inventing and instituting those values, experiences and institutions that might define it for the next.

And that demands we rediscover the radicalism, the boldness of thought and action that we've demonstrated at our best, as at the creation of the Welfare State, the introduction of devolution or the establishment of the minimum wage. For this generation, it might require a new constitution, written perhaps, to enshrine national standards and common values and to frame a more formal, confederal architecture of British Government, including at a more local level in England, as in Wales and Scotland. It may entail the creation of a new National Care Service, as some Labour colleagues have suggested, to provide equitable and decent care for our burgeoning elderly population. Or a new period of national, civic service for our young, inculcating values of tolerance, responsibility and duty. Certainly, it will demand a new social contract around welfare, one which reconnects provision with contribution and desert. A National Day and a State of the British Union Address are other ideas that have been canvassed and that might usefully play a part in this task of re-invention.

These new inventions could create a new spirit and rhetoric of fraternity and national solidarity – of common endeavour and collective enterprise – to replace the narrative of individual rights and personal achievement that has dominated our political discourse for much of the last 30 years. It might also provide a framework within which we could more easily recognise the gross inequality of wealth, education, opportunity and even life expectancy that persist in Britain, and enlist a majority in favour of their eradication.

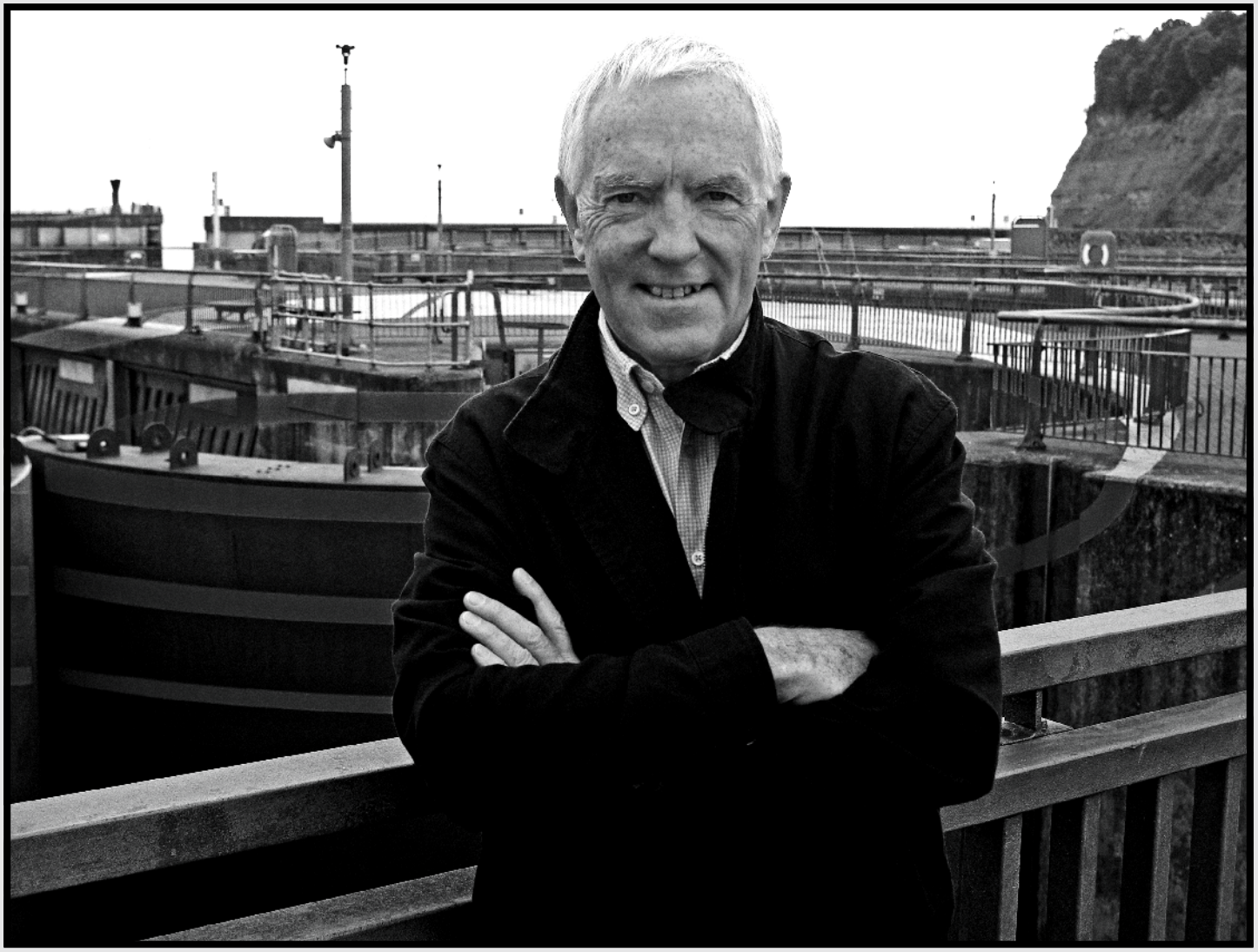
The real key to forging a new national solidarity and a new faith in Britain is to restore what Ed Miliband has memorably characterised as its 'promise'. The 'promise of Britain', whereby each succeeding generation believe they might have the chance to do as well in life, if not better, than their parents. That promise feels to have been broken for many of our current generation, for whom the prospect of securing spiritually and materially rewarding work, affordable and appropriate housing, within a sustainable environment and a supportive community - a commonplace expectation among their parents' and grandparents' cohorts - feels like a utopian dream. Our ambition must be no less than that 'everyday' dream should be within reach of the vast majority of our citizens, and our programmes should be designed to make it so.

