The literary tradition of the Neath and Afan Valleys and Tir Iarll (Maesteg and Porthcawl).

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THE LITERARY TRADITION OF THE NEATH AND AFAN VALLEYS AND TIR IARLL (MAESTEG AND PORTHCAWL)

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SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis was to test what has been the standard view of English-language writing in Wales - that it is a very recent growth, beginning in 1915, and a phenomenon largely confined to the anglicised industrial valleys of South Wales. The research also looked at the possible relationship between writing in the two languages, Welsh and English.

In order to investigate these questions one geographical area - Neddafan, the Neath and Afan Valleys, Maesteg and Porthcawl - was selected and the history of the English language in this area was considered, together with the growth of an audience for English language literature. The role of the Welsh language and of Welsh-language writers in the area was also considered.

The study then took three specific examples: bilingualism and the translation of Welsh-language writing and culture for the English-speaking audience; local historians and historical novelists; and women writers, and looked at similarities in subject matter, approach and style between these writers, both in their categories and more generally. Finally the thesis looked at the writers of the twentieth century and their contribution to the literary culture of the area in that century.

The conclusions reached are that English-language writing in Neddafan dates back to well before 1915; that much of it follows and/or adapts Welsh language traditions like that of the *bardd gwlad* (household poet); that its audience is most often the wider community, not an elite readership; and that the oral tradition and a sense of place are important factors in what is written and the forms it takes.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently subnitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed .... (candidate)

Date ..... 18.2.2010 .....

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed .... (candidate)

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be made available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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CONTENTS

I would like to acknowledge the very considerable support that I received from Professor M.Wynn Thomas and the whole of the English Department at Swansea, who made me welcome, as a non-academic, and enabled me to put fifty years of research into a useful shape.

Abbreviations

Companion	-	*The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*
HLV	-	*History of the Llynfi Valley*
HVN	-	*History of the Vale of Neath*
MADHS Trans	-	*Transactions of the Aberafan and Margam District Historical Society*
PTHS Trans	-	*Transactions of the Port Talbot Historical Society*

INTRODUCTION

For many people the standard view of Welsh writing in English has been that laid down by Professor Gwyn Jones in *The First Forty Years* (1957) and in the anthologies he edited from 1942 onwards. According to this, Anglo-Welsh literature began in 1915 with the publication of *My People* by Caradoc Evans; although there had been English language writers in Wales before 1915, these were either the occasional country parson-poet or so-called sentimental romantic novelists like Allen Raine.[1] Even among Gwyn Jones`s contemporaries, he tended to highlight those who were part of his own literary circle, so that interesting, but in many ways marginally Welsh, writers like Margiad Evans were included, where Eiluned Lewis or Cledwyn Hughes were not. (Not entirely surprisingly, Professor Jones saw the passing of his own literary generation as the sunset of Anglo-Welsh literature - which, of course, it has been. Welsh writing in English is a much broader and more complex category than Anglo-Welsh literature as defined by Professor Jones.)

To a considerable extent Jones`s definition of Anglo-Welsh writing, which still tends to dominate critical histories of the subject,[2] stems, often unconsciously, from the assumption that the English language has been a very late arrival in Wales, and hence only the anglicised industrial valleys of South(east) Wales, adulterated by immigration, have been able to produce a large enough English-reading and writing population to create and sustain a Wales-based English language literature.[3] However, recent years have seen a vast increase in critical studies of writers outside the largely white male socialist dominated tradition of *The First Forty Years.* Initially there were studies of some of the women novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who lived in and/or used Wales as a setting.[4] This new interest was further encouraged by the setting up of the *New Welsh Review* and the annual volumes of

Welsh Writing in English that stemmed from this, something which has now been still further enlarged by the work of M. Wynn Thomas, Jane Aaron, Katie Gramich, Stephen Knight, Kirsti Bohata, Barbara Prys Williams and others, who have explored the literary background and/or applied literary theory to the work of relevant authors.[5] Welsh-language writing has also become more accessible, both in translation and through critics who, for example, discuss Welsh women writers as a whole, not Welsh-language or English-language women writers separately.[6]

On the other hand, this wider focus does present a particular problem. Welsh-language books, with a necessarily limited readership, have tended to have short runs and to go out of print fairly rapidly, but the various schemes set up to promote Welsh-language writing and publishing have meant that even if the books are not available to purchase, most public libraries and similar institutions will have a reasonably comprehensive set of titles that can be borrowed or at least consulted. Welsh writing in English, however, has never had that kind of support; the occasional enthusiast may have built up a personal collection, and many public libraries include local authors in their local history collections, but it has been no-one`s duty to identify and collect English-language writing of Welsh relevance as an entire subject area. Inevitably, therefore, attention has tended to focus on those writers highlighted by Gwyn Jones, or those who are or were available as part of the English literary scene - writers like Dylan Thomas, Alun Lewis, Rhys Davies, David Jones, Arthur Machen, Henry Vaughan, Raymond Williams and R.S. Thomas. Indeed, one reason for the importance of Gwyn Jones`s critical view has been that his anthologies were often the only identifiable sorce of this material in print/available.

It is not surprising in these circumstances that Welsh writing in English has in

the past often been seen as a paler shadow of English literature proper, and not as an English-language literature in its own right, smaller, perhaps, but no less valid, than Canadian or Australian literature, responding to a different cultural background and different social priorities.

The intention of this thesis, therefore, is to take one particular geographical area and look in depth at its literary tradition, in both languages but in English in particular, to see whether it is indeed something that can in any way be seen as part of a separate literature. Also, bearing in mind the critical attitude that English-language writing came late to Wales and was mainly confined to the industrial valleys of South Wales, this thesis will include a study of the historical and cultural growth of the area, looking at when and how the English language arrived there.[7]

This study will also include detailed accounts of particular writers or groups of writers from the area and the audiences they address. These will normally be writers who have received no major attention in the past; although the narrative will refer briefly to some of the more prominent contemporary figures - among them Robert Minhinnick, John Davies, Ruth Bidgood and Lewis Davies - extended critical accounts of their work will not be included here. One of the main aims of this thesis is to foreground writers whose primary intended audience is, broadly speaking, a local one; some were also published locally, some found a London publisher, but they are addressing, first and foremost, their own community.

Definitions

The geographical area to be studied in this thesis, described here for conciseness as `Neddafan`, includes the Neath and Afan valleys, together with Tir Iarll - `the Earl`s Land` i.e. the parishes of Margam, Llangynwyd, Bettws and Kenfig

(which for this present purpose extends to cover Newton Nottage and Porthcawl, both of which were in the Aberavon Parliamentary constituency until c. 1990). The links connecting these areas are economic and cultural rather than political: poor communications in earlier centuries meant that Cwmavon and the upper Afan valley looked towards Neath as much as Aberavon; the Mansel Talbot estate linked Briton Ferry, Margam and Llangynwyd; from 1800 onwards the spreading network of tram- and rail-ways united the Llynfi, Afan and Neath valleys[8]. Even today the bus turning circle at Cymmer in the upper Afan valley is a focal point linking Bridgend, Blaengwynfi, Maesteg, Neath, Aberavon and Margam. It is also relevant to note that until the opening of the first Briton Ferry Bridge in 1966, the Afan district in particular was one extremity of the Vale of Glamorgan, looking east towards Bridgend and Cardiff, and thus sharing in the rural folk tradition of the Vale rather than the more urban culture of Swansea.[9]

Although it would not be possible to discuss the literary tradition of the district without reference to its Welsh language element, the emphasis here will be on English language writers and on the ways in which Welsh language culture has been carried over into English language writing. The geographical position of Nedd/Afan/Tir Iarll has meant that in many ways the area stands on a boundary between languages, and among the subjects to be discussed will be bilingual and parallel texts and translations.

Format

Part I of this thesis will consist of two general chapters, on the cultural-linguistic background and on the Welsh-language literary tradition.Pat II will consist of five chapters exploring various aspects of English-language writing in Neddafan. Each

chapter will begin with a general overviewof its subject area, followed by one or more case studies - detailed accounts of individual writers whose work is of particular relevance in that subject area.

Notes

1. Jones, G. (1957) *The First Forty Years.* Jones, G. (1956) *Welsh Short Stories.* Stephens, M. (2003) `Bringing up the rear`, *Planet,* 161, pp.100-101. Gwyn Jones`s introduction to *Twenty-five Welsh Short Stories* (1971) lists more or less the same suspects, but expands on the Welsh language short story, which he sees as something quite distinct from those of the Anglo-Welsh.
2. Stephens, M. (ed) (1998) *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales,* p. 676. `It is customary, therefore, to date the energence of the Anglo-Welsh short story from the appearance of *My People* (1915) by Caradoc Evans.` The *Companion* entry on the novel in English, after a brief paragraph listing five 19th century novelists, goes straight into an account of the novelists from the industrial valleys, though it does later discuss the Border romances of Margiad Evans and others and the rural novels of Rhys Davies. As suggested earlier, one of the problems here has been the difficulty of identifying earlier writers and locating their material. Gender studies and post-colonial theory have led to the critical study of the women writers referred to below, but elsewhere there isstill very little critical work in progress on those writers who do not feature in the school or university curriculum. Sam Adams has worked on T.J. Llewelyn Prichard and M. Wynn Thomas has written on the plays of J.O. Francis, but there is still, for example, no adequate study of the work of Owen Rhoscomyl as novelist and promoter of Welsh history and culture, or of the drama movement of the early nineteen hundreds, backed by the Educational Publishing Co, of Cardiff, Wales`s equivalent of Samuel French. Joseph Keating is another case in point; there are occasional references to him in passing, but his novels are to all intents and purposes invisible. Earlier than that, most writers have still to be discovered, let alone studied.
3. *Companion* p. 772 `[At the beginning of the 19th century] English was confined to a small upper class, to those who had received a formal education, to the larger towns, to places along the border with England and to parts of South-west Wales such as Gower and southern Pembrokeshire.`
4. Dearnley, M. (2001) *Distant Fields.* Aaron, J. (1995) `The hoydens of Wild Wales: representations of Welsh women in Victorian and Edwardian fiction`, *Welsh Writing in English,* I, pp. 23-39. Painting, D. (1987) *Amy Dillwyn.* Jones, S.R. (1979) *Allen Raine.*
5. Two particular series have begun a systematic approach to the subject: *Welsh Writing in English* (2003), Volume VII of the University of Wales Press`s *A Guide to Welsh Literature,* edited by M. Wynn Thomas, was the forerunner of the CREW series *Writing Wales in English,* which includes studies by Stephen Knight, Kirsti Bohata, and Barbara Prys Williams among others, while *Gender Studies in 00Wales* has continued the work on women writers quoted above.
6. Aaron, J. (2007) *Nineteenth-Century Women`s Writing in Wales* and Gramich, K. (2007) *Twentieth-Century Women`s Writing in Wales,* both in the *Gender Studies* series, are examples of this.

7. This thesis looks at Neddafan, but thre is no reason to think that this area is unique. A list of `local writers` prodced for Swansea for the Year of Literature 1995 included some 215 authors; upated and extended to 250, the list ranges from local versifiers to acclaimed novelist like Russell Celyn Jones and Stephen Knight, as well as popular `best-selles` like Iris Gower and Catrin Collier. This is the soil from which a poet like DylarThomas could grow; we know, from his *Evening Post* articles that he was awre of the local literary/cultural scene and in his early years was part of it. The sare is undoubtedly true of communities across Wales, and at this level there is oftem connectedness between the language communities which is easily missed i one concentrates only on the `stars` of the Gwyn Jones tradition.
8. Smith, C. (1982) *Bygone Railways o,the Afan.*
   Smith, C. (1984) *Railways of the Llyfi Valley.*
9. When Richard Lewis - `Dic Penderyr, Wales`s first labour martyr - was executed in August 1831, the vast crowds tha followed his coffin from Cardiff to Aberafan were drawn from the Vale, which clarly saw him as one of their own. Even in the later nineteen sixties, shortly after th Briton Ferry bridge was opened, there was a regular half hourly bus service to Covbridge and Cardiff, but by the nineteen nineties this had been severely curtaied, and Swansea had taken the place of Cardiff as a shopping destination (though many Port Talbot football fans still support Cardiff, not the `Jacks`).

PART I

CHAPTER I. THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Recorded history in South Wales, political or cultural, effectively begins with the arrival of the Normans c. 1090. There is earlier evidence, of course - stone monuments of various kinds, monastic and other charters of often dubious provenance, contemporary writings like those of Gildas and Nennius - but it is with the arrival of Robert Fitzhamon and his cohorts that a recognisable pattern begins to emerge.

In the east this pattern was simple: the rich lowlands of the *bro* fell to the invaders, the native Welsh were pushed up into the hilly, less fertile *blaenau*. In Neddafan, however, things were rather different. The fertile vale of Neath was indeed dominated by the Norman-founded and garrisoned town and castle and by the Cistercian monastery on the west bank of the river,[1] but elsewhere the geography of the area produced a less obvious arrangement.

Between the Neath estuary and the opening out, beyond Margam, of the broader lands of the Vale lies a narrow strip, perhaps six miles long, where the mountains come down almost to the sea. This strip commands the main road to West Wales and Ireland, and contains the lowest crossing point of the river Afan, as well as the east bank of the Neath estuary, the shortest route to Swansea. Even allowing for the possibility of bypassing this section of the road by sea (and sea transport was much more heavily used in earlier centuries), the Afan strip was clearly of strategic importance, and one might have expected that it would be placed securely in the hands of de Granville at Neath or another of the Norman invaders. Instead it was left in Welsh ownership, ruled by the heirs of Iestyn ap Gwrgan, last native Welsh prince of Glamorgan.[2]

Caradoc ap Iestyn and his descendants were in no way `tame` Welshmen. When Robert of Gloucester, Fitzhamon`s son-in-law, founded Margam Abbey in 1147, it was intended as much to provide a buffer between Welsh and Normans as it was for the good of Robert`s soul, and the Lords of Afan were as likely to attack the abbey lands as to be buried in its abbey church. However, as time went on, Welsh and Normans became assimilated, and by 1316 Leisan ap Morgan was styling himself Sir Leysan de Avene and naming his sons Thomas and John instead of Caradoc or Ieuan. Earlier, c. 1304, when he issued a charter for the small town of Aberafan that had grown up around Caradoc ap Iestyn`s castle, he had done so as `Leysan ap Morgan`. More importantly for us, he had issued the charter for the benefit of `all my English burgesses and also ... all my chencers of Avene`.[3] (Chencers were traders - perhaps the equivalent of permanent stall-holders in the weekly market; they would probably have been local craftsmen and farmers.)

Most towns in Wales at this time were Anglo-Norman foundations, and the native Welsh were often specifically excluded from them, particularly during the hours of darkness. Whether this was true of Aberafan remains unknown, as does the origin of Leisan`s `English burgesses`; this was the period when Edward I was establishing his own boroughs in North Wales, and possibly Leisan was following the king`s model (he had, after all, been knighted, presumably on behalf of the king). In that case, perhaps he imported English settlers, believing them to be more experienced as traders, and therefore more profitable, than his own countrymen. On the other hand, charters were usually issued at the request of the inhabitants, which might suggest that the `English burgesses` had settled in the town over a period of many years, brought there in the normal way of trade with the West Country. The

monks at Margam certainly traded with the West Country from very early on. In his *Itinerary* Giraldus Cambrensis mentions an occasion c. 1188 when they ordered a cargo of corn from Bristol to relieve a famine in Margam.[4] The charter does not mention how many burgesses were involved, but later there seem to have been c. 29-33,[5] and if this was true in 1304, then they and their families must have formed the bulk of the population, so that Aberafan would have been, at least for a while, a largely English-speaking town.

It is clear that the language pattern in Neddafan in the medieval period was more than a little complicated. Welsh would have been the most widely spoken language in the area as a whole; French, used mainly in the two abbeys and Neath town, would have declined slowly in line with the situation in England, giving way to English, while English would also have been the principal language of trade, much of this being cross-channel with the West Country. Latin, used mainly in the abbeys and for official purposes, lasted longer than French, but was not in use by the ordinary man or woman.

Two hundred years later, in the early sixteenth century, the picture is still unclear. The names of those inhabitants of Aberafan contributing to the lay subsidy tax of 1542-3 [6] were solidly Welsh - Hopkin, David, Howell, Gryffyth, Llewelyn - with fourteen of the twenty-nine contributors listed still using the `ap` form. Neath, a much larger town, with a greater official non-Welsh presence, had seventy-four contributors, and here too the names were overwhelmingly Welsh, though the change from the `ap` form had progressed much further - only twenty-five percent still styled themselves `ap` as against fifty percent in Aberafan. In Neath the only obviously non-local contributor was James Frensheman; John Fox and John Corsser were also probably foreigners, but John Dee, a shoemaker, is likely to have taken his surname

from *du,* black. Yet despite this solid evidence of Welshness, the *Orders and Laws for the Town of Neath,*[7] issued in 1542, are written in English. The choice of language may be a result of the Act of Union, but these are very practical instructions about day to day living, and there must have been sufficient people with some fluency in English to make the *Orders* work. (This is, of course, true of much more than the Neath ordinances. English may have been the `official` language of court proceedings, administrative documents, Church registers and tombstones, but it did have to be reasonably accessible to those whom these documents concerned or the whole edifice of public life would have collapsed into a mist of confusion.)

There is, incidentally, one decidedly odd item : `If there be any Burgess having a Welshwoman to his wife that threateneth her neighbours with her friends or kindred, and if he be condemned in the same by six men, then she and her husband to be discommoned [lose their civic rights] and the King to have the amerciament [fine].`[8] The inference is that the burgess himself would not be Welsh and that his Welsh wife was a problem not because she threatened her neighbours, but because she had the support of her kindred beyond the walls. This sounds more like the wilder days of the twelfth century than the relatively settled, largely Welsh-inhabited Neath of King Henry VIII.

Though such evidence as we have suggests that the English language did have a presence in Neddafan in the early sixteenth century, Welsh was plainly the main language of the area for all cultural and social purposes, and also probably for most local economic activity. The `English` element in Aberafan and Neath had been assimilated; the two abbeys of Neath and Margam had been fully `Cymricised` well before they were dissolved by Henry VIII;[9] Maesteg and Porthcawl, both magnets for English speakers in later centuries, would not come into existence for almost three

hundred years, and the rest of Neddafan was a patchwork of Welsh-speaking rural parishes, with the occasional manor house - Aberpergwm, Plas Baglan, Ynysymaerdy - acting as a centre of cultural patronage. (The Lords of Afan, of princely status, had intermarried with Norman families such as the Turbervilles and de Sullys, and finally disappeared from the area into England following one such marriage; the younger branches of the family chose Welsh brides and remained in Neddafan as patrons of the bards and preservers of the native traditions.)

One thing is clear at this point: however common the legal or commercial use of English might be, there was not yet a native audience for Welsh writers using the English language for literary purposes. They could, of course, write for the wider English audience, as Henry Vaughan did in Breconshire, but there is no evidence so far of any such writers in Neddafan.