Of course, achieving that ambition against the backdrop of deficit reduction and low growth, which appears set to constrain our economy – especially if the current Government's cack-handed stewardship continues to 2015 – will be a formidable task. But we cannot allow our own dreams to be curtailed, because those of the British people will not be. Yes, budgets must balance over the economic cycle, and we know that growth and gainful employment for those that can work is the most effective means to deliver that bottom line. But our horizons must extend beyond the accountants' slide rule and short-term fiscal imbalances, to tackle more fundamental imbalances in our economy and society as well – the growing gulf between rich and poor, healthy and sick, sated and frustrated. Unless we address those divides, the promise of Britain will remain a chimera, hope will remain a rare commodity and the army of those with no faith in politics will continue to gather.

25 years is an awfully long time in politics but it just might be the right sort of timeframe over which to paint a picture of transformation in Britain, from our current state to the good society we might become. Constitutional change and decentralisation will continue to play a part in that transformation, as local people in Wales and other parts of the UK assume greater autonomy over different aspects of their governance. The tide of Welsh patriotism will not recede, nor should we want it to. And Welsh Labour should continue to exploit its energising potential, but always in pursuit of our broader and deeper progressive aims, aims which will always transcend ethnicity and unite Labour and all people of hope across the UK.

In England and Scotland too, that patriotism will continue to swell, and Labour will need to further accommodate ourselves to its growing strength. We must reflect it in our party structures, and acknowledge it through change at Westminster too.

Yet in affecting all such change we must continue to emphasise in our words and deeds – and in the structure of our government – the common interests of the British people in economic growth and social mobility, in a more equitable distribution of wealth and a more democratic distribution of power. Such a new narrative of social solidarity could provide the backbone for a new British Nationalism, a social and liberal nationalism if you like, with new symbols, institutions and sense of common purpose. Only the Left, only Labour, can imagine and nurture such a hopeful vision of our future. That's our job in politics. Let's raise up our eyes and look to it.



Geraint Talfan Davies,
The Barrage, Cardiff Bay, 2012

25 Imaginative realism of a serial optimist

Geraint Talfan Davies

The following address was delivered at the opening of the 5th Annual Assembly of British and Irish Legislatures by Dr Nerys Nasrallah, Chair, Institute of Welsh Affairs, at the Severn Barrage Conference Centre, September 2037.

First Minister, First Secretaries, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Salaam alaikum. Noswaith dda. I shall be speaking in Welsh, so I would be grateful if all those who need to would now touch the simultaneous translation chip embedded in your conference lapel badge.

I must thank you for your invitation to address this remarkable conference, particularly as it coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Institute of Welsh Affairs. It gives me, the first Muslim woman to chair the Institute, the rare privilege of looking back over half a century in the history of our nation, on which this institute has commented daily.

It is fitting that we are celebrating our anniversary here in Plas Hafren, this magnificent conference centre planned, with great prescience as part of the Severn Barrage scheme that was completed only 10 years ago. The creation of the conference centre, alongside the barrage control centre here on the Glamorgan coast, has reinforced the specific association of the barrage with Wales, to the extent that it is now the principal beacon for Wales in the world, as we saw five years ago at the Rio +40 conference.

I am particularly delighted to see here tonight the centre's architect, Zaha Hadid, since this is likely to be one of the last buildings to bear her unmistakable stamp. She retired last year at the age of 85. We seem to have a knack in Wales of recognising great architects late in the day. Despite his Welsh roots Frank Lloyd Wright was 90, four years older than Zaha, when he came to Bangor University in 1956 – 81 years ago - to receive an honorary degree. So things are improving, Zaha. Slowly.

There are other special guests that deserve a warm welcome: our own First Minister - fresh from the Welsh Social Market Alliance's third election victory following the introduction of the STV voting system in 2026 - and the First Secretaries of the regional assemblies of Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex, now approaching the end of their first decade. Unfortunately, the First Minister of Scotland cannot be with us - for reasons I am sure we understand, with the second referendum on Scottish independence only a week away.

We are also very privileged to have here this evening the Foreign Minister of the state of Palestine. In extending a very warm welcome we wish her well with the continuing reconstruction of her country and congratulate her and our own First Minister on the Cultural and Educational Development Memorandum signed between Wales and Palestine this afternoon - the fourth such memorandum signed between Wales and countries that have endured decades of tension in different parts of the world.

It is now nearly fifteen years since the end of that terrible regional war in the Middle East, and in its aftermath we are very proud of the role played by two Welsh universities: the Centre for International Reconciliation at Aberystwyth and the International Centre for the Governance of Small Countries at Cardiff – two centres that grew and flourished during the period of renewed investment in Welsh higher education research in the second decade of this century. Like the barrage, they too have been highly significant to the projection of Wales in the outside world. Both have reflected a combination of our values and our expertise, the one harnessing the immense physical forces of nature and the other mitigating the often destructive stresses of human interaction.