The first indication that this situation could change came in 1583-4, with the arrival of the Mines Royal Society at Aberdulais Falls, where a copperworks was established; in doing so, the Society brought in experienced workers from England and Germany.[10] This was the beginning of the major industrial development of the Vale of Neath, and it set a pattern of industry often established and funded by English capital and, because of that, bringing in English workers.

Something similar may have happened in Margam, where families like the Hockins who claim Cornish origins, were already working on the Mansel estate by the late sixteenth century. (Great estates were their own form of industry, major employers.) And it was less easy now for these incomers to be totally absorbed; after 1536 Wales was an integral part of the English administrative system and knowledge of the English language became a necessary evil for anyone involved in administration of any kind. When Griffith Hockin and five other local men were

involved in a dispute over a shipwreck in 1583, they were ordered to go to London, where the case would be heard.[11] (If the Hockins *did* come from Cornwall, they had evidently been at Margam for more than a generation - Griffith is not a common Cornish name.)

At first this embryo English language audience was just that - an embryo, too small to make any difference to the overall Welsh-speaking population. However, industry continued to grow in the Vale of Neath, and at the end of the seventeenth century the estate of the Evanses of the Gnoll acquired an English squire, when Sir Humphrey Mackworth, from Derbyshire, married Mary Evans, the Gnoll heiress.[12] Evan ap David, founder of the Evans family, had been a wealthy salt merchant; his descendents went up in the world socially, joining the ranks of the gentry who held public office (and had to use English in doing so) and who were encouraged to spend part of the year in London, but the arrival of Sir Humphrey set the seal on the anglicisation of the family and its retainers. Now, for the first time, local poets and ballad makers had an English audience and/or patron for their praise poems and elegies, and even writers whose first creative language was Welsh tried their hands at English verses.

In 1695 or thereabouts, Edward Lhwyd the topographer wrote to correspondents throughout Wales, asking them to provide him with information on their local parishes for a book he planned to write. The book was never written, but the replies survive (as *Parochialia).* Anthony Thomas of Baglan Hall provided a particularly full account of his own area, including comments on the position of the English language locally.

> "Welsh that is common in the neighbourhood is here spoken without any alteration, but the inhabitants of the lower parts retain their Welsh as well as others, notwithstanding the continual trade there hath been

there for several ages by English men for coal, and hardly (but some that have been either in school or over some time in England) understand any English, such is their love to the British language."[13]

The reference to learning English in school is interesting, particularly considering the role that education was later to play in spreading the English language, but Anthony Thomas does not say what kind of schools he has in mind - there were no local grammar schools at that period. Although the Thomases were gentry - they were yet another cadet branch of the lords of Afan - they were not quite at the level which provided members of Parliament or lords lieutenant, and unlike the Mansels at Margam, they married Welsh wives. Thomas`s comment that the local population `hardly understand any English, such is their love to the British language`, suggests that he, at least, was actively supportive of the language - and its bards; his elegy was in Welsh, by William Prys of Neath.[14] On the other hand, he himself had learned an English that was both fluent and supple; though his account of Baglan is only a few pages long, in terms of style and structure it could be said to qualify him as one of the first of Neddafan`s English writers.

If Anthony Thomas represents the continuation of an old tradition, the Hobys of Neath Abbey represent the new order. The abbot`s lodgings had been converted into a grand mansion by the Herbert family, but the estate then passed by marriage first to the Dodingtons and then to the Hobys (an English family, though with a slight Welsh link, in that they were related by marriage to the Cecils). Circa 1670 Philip Hoby married Elizabeth Tyrrell from Oxfordshire and David Evans of Neath duly produced verses in her honour. Part of the poem is in Welsh, but there were at least 24 lines in English. As can be seen from the extract below, this was not great literature, but as the product of a very minor folk poet, writing in what was at best his second language, it does have a certain merit.

Sweet nightingale go kindly
from hence into the abbey
with salutations soon address
God save and bless the Lady
salute to Madam Hobby (sic)
say welcome home fair Lady
we all will bless our God alone
that brought her home most safely.[15]

(The Hobys soon married into the family of the Rices of Dynevor and their literary descendants include the art historian David Talbot Rice, the historians Lady Longford and Thomas Pakenham, the biographer and detective story writer Lady Antonia Fraser and the novelist Rachel Billington).[16]

Over the next hundred years or so we have the slow emergence of a two-fold audience for English-language writing. On the one hand there were the gentry who could inspire occasional verse - poems on their coming of age, their marriages and their deaths. In some places they themselves write - the Brogyntyn and Owen of Orielton archives include some competent family verse [17] - and `Madam Hoby` mentioned above received a more polished tribute in this style, possibly composed by one of the Williams family of Dyffryn. The poem is an elegy, of some length; it begins:

When we would correct indict
Of merit that exceed the fight
`Tis easi`r to conceive than write
This hardship does my thoughts attend
When my Romana I commend
My best, my dearest, but lost friend.

For how can I the half reveal
Of virtue, which she did conceal
Which when by their effects we knew
She ever from the praise withdrew
Or did by silence so confess
As only gave no leave to guess
These mighty works she had laid by
To bear her company on high.[18]

On the other hand there was now an increasing audience of English-using workmen, brought in to man the copper and ironworks of the valleys. Inevitably most of what literature was produced has not survived. The legitimate printing press did not arrive in Wales until 1718, and even after that much of the popular literature produced must have remained in manuscript, subject to the vagaries of domestic life. (How much interesting work has been lost because families, clearing up after a death, or perhaps when moving house, have not noticed or valued those battered notebooks or slips of paper ?)

Fortunately, we do have one excellent example of the way in which the English language tradition developed. Elizabeth Davies was a shopkeeper in Neath who wrote ballads and hymns.[19] Initially, it would seem, her work circulated in manuscript, but in 1825 she produced a ballad on the building of the Neath and Red Jacket Canal which proved so popular with the men working on the canal that they asked her to have it printed so that they could pass on copies to their families and friends. This was not, in fact, her first published work; an earlier poem, a Welsh-language ballad about a local murder, apparently saw print just before the canal ballad. Later she wrote verses in honour of local families such as the Prices (Quaker ironmasters), or celebrations of events such as the arrival of the Great Western Railway at Swansea in 1850. Most of her surviving work is in English, but there are also two hymns in Welsh (printed with English versions next to them). As can be seen, Elizabeth Davies spanned both audiences, the gentry and professional classes, and the working classes represented by the canal workers. Her main publisher was Whittingtons (who were still active in Neath as printers and stationers at least until the nineteen eighties - when one of the family also ran the local Welsh

bookshop).

There must have been other native writers like Elizabeth Davies; we have no reason to believe that she was unique, and clearly by 1800 there was a large enough English-reading population in the Vale of Neath to provide an audience. However, researching these writers is another matter. In his magisterial *History of the Vale of Neath* D.Rhys Phillips gives two full chapters, over a hundred pages, to the Welsh-language writers of the valley; the only English-language writer treated at any length is Thomas Stephens, born at Pont-nedd-fechan in 1821, author of *The Literature of the Kymry*. One or two possibly English-language writers are named under `Miscellaneous Writers`,[20] but if one wishes to learn more about them, or track down other candidates, then one has to check through the chapters on family history. (Even David Evans`s verses to Madam Hoby were preserved in the Margam archives, a body of estate records and charters.)

In Afan and Tir Iarll the situation was rather different. English entrepreneurs began to come into the area from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, and the diary of one such visitor who arrived in 1769 has survived.[21] The author was probably George Boughey, a lawyer from Staffordshire, who struggled manfully with the Welsh names (Mynydd Bychan = Money Bohun !). He met a number of local men, from landowners and copperworks agents to colliers, but seems to have had no difficulty in communicating with them. Taibach, the area with which he was most concerned, had been a busy harbour since the Middle Ages, and perhaps a reasonable knowledge of English was to be expected there, but otherwise Afan seems to have taken much longer than Neath to acquire a sufficiently large English-speaking population to produce English-language writers. The social composition of the area

did not help here. The chief family, by now the Talbots, had partly English origins and had no adequate mansion at Margam until the Castle was built c. 1836; they do not seem to have patronised local writers in either language. Curiously, one of Thomas Mansel Talbot`s gifts to his English bride, c. 1780, was a Welsh dictionary;[22] the picture may have been less clear-cut than it appears, and though no documentary proof has yet emerged, it is just possible that a hundred years later their patronage helped the young Edward Thomas to a sound education.

Griffith Llewellyn of Baglan Hall collected manuscripts, including the collection of genealogies which came to be known as the Book of Baglan or Llyfr Baglan, but there is no record of the family supporting any local writers. Their literary connections lay elsewhere, since Charles Kingsley, author of *The Water Babies* and *Westward Ho !*, was a cousin of Mrs. Llewellyn and occasionally stayed at Baglan Hall.[23] The poet William Mason, who stayed, reputedly with Thomas Gray of *Elegy* fame, at the Baglan home of their mutual friend the Rev William Thomas, wrote an elegy on either Briton Ferry or Baglan Church; the description fits both in parts. He also wrote an elegy on Lady Coventry while at Baglan.[24]

Further east, in Tir Iarll, the literary tradition remained firmly Welsh-language territory until the nineteenth century. There was one exception to this, in the shape of Dr. Richard Price, born at Tynton, Llangeinor, in 1723. He was educated in Wales, but soon moved to England and spent most of his life as a clergyman in and around Stoke Newington in London. He published extensively on philosophy, theology, mathematics and politics, but all in English and all in prose. Though his career lay outside Wales, it is perhaps worth noting that he, from a thoroughly Welsh-speaking background, was equally fluent in English, and that his political theory, born out of the experience of the American colonies, might be described as a precursor of

devolution.[25]

It was inevitable that the necessary English-speaking audience would appear first in the Vale of Neath. Though Aberafan and Taibach were open to outside influences from trade and industry, they were little more than villages and large-scale immigration did not begin until the mid nineteenth century; Llangynwyd was still too rural to attract many incomers, and though Newton Nottage and Kenfig were open to cross-channel visitors from Somerset, they were still basically native Welsh in culture (as R.D. Blackmore makes clear in *The Maid of Sker*). The Neath valley, on the other hand, had been industrialised for at least two centuries by 1800, and Neath itself was a major market town, the centre of a fertile agricultural region. It also had the benefit of a particularly literary set of industrialists, whose work balanced the Welsh-language role of the Williamses of Aberpergwm and their relations.

For some reason the Vale of Neath proved particularly attractive to an inter-related group of Quaker industrialists, the Tregelleses, Prices, Warings and Redwoods.[26] The Tregelleses came from Cornwall and the Prices from Montgomeryshire via Southport; the Warings were from Hampshire and the Redwoods from the Vale of Glamorgan, but they all settled in and around Neath Abbey, where they were involved with the ironworks set up there in 1792. Although their own literary productions were in English, they also had strong connections with the Welsh language. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, first cousin to Joseph Tregelles Price the unsuccessful advocate of the labour martyr Dic Penderyn, became a primitive Methodist and learnt Welsh sufficiently well to preach and write letters in it, while the Redwood link brought them into Iolo Morganwg`s circle. (Elijah Waring was the author of *Recollections and Anecdotes of Iolo Morganwg*, published in 1850.) While the Redwoods and Prices mainly produced prose works, the Warings were also hymn

writers, and Anna Letitia Waring gained a reputation well beyond her place of birth.

Another family drawn to Neath by its industrial possibilities were the Tennants of Cadoxton Lodge, who arrived c. 1816.[27] Charles Tennant, son of the founding father George, published poetry, travel writing and other prose; his descendants married writers (among them H. M. Stanley) rather than wrote themselves, but his daughter-in-law Winifred was a strong supporter of the National Eisteddfod, being admitted to the Gorsedd as `Mam o Nedd`.

These were what might be called the `industrial gentry`, mostly from professional backgrounds. Their writing was practical rather than `literary`, prose rather than poetry, (though James Motley, drawn to the infant town of Maesteg by its new industry, produced *Tales of the Cymry*, (1848), poetic versions of local legends). William Weston Young, author of *A Guide to the Beauties of Glyn Neath*, (1835) is another, as is Mary Howitt, née Botham, whose family had connections with Neath and Margam.

Another source of Anglo-Welsh writers was the country clergy, but Neddafan produced few of these; its clerical writers tended to be Welsh-language Nonconformist ministers. However, Henry Hey Knight, vicar of Neath from 1825-54, was an antiquarian and wrote several papers on the history of Glamorgan. (Though his major contribution to English literature came via his nephew, Richard Doddridge Blackmore; without the funds from the sale of land in Aberafan left to him by his uncle, Blackmore could not have found the freedom to become a novelist and *Lorna Doone* would not have been written. Both men were descended from Caradoc ap Iestyn, Lord of Afan.) [28]

Richard Pendrill Llewelyn, vicar of Llangynwyd from 1841-91, was another clerical author who, with his wife, Mary, wrote widely on local subjects. They were

fluent in both languages and produced translations of a number of Welsh-language poems and songs, particularly those collected by Maria Jane Williams of Aberpergwm in the Vale of Neath; Maria Jane collected the traditional material and the Llewelyns made them available to a wider audience.[29] This kind of cultural search and rescue was perhaps only possible in an area like Neddafan, where the incoming industrialists tended to be both sympathetic and interested in native traditions, and where the English-speaking population arrived by degrees, not in the Klondyke-style swamping rush that the Rhondda was to see.

By the time that Pendrill Llewelyn became vicar of Llangynwyd, that picturesque village was in the process of becoming a suburb of the rapidly expanding town of Maesteg. There had been low-level industrialisation in the area ever since the monks of Margam Abbey mined coal locally in the Middle Ages, but it was the setting up of the Maesteg Iron Works in 1826 which marked the beginning of the transformation of a valley of scattered farms into a bustling urban centre. James Motley, mentioned above, was a director of the Maesteg Iron Works, while Sir John Bowring, linguist, translator and hymn-writer, also arrived in the town in the eighteen forties, as owner of the Llynvi Iron Works - though Bowring`s numerous published works seem to have had no local relevance.[30] Meanwhile the thriving industries of Maesteg needed an outlet for their products, and initially this was provided for by the development of new docks some sixteen miles away, at what was to become Porthcawl; the two towns were connected by the Llynfi Valley Railway, which was opened in 1828.

As far as one can tell, the population of Maesteg in the middle of the nineteenth century was largely Welsh-speaking; the `Blue Books` inspectors who

visited what was still termed `the parish of Llangynwyd` in 1847 have little or nothing to say as regards language, though they note that the pupils of the National School know `but little English, since they scarcely ever hear any except in school.` It is clear from the reports that Maesteg was very much a frontier town at this point; the available accommodation was overcrowded and fights and drunkenness were common, an attempt to set up a mechanics` institute with library and reading room had failed, and though the local schools were reasonably well equipped, they were not `well conducted`.[31] On the other hand, there was a lively Welsh-language literary culture throughout the nineteenth century - and looking at the names and activities of those who supported it, one can see just how important the chapels were, in providing both authors and venues.[32]

Although the lower Afan Valley had been first industrialised only a few years before the Maesteg area, matters were rather different there, perhaps because of the priorities of their respective industrialists. The English Copper Company ran two schools, at Pontrhydyfen and at Cwmafan village, and it is worth quoting in full the inspector`s comments on the language situation:

> `The master [at the Oakwood Schools, Pontrhydyfen] told us that the Welsh language constituted his great difficulty. It had taken him a full month to make the boys remember the English names for the numerals instead of the Welsh. It made all his teaching twofold in labour. Nevertheless, English was rapidly spreading in the locality; more English people were settled there; many of the Welsh workmen had English books; the children read their English Bibles and their copies to their parents.The master of the Cwmavon school bore testimony to the same effect. He stated that within the last 17 years, during which he had known the neighbourhood, "twenty times as much English was spoken now as there had been." There was no prejudice against learning English, except among some of the least educated.`[33]

(As it happens, Cwmafan is still one of the more Welsh-speaking areas of Port Talbot, though its inhabitants speak of their own `Cwmavon` dialect as if it was not quite proper Welsh. Perhaps it is also worth noting that just over a hundred years later one

of the earliest Welsh-medium primary schools was established at Oakwood and flourished there for over thirty years before moving into larger premises in Port Talbot itself. The language pattern is rarely static.)

At Taibach, where the copperworks dated from the later eighteenth century,

> `The master complained of the difficulty which he had to encounter from the prevailing ignorance of English. These were old works, and the population about them had been less intermixed with strangers than at Cwmavon and elsewhere.`[34]

The 1847 inspectors do not comment on the language situation as regards the Aberafan schools, but a few years earlier, in 1833, a Royal Commission report had said, `The officers of the borough are farmers and labouring men, almost entirely ignorant of the English language; and it was with considerable difficulty that any information could be collected from them.`[35] On the other hand, the inscriptions on all the eighteenth century gravestones in St. Mary`s churchyard, Aberafan, are in English, and the use of Welsh does not really begin until after 1840, dying out again quite abruptly just before 1900.[36] Gravestones are effectively official documents, so that one might see the earlier use of English as reflecting this official context, later changed to Welsh as a response to immigration from outside Wales - with Welsh replaced in turn by the socially more acceptable English. (It seems likely that it was the social downgrading of Welsh that caused the last changeover, since there was no sufficiently large-scale immigration to Aberafan at this point to have caused it.)

Not surprisingly, therefore, the literary culture of Afan, like that of Maesteg, remained a mainly Welsh-language preserve for much of the nineteenth century. Where the Vale of Neath had its gentry families, with their bilingual or English lifestyle, together with a significant number of navvies and industrial workers from outside Wales, to provide an audience, Afan and Tir Iarll had only occasional

industrialists, most of whom were short-term visitors. C.R.M. Talbot, squire of Margam, though resident locally, was a mathematician and scientist, with no apparent interest in literature (though in an area so little explored, it is always possible that there is more to be discovered). On the other hand, Talbot`s son Theodore did provide the occasion for one surviving piece of `folk literature`, in the shape of the Margam Bando Boys` Song.[37] This was written by Thomas Bleddyn Jones of Aberafan, step dancer and brass band conductor, and was first performed at Margam Orangery in 1859 on the occasion of Theodore`s coming of age. (He was the captain of the bando team.) The Song is bilingual, mainly in Welsh, but with `chorus` verses in English; a sample follows:

Due praises I`ll bestow
And all the world shall know
That Margam valour shall keep its colour
While Kenfig`s waters flow.
* * * * * * * * *
Let cricket players blame
And seek to blight our fame;
Their bat and wicket can never lick it,
This ancient manly game.

It would appear that Jones wrote comic and satirical verse in both languages, though very little of his work has survived. However, if he represents the folk tradition, he also represents something else - the bilingual tradition that we have already seen hinted at in the poems of Elizabeth Davies. From the mid nineteenth century onwards this became increasingly common, though usually in the shape of separate volumes in Welsh and in English by the same author, rather than the literally bilingual pattern of the Bando Boys` Song. Perhaps the best-known of these writers was Isaac Craigfryn Hughes, a blind ex-miner from Quakers` Yard, Merthyr. Hughes`s novels were published by D. Davies, Bookseller, of Ferndale in the Rhondda, but their interest for

us is that several of the novels are based on the folklore of Tir Iarll - the legends of the Maid of Cefn Ydfa and the Maid of Sker in particular. The publisher`s preface to *The Maid of Sker*[38] makes it clear that the English versions had been produced by public demand, and though Hughes`s books (he translated his own Welsh originals) are unpolished, to say the least, they helped to make these Neddafan tales part of the literary tradition of Wales as a whole.

Poets too used both languages, though usually in the tradition of the *bardd gwlad*, with poems on special events or public figures. An example of this is Thomas Owen David, who, c. 1902, published *Local and Miscellaneous Poetry*,[39] dedicated to Miss E.C. Talbot of Margam Castle. David had a bardic name - Owain ap Japheth - and his book included three pages of Welsh verse (he also produced pennillion for the Wil Hopcyn festivities in Llangynwyd in 1928). The English language poems include a number on such general subjects as `The Cry for Disestablishment` and `In Defence of Our Church`, but David also commemorates events like the Port Talbot boating disaster of 1893 or the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Davies in April 1896 (this poem includes a final verse in Welsh). His poem to Miss Olive Talbot (founder of St. Michael`s Theological College, where R.S. Thomas later studied) begins:

> Our Benefactress is at rest,
> In sweet communion with the Blest.
> Although she`s gone, her works still show,
> In living monuments below.[40]

Interestingly, it is said that David was a descendant of the seventeenth century Welsh-language poet Edward Dafydd of Margam.

Much of this body of work is, like Isaac Craigfryn Hughes`s novels, unpolished, and would probably be dismissed out of hand by metropolitan literary critics, but even today it has its audience; a recent reprint of the English language

version of Hughes`s *The Maid of Cefn Ydfa* sold well, and readers said they preferred it to Michael Gareth Llewelyn`s more literary version, *White Wheat.* Equally, local poets still produce commemorative verse for weddings, anniversaries and funerals (some contributions more accomplished than others) and the Welsh language office of *bardd gwlad* has conveyed itself quite easily into English.

Meanwhile the English language was steadily gaining in strength, so that Gwyn Williams, born in Port Talbot in 1904, was later to say, `Welshness in Port Talbot during the first quarter of [the twentieth] century was a kind of underground movement without revolutionary spirit.`[41] Earlier contributions to local cultural history had been in Welsh, products of the numerous local eisteddfodau, but by 1930 the transactions of the Aberafan and Margam Historical Society were almost entirely in English, the few Welsh language contributions being mainly antiquarian.

Gwyn Williams himself was one of the first of the writers of Neddafan to appear on the wider literary stage. He did publish Welsh-language poems, as well as numerous translations from the Welsh and a standard work in English on the Welsh poetic tradition, but as an academic he mixed with `metropolitan` writers such as Lawrence Durrell, Terence Tiller and Bernard Spencer, and though he wrote about Wales, he was producing national, not local, history.[42] Elsewhere, Vernon Watkins, born in Maesteg, used the local folk tradition of the Mari Lwyd as the basis of his long poem, `The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd`[43,] and later writers of much more than purely local standing include Robert Minhinnick, John Davies and Ruth Bidgood. Curiously, the Vale of Neath does not seem to have made as much of a contribution in recent years, though audiences for cultural events in Neath tend to be much stronger than elsewhere in Neddafan. However, its most noteworthy current writer more than compensates for any shortfall with his own versatility; Lewis/Richard Davies is

novelist, short-story writer, travel writer, publisher (of Parthian Books) and literary entrepreneur. At the same time the `incoming writers` have their own representative in Chris Torrance, originally from Edinburgh, but settled in Pontneddfechan for many years now; like David Jones he uses unconventional techniques and mythological and historical subjects, but his main influence on local writers has been as a teacher of creative writing.[44]

Mention of John Davies and Ruth Bidgood serves to highlight one other feature of the Nedd/Afan literary tradition, and that is the presence of what might be called `literary families`, groupings by blood or discipleship or both. Tir Iarll offers an early Welsh-language example, where the fifteenth century Rhys Brydydd is brother or father to Gwilym Tew, Rhisiart ap Rhys, Lewis Morgannwg and Tomos ap Ieuan ap Rhys, and spiritual parent to Iorwerth Fynglwyd, Rhisiart Iorwerth and Dafydd Benwyn. In the nineteenth century, again in Tir Iarll, one has Richard and Mary Pendrill Llewelyn `fathering` T.C. Evans (Cadrawd), his sons Christopher John, Llewelyn and Frederic (Michael Gareth Llewelyn) and his daughter Celia.[45] In the west, in the Vale of Neath, one finds the Tregelles Price - Waring - Redwood family grouping, and though the Lords of Afan themselves left no recorded literary heritage, either as writers or patrons, their collateral descendants - Ieuan Gethin of Baglan and the Williamses of Aberpergwm in particular - contributed a great deal in both roles. [46]

However, these family groups have a wider relevance. It has been said by a number of critics, particularly those from the Welsh-language tradition, that talk of an Anglo-Welsh literature is invalid because the writers who might represent such a literature have no cohesion; they are simply individuals who happen to have a Welsh

connection of one sort or another. And certainly, if one looks only at those writers who are featured in anthologies or who are included in Arts Council and other prize lists, the criticism can appear to be true. Ruth Bidgood and John Davies: both poets certainly, but of different generations and sexes, living in different places - Builth Wells and Prestatyn - and writing on very different themes; how, if at all, do they relate ?

In the nineteen thirties Philip Burton, from Mountain Ash, joined the staff of Dyffryn Secondary School in Margam, Port Talbot. His best-known pupil, of course, was his adopted son, the actor Richard Burton, né Jenkins (who had his own largely unfulfilled literary ambitions), but Ruth Bidgood, née Jones (her father was vicar of St. Mary`s, Aberafan) was also one of Philip Burton`s pupils.[47] Burton, novelist and playwright as well as teacher, had a strong interest in theatre, both amateur and professional, and wrote and produced a number of plays locally; among those involved in these productions were Leo Lloyd, Charlie Tapp and Cyril Jenkins, all three of whom themselves later became producers and occasional scriptwriters. The drama groups they founded or worked with, the YMCA Dramatic Society and Taibach [Young] People`s Theatre in due course gave rise to writers like Leo Arthurs, author of several radio plays and of the text of the Margam Passion Play, and Alan Davies, poet, scriptwriter and congener of local poets and poetry readings.

Also active in amateur theatre in the area were/are the Evans family, mother, daughter and son; their husband, father and keenest audience, A. Leslie Evans, was the doyen of local historians, author of some twenty books and pamphlets on local history and two collections of verse. Leslie Evans was also the headmaster of Dyffryn Lower School from 1968-1976 - while J.V. Davies, father of the poet John Davies, was headmaster of the school as a whole from 1965-1971.

Admittedly, this kind of network (which in practice spreads even wider) is very local and what might perhaps be called homespun, but its existence makes connections with the wider literary world possible. Tony Curtis, now Professor of Poetry at the University of Glamorgan, gave his first public reading at the Afan Lido, and Gillian Clarke gave, if not her first, then certainly one of her earliest readings at the Ros-a-Mar Rooms in Aberafan alongside B.S. Johnson and John Tripp; members of the Port Talbot Literary Society were among the staunchest early supporters of the English Language Section of Yr Academi Gymreig.[48] Whether this particular grouping is unusual, or perhaps unusually strong, would be hard to determine without much more research, but it does suggest that even where the Welsh language is, in Gwyn Williams`s phrase, part of an `underground movement`, the cultural impulse that created that language can also create an English-language version of its literature to fulfil the same needs.

NOTES

1. Phillips, D.R. (1925) *The History of the Vale of Neath,* pp 30, 53.
2. Jones, S.R. (1991) *The History of Port Talbot,* pp 16-29.
3. O`Brien, J. (1926) *Old Afan and Margam,* pp 70-73.
4. Gerald of Wales (1978) *The Journey Through Wales/The Description of Wales,* pp 127-8.
5. Jones, J.T. (1929) `An interesting 18th century document`. *MADHS Trans,* pp. 18-26, 51-54, 74-77.
6. *HVN,* pp 645-7.
7. *Ibid.* pp 660-2.
8. *Ibid.* p 661.
9. Evans, A.L. (1958) *Margam Abbey,* pp 90-93.
10. *HVN,* p 266.
11. Rees, D.B. (2000) `The Wreck of the Anne Francis`, *PTHS Trans.* Vol. IV, No. 2 pp 106-7.
12. *HVN,* pp 374-380.
13. Phillips, M. (1932) `Aberavon and District about 1700`, *MADHS Trans.* pp 48-9
14. Evans, A.L. (1970) *The Story of Baglan,* p38.
15. *HVN,* pp 414-5.

16. Information from Lady Antonia Fraser; family trees in *Burke`s Peerage* etc.
17. The poems from the archives of the Owens of Clennenau and Brogyntyn and the Owens of Orielton (a separate family) were seen in 1958, during research at the National Library of Wales and archivist training at the Caernarvonshire Record Office respectively.
18. *HVN,* pp 373-4
19. Jones, S.R. (2004) `The Lesser of the Least`, *WWE* 9, pp 170-179.
20. *HVN,* pp 469-570. The authors included under `Miscellaneous Writers` on pages 567-70 seem mostly to be English language writers, though over half this section is devoted to Thomas Stephens, the 19th century literary historian.
21. Rees, A. (1990) `Notes on the Early Development of Taibach`, *PTHS Trans.* 4,1 pp 41-57.
22. Martin, J. ed (1993) *The Penrice Letters 1768-1795,* p 139. In her Introduction Martin says that it was Mary Lucy Fox-Strangways`s father who gave her the dictionary; the text is ambiguous as to who actually made the gift, but in either case the point is the same; it was felt to be appropriate.
23. Evans, A.L. (1970) *The Story of Baglan,* pp 43, 165.
24. *Ibid.* pp 129-131.
25. Stephens, M. ed (1998) *Companion*, pp 600-601.
26. *HVN*, pp 438-447.
27. *Ibid.* pp 427-430.
28. Jones, S.R. (1984) `R.D. Blackmore and Glamorgan`, *PTHS Trans.* 3,3 pp 99-100.
29. Jones, D.R.L. (1991) *Richard and Mary Pendrill Llewelyn: a Victorian Vicar of Llangynwyd and his Wife.* Passim; Williams, M.J. (1844) *Ancient Airs of Gwent and Morganwg.*
30. Lewis, D.A. (2001) *A Cambrian Adventure,* p. 41.
31. Phillips, M. (1932) `Local Elementary Education in 1847`. *MADHS Trans.* pp 102-3
32. Richards, B. (1982) *A History of the Llynfi Valley* , pp 300-310
33. Phillips, `Local Elementary Education`, p 96
34. Phillips, `Local Elementary Education`, p 95
35. Royal Commission on Municipal Reform (1833) Report of the Commissioners on Aberavon, *MADHS Trans.* 6, p 51
36. Jones, S.R. (1974) `St. Mary`s Churchyard and its Inscriptions`, *PTHS Trans.* 2,3 pp 112-3
37. Jones, S.R. (1999) `The Margam Bando Boys`, *Roundyhouse* 1, pp 19-21
38. Hughes, I.C. (1909) *Maid of Sker,* p. [3]
39. David, T.O. (1902 ?) *Local and Miscellaneous Poetry.*
40. *Ibid,* p.7
41. Stephens, M. ed. (1971) *Artists in Wales,* p 133. This was confirmed by Rev. Morgan Mainwaring, also a child of Grove Place Chapel, just seven years younger than Gwyn Williams. When interviewed on the radio programme *Beti a`i Phobl* in the summer of 2006, he commented that there was very little Welsh in the town when he was young; the Welsh churches were becoming English and the Welsh speakers were the incomers (like Gwyn Williams`s father, from Cardiganshire).
42. Williams, G. (1981) *An ABC of (D)GW*, passim.
43. Watkins, V. (1941) *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd.*
44. *Companion,* p 728.

45. *HLV,* pp 293-295, 302-303, 321-323.
46. *HVN,* pp 469-518.
47. Jones, S.R. and Trowbridge-Matthews, A. (2001) `A Poet in her Place: an interview with Ruth Bidgood`, *Roundyhouse* 7, pp 21-25
48. Personal knowledge; as a member/officer of the Port Talbot Historical Society, the Port Talbot Literary Society and Taibach [Young] People`s Theatre, I was involved in most of these activities.

CHAPTER 2. WELSH-LANGUAGE LITERATURE IN NEDDAFAN

One of the major differences between the literary traditions of Wales and England is the role of the patron. English writers, both past and present, *have* had patrons, but the relationship has been a much looser connection, with no particular relevance to the social fabric. Chaucer might write *The Book of the Duchess* in tribute to John of Gaunt`s late wife, Blanche, but his livelihood did not depend on this, nor was he expected to be an ambassador or a recorder of genealogies on Gaunt`s behalf. For the Welsh writer, on the other hand, (and in earlier centuries this effectively meant the Welsh poet) his patron was both his employer and the occasion of much of his verse.[1]

There was another difference too; the Welsh poet, using the strict metres, was a craftsman and earned respect as such, so that the Welsh laws gave the bard an official status.[2] Craftsmanship carried no social stigma; in the *Mabinogion* Pryderi and Manawydan, a prince and a demoted god, see no shame in earning their living as shoemakers or swordsmiths.[3] Princes could be poets, and poets walk with princes. It would be very difficult to imagine Robert, Earl of Gloucester, illegitimate but acknowledged son of Henry I, as a major English poet, yet his contemporary, Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd (fl. 1140-70), earned himself a substantial entry in the *Companion to the Literature of Wales* and was even an innovator, since his princely rank allowed him to experiment and write of women and love as well as war and heroism.[4]

As far as one can tell (and much early Welsh poetry remains in manuscript, waiting to be revealed) the Welsh-language literary history of Neddafan begins with Ieuan Gethin of Baglan, in the fifteenth century.[5] Ieuan Gethin was a poet himself, but

as a descendant of the lords of Afan, he was also a patron and welcomed other poets to his home at Plas Baglan. Almost a dozen of his own poems have survived - they include elegies for two of his children, a daughter and a son who died of the plague, and two poems to Owain Tudur. Ieuan Gethin`s own elegy was written by Iorwerth Fynglwyd, while his hospitality and nobility was praised in poems by Ieuan ap Rhydderch and Ieuan Ddu ap Dafydd ap Owain.

It is worth stressing that Ieuan Gethin was of princely ancestry. One reason for the apparent lack of poetic activity in Neddafan in earlier centuries was probably the lack of patrons. Neath was a Norman/English borough, Margam Abbey was also a Franco-English preserve until the fifteenth century, and the Lords of Afan, though Welsh, apparently took no interest in literature. In any case the Lords were heavily Anglicised by c. 1300 and had disappeared from the scene by c. 1370, leaving the duty of literary patronage to the junior branches, at Baglan and in the Vale of Neath.

One complication that needs to be borne in mind when studying the literary history not just of Neddafan, but of Glamorgan as a whole, is the over-fertile imagination of Iolo Morganwg (1747-1826), poet, stomemason and literary forger.[6] Iolo`s aim, like those of other writers before and after him, was to promote the achievements of his native Glamorgan; he travelled from great house to great house copying and recording manuscripts and traditions many of which no longer exist outside his own collections. Unfortunately - for scholars, if not for lovers of a good story - where a tradition or a poem had not survived, Iolo created one. There was, no doubt, a kernel of truth in all his creations - writers, like oysters, need their piece of grit to work on - but it is rarely possible now to disentangle truth from invention, and some critics have gone so far as to dismiss anything he even mentioned as simple forgery.

Hence we have the tale of the poet Dafydd ap Gwilym arriving at Plas Baglan for an eisteddfod in the lifetime of Ieuan`s father, Lleision.[7] Another bard, Rhys Meigen, was also present and ridiculed and insulted Dafydd, who duly replied at another eisteddfod in Emlyn the following year; the new poem was so biting in its satire that Rhys Meigen fell dead on the spot. Whether this is one of Iolo`s inventions one does not know, but whatever the precise truth of the tale, it does highlight several points - the value of poetry, seen as something that might even kill, the professionalism of poets (because Rhys Meigen`s comments were part of the critical process) and the importance of patrons not just in funding work, but also in providing a place where poets could meet.

As it happens, Iolo`s misdeeds are particularly relevant in Neddafan. Although he himself came from the Llantwit Major area towards the eastern end of the Vale of Glamorgan, his literary master was John Bradford of Betws in Tir Iarll, and Bradford, though not a remarkable poet himself, was the centre of a literary revival in early eighteenth century Glamorgan; he collected manuscripts and bardic traditions and also took an interest in contemporary English literature. However, from this Iolo developed the idea of the Chair of Tir Iarll, a continuing and colourful literary tradition of which Bradford was the heir and chief tutor, and which featured such almost certainly apocryphal characters as Ieuan ap y Diwlith, so called because he was found as a baby lying on a mound on Margam Mountain on Midsummer morning.[8] Since even genuine traditions were often not written down until after Iolo`s time, one can rarely be quite certain that they *are* genuine and not either elaborated or invented.

There is, however, no doubt that Ieuan Gethin existed, the first of a number of descendants of Iestyn ap Gwrgan and Einion ap Collwyn to act as patrons of the bards

in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and in some cases they were poets themselves).According to legend (not Iolo`s !) it was a disagreement between these two princes that had allowed the Normans to take over Glamorgan, but their descendants intermarried and provided most of the gentry families of the Vale of Neath.[9] Curiously there seem to have been no equivalent gentry families in the rest of Neddafan, perhaps because the Afan valley and Tir Iarll fell within the lands of Margam Abbey; the Mansel family who took over at Margam after the Dissolution of the monasteries in 1536-7 do not seem to have played a significant role in the local bardic network.

On the other hand Tir Iarll did produce a remarkable `family` of poets in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[10] The family began with Rhys Brydydd and his brother (or possibly son) Gwilym Tew; Rhisiart ap Rhys was a poet himself and the father of Lewys Morgannwg; and though Rhisiart`s brother Ifan was not a bard, Ifan`s son, Thomas ap Ieuan ap Rhys, was. (He also features in local folklore as Twm Ifan Prys, the prophet.) Meanwhile, Rhisiart ap Rhys was poetic tutor to Iorwerth Fynglwyd, whose own son, Rhisiart Iorwerth played the same role for Dafydd Benwyn. Not all of the family stayed in Tir Iarll; Lewys Morgannwg, for instance, lived at Cowbridge, but his bardic circuit included the Vale of Neath, where he provided an elegy for Rhys ap Sion ap Rhys of Glynnedd and a poem of praise for Abbot Lewis of Neath Abbey.

Other members of the family directed their poetic skills to Margam Abbey, particularly during the reign of Abbot David (1500-17) who was related to Rhys Brydydd. Rhisiart ap Rhys sang in praise of Abbot David, as did Iorwerth Fynglwyd and his fellow bard William Egwad, while Thomas ap Ieuan ap Rhys directed his praises to Abbot Lewis Thomas, last to preside at Margam before the Dissolution.