Looking back over fifty years can give you a more complete view of the trajectory of a society than surveying a mere 25 years. A half century spanned the accession of the first Tudor to the throne of England in 1485 and the annexation of Wales through the so-called Act of Union in 1536. It took only slightly less than half a century from the outbreak of the English civil war in 1641 to witness the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 and the Bill of Rights a year later. In the 19th Century a half-century got us from Wellington's 'close run thing' at

Waterloo to the second great Reform Act of 1867.

If I had been addressing you on the occasion of the IWA's 25th anniversary, back in 2012, I would have been talking at what we now see clearly was an intermediate point It was a critical and advanced point in the development of Welsh society and governance, to be sure - a year after the 2011 referendum - but a much earlier point in what became, over the subsequent quarter century, the great British economic and governmental transformation.

My predecessors in the IWA often grumbled that the development of devolutionary sentiment in Wales in the latter half of the 20th century was a slow, hesitant progress. But from our vantage point in 2037, it seems to have been a veritable sprint, certainly from 1987 onwards. This seemed to take London by surprise, rather more so than the parallel developments in Scotland that had always lurked in the sweatier nightmares of Whitehall officials. While some of the more prescient civil servants may have feared the consequences of devolution from the outset, the majority viewed it as an irritating concession to local sentiment, tiresome rather than revolutionary in its consequences. They could not have been more wrong.

As we sit here tonight on the eve of another Assembly of British and Irish Legislatures, it is chastening to remember how close the United Kingdom came to dissolution in 2014. Complacency was a major cause of the near disaster in the referendum on Scottish independence. For two years opinion polls had shown a decisive majority in favour of sticking with the union, but things began to move the SNP's way as a result of a combination of four things: the dilatory way in which unionist parties constructed their case, a rash of BBC documentaries marking the 700th anniversary of Bannockburn in June 2014, a sensationally successful theatrical event on the same theme by the National Theatre for Scotland (it toured extensively and was even lauded by London critics) and a clutch of Scottish gold medals at the Commonwealth Games that summer, only a few more months before the vote.

The upshot was that the unionist side scraped home with a majority barely bigger than Wales achieved in its 1997 devolution referendum. Inevitably, there were allegations of ballot rigging from aggrieved nationalists as well as from some Presbyterian sects that had protested against the fact that the independence poll was, astonishingly, the first British poll ever held on the Sabbath.

However, those of you who can recall that time will remember that the result gave unionist parties such a scare that Carwyn Jones's repeated calls for a UK Constitutional Convention were suddenly being endorsed by the Daily Mail – a famously conservative old newssheet that is no more. It even attracted support from a rather bizarre set of Anglo-Scottish hereditary peers whom most people did not know existed. It was also reported that there had been a clandestine meeting between the legendary Paul Dacre, the Mail's editor in chief, and the equally legendary Lord Elis-Thomas (non-hereditary) acting as an emissary from Carwyn Jones.

I am delighted that Lord Elis-Thomas is also with us this evening. We wish him well for a sprightly 91st birthday next month.

As we all know, it took several years before that constitutional convention was brought together. It suffered from several false starts. The crucial suspension of the penultimate convention came when the Prime Minister realised that he could not control the anti-European forces that were then also demanding an English Parliament. His Chancellor of the Exchequer, always a rival, had resigned and made it known that he would bid to be First Minister of England, in which position, with control of domestic policy and expenditure for 85 per cent of the UK population, he could eclipse any federal prime minister. It was at this point that the power brokers in both Labour and Conservative parties started to give support to regionalism in England, even if only as the lesser evil. The quasi- in quasi-federalism suddenly became a virtue.

This crucial policy switch was made easier by the recent demise of several tabloid and broadsheet newspapers that found that they exercised far less influence on the public and politicians in their online form than they had done in the days when their headlines glared at you in shops that we used to call newsagents. Some of us can remember the days when late night television presenters would, rather quaintly, hold up the front pages of newspapers to the camera to whet our appetites for the punning headlines that, sadly, soon disappeared under the pressures of search engine optimisation. It has been a loss to our language and our humour.

The near universal adoption of ultra-fast broadband had created hyperlocal sites for almost every community. In Wales they had been able to build on the tradition of *papurau bro*, but even in England the coverage was extensive, especially in the north, the midlands and south west. However, this intensely local phenomenon was not able to satisfy everybody, so it is not surprising that, in a second phase, English *regional* online networks began to develop. Again, many of them had looked to Wales, where the growth of social enterprises between 2015 ands 2020 had, among other things consolidated a diverse and argumentative online network that managed to fuse local knowledge with a national policy discourse.

The decisive switch towards regionalism in England fell on fertile soil for other reasons, too: the frustration that had built in the years before the 2015 general election, as economic growth failed to take off, public services succumbed to round after round of cuts, and European funding fell as the Eurozone and the EU as a whole struggled with a near terminal crisis. Disillusion in England had also deepened as a result of chaotic local disparities in health service provision and a paradoxical

Sadly, the outbreak of imaginative realism did not come in the form of a Damascene conversion, rather as a reluctant realisation that there was no other way.

abandonment of even a token localism in other fields as a result of the Treasury's stubborn and distrustful centralist instincts. Street protests by the poorest communities coalesced with a rash of middle class campaigns against overblown development projects that multiplied after the wholesale of lifting of planning restrictions in England.