Earlier, Lewys Glyn Cothi had written an elegy for Abbot William de Corntoun (1468-87); he also wrote a genealogical poem for Rhys ap Sion ap Rhys of Glynnedd,[11] and this illustrates the role played by the bards in the cultural life of Wales generally. At the professional level there were standards to be met, hence the critical process carried out via eisteddfodau, meetings at which poets competed and/or were examined as to their competence. Recognised poets would frequently be attached to a particular family - the `household bard` - but they would also go on tour, not unlike rock bands today, calling at gentry houses or similar establishments and writing in praise of the hospitality they received. Hence we have a poem by Meurig Dafydd in praise of Aberafan; he himself was associated with the family of the Lewises of the Van, near Caerphilly, but his tour (or circuit) brought him to Aberafan.[12] Lewys Glyn Cothi, mentioned above, came from Carmarthenshire, but he too visited Neddafan and addressed its patrons. Another of these bardic itinerants was Sion Mawddwy, from Merioneth, who celebrated several of the Vale of Neath gentry and debated with Meurig Dafydd.

The subject matter of these poems is also revealing. Elegies might be expected, and appear in all literary traditions, but the bards of Neddafan covered a much wider range of topics - praise for hospitality, of course, but also genealogy; peacemaking and reconciliation between neighbours or family members; poems of comfort when ill or in trouble; requests, on behalf of the patron or the poet, for gifts or loans of property; even a poem on moving house. These were artists with an allotted social role. They did write personal poetry, of which perhaps the most moving example is Lewys Glyn Cothi`s elegy for his five-year-old son, Sion y Glyn, but as bards they wrote for their community and its leaders.

All of these poets wrote in the `strict metres`, a highly technical, codified

system using *cynghanedd* or the repetition of consonants in set patterns within each line of verse. It is a verse form which, though awkward when attempted in English, can produce magnificent results in Welsh and is still widely used today. However, professional standards had begun to slip by the end of the sixteenth century, and though literary activity continued, the work produced was often mediocre, and poetry in the `free metres` began to take the place of the earlier strict forms.[13] (The free metres are not free verse; the term refers to poetry which in English would probably be regarded as formal, with set rhyme, metre and stanza patterns.) Free metre poetry had been written alongside that in the strict metres from the mediaeval period onwards, but now it began to dominate, often in the shape of *cwndidau* or religious verses, often known as carols. Edward Dafydd of Margam (c.1600 - 1678 ?) seems to have been the last of the Neddafan poets to be able to compose a professional *awdl* (a long poem in the strict metres - the form is still used today, but mainly for purposes of eisteddfodic competition).[14]

The last Welsh household bard in the traditional style was Dafydd Nicolas (c. 1705-74) who was attached to the Williamses of Aberpergwm.[15] His life time coincided with a literary revival in upland Glamorgan, when men like John Bradford of Tir Iarll and Rhys Morgan from the Vale of Neath studied and collected material from earlier centuries, produced poetic grammars and acted as mentors to other writers. They were often craftsmen by trade - Bradford and Morgan were both weavers - and also Nonconformists, a background rather different from that of the earlier bards.

Welsh language literature produced a number of verse forms apart from the *awdl* and the *cwndidau*; one of these is the *englyn*, a four-line stanza with a single rhyme, which is perhaps the oldest native Welsh verse form, dating back at least to

the ninth century. Its single stanzas can be used for epitaphs and/or pithy comments, but long poems can also be written as a sequence of *englynion*. In due course the single *englyn* mutated into the *triban*, a four-line verse especially typical of Glamorgan, where it was employed in a number of local customs such as the rhyming contests of the *Mari Lwyd* or the practice of singing to the oxen while one ploughed. The *tribannau* were often very local indeed, referring to places or people or events - for instance, the amount of smoke rising from the Cwmafan copper works.[16]

The development of the *tribannau* could be said to mark a change in the literary emphasis of Neddafan. The earlier poets had been part of a national, professional tradition based round the homes of the princes and the gentry. Now, though the work of John Bradford and his fellows in collecting and copying manuscripts and producing grammars and dictionaries was of national importance[17], the actual literary production of the area was much more that of the *bardd gwlad* tradition, homespun verses with local references or celebrations of people and events which, though they have their own importance, would never be of national significance. Interestingly, though in England this would be a value judgement - verse always ranks lower than poetry, even in the hands of a skilled practitioner like Sir John Betjeman - in Wales it is much more a matter of audiences. A poet in the *bardd gwlad* tradition like Dic Jones can win the Chair, the highest award at the National Eisteddfod, and yet also contribute a weekly poem to the current affairs magazine *Golwg* - not something one could imagine for T.S. Eliot or Philip Larkin - or even for the Poet Laureate, whose poems are expected to have a proper solemnity.

There is always an element of chance in literary survival, even in these more recent centuries when books can appear in editions of thousands rather than as the

limited number of handwritten copies possible before the arrival of the printing press in the latter half of the fifteenth century. The first Welsh-language printed book appeared in 1546, and the first legitimate printing press was set up in Newcastle Emlyn in 1718. Between 1546 and 1660, a period of well over a hundred years, the average rate of production was less than one book a year; from 1660 to 1729 this figure rose to some eight titles a year, but it was not until the nineteenth century that the Welsh printing industry finally took off.[18]

This is reflected in Neddafan, where it seems that some eight Welsh-language writers have survived from the fifteenth century, fifteen from the sixteenth, eight from the seventeenth and ten from the eighteenth. There were, no doubt, many others of varying degrees of ability, but their work, if it has survived at all, is currently lost somewhere in the archives. When one reaches the nineteenth century, however, an initial search reveals some fifty names, and the twentieth century yields another forty-nine (not including, in either century, those who, like Wil Ifan, were basically Welsh-language writers, but also published a significant amount of work in English). Relatively few of these writers are known beyond the immediate area, at least *as* writers; the many clergymen included on the lists would naturally have been widely known in their professional capacity.[19]

This increase does not, of course, mean that Neddafan suddenly began to swarm with poets and novelists. If one looks at Brinley Richards`s exhaustive account of writers of the Llynfi valley, it becomes clear that many of those listed were hymnwriters and/or published their sermons; others contributed to the *cofiant* tradition of biography (a *cofiant* being a particularly Welsh genre, normally an account of the life, work and religious writings of an eminent minister[20]). The

nineteenth century was also an era of very active journalism in Wales; numerous periodicals were published, and many of Brinley Richards`s authors contributed articles to these, on local topics of all sorts, on the history and traditions of Wales, and on current affairs. Another stimulus for local writers was the wide range of eisteddfodau which took place at every level, from the village chapel up to the national event. A typical figure here is George Evans (Awenydd Tyssul), who came originally from Llandysul in Cardiganshire, but spent most of his life as a chemist in Nantyfyllon. Over the years he won some four hundred prizes for his lyrics, as well as sixteen bardic chairs, but his work was never published as a collection.[21]

By the beginning of the twentieth century teachers began to rival ministers in the literary field. Many wrote on educational subjects or for children, and here a leading figure is Norah Isaac, born in Caerau in 1914, and eventually Head of Welsh Drama and Bilingual Education at Trinity College, Carmarthen.[22] And there were still those like William David Thomas of Gilfach Farm, Llangynwyd, for whom `author` is a more valid title than `writer`; Brinley Richards says of him, in 1981

> `[he] is about the last survivor of the traditional embodiment of Welsh rural native culture for which the valley was once famous. His many uncollected poems ... on local events, personalities etc., make homely reading. They become highly entertaining when sung by him ... `

Evidently some of William Thomas`s poems were available to read, in print or in manuscript, but otherwise he continued the ancient tradition of performer poet.[23]

In fact, Neddafan`s Welsh-language literary strength, for at least the last two hundred years has tended to lie in a range of competent middle-ground writers and *beirdd gwlad* rather than in the occasional high-profile figure. Perhaps Wil Ifan (1883-1968) is a typical example.[24] He was a minister for a time in the Afan valley, won the Crown at the National Eisteddfod on three occasions and was Archdruid from

1947-50, but was perhaps never really regarded as a literary high-flier. The same is true of Brinley Richards (1904-1981), winner of the Chair in 1951, and Archdruid from 1972-74;[25] though both men won the highest literary honours, their reputations have a kind of home-spun quality to them, and both wrote extensively about the communities in which they lived. It is perhaps appropriate in the circumstances that the *Writers of Wales* series volume on *The Folk Poets* was written by W. Rhys Nicholas (1914-96), himself a poet and author of some fine popular hymns. Though born in Pembrokeshire, he lived for many years in Porthcawl, where he was a Congregational minister.[26]

One theme which emerges from any study of the Welsh-language literary tradition of Neddafan is the importance of religion in all its forms. In earlier centuries the patronage of the abbots of Margam and Neath drew poets to the two abbeys; later it was Nonconformity which provided both a career structure and subject matter for many potential writers. Perhaps this is why Welsh-language culture is currently somewhat muted in Neddafan, and there are no obvious successors to the writers discussed above. There are still `Welsh` chapels in the area, but their congregations are mostly elderly, and a combination of new regulations on fire, health and safety with a (probably unwarranted) fear of crime, means that the vigorous social and cultural life once common, now hardly exists.[27] As for the younger generation, a lack of career opportunities locally means that the most enterprising spirits have to move away. On the other hand, the Welsh medium school movement is growing steadily, and only time will tell what or who emerges from that. (Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera, the local Welsh medium secondary school, which takes children from Neath and Port Talbot, is nurturing some fine new literary talent, as the annual St. David`s Day eisteddfod regularly demonstrates; interestingly enough, the ability seems often to be

bilingual, with the same competitor being successful in both languages.)[28]

NOTES

1. The main sources for this chapter are D. Rhys Phillips, *History of the Vale of Neath;* Brinley Richards, *History of the Llynfi Valley;* Ceri Lewis, `Literary History of Glamorgan 1550-1770 (*Glamorgan County History,* Vol. IV); and the *New Companion to the Literature of Wales.*
2. *Companion*, pp 37-8
3. Jones, G. and Jones, T. trans. (1949) *The Mabinogion,* p.43.
4. *Companion* p. 341
5. *HVN*, pp 471-79; *Companion,* p. 345
6. *Companion,* p. 788-9. This is a useful introduction to Iolo Morganwg, about whom there is a substantial literature in both languages.
7. *HVN,* pp 471-79
8. *History of Llangynwyd,* pp 68-79 (the Chair) and p. 176 (Ieuan Fawr ap y Diwlith). Although he names John Bradford from time to time as a poet, T.C. Evans does not describe his antiquarian work.
9. *HVN* pp. 359-410
10. *HLV,* pp. 293-296
11. *HVN,* pp. 476-7; *Companion,* p. 436.
12. *Companion,* p. 150; *HVN, pp. 514-8;* Jones, S. (1971) `In Praise of Aberafan`, *Transactions of the Port Talbot Historical Society,* Vo. II, 2.
13. Lewis, C. (1974) `Literary History of Glamorgan from 1550-1770`, *Glamorgan County History,* Vol. IV. pp. 562-575.
14. Lewis, pp. 554-558; (Edward Dafydd)
15. Lewis, pp. 616-617 (Dafydd Nicolas)
16. Lewis, pp. 608-629; the section specifically on John Bradford is pp. 614-616.
17. *HLV*, p. 299; Lewis, pp 572-73; *Companion*, p. 735 (on the triban).
18. *Companion,* pp. 604-606; article on printing in Wales.
19. *HVN*, passim; Phillips did not necessarily organise his literary reference either thematically or chronologically; *HLV*, pp. 304-310; 313-318; 326-331.
20. *Companion,* p. 50, gives a useful description of the *cofiant*; *History of the Llynfi Valley,*pp. 306-310; 313-318.
21. *HLV*, p. 313.
22. *HLV,* pp. 326-7; *Companion,* p. 353.
23. *HLV,* p. 307.
24. *Companion,* p. 239.
25. *Companion,* p. 640; a fuller account, unfortunately not included in the text, is given as the cover-blurb to the *History of the Llynfi Valley,* and Professor Stephen J. Williams`s Foreword to that book adds a little more detail.
26. *Companion,* p. 531.
27. Personal knowledge. For example, the Cymdeithas Cymraeg in Port Talbot, which flourished for many years, had to disband c. 2005 because of declining support.
28. Personal knowledge. I was adjudicator of the English language literary competitions at the Ysgol GyfunYstalyfera school *eisteddfodau* for much of the period between 1975 and 2004, and was able to see how many of the winners won or did well in both languages. One of the earliest examples was Meirion Pennar,

son of the poet Pennar Davies, who himself began as an English language poet. Meirion Pennar won the senior medal for a group of English poems.

PART II

CHAPTER 1. HISTORY AND FICTION

Neddafan has been fortunate in its historians. Some, like D. Rhys Phillips, author of *The History of the Vale of Neath*, or Henry Hey Knight (1795-1857), vicar of Neath and recorder of the antiquities of his home village of Newton Nottage, are historians and nothing more, piling up facts into books which, though invaluable sources of information, could not be described as `readable`.[1] Others, however, have combined an interest in history with a literary career. Brinley Richards (1904-81) [2], author *of The History of the Llynfi Valley*, was also a poet; Lewis Davies, (1863-1951) Cymmer[3], author *of An Outline of the History of the Afan District* and of articles on various local subjects, was also a Welsh-language novelist, author of *Daff Owen (1924), Lewsyn yr Heliwr* (1922) and other historical stories, aimed chiefly at teenage boys. (Davies was a teacher.) Alun Morgan produced a history of Porthcawl and a collection of local legends, but then went on to produce a series of historical novels set in the Porthcawl area beginning with *The Breakwater.*[4]

These writers, though published locally, were all aiming at the wider literary world, but there were others whose intended audience was more local, for instance A. Leslie Evans (1911-96), whose almost too solidly factual histories were balanced by two booklets of imaginative verses on local themes and a collection of fairy stories which were published in the local paper.[5] Some did not even reach print; Thomas Gray (1847-1924), author of *The Buried City of Kenfig* (1909), is reputed to have written a historical novel set around Margam Abbey, while Margaret Shanahan, a stalwart of the Port Talbot Historical Society, wrote a novel for children based on Sker House. (Sadly, though it was competently written, by the time the Sker House story was shown to a potential publisher, it was too old-fashioned in style to be

marketable.) A. Leslie Evans, too, left behind two novels in manuscript when he died. [6]

One local historical novelist did reach the heights. This was Ronald Felton, better known as Ronald Welch, who won the Carnegie Medal for the best children`s book of the year in 1954 for his novel *Knight Crusader* (1953).[7] This was the first of a series about the fictitious Carey family of Llanstephan (who were at least partly based on the Mansels and Talbots of Margam - Felton`s grandfather had been agent for the Margam estate). *Sun of York* (1970), a non-Carey novel, was set in fifteenth century Kenfig, and other books also had local references. Curiously enough, though Felton taught history and was meticulous in researching such details as train times, he took surprising liberties with major facts like the dates of battles and the deaths of kings (which could make the difference for his heroes between being legal combatants or traitors liable to execution). His particular interest was military history, and one would not go to his books for exploration of character or moral dilemmas. *Knight Crusader* is impressive because of its brilliant evocation of the physical experience of being a fully armoured knight in the middle of the Syrian desert, but in *Tank Commander* (1972), set in the 1914-18 war, Felton`s hero (and perhaps Felton himself) does not even realise that there *is* a moral dimension to the execution of a supposed deserter.

The interplay of history (in its widest sense) and literature is especially strong in Neddafan. R.D. Blackmore, author of *Lorna Doone*, is normally associated with the West Country, but he was in fact yet another of the literary descendants of the Lords of Afan[8] and his career and his novel *The Maid of Sker,* his main contribution to the literature of Wales, will be dealt with at more length later in this chapter.

At this level of use, history is really much more a part of folk culture than it is an academic discipline. Recording and perpetuating those events which finally

become history was one of the duties of the mediaeval bards; they celebrated or mourned great battles, princes, heroes, legends, while at the same time local poets and storytellers wove truth and fantasy together. The wasteland of the *Mabinogion*, where Pryderi and his friends wandered, was a legendary country - and yet the historical St. Patrick, returning from Ireland, also travelled for many days through a country laid waste, where he and his companions could find no food. Where, if anywhere, the historical truth lies is no longer something that can be discovered, but what does exist is the stuff from which literature is made.

One especially rich example of this interface between history, myth and literature comes from Tir Iarll. Cadrawd (Thomas Christopher Evans, 1846-1918) was a native of Llangynwyd; his father was the parish clerk, and as a young man he was encouraged to take an interest in folklore and local history by the vicar, Rev. R. Pendrill Llewellyn and his wife Mary. Cadrawd`s main occupation was that of blacksmith, though he also worked as a quarryman, and he twice visited the USA, where he worked at Pittsburgh (as a steel town in Pennsylvania, this had strong Welsh links). Meanwhile he became an indefatigible collector of all forms of folk culture, and won numerous prizes at the National Eisteddfod for collections of this material: weather lore, nursery rhymes, tribannau, place names, dialects, legends and tales of the supernatural etc. He also contributed articles to the many newspapers and periodicals of the time, both Welsh and English, and after his death his archives were deposited partly in Aberystwyth, at the National Library, and partly at Cardiff Central Library. His collections of furniture and farming implements mostly went to the Museum of Welsh Life at St. Fagans.[9]

This was a remarkable achievement in itself, but Cadrawd`s influence went beyond the simple listing of names and rhymes. He edited (1913) a selection of the

work of Iolo Morganwg for the *Cyfres y Fil* series of work by Welsh poets[10] and was co-editor with the Rev. Lemuel J. Hopcyn James of *Hên Cwndidau a Chywyddau Eraill* (1910), a collection of carols and other religious verse.[11] His finest literary work, however, was his *History of Llangynwyd Parish* (1887) which covers everything about his native parish, from the plants growing in the moat of the ruined Llangynwyd Castle to the price of half a pound of yellow soap in 1796 (5d).[12] Despite its plethora of detail, the history is very readable, and though Cadrawd was in many ways a disciple of Iolo Morganwg, he maintained a judicious distance from Iolo`s wilder imaginings. For instance, he comments on *y Twmpath Diwlith*, according to Iolo `the dewless mound` and the site of bardic gatherings:

> `But what is most interesting concerning this mound is the general tradition that no dew was ever seen upon it, hence the name by which it is still known. Of course, were this the case, it would have been truly one of the seven wonders of the world; but the hillock was never dewless, and it would have been the last place for the Welsh bards to respect, much less hold their *Gorsedd* upon.`[13]

He goes on to derive the name from *Duw-lith*, one of the stones at which unwilling choir boys would be subjected to an annual beating and a sermon from the vicar to help them remember the parish boundaries. (Hence `beating the bounds`.) His comparatively judicious approach to Iolo is all the more praiseworthy because Iolo was a friend of Cadrawd`s own mentors, the Llewelyns of Llangynwyd Vicarage.

Yet despite his attention to detail, Cadrawd was at heart a romantic historian, not a statistician, and he devotes a substantial chapter to the story of the Maid of Cefn Ydfa.[14] This is a classic tale of star-crossed lovers; Ann Thomas, the Maid, heiress to a fine fortune, falls in love with Wil Hopkin, tiler, plasterer and bard, but her ambitious mother arranges a match with a local lawyer of good family. Ann tries to resist, but is finally forced to marry Anthony Maddocks, the lawyer. Wil, in despair,

goes to Bristol, but returns home two years later, after dreaming that Maddocks has died, only to find that it is Ann who is dying. She has pined away for love of Wil, and dies in his arms. It is a thoroughly beguiling romance and has inspired a number of poets and novelists over the years. In fact, Ann was not a great heiress and the true story may well have been that of a flighty girl choosing a well-connected husband over a romantic but penniless hunk.

Yet whatever the truth of the story, it lives on partly for its romance, partly because of the song which Wil is said to have composed for his beloved Ann - *Bugeilio`r Gwenith Gwyn* or `Watching the Wheat`. Very little of Wil Hopkin`s work survives - Cadrawd rescued a few verses, but Ann`s beloved seems to have been a *bardd gwlad* rather than a full-blown poet in the grand style. Perhaps for that one moment of loss his muse was raised to the heights, or perhaps others later improved on a primitive original to produce the poem and the story we have now. Nothing seems to have been written down until the mid-nineteenth century, a hundred years or so after Ann and Wil had died, and though oral tradition in Wales is strong and often surprisingly reliable, it is not something that can easily be called in evidence.

Professor G.J. Williams, the authority who exposed Iolo Morganwg`s forgeries, was drawn to the Cefn Ydfa legend, perhaps because of its links with Iolo`s son, Taliesin, and he accused Mrs. Pendrill Llewelyn, the vicar`s wife, of creating the story.[15] However, his account of the supposed fabrication was not his best work, and Brinley Richards, who had the benefit of a legal training and access to local archives, both oral and written, firmly refuted the accusation. The matter is still to some degree out to judgement, but whatever the final verdict on its authenticity, it is worth examining the way in which the story became part not only of our folk heritage, but also of the literature of Wales.

On the 9th of August, 1845, the *Cambrian* newspaper published a notice of the death of Edward Mathew, whose grandfather Thomas had featured in `that song so well known in this locality, "Cân Tarw Maescadlawr" composed by that excellent lyric poet, William Hopkin.`[16] The notice sparked off a series of letters from Richard and Mary Pendrill Llewelyn, giving the Welsh words of the song and an English translation, plus further details of the characters mentioned in the song, and of the life of its supposed author. The information given is solidly antiquarian - entries from parish registers etc - but the fourth letter, which gives the Welsh and English words of *Bugeilio`r Gwenith Gwyn*, the song associated with the Cefn Ydfa story, also includes the following:

> [Wil Hopkin] unfortunately fell in love with a lady, far his superior in rank, a daughter of the Thomases of Ceven Ydva. She returned his love, and being compelled to marry another - she lost her reason.[17]

This sounds far more like a brief précis of a well-known story than the work of a sentimental woman inventing a romance out of nothing (which is what Professor Williams declares it to be). It gives the bones of the legend, but no details - no scheming lawyers or cruel guardians, no letters written in blood or imprisonment in the cellar.

Some twenty years later, in 1864, the poet Ceiriog published *Y Bardd a`r Cerddor: gyda Hen Ystraeon am danynt* (*The Bard and the Musician: with old stories about them*) in which he included the story of Cefn Ydfa. Ceiriog himself came from Denbighshire in North Wales; whether the *Cambrian* (which was published in Swansea) circulated widely enough for him to have seen the Llewelyns` letter is not clear, but the summary of his version, as given by Professor Williams, suggests that he had quite another source for his work - which would in turn suggest that the story was already known well beyond the Llangynwyd area. In any case,

Ceiriog seemingly added numerous details either of his own devising or from that other source; for instance, he describes the Maid`s use of a hollow tree for a post box.

Ceiriog was perhaps the most popular Welsh-language poet of his day, and his version of the story brought it to the notice of a still wider public. In 1866 `The Maid of Cefn Ydfa` was set as the subject for a love poem in the Neath Eisteddfod, and the prize was won by Mynyddog, who took the details from his friend Ceiriog`s version. Local pride seems to have been stirred by this northern invasion, and in 1869 Thomas Morgan (better known as Llyfnwy, a native of Tir Iarll) published what was to become almost a canonical version; his booklet, *The Cupid*, also included the story of the Maid of Sker.

By now the Welsh press was in full swing. Literacy in the Welsh language had come with the Sunday Schools, but now the public was looking for something more entertaining than theology in its reading matter, and there were numerous small printer-publishers throughout South Wales, producing popular material for leisure reading. Neath had the Whittington family who printed Elizabeth Davies`s ballads, the Afan valley had Llewellyn Griffith and his family, and Ferndale in the Rhondda had D. Davies, Bookseller (printing and bookselling naturally went together). Davies published a number of novels, including *Twm Shon Catti* and *Isaac Lewis* (author not known), but his `star` author seems to have been Isaac Craigfryn Hughes from Quaker`s Yard.[18] Hughes produced a number of Welsh-language novels, but the two best known were *Y Ferch o Gefn Ydfa* and *Y Ferch o`r Scer*, both of them versions of folk tales from Tir Iarll. (At this point the Rhondda valley was connected to Maesteg and the Afan valley by the Rhondda and Swansea Bay Railway, so that they were almost one community.)

Twm Shon Catti was originally written in English, by T.J. Llewellyn Pritchard, but its popularity was such that it was coninually reprinted and enlarged. It was no wonder, therefore, that it was translated into Welsh for the benefit of the new mining communities of the Valleys. However, this was a two-way process, and soon Welsh-language novels were being translaed into English; *Y Ferch o Gefn Ydfa* (1873) became *The Maid of Cefn Ydfa* in 1881, while *Y Ferch o`r Scer* became *The Maid of Sker* in 1902. In his Note to the 1909 edition of *The Maid of Sker*, the publisher comments that he had frequently been asked to produce an English version, but he does not say whether the demand came from a native audience which had lost its Welsh, or from English-speaking incomers, though at that point in the Rhondda the latter would seem more likely.[19]

It has to be admitted that Isaac Craigfryn Hughes`s style lurches between romantic overkill and homespun dialogue:

> `In a room in Cefn Ydfa lay Ann Maddocks in the throes of death. In the intervals between the fits her fearful cries and curses upon her mother for compelling her to marry a man whom she disliked were enough to pierce the human heart.
>
> "My mother, my mother - if worthy of the name - you have sacrificed the happiness of your only child on the altar of your cursed ambition ! You are nothing better than a murderess ! Get out of my sight - far enough ! Where is Will, my dear Will ? Why does he not come ?"[20]

Hughes adorns the basic story with a series of melodramatic subplots in which various rivals for Ann`s hand try to murder Wil, or have him carried off by the press gang, while the successful suitor, Anthony Maddocks, joins with his father to murder an old hermit who threatens their schemes. The book could best be described as episodic, though the central romance does provide just sufficient scaffolding to hold it together as a novel.

From this point on the Cefn Ydfa story became the subject of a variety of

poems and several plays, at least two operas and a musical play, and one of the earliest silent films, produced by the Haggar family, who had local connections.[21] Most of these fall outside the literary history of Neddafan, but it is worth noting the extent to which a very local folk story has spread into the national consciousness - though this may be due as much to the haunting quality of the melody of `Bugeilio`r Gwenith Gwyn` as to anything else. And whoever composed the words of the song, they reached to that same mythic level that Robert Burns achieved in `My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose`.

Later, Cadrawd`s son Frederic was to provide yet another version of the story, but before discussing his output, it is perhaps appropriate to look at that other local legend novelised by Isaac Craigfryn Hughes, the story of the Maid of Sker.[22] The tale is very similar. Elizabeth Williams, daughter of the tenant of Sker House, near Porthcawl, c.1768 fell in love with Thomas Evans, a harpist, who composed the song `The Maid of Sker` in her honour; the lovesick maiden pursued the harpist from fair to fair round the countryside even after her family had forced her to marry Thomas Kirkhouse of Llansamlet, an engineer. She finally died ten years later, of a broken heart.

The story was recorded earlier than that of Cefn Ydfa, the first mention being in a letter of 1806 written by William Davies of Cringell, who had seen the harpist playing at local festivities. Maria Jane Williams also mentions it, including the melody in her 1844 collection[23], but the Maid of Sker inspired very little in the way of literature compared to her rival at Cefn Ydfa. R.D. Blackmore`s novel takes its title from the song, but does not mention the legend; however, though Thomas Evans does seem to have composed the music of the song, the words are said to have been the work of David Llewellyn, a bard from Newton Nottage, and Blackmore`s hero is

Davy Llewellyn, bard and sailor.

The title page of Hughes`s *Maid of Sker* carries a note: `The present work has nothing to do with the celebrated Romance by Mr. R.D. Blackmore, published by Messrs. Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., Dunston House, London, E.C., and by their kind permission this work is published.` The novel itself, translated by the author, shows its Welsh-language origins mainly in its dialogue:

> "Now, Twmi, you must come with me over the Fforddlas."
> "What is that good for ?"
> "I want to pass the Sker, so as, if possible, to have one look at Betty previous to taking an eternal adieu of her."
> "It will be better for your sake not to attempt such a thing ... "[24]

It is perhaps appropriate to comment here on the relationship between Blackmore`s novel and the Sker legend, not least because so many of those writing on the subject have taken it for granted that the novel retells the legend. It seems very unlikely that Blackmore was unaware of the story; his own family had once owned Sker House and his uncle had published an account of Newton Nottage in *Archaeologia Cambrensis.* Indeed, he half hints at the legend when he says, `Of course [Sker House] is said to be haunted; and although I believe not altogether in any stories of that kind ... I would rather not hear any yarns on that matter just before bedtime.`[25]

There are two probable reasons for his neglect of the romantic possibilities of the tale. Firstly, he almost certainly knew that the legend was untrue. Elizabeth Williams, the eponymous `Maid`, was indeed engaged to a poor man and then, six months later, married Mr. Kirkhouse, but her fiancé was not Thomas Evans the harpist, but one Jack Richards, clerk to the agent of the Margam estate, who earned `but twenty pounds a year`.[26] No doubt the combination of the popular song with the romantic history of `Betsy Williams`, set against the background of the earlier tale of

the Maid of Cefn Ydfa, produced the legend of Sker House. Secondly, Blackmore`s novel is not a romance, in the style of *Lorna Doone*; its anti-hero Davy Llewellyn is a garrulous old sailor, and although there are numerous dramatic moments, the heart of the story is Davy`s observation of life and in particular of his native village and his neighbours.

The story of the Maid of Sker has been retold in numerous collections of folk tales and legends, but there has only been one other literary version, Alun Morgan`s novel, *Elizabeth: Fair Maid of Sker*,[27] a straightforward romance. This retelling stays close to the traditional tale and ends with Thomas Evans in tears after Elizabeth`s death, unable ever to play that tune again. The book was published locally by a Cowbridge printer/publisher and so fits into the same model as that of his predecessor, Isaac Craigfryn Hughes - though both D. Brown and Son, the printers, and Morgan himself were working on a more sophisticated level.

One other piece of semi-local history also passed into literature, and that was the story of Richard Lewis, better known as Dic Penderyn, hanged for his part in the Merthyr Rising of 1831. Dic`s first appearance in literature was in a Welsh-language ballad on the Rising,[28] where he plays second fiddle to the Rising itself. His next appearance was also low-key, in Lewis Davies Cymmer`s teenage novel *Lewsyn yr Heliwr*,[29] but much later on his story was part of the inspiration for Gwyn Thomas`s *All Things Betray Thee*[30], a version of Valleys` history curiously devoid of any obviously Welsh elements. John Stuart Williams produced a radio ode on the subject, and this was published in his verse collection *Dic Penderyn.*[31] Later still came Alexander Cordell`s *The Fire People*,[32] a novel for the popular audience, but not, sadly, his best work. (He had begun to take himself a little too seriously as the only historian of the people.) And finally, for the moment, there was Rhydwen Williams`s

The Angry Vineyard[33], which restored the Welsh-language dimension to the story.

It would be difficult to find a parallel for this kind of interaction between local history, folklore and literature in England. There *are* English regional novelists, but they tend to be either middle-class writers aiming for a middle-class audience - like, for example, Winston Graham, with his Cornish `Poldark` series - or `popular` novelists like Catherine Cookson, using mainly local geographical settings, but not much more. Cookson`s own earlier novels used her personal experience of Tyneside between the First and Second World Wars. but her later work often fits best into the "trouble at t` mill" stereotype. More recently again there has been a developing genre of novels, mainly by women, describing the life of working class families in the first half of the twentieth century, but the emphasis is on family relationships, often during the two World Wars, and set in communities like London`s East End or Liverpool`s dockland. Catrin Collier is Wales`s best-known example of this genre, with a series of novels set in Pontypridd or, more recently, Swansea.[34]

The difference lies partly in the expected audience, which in the Welsh tradition, in either language, is always inclusive, but also in the writer`s role as the disseminator of tradition. Though today they use prose rather than verse, it was the bard`s duty to record and broadcast the history of the community. It is worth noting that whereas in the early twentieth century London publishers seem to have been quite happy to publish authors like Michael Gareth Llewelyn whose work followed this Welsh pattern, nowadays writers like Catrin Collier, published in London, but by firms that are part of international marketing consortia, use localised backgrounds, but write primarily for an international audience.

CASE STUDIES

1. Michael Gareth Llewelyn (1888-1958)

In addition to *Elizabeth, Fair Maid of Sker,* Alun Morgan wrote several other novels based on the history of the Porthcawl-Pyle-Cefn Cribbwr area, but they are straightforward romances, entertaining light fiction. A more intriguing author is Frederic Evans, mentioned above, whose four novels and one volume of autobiography all appeared under the pseudonym Michael Gareth Llewelyn - this was probably a tribute to his father`s old mentors, the Pendrill Llewelyns. However, Evans`s first published work did appear under his own name; this was *Tir Iarll*[35], a history of the Maesteg area, which was published in 1912. He describes its conception in some detail in his autobiography *Sand in the Glass* (1943),[36] explaining how the book was intended `to be a popular treatment of the subject suitable both for older schoolchildren and for general reading`, profusely illustrated with his own photographs and maps. At the same time he also began to write articles for the press `on education, on school construction and equipment, on geographical and historical subjects and on military matters. Then I had some success with short stories.`[37]

Whether *Tir Iarll* would have been followed by other volumes of local history we cannot know - though he and his father, Cadrawd, had planned at least one sequel of research and source materials. However 1914 saw the outbreak of World War I, and Frederic Evans volunteered for the Welsh Army Corps; he had diplomas in Hygiene and Sanitation (and some practical experience, having installed a water-closet and bath in the family home in Llangynwyd), and was due to join the Hygiene Service of the Corps. After the war he studied at Cambridge, graduating with First Class Honours in the Geography Tripos, and then became a Schools Inspector in Glamorgan, 1923-28, moving then to be Director of Education at Erith in Kent. He

also served in World War Two, attaining the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

It was during the Second World War that what might be called his second literary career began, with the publication of *Sand in the Glass,* an account of his early life up to 1914. In one sense, it would be misleading to call the book an autobiography; perhaps it would be more accurate to call it a personal account of Tir Iarll between 1888 and 1914, though it also goes further back into the past history of the area. Curiously, although Llewelyn makes no attempt to disguise the names of such local heroes as the artist Christopher Williams, or the political philosopher and mathematician Dr. Richard Price, many place and personal names are altered, so that, for example, Llangynwyd becomes Llanarbryn and Maesteg Trellwyn; this was evidently not to prevent any local embarrassments, because to anyone at all local it is perfectly clear who, what and where he is describing. In any case, there appears to be nothing at all exceptionable in the book. One might perhaps speculate, bearing in mind the date of publication, that this transparent disguise has something to do with wartime regulations about the concealment of topographical information, but this seems unlikely. However, there is another context in which both the timing of Llewelyn`s literary career and the style and content of his books make perfect sense.

As has been shown above, Michael Gareth Llewelyn was the son of Cadrawd, local historian and collector of folk traditions and rural artefacts. Cadrawd died in 1918, but the material he had gathered together was not lost, as it might have been - he had drawn his family into his own interests and they realised that the collection was too important to be dispersed. Then, in 1932, Iorwerth Peate was appointed Head of the Sub-Department of Welsh Folk Culture and Industry at the National Museum. Peate had been greatly influenced by the open-air folk museums of Scandinavia, and

he began a campaign which led to the establishment of the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans in 1948. It is this institution, now renamed the Museum of Welsh Life, which currently houses Cadrawd`s life work.[38]

Although by the nineteen forties Llewelyn had been living away from Wales for more than a dozen years, he, as a fluent Welsh speaker, with an interest in folk culture that matched his father`s, would undoubtedly have known and sympathised with Peate`s dream - if only because the Cadrawd collection had gone to the museum. Hence one is justified in seeing *Sand in the Glass* and the four novels that followed it as a literary equivalent of St. Fagans, recording the life and traditions of Glamorgan. This explains why, though the book is autobiography, its author is curiously absent from it, at least as far as his personal life and feelings are concerned; and it also goes far to explain the lack of a conventional structure in the novels. In this connection, too, one can see how the fictionalising of place names could give the account a wider relevance, by not pinning it too precisely to Llangynwyd itself.

As it happens, *Sand in the Glass* is often described as a novel, and one can see how a casual reader might get that impression; the book is full of tales and anecdotes, based on fact, no doubt, but told with all the colour and vivid characterisation of a short story. Indeed, if one forgets Caradoc Evans`s idiosyncratic style, a tale like that of Shan Morgan and her two suitors could have come straight from *My People*:

> `Shan Morgan was the strapping serving wench at the farm of Maes yr Ogof, owned by Nwncwl Bevan who, in his cups, also boasted that he had a tidy little fortune of four figures in the bank. Shan had come to the farm two years before and from the first Nwncwl Bevan`s nephew, Shoryn Griffydd, had set his cap at her, and she, nothing loath, had responded, for old Bevan was over eighty and Shoryn was his heir.`[39]

A year or so, two corpse candles and a brace of funerals later, Shan owns the farm.