There was also a fourth and more positive factor: the productive alliance that had been formed after 2015 between the Welsh Government and some English regions - notably the North East and West Midlands - that had suffered so much from the anti-manufacturing, pro-finance policies that had been pursued by governments of differing hues for more than 30 years following the 1979 election. They were only minimally diluted even during nearly ten years of stagnation after 2008. When we look back it is mystifying that it took so long to create such an alliance that was so much in the interests of a more balanced development of this island and its economy. It was no accident that it came about in the second decade of devolution, a period when, in extreme adversity, Wales and the Welsh Government started to look outwards. One historian recently dubbed it our first decade of imaginative realism.

It did not come easily, and I offer the following history as a comfort to our friends from the English regional assemblies who are still struggling with the last remnants of the centralised system of governance – older, nostalgic officials still clinging by their fingertips to their Treasury desks. I don't want to dwell on the current crisis, but I never thought I would live to see the day when the Treasury would take the Independent Board for Territorial Finance to judicial review.

In the National Assembly's first dozen years the familiarity of Welsh politicians and large parts of civil society with constitutional debate had meant that the development of the institution had fair bounced along. In economic and financial management we were not as expert.

Less than two years after the opening of the Assembly in 1999, one of my predecessors, in a talk to a gathering of civil servants, had described the Welsh economy as "the nearest thing to a communist East European economy west of the Oder-Neise line". He put forward five propositions: that Wales faced a general crisis of under-performance; that public servants had to regain the capacity to be shocked; that they should put aside the traditional incrementalism of administrative machines in favour of transformative policy making; that there was, in particular, an urgent need to transform our capacity to analyse our own situation; and, lastly, that in policy-making we had to remain plugged in to our nearest neighbour, England, as well as to Europe. It wasn't until our Assembly's second decade that we began to see some evidence that that advice was being heeded.

Sadly, the outbreak of imaginative realism did not come in the form of a Damascene conversion, rather as a reluctant realisation that there was no other way. Welsh economic indicators were still falling, as was the Welsh Government's block grant revenue. The resultant new mindset was also aided by the debate on the devolution of taxation and borrowing powers – powers that we take for granted today but which were quite controversial at the time. This thrust the basic arithmetic of Welsh finances to the fore, sharply contrasting the Scottish debate about how their books might balance, with the Welsh situation of a large and seemingly ineradicable public finance deficit.

Gerald Holtham, an economist, who divided his time between London and Nantymoel and had learnt Welsh sufficiently well to read Welsh novels, had let loose a barrage of meticulous data and argument while chairing what became known as the Holtham Commission. Later, even while advising the Welsh Finance Minister, he had set out publicly – in the IWA's journal - a trenchant view that the scale of deficit that Wales was running was at the root of its lack of policy leverage within the UK. The economy had to be the primary focus for the Welsh Government.

There was also a sudden realisation that Wales, rather than remaining a follower of a Scotland whose leverage might have peaked, might have more to gain from leading the charge on behalf of all those south of the border who lay outside magic arc of the south east of England. A conference of leaders of 'nations and regions' – a quaint revival of old BBC parlance – was held at a Catterick hotel to plan a campaign that would reverse the miserable sixth-century defeat by the forces of the south recorded in *Y Gododdin*. It was a pivotal moment.

By 2020 things were looking very different. Not only had the electrification of the railways in southern Wales been completed, but

work had already begun on the rest of Wales after the train companies had protested at having to maintain any diesel capacity. The first 90-minute service from Paddington to Cardiff had been inaugurated by the now familiar 'red express' that has been running for more than 15 years in its classy Visit Wales livery. Cardiff to Wrexham became a two-hour journey not long after, while a deal between the European Union and the Welsh and Irish Governments had also taken electrification to Holyhead and Fishguard, as an important plank in a linked recovery programme for both Ireland and northern and western Wales.

By 2020 the city region concept that had been touted in 2012 was an institutionalised reality in both south east Wales and in the greater Swansea area. By the end of the decade they were collaborating to such an extent that older people began reminding us of the glories of Glamorgan County Council whose writ had run from the outskirts of Newport to the tip of Gower from 1889 to 1974. Who said Welsh localism can't be surmounted?

At the same time the building of the Severn Barrage was also under way, although it had been as close run a thing as Waterloo. The first Severn Barrage Bill had been filibustered into the ground, in a historical echo of the way in which Lord Bute's allies had destroyed David Davies's first Barry Bocks Bill in the 19th Century. It looked as if the second Severn Barrage Bill would go the same way, and it would have done had it not been for divine intervention. Many of us remember the terrible heatwave that totally eclipsed the European heatwave of 2003 in which 35,000 people had died. This time the mortality rate was almost double that figure. The heat in London was so intolerable that Parliament had to shut down for three weeks. When it resumed the debate took on a more sombre tone, the Bill's opponents cowed into submission.

Even with the Severn Barrage Act in place the project would not have happened had not the Welsh Government intervened - after much Whitehall prevarication and the withdrawal of a consortium of British banks - to secure a combination of Chinese and Qatari funds. These sovereign fund investments were not such a surprise, since the Chinese were already involved in building the nuclear power station at Wylfa and the Qataris had long since funded the LNG terminal at Milford Haven. However, the speed with which they were drawn in was indicative of a new boldness in Welsh policy that, ten years earlier, people would have described as uncharacteristic.