Although the book does follow Llewelyn`s life, beginning with the arrival of

his schoolmistress mother in Llanarbryn/Llangynwyd, where she sees the village blacksmith shoeing a horse while singing `Bugeilio`r Gwenith Gwyn`, and ending with Llewelyn`s enlistment in the Welsh Army Corps, it is not a narrative in the usual sense, but rather a series of impressions, anecdotes, descriptions and folk tales loosely based around the author and his family. Unsurprisingly, Llewelyn took a considerable interest in the educational system of his youth, first as pupil and then as teacher, and his considerable experience of writing articles for the press shows itself particularly in the numerous passages on educational subjects - relevant, but somewhat `prosy` to today`s reader. The literary essay has almost vanished now as a genre, but in the nineteen thirties and forties it was still strong and its influence often crept into the work of those writing about traditional rural life. Those who laboured in heavy industry were not the only workers to suffer in the Depression, and the kind of uncontrolled development attacked by Betjeman was a common theme for discussion in prose-writing of the period. Llewelyn`s bugbear was education rather than ribbon development, but the effect was the same, producing what is, for us, a curious mixture of the romantic:

> `They spent many a happy day together on the hillsides, above which the plover flew lazily and uttered his plaintive cry and where the blue-black whinberries grew in profusion, where the yellow gorse bloomed amidst the wiry mountain grass and where the purple heather and the brown bracken added their colour to the scene. Often would Taff besport himself in the cool brown waters of the peaty mountain streams whilst his master sat in the sun on a hummock and ate his frugal meal of wheaten bread and of cheese made from sheep`s milk`[40]

and the utilitarian:

> `Shall we spoil the child if we spare the rod ? ... In this moot question the psychologist can teach us much. If we are content with the outward semblance of a regimented discipline, then "tanning" may produce results - that is, for a time. If, however, we seek to train our children in self-respecting, self-reliant, and self-disciplined, free personalities, then the less we use physical punishment the better.`[41]

Despite what is, to the critical eye, its homespun and very local context, *Sand in the Glass* was published by a major London publisher, John Murray, and reprinted at least twice in its year of publication - this at a time when book production was still curtailed by wartime restrictions. John Murray also published Llewelyn`s four novels, and these too went into reprints and, in at least one case, into a cheap edition.

Angharad`s Isle[42], his first novel, followed immediately, in 1944. This time the story is historical, going back almost a century and a half. Dafydd Niclas, its hero, is the grandson of that other Dafydd Niclas who was household bard at Aberpergwm, and the story he narrates begins in 1814, the year before Waterloo. Though he has not inherited his father`s post at Aberpergwm, Niclas Dafydd, the narrator`s father, still lives there and takes his young son with him on seasonal bardic tours of the gentry houses in Glamorgan. Ynys Angharad, the `Angharad`s Isle` of the title, is the home of Dafydd`s kinfolk in Llangynwyd, a symbol of the richness of pre-industrial Wales:

> `How can I say what is in my heart about that kindly house ? It embraced me, as I entered, with a kindness that was not of sticks and stones. The warm hearts of countless generations were still beating in the air of that old house.`[43]

Even the food here (and there is a great deal of it in Chapter II) is `the ambrosia of the gods.`

The novel is neither plot nor character driven - perhaps one might describe Dafydd`s story as picaresque pastoral. He travels about with his father, volunteers for the army and is at Waterloo, then later goes to jail for perjury when he tries to save an old army comrade from being hanged as a highwayman, but his adventures are in a way peripheral to the subtext of the novel, which is the slow corruption of the milk and honey world of Ynys Angharad by the greed and callousness of the industrialists who invade it. The stain of corruption appears early on:

> `Below Resolven we turned our steps to the mountain. Steep was the road, but now and then we would rest and look back at the valley all covered with woods, with the river showing here and there like a silver ribbon. But over by the old Abbey of Neath the smoke arose from the blast furnaces of the ironworks. My father ... said, "They may make good iron ore there - but they poison the air."[44]

The three women in Dafydd`s life: Mair, the sweetheart of his innocent youth; Megan, the free spirit who compromises with vice and dies of consumption, yet remains uncorrupted; and Gwenllian, his true love, the heiress of Ynys Angharad, who is destroyed by her scheming English industrialist husband, Rutland, are all in their own way images of the theft of their country and its culture.

It has been suggested above that Llewelyn, consciously or not, was producing a literary version of St. Fagans, and this applies as much to *Angharad`s Isle* as to *Sand in the Glass*. Dafydd meets a variety of historical characters, most notably Iolo Morganwg, who speaks at length on the bardic chair of Tir Iarll, while Phil, the lovespoon carving collier of the earlier chapters, later mutates into the Dic Penderyn of the Merthyr Rising, in which Dafydd takes part.

As far as structure is concerned, *Angharad`s Isle,* like *Sand in the Glass* earlier and *The Aleppo Merchant* later, resembles a page from a Celtic manuscript rather than a conventional structured piece of English literature. It does have a pattern and a purpose, but even where dramatic events occur, there is no building of tension, things just happen in the flow of the story. Indeed, one might say that these are the products of a storyteller (using that term in the folk sense), rather than the work of a novelist. This approach does occur elsewhere in Anglo-Welsh writing; Jack Jones, among others, had a tendency to follow the pattern and even the other Llewellyn, (with four Ls), author of *How Green Was My Valley*, echoes it from time to time. It may even be one reason why the child`s eye view so often appears in Anglo-Welsh

novels and short stories: although the child is part of the culture, he (it is mostly `he`) can also act as a channel through which those to whom his world is literally foreign, can come to see it from the inside. The end result must often seem amateur and formless to the reader schooled in the mainstream English tradition of the novel, but the Anglo-Welsh author may simply not be aiming at the same goal.

The Aleppo Merchant[45], which was published in 1945 and reprinted in the following year, is described by its author as a sequel to *Sand in the Glass* - or rather, set in the same community, because it is clearly fiction rather than straight autobiography. It deals with the nineteen twenties, thirties and forties, and is once again a first-person narration, this time by Shaci Howells, whose family live in the public house that gives the book its title. Shaci is lame, and so sees more of the adult world than the average boy. According to the author`s preface, the book was written in response to numerous enquiries as to what had happened to the characters of the earlier book.

White Wheat[46], published in 1947, is rather closer to the standard English model. It is told in the third person, and the romantic tale of the Maid of Cefn Ydfa is framed in a modern story which tells how an American, in Wales because of World War II, meets a Welsh girl, Ceridwen (herself a descendent of the Cefn Ydfa family). The American, Hopkins, turns out to belong to the family of Wil Hopkin, and the star-crossed lovers of the legend are vicariously married, in the persons of their modern kinfolk. Once again the novel is rich in local colour, though its slightly more literary version of the tale was not as popular with local readers as Isaac Craigfryn Hughes`s melodrama had been in earlier years.

The last of Llewelyn`s novels, *To Fame Unknown*[47], was published in 1949, and its author seems to have been trying for something more ambitious, perhaps

picking up on the success of *How Green Was My Valley*. The story is told in the third person this time, but chiefly from the viewpoint of a young boy, Shoni Beynon, who stutters and is flogged for it; Mr. Mordecai, the flogger, has echoes of the vicious Mr. Jonas in Richard Llewellyn`s novel, but Mordecai later meets an old flame, Rose Budding, at an NUT meeting, and is duly reformed, becoming a devoted husband and father. Indeed, this novel, for all its echoes of the other Llewellyn`s best-seller, is far more down to earth and rooted in normal everyday life - it is set in the years between the two World Wars, and the action has more to do with union meetings, council corruption and the basic problem of keeping a roof over one`s head than with the melodramas of Huw Morgan`s green valley. Although this is more structured than Michael Gareth Llewelyn`s earlier books, cutting between the various main characters, and climaxing in a mine disaster, it is still closer to the storytelling tradition than to a conventional novel. It does, though, have an interesting subtext; Shoni`s family does not use Welsh at home (his mother comes from the Vale), but the boy discovers that he does not stutter when he is speaking Welsh in Urdd meetings, and his brother Mark, a Communist and keen union man, courts and marries Blodwen Jones-Howell, a Welsh-speaking Nationalist. At the end of the book, though Shoni has become a Rear Gunner in the RAF and died on a raid over Berlin, Mark has survived the `dust` and has two sons, Marc and Meurig; he is now Welsh-speaking, and the combined heritage of socialism and culture has been preserved.

Perhaps it is worth noting that Michael Gareth Llewelyn, like most Anglo-Welsh writers before him, was accused of producing a dialect for his characters that had no connection with the reality of English as spoken in Wales. This was not something that had begun with Caradoc Evans - it was an accusation levelled at Allen

Raine at least ten years before her fellow parishioner published *My People*[48]. Llewelyn merely commented that he had taken the speech of his characters from life; bearing in mind his family background, he was probably more qualified to pass judgement on his success than his critics. That apart, he is an interesting figure, presenting, perhaps, one of the best examples of a specifically native tradition in creative prose.

2. Richard Doddridge Blackmore (1825 - 1900)

For most people, including his biographers, R.D. Blackmore is so completely identified with the West Country in which *Lorna Doone*, his most famous novel, is set, that it must seem almost perverse to suggest that he belongs to the category of Welsh writers in English. Insofar as any Welsh connection is acknowledged in the biographies[49], this mainly consists of lengthy quotations from *The Maid of Sker*, describing the wild Glamorgan coastline and the isolation of Sker House, with perhaps a passing mention of the fact that his mother`s family came from the area. The assumption is that, like Charles Kingsley (who also had a local family link, with Baglan[50] and wrote of North Wales in *Two Years Ago),* Blackmore was basically a visitor to Wales who used its picturesque scenery and legends as set dressing for one novel. Perhaps this is not entirely surprising, since most of Blackmore`s novels have a sub-title: `a Yorkshire tale`, `a tale of the South Downs`, `a tale of the Western Hills` and so forth. He was not a regional novelist in the sense that Thomas Hardy or the Brontës were, but his fiction had a regional basis, and to anyone who did not know his family background, *The Maid of Sker* must have seemed to be just another such story. The truth is rather different.[51]

Blackmore`s father, the Rev. John Blackmore, did indeed come of West Country yeoman stock, and in 1825, when the future novelist was born, was curate of

Culmstock in Somerset. He also tutored students at Oxford University, and for this reason lived at Longworth in Berkshire, where his son Richard was born. The Blackmores might almost be called a professional clergy family, since the Rev. John`s father was himself rector of Oare and Combe Martin, and John`s brother Richard was rector of Charles, on the edge of Exmoor. Perhaps this was how John Blackmore met his wife, Anne Bassett Knight of Nottage Court, near what is now Porthcawl, since the Knight family included even more clergymen than the Blackmores. The Knights seem to have been socially a cut above the Blackmores; on the one side they were descended from Sir John Knight, M.P. and Lord Mayor of Bristol c. 1700, and on the other from Caradoc ap Iestyn, first Lord of Afan, via Lougher and Turberville heiresses. (Both of these latter families had connections with Sker House.)

John Blackmore and Anne Knight were married in 1822, and Richard, their third child, was born in 1825; three months later his mother contracted typhus and died. The Knights immediately stepped in to help their widowed son-in-law, and took the baby home to Nottage Court, where he spent at least the first five years of his life. John Blackmore had remarried by 1831, and was then able to reunite his family at Culmstock, but it is clear that he continued to maintain a close friendship with the Knights, and to visit Nottage Court. (He was visiting Glamorgan when he died, in September 1858, and is buried in the churchyard of St. John`s church, Newton Nottage.)

Though the young Richard was enrolled at the King`s School at Tiverton in Somerset by the time he was nine years old, he evidently spent as much time as possible at Nottage Court with his grandmother Harriet and his uncle, Henry Hey Knight, antiquarian and vicar of Neath. He seems to have seen his uncle as part father figure, part older brother, and portrayed him as the Rev. John Rosedew, vicar of

Nowellhurst, in his second novel, *Cradock Nowell* (1866). Rosedew is a friend to all, a connoisseur of wines and a man of learning, but also skilled at such sports as swimming, fishing, rowing and shooting. In a letter of 1841, while Blackmore was still at Blundell`s School in Taunton, he comments that he has been learning to swim, but is not able to do much more than dog paddle, and hopes his uncle will coach him. He also asks to be remembered to all his friends at Neath, which it would seem he visited frequently.[52]

Blackmore followed what might be called the standard career pattern for someone of his background: public school, Exeter College, Oxford, and the Inns of Court, where he qualified as a lawyer. However, he was diagnosed with epilepsy (often stated to be a consequence of bullying when he was at school), and therefore changed from the law to teaching, becoming Classics Master at Wellesley House School near Teddington in Middlesex. At first sight this change of career might seem a little odd; schoolmastering was surely not less stressful than his work as a conveyancing solicitor. However in 1852 he married, and perhaps that had as much to do with his change of direction as ill health, since he now needed a steady and sufficient income. His bride was Lucy Maguire, a Roman Catholic from the Channel Islands. Lucy converted to Anglicanism when she married, but it seems that it took some time before John Blackmore was reconciled to the young couple, and it is possible that Lucy felt somewhat overpowered by the more aristocratic Knights. Certainly there appears to be no record of her visiting Nottage Court, though the Knights visited Teddington. A.J. Munby, a close friend, describes a visit to the Blackmore household thus:

> Saturday, 8 August, 1863. I went to call on Blackmore - scholar of Exeter, barrister, novelist, poet, and market gardener. Found him in his garden among

> (for instance) five acres of strawberry beds: & he took me through his vineries, and fed me on luscious grapes; among others the more aromatic Muscat. We adjourned to the house close by, & in the drawingroom, besides his odd goodhumoured insipid little wife was his aunt Miss Knight, a lady of perhaps fifty; so handsome and refined and courtly, and withal so grey and delicately worn, that one fancies so sweet a spinster must have a tender history. I sat awhile with them, and back by train to London by 8.45.[53]

It will be noted that by 1863 Blackmore was no longer a teacher, but a market gardener. This was courtesy of Henry Hey Knight. The vicar of Neath had died, unmarried, in 1857, leaving a sum of money and some landed property in Aberafan to his nephew. Whether Blackmore, if he had still been a bachelor at the time, might have settled in Glamorgan and established his market garden there cannot now be known, but in his novel *Christowell* he comments on one of the characters, "By the death of an uncle, he has come into a large estate on the west side of the moor; and there he is going to improve the garden."[54] At this point he paid a number of visits to Aberafan, lodging with a Miss Turpin on Pentyla (Baglan Road), and was later remembered locally as `a man of fine physique and appearance, usually dressed in silk hat and frock coat as was customary with country gentlemen of the period.`[55] In the end, though, he sold the land at Aberafan and set up his new business in Teddington, building a house there. After this, though there are references to Welsh friends and correspondents, such as Betha Johnes of Dolau Cothi or the Feddens of Cardiff, there appear to be none to Neddafan.

It is possible, though not entirely likely, that with his uncle and his grandmother both dead, Blackmore lost touch with his Knight relations. However, there is another probable cause for the `disappearance` of his Welsh family from the record. The Blackmores had no children (though they adopted Lucy`s niece, supposedly the original of Bardie, the `Maid of Sker` in the novel of that name) and, due seemingly to Lucy`s ill-health, they led a very secluded life. Hence, when Waldo

Dunn, the novelist`s fullest biographer, researched his subject, he drew most of his material from Lucy Blackmore`s relations, from Blackmore`s half-sister`s grand-daughters, and from Mrs. Barbara Blundell, widow of George Blundell of Nottage Court who was the grandson of the Rev. Edward Knight, Blackmore`s uncle.[56] This is not to suggest that the information they supplied was either incorrect or irrelevant, but it was unlikely to contain much of direct relevance to either Blackmore`s Welsh upbringing or the Knight connection, or to alter the picture of him as the archetypal West Countryman, a living embodiment of John Bull.

In many ways this links Blackmore to other, much later Anglo-Welsh writers, particularly those of the Sixties `Second Flowering`. From c. 1970 onwards it has been relatively easy to build a professional career inside Wales, but in earlier years it was all too often necessary for potential writers and/or their families to go to South-East England or London to find appropriate work; teachers, for instance, were a major Welsh export. Hence Edward Thomas (1878-1917), many of whose ancestors came from Neddafan and whose attachment to Wales is clear even in his essays on the English countryside, was born in London where his father was a civil servant, made his career in London literary circles, married there, and is very often classified as an English writer with some minor Welsh links.[57] (He is not included in Mathias and Garlick`s *Anglo-Welsh Poetry 1480-1980.*) This English background was clearly not a matter of personal choice but the cumulative result of the lack of opportunities in Wales and of having an English wife. Writers such as Tom Earley and Robert Morgan found themselves in a similar position in the later nineteen sixties[58], and even Leslie Norris, though fully acknowledged in Wales, has always been to a certain degree marginal to the native scene. (Happily Dylan Thomas has now been brought inside the

tradition, but in earlier decades he too was often rejected as not quite authentically `Welsh` because he was part of the London literary scene.) At least these writers had the advantage of being born and brought up in Wales; for those whose families were based wholly or partly in England, `of Welsh parentage`can at times sound like a very grudging admission. Nowadays it is nowhere near as likely that such writers would be lost from the record, but earlier generations were less fortunate.

If we turn from biography to literature, then we find an equally enlightening picture.Blackmore always had ambitions to be a writer, and published several slim volumes of verse, both original and translations, before Henry Hey Knight`s legacy provided him with the financial stability that allowed him to venture into the field of fiction. (The market garden was never particularly profitable; among other things, Blackmore tended to use it to experiment with new crops and breeds of plant.) His first two novels, *Clara Vaughan* (1864) and *Cradock Nowell* (1866) both have `Welsh` titles, but are set in Gloucestershire and the New Forest respectively.[59] (The original Cradock Nowell was a former owner of Nottage Court, and the plaque in memory of Nowell`s wife Jane, placed near the pulpit in Newton Nottage church, was Blackmore`s earliest childhood memory.) Next came *Lorna Doone*, in 1869, and even here, despite the Exmoor setting, there are Glamorgan links; the gentleman who inherits Lorna`s estate when her parents die and she is carried off by the Doones, is a `Mr. Jones of Llandaff`[60], while there are references to the cross-channel trade between South Wales and the West Country. Initially *Lorna Doone* was a failure, but the publisher, Sampson Low, persisted, and a chance similarity between Lorna`s name and that of the Marquis of Lorne, Queen Victoria`s future son-in-law, is said to have boosted sales sufficiently to establish the novel in the canon of popular English literature.[61]

The Maid of Sker was Blackmore`s fourth published novel and also apparently his earliest piece of fiction, since he had begun it during his Oxford vacations, but had for some reason put it aside when only about two-thirds had been written. Now he brought it out again, completed it (though the break still shows, in a definite loss of vigour in the last third of the book), and published it in 1872. This time he chose a Welsh hero; the story, like that of *Lorna Doone*, is told in the first person, narrated by one Davy Llewellyn of Newton Nottage, bard, sailor, fisherman and rogue. Davy is a complete contrast to the heroic, but somewhat heavy-witted John Ridd, and his sly comments on people and events give the novel an element of wry humour mostly absent from the earlier book. Above all, Davy is a patriot; he says early on, "But the object of my writing is to make [the English] understand us, which they never yet have done, being unlike somehow in nature, although we are much of their fathers."[62] When five of the six sons of Sker House are smothered in a sandstorm, he comments, of their inquest: "However, it was the old, old thing. The Welsh must do all the real work; and the English be paid for sitting on them after they are dead."[63] On the other hand, his patriotism is not blind: "Heartily we [the Welsh] love to find man or woman of our own kin (even at the utmost nip of the calipers of pedigree) doing anything which reflects a spark of glory on us. Of this man, or woman even, we make all the very utmost, to the extremest point where truth assuages patriotism."[64]

The novel is of particular interest in the way in which it illustrates those cross-channel ties between the West Country and South Wales which have been so important in the development of the use of the English language in the latter area. The Welsh maritime tradition has largely faded from view over the last century, but Davy is equally at home on either side of the Bristol Channel. At one point, standing in

Devon, but looking across at his home in Wales, Davy comments: "But our own land has a sweetness, and a gentle liking for us, and a motherly pleasure in its bosom when we do come home to it, such as no other land may claim - according to my experience."[65] Blackmore is speaking in character here, and he was certainly at least as proud of his English ancestry as he was of his Welsh inheritance, but he was surely speaking for himself as well as Davy on this occasion.