Only this morning I read an eFT article that described the profound long-term effect that the Chinese investment in Wales has had on our industry, academia and tourism. Anglesey has been a particular beneficiary, with Holyhead becoming a mini Aberdeen, servicing offshore wind farms. The Menai Straits Tidal Flow power station, using technology adapted from the Severn scheme, is also a big attraction. Chinese tourists are, of course, heavily represented in the cruise ships that call at Holyhead, and I'm told that thousands of Chinese homes now have a framed sepia photograph of tourist groups standing under the railway sign at Llanfair PG. Those same cruise ships also call at Fishguard, although for most voyagers the main attraction is the negotiation of the Severn barrage locks before docking at Cardiff. Panama without the mosquitoes. The train then takes them from Cardiff Bay to the Barrage Parkway at the start of the same tour that some of you will have enjoyed this afternoon.

Recently much attention has focused on the opening of the Chinese car manufacturing plant, the first on Welsh soil since the Rover Car Company left Cardiff in the 1984. This plant, making hydrogen-fuelled cars using vital patents developed at Welsh universities, was built on the land at Port Talbot released after the end of barrage caisson construction. And it was not the only major foreign investment in Wales. Both the Qataris, anxious to maintain the market for LNG, and the Indian Government, coping with its own massive environmental problems, were desperate to invest in carbon capture.

The latter was much influenced by Tata Steel, not least because of the huge reserves of coal that still lay underground and untouched at Margam. The timely attraction to Wales of two teams of internationally-renowned scientists - much as the Nobel prize-winning bio-chemist, Sir Martin Evans, had been enticed to Cardiff back in 1999 – accelerated the research already under way at the University of Glamorgan, resulting in a breakthrough of international significance. It also neutralised the opposition to the controversial 'fracking' process that is now such a big income earner for the Welsh economy and Government, even though the fact that the new station at Wylfa will now run well below its design capacity has been a game-changing embarrassment.

All these developments, the multi-faceted challenge of the barrage as well as the intense overseas interest, led to the formation of the Welsh Academy of Environmental Sciences, a network of Welsh university scientists, north and south, that pushed up our university research income very substantially and became a magnet in its own right. Witness the clusters of environmental consultancies that still exist in northern and southern Wales. In one decade in this field we had gone from 'notspot' to 'hotspot'. It is striking how many Welsh academics now drive electric Porsches to the offices of their spin-out companies.

But perhaps the most unexpected and welcome effect was the sharp increase in the number of children in Wales who wanted to study engineering, encouraging Swansea University to increase the size of its second campus that had opened back in 2019, and to forge a strategic alliance with Cardiff University. A virtuous circle had been created, and for the first time in decades Welsh broadcasters complained about recruitment difficulties. Several media studies courses closed.

None of this would have happened without that fundamental reappraisal, a quarter of a century ago, of every aspect of Welsh

Government as it faced up to the prospect of a decade of stagnation. It had taken a courageous decision in 2011 not to ring-fence the health service as had happened in England. To have done so in Wales would have decimated all other spending, seriously disrupting the balance of services across the whole of the public realm. But even this was not enough, as soon became clear when deficits in various parts of the Welsh NHS started to balloon.

The scale of the crisis led to a cross-party agreement on the reorganisation of the health service, although some recalcitrants had to be expelled from each party. The inevitable closure of some hospitals was softened by the extension of the air ambulance service. But it was the aversion both to user charges and to the scandals that had arisen in England in the wake of the Lansley reforms, that pushed the Welsh Government to explore insurance funding on a Swedish model. Although BBC Wales's political correspondent tweeted that it was 'Blairish but not Blairite', the truth was it was much the most radical health policy development in any of four countries of the UK since the establishment of the NHS. The package helped avoid the ridiculous dilemma of Wales having to choose between investing in health or education. It was also the step that, in its second phase, brought us a universal system of care for the elderly.

Not unexpectedly, the strains of austerity affected all parties. The re-alignment of Welsh politics had started when the Welsh Conservatives, appalled at the prospect of a further five years of austerity, had broken free of their English counterparts before the 2015 General Election, just as the Liberal Democrats, embedded in Llandrindod's Metropole Hotel, were debating, though not necessarily deciding, to split into two camps.

It was health reorganization and funding that tested both the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru, the latter more so because of the existence of a more obvious business-orientated wing. A third attempt to form a One Wales Government eventually split both parties, which led to the formation of the Welsh Social Market Alliance that also swept up disaffected Liberal Democrats. It was ironic that the disputes within parties were a clearer guide to the real issues than the knockabout between parties. The introduction of open primaries was a useful by-product.

The new alliance had no illusions about the superiority of private enterprise but it was prepared to use private suppliers as long as they had signed up to the codes of practice of the New Model Capitalism – the silver lining of the banking scandals - that had replaced the woolly and rather too flexible old concept of 'corporate social responsibility'.

The Alliance also surprised many observers of Welsh politics by reducing the top rate of income tax in Wales by 2p below the English rate. This had been a counter to the Treasury's insistence on a uniform rate of corporation tax, but it produced a remarkable influx of millionaire business people into Wales that, in short order started to have an effect on levels of inward investment. The eFt even created a post for a business reporter in Wales.