We have already looked at the matter of structure and plot development in relation to the novels of Michael Gareth Llewellyn and other Anglo-Welsh writers and considered the effect of the popular story-telling mode on their work. *The Maid of Sker* does not strictly belong to this group, for it has a definite plot and character development, but it does stand a little apart from the romantic tradition as exemplified in *Lorna Doone*. Davy is not simply the narrator, he is also the hero (or anti-hero) of the novel inasmuch as it has one, and the romantic leads, Drake Bampfylde and Rodney Bluett, are relatively minor figures, as is the Maid herself. How far Blackmore himself was aware that this was the case, one cannot know, but one of Davy`s comments has a particular relevance:

> `Now this is just the way I keep going out of the proper track. If I could not train a gun much straighter than I can tell a story, France would have conquered England, I believe, in spite of Nelson. It is the excess of windage, coming down to me from great bards, which prevents my shot from flying point-blank as it ought to be.`[66]

It is interesting, in this context, to note that Davy attributes his roundabout style of story-telling to his bardic ancestors.

Sadly, Davy and his tale did not find favour with all of Blackmore`s readers, and the use of Davy himself, a mere peasant, as narrator seems to have been one of the problems. One friend, the novelist Mortimer Collins, writing on October 4, 1872, to acknowledge the gift of the book and some rose scions, says:

> `I have been reading *The Maid* and the corporal has been budding the roses. I am rather doubtful whether the public may not get a little tired of your perfect old Welshman. He is a delightful bore, but then he *is* a bore. Bardie [the Maid] is a lovely sketch, and I greatly admire the two Devon parsons. The book is full to the brim of humour and poetry. I hope it may not be caviare to the general.`[67]

Mrs. Collins was less tactful. Writing a few days later, she commented:

> `I think [the book] is wonderfully written, but I don`t care for autobiographies. And yet it must have been so difficult to keep up the character of the Welshman all through, but I don`t think the public appreciate that. I should have preferred it if the Welshman had talked sometimes, and *you* sometimes ... you have hit the character of the Welsh most wonderfully. I lived three and a half years in Wales, so I learnt the character of the Welsh, and I despise the people so much that I think they are not worth writing about.`[68]

Clearly the Collinses had no idea that Blackmore might identify in any way with his Welsh narrator. It would be interesting to know if they had made the same objections to John Ridd as narrator of *Lorna Doone*; was it the type of narrative or the attitudes of the narrator that irritated them ? One suspects the latter.

Though *The Maid of Sker* did not repeat the success of *Lorna Doone*, it is still the only one of Blackmore`s novels, apart from the John Ridd saga, likely to be found on the shelves of second-hand bookshops. Partly, of course, this is due to its local connection; though it does not retell the romantic legend of the Maid of Sker, its pictures of Sker House and of Newton Nottage village are full of atmosphere and (to quote Mrs. Collins again) `the most poetic prose`. Blackmore`s ancestor Watkin Lougher had once owned Sker House, and it had burned itself into the novelist`s imagination.

> `This always was, and always must be, a very sad and lonesome place, close to a desolate waste of sand, and the continual roaring of the sea upon black rocks. A great grey house, with many chimneys, many gables and many windows, yet not a neighbour to look out on, not a tree to feed its chimneys, scarce a firelight in its gables in the very depth of winter. Of course it is said to be haunted; and though I believe not altogether in any stories of that kind - despite some very strange things indeed which I have beheld at sea - at any

rate, I would rather not hear any yarns on that matter just before bedtime in that house; and most people would agree with me, unless I am much mistaken.`[69]

Blackmore wrote ten more novels after *The Maid of Sker*, together with a book of short stories and a volume of verse, but apart from one story set near Cader Idris and included in *Tales from the Telling House*, he did not return to Wales in his fiction. Presumably the criticisms of the Collinses and others had had their effect, though he always held that *The Maid* was his own favourite piece of work.

Blackmore was the first writer of local antecedents to have made a serious impact on the wider literary world, even if that impact was mostly limited to just one of his novels. The British Library lists some fifty-one items in its on-line catalogue[70]; some of the novels are not included at all, and there are only at most half a dozen critical or biographical items, most of them concerning the setting of *Lorna Doone.* Yet its author was clearly not what might be called a `one-hit wonder`. Some of the other novels went into as many as ten printings in the nineteenth century, and a number were published in Germany in Tauchnitz editions of English authors between 1875 and 1895. There are no records in the catalogue of new editions in the early twentieth century (with the exception of *Lorna Doone*, naturally), but local interest probably led to the reprinting of *Perlycross* in 1983 by the Three Rivers Press at Bampton. This press also reprinted *Springhaven*, which was also available in Dent`s Everyman`s Library.As for *The Maid of Sker*, that was reprinted by Blond in 1968, as volume 13 in their Doughty Library series.

NOTES:

1. Rev, H.H. Knight has an entry in *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography to 1940.* However, D. Rhys Phillips is not included in the *Dictionary*, nor, despite strong representations from his successor as Local Studies Librarian at Swansea, in the *Companion.*

2. For Brinley Richards, see the preceding chapter.
3. Davies, L.(1914) *An Outline of the History of the Afan District,* Aberavon: T.M. Jones and Son, Printers. Lewis Davies has an entry in the *Companion*, though this does not note his English-language local history contributions. He had an active interest in promoting Welsh history, and his children`s novels often began life as eisteddfod entries.
4. Morgan, A. (1972) *Porthcawl: its History and Development*; (1974) *Legends of Porthcawl and the Glamorgan Coast;* (1975) *The Breakwater;* (1977) *Inn of Fear;* (1979) *Elizabeth, Fair Maid of Sker;* (1984) *The She-Goblin.*
5. Evans, A.L. (1992) *Collected Poems;* (1994) *Aberavon 1992 and other poems.*
6. Personal knowledge. Thomas Gray`s novel is part of Port Talbot Historical Society folklore; if it ever existed, it probably disappeared when Gray died. Miss Shanahan let me read her Sker House novel, but this too seems to have vanished after her death; A.L.Evans`s two novellas are in my possession.
7. The *Companion* includes an entry on Ronald Felton. His children`s novel, *The Story of Sker House* (1954) is a modern adventure story and has no relevance to the legend of the Maid of Sker. In the mid-1970s he paid a visit to his old school in Port Talbot, now Glan Afan Comprehensive School, and talked about his research methods. *Knight Crusader* (1953), *Sun of York* (1970) and *Tank Commander* (1972) were all published by Oxford University Press.
8. There is an entry on Blackmore in the *Companion*, though this does not include his family`s descent from the mediaeval Welsh Lords of Afan
9. There are entries on T.C. Evans in both the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* and the *Companion.*
10. Evans, T.C. ed. (1913) *Iolo Morganwg.* (Cyfres y Fil), Llanuwchllyn: Ab Owen. There is a note on the title page: `Under the editorship of Cadrawd. The largest part has been taken from Iolo`s manuscripts at Llanover.`
11. Evans, T.C. and James, J.H. eds (1910) *Hen Cwndidau a Chywyddau Eraill.*
12. Evans, T.C. (1887) *History of Llangynwyd Parish.*
13. Ibid, p. 37.
14. Ibid, p.89-108.
15. Williams, G.J. (1969) Wil Hopcyn and the Maid of Cefn Ydfa, *Glamorgan Historian*, Vol. 6, pp. 228-251. Professor Williams`s articles were prompted by the publication in 1927 of a book, *Souvenir of the Wil Hopkin Memorial,* which presented the story to the public in all its picturesque details, many of them drawn not from Mrs. Pendril Llewelyn, but from a version by the poet Ceiriog.
16. Hill, G.V. (1990) *Cefn Ydfa: A Who`s Who and What`s What.* G.V. Hill was a carpenter by trade, and his interest in Cefn Ydfa house began when, as a young apprentice, he worked on repairs there. Over the following years he collected a range of documents, wills, articles, family trees etc., relating to its history and in 1988 I was commissioned by the Welsh Books Council to edit these into book form, supplying a narrative framework for the collection.
17. Ibid. p. 168.
18. D. Davies does not appear in either the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* or the *Companion.* However, c. 1993, his grand-daughter was living in Porthcawl and lent me the 1909 edition of the *Maid of Sker*, from which many of the details of his publications have been taken. (Davies was apparently known as `John Books`.)
19. Hughes, I. C. (1909) *Maid of Sker,* p. 2.

20. Hughes, I.C. (1881) *The Maid of Cefn Ydfa*, p. 155. A facsimile edition of the original version was published by John Jones Cardiff in 1979, and once again proved very popular with local readers.
21. Berry, D. (1994) *Wales and Cinema: the First Hundred Years*, pp. 55-6. Haggar`s version was probably based on the I.C. Hughes novel; his family had roles in the film, of which there were at least two versions, one in 1908, another in 1913-4.
22. Hughes, I.C. (1909) *Maid of Sker.*
23. Williams, M.J. (1844) *Ancient Airs of Gwent and Morganwg* Llandovery: William Rees; London: D`Almaine and McKinley.
24. Hughes, I.C. (1909) *Maid of Sker,* p.46
25. Blackmore, R.D. (1872) *The Maid of Sker,* p. 22.
26. Evans, A.L. (1974) `Note on the Maid of Sker`, *PTHS Transactions*, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 59-60
27. Morgan, A. (1979) *Elizabeth: Fair Maid of Sker.*
28. Jones, H. (1995) *Dic Dywyll y Baledwr*, pp. 52-56
29. Davies, L. (1922) *Lewsyn yr Heliwr*
30. Thomas, G. (19 49) *All Things Betray Thee.*
31. Williams, J.S. (1970) *Dic Penderyn and other poems.*
32. Cordell. A. (1972) *The Fire People.*
33. Williams, R. (19 75) *The Angry Vineyard.*
34. Catrin Collier is one of the most prolific and skilled of these authors; *Hearts of Gold* (1992) is a typical example of her work. Bethan, the heroine, is a trainee midwife in Pontypridd during the Depression; she meets a young doctor, Andrew, London-raised, owner of a flat and a car. As the cover blurb explains: `Their love will have to overcome formidable prejudice... Bethan [must] choose between the pull of her heart and a deeper sense of duty to her family and her home ... ` The detail is authentic, but the story would be no different if it was set in Liverpool.
35. Evans, F. (1912) *Tir Iarll.*
36. Llewelyn, M.G. (1943) *Sand in the Glass.*
37. Ibid, p. 223.
38. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, entries on Iorwerth Peate and T.C. Evans .
39. *Sand in the Glass*, p. 63
40. Ibid, p. 58
41. Ibid, p, 125
42. Llewelyn, M.G. (1944) *Angharad`s Isle.*
43. Ibid, p. 14
44. Ibid, p. 5
45. Llewelyn, M.G. (1945) *The Aleppo Merchant*
46. Llewelyn, M.G. (1947) *White Wheat.* Frederic Evans also co-authored, with Dr. Emrys E. Jones, a play about the Cefn Ydfa story. This was translated into Welsh by Cadrawd, and read by Lewis Davies before it went to the printers. (These details come from a Welsh-language copy of the play in the local collection in Port Talbot Central Library; it is not clear whether the English-language version was ever published.)
47. Llewelyn, M.G. (1949) *To Fame Unknown.*
48. Jones, S.R., (1979) *Allen Raine.* In an interview c. 1947 Llewelyn himself was asked about this and replied that he used the dialect he knew from his own youth in the area. (The reference for this, seen in 1969, was in a magazine in the Port

Talbot Library local collection, probably the *Glamorgan Magazine*, but the relevant copy now seems to be missing.)

49. Budd, K. (1960) *The Last Victorian.* Dunn, W.H. *R.D. Blackmore: the author of Lorna Doone,* Chapter VII, pp. 46-50: `The Glamorganshire Coast`. This, like Budd`s similar chapter consists mostly of extracts from *The Maid of Sker.*
50. Evans, A.L. (1970) *The Story of Baglan (Port Talbot),* p. 165. Kingsley was related to Mrs. Madelina Llewellyn, née Grenfell, of Baglan Hall.
51. Jones, S.R. (1975) A Lost Leader: R.D. Blackmore and the Maid of Sker, *Anglo-Welsh Review*, Vol. 25:55 pp. 32-45.
    Jones, S.R. (1984) `R.D. Blackmore and Glamorgan`, *PTHS Trans.* Vol. 3, 3, pp. 97-101.
52. This was one of several letters from Blackmore to his uncle seen during a visit by the Port Talbot Historical Society to Nottage Court. John Blundell, son of the Mrs, Blundell who provided information to Waldo Dunn, arranged the visit, and more recently has been one of those involved in the restoration of Sker House, which now belongs to Professor Niall Ferguson, the historian.
53. Hudson, D. (1972) *Munby: Man of Two Worlds.*
54. Quoted in Dunn, p. 85.
55. O`Brien, J. (1930) `A Famous Novelist`s Residence at Aberavon`, *AMDHS Trans.* 1930, p. 1.
56. Dunn, p. 17. Dunn comments "I have documentary evidence for every fact I have given covering every phase of his life." This may be true, but in the early period of Blackmore`s life he rarely cites any such documentary evidence, and there are places where his information is clearly based on supposition.
57. Jones, S.R. (1987) `Edward Thomas and Wales` <u>in</u> Barker, J. *The Art of Edward Thomas,* pp. 75-83.
58. Personal knowledge.
59. Jones: `A Lost Leader`, p.36; information drawn from Budd and Dunn. *Lorna Doone* and *The Maid of Sker* apart, Blackmore`s books have vanished even from secondhand bookshops; several are not even listed in the British Library catalogues.
60. Blackmore, R.D. (1869) *Lorna Doone*, p. 420. However, there are so many varying editions of the novel, most undated, that the page reference is probably unhelpful. The paragraph about John Jones of Llandaff comes at the end of Chapter 56.
61. This story is repeated in most accounts of Blackmore`s career, though not in the DNB entry on him. An example of the tale is given in Macleod, D. (1972) *The Gardener`s London,* pp. 205-212 - p. 210 is the main reference. Some sources suggest that the sudden success was due simply to the similarity of the names Lorna and Lorne, but in the story Sir Ensor Doone`s uncle, who is Lorna`s grandfather, is the last Earl of Lorne. Though not a Doone herself, she is related to them.
62. Blackmore, R.D. (1872) *The Maid of Sker,* p. 50.
63. Ibid, p. 68.
64. Ibid, p. 343.
65. Ibid, p. 333.
66. Ibid, p. 279.
67. Dunn, pp. 169-70.
68. Ibid, p. 170

69. *The Maid of Sker,* p. 22.
70 British Library website: catalogue.bl.uk/ Accessed 7.7.06

CHAPTER 2. A BILINGUAL TRADITION

Over the last seventy years or so we have become used to a Welsh-language sector that prefers not to see its literature translated - into English, at least. The logic behind this is understandable: if the novels, poems etc remain untranslated, then there will be a strong incentive for any interested parties to learn the Welsh language in order to read the work of its writers. The problem here, of course, is that without at least some hint in English of the riches of the senior tradition, the interest will not exist in the first place. Indeed, one might find that those excluded became hostile to both the Welsh language and Welsh culture in general. One can see this reaction in the attitude of many of the writers and historians of the Valleys, from Gwyn Thomas onwards, even in the current controversy over Janet Street Porter, who was brought up in an English-speaking environment, but with a Welsh-speaking mother, and clearly felt left out when her maternal family insisted on speaking that `ridiculous language`. On holiday in North Wales, she notes, `you go round shops and people are all speaking Welsh which you can`t speak. So you don`t feel you`re in a community. It`s not your community.`[1] It is clear that in this case language and way of life are identified as one thing; the Welsh grandmother with old-fashioned ideas on discipline and an overdose of Nonconformist work ethic is part and parcel of the medieval `nonsense` of the language.

More recently, attitudes, at least on the Welsh-language side, have changed considerably. Whereas in the past such translations as did exist were often the work of English scholars and writers such as A.P. Graves or the Bells, nowadays the impetus for translation frequently comes from Welsh-language writers themselves - the obvious example is the recent Bloodaxe anthology of translations from the Welsh.[2] The literary quality of the translations has improved too; though poetry has always

been at least adequately served, translations of Welsh prose have often been clumsy and in no sense an advertisement for the Welsh literary tradition. In fairness, the changing attitudes have also been due to a greater willingness on the part of a number of English-language writers in Wales to become involved in this dialogue and put their own literary skills at the service of their Welsh-language counterparts, so that readers who are completely ignorant of Welsh have access to something that is at the very least literature.

Another approach to the language situation can be seen in the work of Gwyneth Lewis, who writes and is published in both languages, and in Menna Elfyn, who writes in Welsh but is happy to see her work translated and published in English (the translations are made by her English-language fellow writers[3]). This is something also evident in the writers of Neddafan. The English language, as we have seen, came into the area relatively early and the English-speaking element in the community developed at what might be called an organic rate, at least until the early twentieth century. Hence one finds writers catering for both audiences, Welsh and English, and we have already discussed Isaac Craigfryn Hughes and his English-language versions of his own Welsh originals. The process worked both ways, and Hughes`s publisher also brought out a Welsh-language version of Jeffrey Llewellyn Pritchard`s *Twm Sion Catti.*[4]

Hughes himself was not, strictly speaking, a Neddafan author, though the Rhondda valley where his books were published was, thanks to the railways, part of the cultural hinterland of Neddafan. Hughes did, however, use the folk tales of the area as themes for his novels and this helps to illustrate the point that we are speaking here not so much of a bilingual tradition as of something bi-cultural - something that

offered access not just to the language, but to the stories and beliefs of the native community. According to Hughes, it was the English-speaking audience that approached him and asked him to produce English-language versions of *The Maid of Cefn Ydfa* and the rest. [5] They wanted access to the traditions of their neighbours, which they felt should also be theirs.