Most importantly, the breakdown of old tribalisms, also broke down rigidities of thought, and encouraged a new diversity in politics and policy, helped by the increase in the number of Assembly Members to 90 that also encouraged a small but healthy cadre of bolshy back-benchers. For instance, in education, although eschewing the English 'academies' that creationist business men had brought into such disrepute, the governing bodies of schools in Wales were given the freedom to develop their own specialist identities. This led to the introduction of 'el sistema' music schemes in many urban and rural schools, some of them attracting significant private sponsorship from the growing number of SMEs.

By far the most interesting development was the adoption by many schools in poorer areas of the Swedish 'sloyd' system of handicraft-based education that had a re-motivating effect on students disillusioned with conventional approaches. Some critics thought this 'hand and eye' approach to education was old-fashioned, but its emphasis on creativity and integration with digital design techniques, has meant that for some years now employers have been lauding its effect on employability. The enthusiasm these developments created in staff and parents not only pushed up school performance but also began to recreate the old Welsh passion for education. It was another upward spiral.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe this story has been worth telling because it has been one of the emergence of a society from the battering it received during the 20th Century, and not only in two world wars. Wales enjoyed many of the fruits of the growth in living standards in the latter half of the last century, but nevertheless its capacity for imaginative action had remained constrained for at least fifty years by the scar tissue of the 1930s depression. Even when British society started to loosen up, we were for too long reluctant to breathe the fresh air.

In the years after the historic miners strike of 1984-85 we began to find ourselves, even if we were initially timorous explorers. But there was an increasing determination that the 21st Century would be our century, better for our people and better in terms of productive relationships with the rest of the kingdom. The loosening of the centralist grip has been of profound benefit not only for Wales and Scotland but also for the regions of England – in total for the kingdom as a whole. We do not all enjoy precisely the same powers, but constitutions need not constrain our appetite for ideas - new ideas, diverse ideas that you will share together at your assembly tomorrow and which, as ever, will be our only salvation.

Notes on the contributors

Jane Aaron is a literary critic and Professor of English at the University of Glamorgan. She is Editor of the Honno Classics series of reprints of Welsh Women's Writing in English. Her books include *Postcolonial Wales*, and *Nineteenth-century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* which won the 2009 Roland Mathias Prize.

Catrin Dafydd is an author, poet, political campaigner and performer. She won the Medal Lenyddiaeth (literature prize) at the Urdd Eisteddfod in 2005. She works in both English and Welsh. Her books include *Pili Pala*, *Y Tiwniwr Piano* and *Random Deaths and Custard*, nominated for the Spread the Word: Books to Talk About 2009 award. She works as a freelance scriptwriter and currently writes for the popular Welsh soap opera *Pobol y Cwm* for the BBC and S4C.

Grahame Davies is a poet, novelist, editor and literary critic. He is the author of 16 books in Welsh and English, including *Cadwyni Rhyddid* which won the Wales Book of the Year Award; *The Chosen People*, a study of the Welsh and Jewish peoples; *The Dragon and the Crescent*, a study of Wales and Islam; a novel, *Everything Must Change*, about the French philosopher Simone Weil; and the work of psychogeography, *Real Wrexham*. A native of Wrexham, now based in Cardiff and London, he has a degree in English from Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, and a PhD from Cardiff University, where he was an honorary fellow. He has been awarded an honorary D.Litt from Anglia Ruskin University, and is a fellow of Goodenough College, London. His first solo volume of poetry in English, *Lightning Beneath the Sea*, was published by Seren in 2012.

Geraint Talfan Davies is Chairman of the IWA and of Welsh National Opera and a former Chair of the Arts Council of Wales, 2003-06. He is also a trustee of the Media Standards Trust. He spent 12 years (1966-78) as a newspaper journalist in Cardiff, Newcastle and London and was Assistant Editor of the Western Mail before moving to ITV as, successively, Head of News and Current Affairs and Assistant Controller of Programmes at HTV Wales, and then Director of Programmes with Tyne Tees Television. He was appointed Controller of BBC Wales in 1990 and held the post until 2000. He has been a member of the Radio Authority, a non-executive Director of Glas Cymru (Welsh Water), and a board member of the Wales Millennium Centre and the Artes Mundi visual arts prize. He is a former Chair of Cardiff Bay Arts Trust and has served as a governor of both the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and UWIC (now Cardiff Metropolitan University). He published a memoir, *At Arm's Length* (Seren), in 2008.

Rhian Edwards is a poet and performer from Bridgend. Her pamphlet *Parade the Fib* was a Poetry Book Society Choice in 2008. Her first collection *Clueless Dogs* (Seren) was published in May 2012 and shortlisted for the Forward Prize for First Collection 2012.

Menna Elfyn is one of the foremost Welsh-language writers whose work has also been translated into numerous languages. As well as being an award-winning poet, she has published plays, libretti, and children's novels and co-edited *The Bloodaxe Book of Modern Welsh Poetry* (2003) with John Rowlands. She was Wales's National Children's Laureate in 2002 and her latest bilingual collection, *Murmur* (Bloodaxe Books, 2012) is a Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation, the first time ever for a Welsh language volume with English translations to receive such an award. She is Creative Writing Director at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David.

Peter Finch is a poet and psychogeographer. For many years he ran the Oriel bookshop in Cardiff. He was Chief executive of Academi, the literature promotion agency and later Literature Wales from 1998 to 2011. His books include *Zen Cymru* and *Real Cardiff*. He edits the *Real* series for Seren.

Trevor Fishlock is an author, broadcaster and foreign correspondent. He has worked in more than seventy countries and was staff correspondent of *The Times* in India and New York, and Moscow bureau chief for *The Daily Telegraph*. He won the International Reporter of the Year prize in the British Press Awards. He has written books on Wales, India, Russia, America, 19th Century exploration, and has presented more than 150 television programmes about life and history in Wales.

Jon Gower a former BBC Wales arts and media correspondent, has fifteen books to his name, including three books that appeared during 2012, namely *Y Storïwr* which won the Wales Book of the Year award; *The Story of Wales*, which accompanies the landmark BBC history series; and the short story collection *Too Cold for Snow*. Jon is currently a Hay Festival International Fellow and is writing a profile of the American actor Steve Buscemi for GQ magazine.

Angela Graham is a documentary-maker and award-winning feature film producer.

Her credits include more than one hundred documentaries and factual programmes for BBC, ITV, S4C and Channel 4. She writes fiction and is a Union Learning Adviser for the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. She devises courses for CULT Cymru (Creative Unions Learning Together). She teaches documentary-making at the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University.

Bethan Gwanas is a novelist, dramatist, travel writer, broadcaster and creative editor from Gwynedd and has written a weekly column for the *Daily Post* for the past 13 years. Her Welsh language novels for adults, teenagers and Welsh learners are best sellers. She won the Literature Medal at the Urdd Eisteddfod in Cardiff in 1985, the Tir na n-Og Prize for best children's book with *Llinyn Trôns* in 2001, and *Sgôr* in 2003. Her *Hi yw Fy Ffrind* was short listed for the 2005 Wales Book of The Year award. She has presented three series of travels around the globe for S4C as well as an award-winning documentary about her return to Nigeria 25 years after teaching there with VSO. She has just finished writing her autobiography.

Tessa Hadley is a novelist and short story writer living in Cardiff. She teaches literature and creative writing at Bath Spa University College. Her highly-regarded best-selling novels include *Everything Will Be Alright* and *The London Train*. She has chaired the management board of the *New Welsh Review* and reviews for the *London Review of Books*.

Nigel Jenkins, a poet, essayist and travel writer, is one of the editors of The Welsh Academy *Encyclopaedia of Wales*. He is a John Tripp Award for Spoken Poetry winner and his *Gwalia in Khasia* won the Wales Book of the Year Award in 1996. Director of creative writing at Swansea University, he has contributed books on Swansea to the *Real* series and is currently working on a book on Gower.

Patrick McGuinness is professor of French and Comparative Literature at Oxford and lives in Caernarfon. He has published two books of poetry, *The Canals of Mars* and *Jilted City*. His novel *The Last Hundred Days* was longlisted for the Man Booker, shortlisted for the Costa, the Desmond Elliot Prize and the Author's Club First Novel Award. It won the 2012 Wales Book of the Year. In 2009 he was made a Chevalier des Palmes Académiques by the French government, and in 2011 a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. He is a Fellow of the Welsh Academy and of the Learned Society of Wales. He is also the editor of the Welsh modernist poet Lynette Roberts's *Collected Poems* (Carcanet).

John Osmond has been Director of the IWA since 1996. He was a journalist with the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (1968-72) and then Welsh Affairs Correspondent with the Western Mail during the rest of the 1970s. Between 1980 and 1982 he edited the current affairs and cultural magazine *Arcade - Wales Fortnightly*. Subsequently he worked with HTV Wales as a current affairs journalist and later as a documentary programme producer. He was Assistant Editor of Wales on Sunday between 1988 and 1990, after which he worked as a freelance journalist and television producer with his company Agenda Productions. He was chair of the Writers Union of Wales in the late 1980s, and chair of the Parliament for Wales Campaign in the early 1990s. He is the author of many books on Welsh culture and politics, including *The Centralist Enemy* (1974) *Creative Conflict: the politics of Welsh devolution* (1978), *The Divided Kingdom* (1988) and *Welsh Europeans* (1996).

Osi Rhys Osmond is a painter. He lectures in Drawing, Painting and Art History at Swansea Metropolitan University School of Art and Design. For many years he has written reviews and articles on art and culture and has appeared on TV and radio in both Welsh and English. He was elected to the Gorsedd of the Bards in 2006, in recognition of his contribution to the arts, education and the promulgation of the Welsh language.

Mike Parker is a writer, columnist, broadcaster and stand-up comedian. He is author of *Map Addict*, a 300-page love letter to the Ordnance Survey; *The Wild Rover*, a celebration of our rights of way network; *The Rough Guide to Wales*; and *Neighbours from Hell?* a history of English attitudes to the Welsh. He wrote and presented two series of *Coast to Coast* and four of *Great Welsh Roads* for ITV Wales. He has recently written and performed some new stand-up shows, including *A (Very) Rough Guide to Wales*, and has published a volume in the *Real* series, *Real Powys*.

Adam Price is the former Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr. He left Parliament in 2010 to become a Fulbright Scholar and Fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He is now the founder of the technology start-up, Ideoba. Price is regarded as one of Wales' foremost new generation of political thinkers.

Zoë Skoulding is primarily a poet, though her work encompasses sound-based vocal performance, collaboration, translation, literary criticism, editing, and teaching creative writing. She lectures in the School of English at Bangor University, and has been Editor of the international quarterly *Poetry Wales* since 2008. Her recent collections of poems are *Remains of a Future City* (Seren, 2008), long-listed for Wales Book of the Year 2009, and *The Mirror Trade* (Seren, 2004).

Owen Smith is Shadow Secretary of State for Wales and the Labour MP for Pontypridd. He was first elected in May 2010 and is regarded as among the brightest of the new Welsh intakes of that year. Prior to being elected he was a television journalist and later worked

in the biotechnology and pharmaceuticals industry. He began his career with the BBC working on network radio and television programmes, including BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme and BBC Wales' *Dragons Eye*. After leaving journalism, he spent three years working as a Government Special Adviser, principally at the Northern Ireland Office.

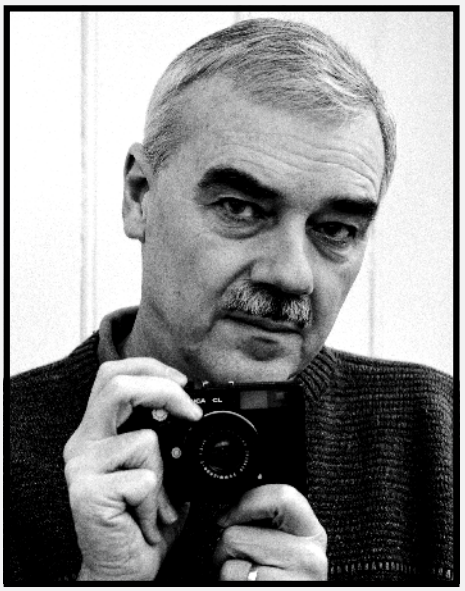
Ifor Thomas is a performance poet and architect. He is a John Tripp Award for Spoken Poetry winner and was short-listed for Wales Book of the Year in 2006. His books include *Safe Sex, Body Beautiful*, and *Stalking Paloma*.

Rachel Trezise is a Rhondda-born novelist and short story writer. She won the inaugural Dylan Thomas Prize in 2006 for *Fresh Apples*. Her *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* won the Orange Futures Award in 2002. Her latest novel is *Sixteen Shades of Crazy*. A second collection of short fiction, *Cosmic Latte*, is due in spring 2013.

Charlotte Williams is Professor of Social Work at REMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. Formerly, she was Professor of Social Work and Social Justice and Head of the School of Public Policy and Professional Practice at Keele University in Staffordshire. She is co-author of *Race and Ethnicity in a Welfare Society* and co-editor of *A Tolerant Nation? Exploring ethnic diversity in Wales*. She was brought up in north Wales, the daughter of a Welsh speaking mother and Guyanese father. Her memoir *Sugar and Slate*, winner of the 2003 Wales Book of the Year prize, charts a physical and spiritual journey between homelands in Africa, the Caribbean, and Wales. In 2007 she was awarded the OBE for services to ethnic minorities and equal opportunities in Wales. Charlotte lives with her family in Llandudno.

Daniel G. Williams is an academic and critic. He studied at the Universities of East Anglia, Harvard and Cambridge. He is now Senior Lecturer in English and Director of the Richard Burton Centre for the Study of Wales at Swansea University. His recent books include *Black Skin, Blue Books: African Americans and the Welsh* (2012), and *Slanderous Tongues: Essays on Welsh Poetry in English*, 1970-2005 (2010). He delivered the IWA's National Eisteddfod lecture in 2010 on *Aneurin Bevan and Paul Robeson - Socialism, Class and Identity*.

John Williams is a journalist, editor, novelist, biographer and short fictioneer, best known for the trilogy set in his home city, *Cardiff Dead* and his biographies of Michael X and Shirley Bassey. He is currently writing the biography of Eartha Kitt.



John Briggs, a freelance photographer, was born in Minnesota in 1947 and came to live in Wales in 1974. He taught modern languages in schools in Newport, Abergavenny, and Chepstow. He is the author of three photo-documentaries published by Seren, two devoted to Cardiff *Before the Deluge* (2002), and *Taken in Time* (2005), and one to Newport *Newportrait* (2009).

25/25 Vision

Welsh horizons across 50 years

To mark the 25th anniversary of the Institute of Welsh Affairs 25 authors cast their minds back over their experience of the past quarter-of-a-century and reflect on what this inspires them to hope for in the next 25 years.

The years between 1987, when the IWA was founded, and 2012 saw a transformation in the political, economic and cultural fortunes of Wales. A quarter of a century ago the Welsh economy was still dominated by heavy industry coming apart in the wake of the miners' strike. Welsh politics were in thrall to a Quango-driven state. Today that era looks altogether like sepia-veiled history. In its place Welsh democracy has been born with the creation of the National Assembly that was granted primary legislative powers in the 2011 referendum. While still struggling with the downturn, the Welsh economy has broken free of what 25 years ago was a third-world structure and is developing a more balanced profile. Meanwhile, Welsh culture has flourished with sport, the arts and the media all gaining recognition on the world stage. Throughout the past 25 years these changes have been closely followed, analysed and promoted by the activities of the IWA.

The contributors to this book were given no specific guidance as to what they should write about, other than they should relate some of their own experience to that of Wales during the fifty-year horizon. Two events in the last 25 years stand out, the miners strike of the mid-1980s and the devolution referendum in 1997. The reflections in this volume make clear the interconnections between the two. They provide the essential background for all that has followed and is likely to emerge in the coming decades.

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