Elizabeth Davies, the ballad writer of Neath, was also responding to public demand in having her ballads published. We have comparatively little of her Welsh-language output, but it was clearly of a higher standard than her English verses; equally, it would seem likely that it was the content of her two surviving Welsh hymns, not their literary qualities, that caused her to publish them in bilingual pamphlets. [6]

This was not always the case. The English verses in Thomas Bleddyn Jones`s Margam Bando Boys song reflected the presence at the event where the song was first performed of Theodore Mansel Talbot, captain of the bando team, and his guests. Theodore himself, brought up at Margam, may have understood Welsh, but his guests would probably have been monoglot English. Thomas Bleddyn Jones (c. 1854-58) seems to have specialised in short comic verses, in either language, depending on his audience.[7]

J. Vyrnwy Morgan (1861-1923), biographer, historian and polemicist, born in the Afan valley, began by publishing Welsh-language *cofiants* of two preachers, Kilsby Jones and Edward Roberts. The Kilsby Jones biography appeared in English as well as Welsh; Edward Roberts was celebrated only in Welsh - though one chapter, dealing with a religious controversy that occurred in Cwmafan circa 1852, consists of Roberts`s correspondence (in English) with a London newspaper[8]. (Although technically this was an ecclesiastical affair, with the Bank of England and its manager

and his wife as the villains of the piece, the story and the correspondence it produced throw an interesting light on the use of English in the area.) Morgan`s later books, however, were all in English, though they dealt with Wales and Welsh culture in an attempt to explain Wales to itself and the world. He saw Wales`s future as being one of greater integration with England and was often highly critical of his native culture, attitudes which have not endeared him to later critics. Nevertheless, he was, in his own way, part of the bi-cultural tradition, opening up Wales to the non-Welsh-speaking world.[8] Morgan, like his earliest heroes, Kilsby Jones and Edward Roberts, chose the ministry as his career, but his aptitude for landing himself in controversy meant that he moved from the Congregationalists to the Baptists to the Church of England, in which denomination he died.

A. Leslie Evans has already been mentioned briefly in his capacity as a historian and as a poet, but he also qualifies as a translator, not simply in his recording of local traditions but also through his translations of Welsh-language texts. The nineteenth century saw a number of local eisteddfodau in Neddafan, and the literary contributions, mainly poems and essays, were occasionally later published. Local subjects were a popular choice for competition entries, and the material thus gathered was potentially an invaluable source for later students. However, since the essays and poems were, naturally, in the Welsh language, they were inaccessible to many of those who might want to use them - indeed, if they remained untranslated, students and others would probably not even know they existed. In Port Talbot the two most important collections were *Gemau Margam* and *Aeron Afan*; both contained long essays, on the history of Taibach and Cwmafan respectively; Evans translated both and the translations were published by the local historical society.[9]

Although the focus of both studies is historical rather than literary, they also

cast light on the cultural background of the area. John Rowlands`s essay on Cwmafan includes such details as the titles of the newspapers and journals stocked in the local institute`s reading room (paid for by the English Copper Company) and he provides a lively picture of that religious and educational persecution of the local Nonconformists by John Biddulph, the Bank of England-installed manager of the works, and his wife which was of such interest to Vyrnwy Morgan. Both Rowlands and Rhydderch ap Morgan who wrote on Taibach were ministers, as was Edward Matthews, Ewenni, author of *Siencyn Penhydd,* another of Evans`s translations.[10]

Writers like A. Leslie Evans rarely feature in histories of literature; their work is apparently too minor to rate a mention alongside the giants. Recently, though, there was a move to place a memorial plaque for Evans in Margam Abbey. This was initially turned down by the relevant Church authority, who considered him not to be sufficiently exceptional to merit such an honour; however, the matter was appealed, and the Diocesan Court met in the Abbey church to discuss the case. Evans`s output, as historian, poet, story-teller and artist covered three long tables, and the evidence given as to his influence (which went well beyond the confines of his native Margam) was more than enough to reverse the decision and win him a memorial, now happily installed in Margam Abbey after all.

CASE STUDIES

1. Margam Jones (1864-1945) held only one pastorate, that of Moriah Chapel, Llwydcoed, Aberdare, which he served for fifty years. He was born William John Jones, at Grugwellt Fach Farm in Margam (hence his pseudonym, chosen to distinguish him from other William Joneses at Trefecca College[11]). His brother, John Morgan Jones (1861-1935) also became a Calvinistic Methodist minister, but had a

rather more public career as Secretary and later Chairman of the Conference of English Churches of the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales. John, a fine Hebrew scholar, was more of a high flier academically, studying at St. John`s College, Cambridge, and publishing a biography of Calvin and several volumes of theology. He was a dedicated pacifist and a friend of Bertrand Russell, as was Margam Jones himself.[12]

The two brothers came from a background that was culturally rich, but also one which Welsh historians have tended to disregard in this context, that of Protestant nonconformity, in this case that of Yr Hên Gorph - Calvinistic Methodism. The local `cause` had been founded in the mid eighteenth century, and was based in the homes of its adherents and in a barn at Dyffryn Farm in Margam. Over the next century and a half the community at Dyffryn expanded into five Welsh-speaking chapels and one English-speaking branch; these were, in order of founding, Carmel, Aberafan; Dyffryn, Taibach; Beulah, Margam (a.k.a. the Round Chapel); Saron, Penycae; Grove Place, and Bethany, the `English` chapel. [13] Although each congregation functioned independently, they belonged to the same *dosbarth* (district), and, as with most chapels, of any denomination, acted as both religious and cultural centres. Like the miners` institutes, they had their libraries, and though commentaries on the Gospels took the place of *Das Kapital* and the Left Book Club, the books available often covered a wide range of subjects. (Carmel`s library, dispersed when the chapel was demolished to make way for a new town centre, included a French New Testament of 1816, a treatise on sheep farming, books [in both languages] on local history, and multiple copies of the *Gwyddoniadur Cymreig*, the nineteenth-century Welsh rival to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* [14]) The chapels also sponsored a wide range of cultural

activities - debating forums, drama groups, literary societies and so on, and the insistence on participation from an early age gave even the youngest members valuable experience of performing in public.[15]

Margam Jones`s literary output ranged from articles contributed to the *Western Mail* to books of verse in Welsh and in English, from novels to *Ysgrifau Byr am Matthews Ewenni,* a tribute to one of his heroes. His verse, published in various newspapers and periodicals, and later collected in *Caniadau`r Pentref* and *The Village Lyre,* is the work of a *bardd gwlad,* and its subjects are public events, commemorations of local worthies such as the old deacon Tomos Dafydd of Margam, retellings of legends such as the Cefn Ydfa story, or tributes to literary figures such as Islwyn or Hedd Wyn.[16] If not strictly poetry, they are competent, effective verse. In English his style was more consciously poetic, and his English poems lack the directness and bite of his Welsh verse, though they have their own charm:

The Old Ruins of Margam Abbey

When silence reigns o`er mounds and crumbled walls -
The double silence that enshrouds the dead -
From the mysterious regions overhead,
A dew, like Benediction, gently falls.

A perfume, holier than the breath of prayer,
Embalms the relics of an age gone by;
And though the altars in oblivion lie,
The fragrant incense lingers in the air.

The dreamy haziness of former days
Spreads, mist-like, o`er the tombs on every hand,
And monks and abbots, from the spirit-land,
Enter ethereal courts with hymns of praise.
Objects unseen I view around this pile,
And strains I cannot hear my soul beguile.[17]

Although he ministered in Llwydcoed for fifty years, his writing very largely takes its subjects, as above, from the district where he grew up, and this is particularly

apparent in his two novels, *Stars of the Revival* (1910) and *Angels in Wales* (1914). Both are officially set in fictitious villages in mid-Wales, but the author admits that he is drawing on memories of the people he knew in his childhood, and to anyone familiar with the area, it is easy to see the actual Margam village behind the imaginary Tredawel or Cwmhelig. No date is given, but the two novels are historical, set in the mid-nineteenth century (circa 1849 - the cholera epidemic of that year is mentioned), and the `Revival` so often discussed is certainly not the 1904 Revival that Margam Jones himself had experienced. (His sister Annie Margaret was one of the singers who accompanied Evan Roberts.) Rather, it is the overflowing of holiness and love that actually occurred even earlier than 1849, and converted such muscular Christians as Siencyn Penhydd and George Heycock, not to mention the immortal Methodist matriarch Betsan Heycock, famous for her outbursts of emotion during sermons. His villagers live in a constant ferment of spiritual excitement, not unlike the more secular fever that swept across America when gold was discovered in California in the eighteen forties, and their spiritual life is far from the morbid piety of the later Victorians. Margam Jones may have gathered some of his detail from the elders of Dyffryn whom he knew in his youth, but a more obvious source is the biographies of Siencyn Penhydd and George Heycock mentioned above, written by Edward Matthews, Ewenni, who was a major influence on Jones in his career. Matthews had a remarkable eye for a good story and no love, it would seem, of narrow piety. (The translations of both of these, made by A.L. Evans, and published by the local historical society, are regrettably somewhat abbreviated and lack much of Matthews` liveliness and colour.)[18]

Stars of the Revival (1910) is concerned mostly with the spiritual life of the villagers, and the world it depicts is very much that of Matthews Ewenni`s

biographies. *Angels in Wales* (1914), which picks up on much the same themes, is rather more ambitious. Its setting is the village of Tredawel, and the book begins with the baptism of three babies, two girls and a boy. Faith, child of poor parents, is the representative of spiritual religion; Gwener represents Nature and the sensuous world, and Gwyddon, the boy, stands for science and the quest for improvement through knowledge. After this beginning, the story leaps forward some twenty years, to Gwener`s return from school in England. Faith`s father is now a drunkard, accused of murdering her mother (who actually died of a heart attack), and Faith has five brothers to look after; her problems inspire Gwyddon with the desire to better the world around him, though he hesitates between becoming a minister or standing for Parliament. Thereafter the story goes through numerous complications; the vicar tries to stop Gwyddon`s political activities; Faith becomes an heiress and is kidnapped by the Anglo-Catholic ladies at the Castle who are after her inheritance; the ladies also try to expel the local Methodists from their chapel, the Barn (cf Dyffryn Barn; the Talbots at Margam Castle were notably High Church). Ultimately right triumphs. The Methodists get a new chapel, Gwyddon becomes an MP, and Faith, now mortally ill, brings together Gwyddon and the happily converted Gwener - the union of Science and Nature, sanctified by Religion; though in fairness, this abstract plan is less obvious in the book itself.

This theme of social reform brought about as part of a spiritual revival can be seen in the context of a comment by Bertrand Russell in a letter of July, 1916, written to Lady Ottoline Morrell while he was campaigning in South Wales against the First World War. He says:

> The Rev. Morgan Jones is a *splendid* man - I go to lunch with him in the hills near here every day. He is a *real* saint, full of simple courage. He has preached

> against the war from the start, & is being turned out - probably to starve. But he is so loved in Merthyr that something is sure to be done for him. The I.L.P. have taken to going to his Chapel, `tho many of them are not Xtians. The difference of Xtian & agnostic has become insignificant among them.[19]

`The Rev. Morgan Jones` was presumably Margam`s brother John, but the picture may stand for both of them.

This interest in social justice, temperance apart, does not seem to have been a concern of the 1904 Revival, but rather one personal to Jones himself. In *Stars of the Revival* social reform takes the shape of public health, when the cholera outbreak is halted by a stranger who arrives and tells them to direct the local river back to its original course and light bonfires round the village. The stranger, who is a doctor and the long-lost son of a local family, tells Taliesin, the hero of the novel, `Religion is a general term and includes more than prayer and praise. Religion includes science, and science includes labour.`[20]

Though he respects the depth of their faith, Margam Jones is not uncritical of his fellow Christians, and comments, for instance, on the injustice of the attitude that keeps Faith`s mother out of chapel because her clothes are not `good` enough.[21] In *Stars of the Revival* he also condemns those who seek to administer the religious law without charity. In fairness, though, when Taliesin is summoned in front of the congregation for having escorted a young girl home on a Sunday night, the members themselves are near to rebelling:

> The sight of Gwen, who was now practically an orphan, with her hunger-pinched cheeks and her threadbare garments, subjected to this trying ordeal, for a trivial offence, was almost too much for the healthy flesh and blood of Cwmhelig ... many of them secretly cursed the hard, cold law that degraded this friendless child.[22]

One has to wonder as to the audience Jones expected to reach. His novels were published in England by John Long, and the books were evidently widely reviewed.

Comments on *Stars of the Revival* are quoted from the *Nottingham Guardian*, the *Scotsman*, the *Aberdeen Journal*, the *Morning Post* (which sixty years before had printed Edward Roberts`s complaints about the Bank of England) and the *Globe*. The *Scotsman*`s comment may perhaps be somewhat tongue in cheek: `An interesting narrative of somewhat unusual features`, but the rest are positive, even enthusiastic. The *Nottingham Guardian* said `Written with vigour and sympathy - a story of intense interest and many strong dramatic touches`, but perhaps the *Morning Post* comes closest to Jones`s purpose in writing his novels: `An account of life in a little Welsh village in the earlier part of last century, which bears every evidence of sincerity and first-hand knowledge. It is an uncommon story, uncommonly and convincingly told.`[23]

Certainly Margam Jones would have expected to find readers among his friends and neighbours, and in one way his novels are extended sermons, based often on the failure of the Saints to live up to their promises. On the other hand, he is plainly also expecting a readership to whom the background is something new, needing to be explained.His initial portrait of the Barn which is central to the story gives a flavour of this:

> The sanctuary of which they spoke was an old barn ... The building belonged originally to a farmhouse near the village. And when, in the olden days, the hills of Wales were being cultivated it had served its generation well. But when the landlords and farmers discovered that it was profitable to let the uplands run wild, there was no longer any *earthly* use for the barn. And after the Methodist Revival, when the spiritual fire spread into the wilds of the country, a few of the rustic saints assembled together for prayer and praise in this rude fabric. And, in due time, it was converted into a chapel by means of a few insignificant internal alterations, such as furnishing it with a pulpit for the preacher, a few chairs for the deacons, and a number of forms for the audience.[24]

Elsewhere the description is leavened by touches of sly humour:

> This particular night was very, very dark, the hills being all covered with a long flowing robe of grey mist. Some of the pilgrims lost their bearings completely, in spite of the inward light of a lifelong experience, and the

> outward aid of a well-trimmed lantern. Evan the shoemaker and Martha, his wife, had more than one serious argument on the relative bearings of the upward pilgrimage. But the shoemaker came out second best every time. At last Evan declared it was too dark to see the lantern.And the tormenting spouse, in order to get the last word, remarked in a sarcastic tone that he had probably left his spectacles on the bench in the workshop.[25]

This metaphorical use of language, linking the material with the spiritual, is typical, the product, no doubt, of half a century of preaching and parable-making, but when appropriate, the dialogue is pointed and direct:

> "Yes, it`s a sin that people should starve in a country where there is plenty of work to be had, and plenty of money to pay for it," said Gwyddon, in a stern tone.
> "But if people drank less they would earn more money, would they not ?" asked Gwener ...
> "Perhaps so," replied Gwyddon in a meditative tone. "But some believe that if they earned more money they would drink less beer."[26]

Later Gwyddon and his foster-father Edward Thomas run into opposition as they pursue the young man`s Parliamentary ambitions:

> "Well, Edward Thomas," said the clergyman, in a nervous tone, "I fear you are causing a certain amount of disturbance in the village by these political meetings of yours at the smithy. And I think it is my duty to put a stop to the thing once for all. I am not a cantankerous man, as you know. I have always respected the Nonconformists. But if you persist in sowing the seed of socialism and anarchy among the people I shall have to use my authority."[27]

Some historians might be surprised to see a link being made between socialism and the chapels, and certainly this is not the kind of thing one would expect to see in the world of Caradoc Evans - *My People* was published the year after *Angels in Wales.* But 1914 was the year in which the Great War began, and pacifism made stranger bedfellows than Rhydlewis ever saw.

One thing is clear; apart from the occasional `thee`, `thou`and `hast`, Margam Jones makes no attempt to create a distinctive Welsh-English style or convey the sense of speaking another language Caradoc Evans-style (because his characters would clearly have been Welsh-speaking). He takes the other approach - someone

speaking in Welsh does not see him or herself as speaking in a special dialect, and therefore, to try to phrase conversation spoken in Welsh, but represented in English, in a Welsh word order, is misleading. On the other hand, he does attempt to give an impression of `Welsh sentences and Welsh phrases`[28], though the slightly old-fashioned tone of the language is at least partly due to the fact that he is writing of an earlier age.

2. Gwyn Williams (1904-1990)

Vyrnwy Morgan and Margam Jones might be described as cultural translators, making a particular history and a way of life available to those for whom it would otherwise be inaccessible, either because they were immigrants or because beliefs and attitudes of mind had moved on, leaving the older traditions and language behind. However, if Neddafan was rapidly becoming a majority English-speaking area, by 1900 it still had a substantial minority for whom the Welsh language and the way of life that had created it were their natural element. It was from this group that Gwyn Williams emerged. Although his father came originally from Trefenter, near Aberystwyth, his mother came from Margam and her family were part of the Dyffryn connection mentioned above; Gwyn himself was christened in the newly-built Grove Place Calvinistic Methodist chapel where Margam Jones`s family still worship. (Mrs. Williams had been a Merchant before her marriage, and the critic, poet and novelist Moelwyn Merchant was Gwyn`s cousin.).[28]

As a boy, Gwyn Williams shared in the various cultural activities mounted by the chapel, and though in later years he was an unrepentant pagan, he acknowledged the value of the roots from which he had grown. In this he was unlike most of the other Anglo-Welsh writers of his generation; his Wales was the country of the

megalith builders and the princes, and Nonconformity, for him, was not the province of mean-minded deacons and judgemental congregations, but that of the passionate eighteenth century revivalists:

> This Methodism, strange though this may seem to us today, was an early manifestation of the European romantic movement. ... [Hywel] Harris said that he and his colleagues preached chiefly to the heart and to the spirit ... They stirred the soul to its depths, carrying conviction to its very foundation.[29]

On leaving school, Williams went first to Aberystwyth, and then to Jesus College, Oxford, to study English literature and through that to discover a new intellectual world, more sophisticated and luxuriant than the one he had left. In 1935 he took up a lecturing post at Cairo University, the beginning of thirty-four years spent in the Near East; he later became Professor of English Literature, first at Cairo and then successively at the Universities of Alexandria, Libya and Istanbul, retiring home to Trefenter in 1969.

It was while he was in temporary exile in Egypt during the Second World War that Gwyn Williams began to translate Welsh-language poetry into English, and his first small collection of translations, *The Rent That`s Due To Love*, was published in 1950. This was followed in 1953 by a critical study, *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry*, and then by a larger volume of translations, *The Burning Tree*, which appeared in 1956.[30] Although his translations and critical studies of Welsh literature are the heart of his work, he also published four volumes of his own poetry, as well as novels, travel books, Shakespearian criticism and *The Land Remembers*, (1977), the book of his television series on the history of Wales. *ABC of (D)GW* (1981) was an unconventional, but fascinating, autobiography. He also wrote and published in the Welsh language.

Whether he would have begun on his major work as a translator without that

wartime spent in Egypt is a matter for speculation. Williams, like the other British academics in Cairo and Alexandria in 1939, was asked to remain there as a morale-boosting gesture and that unchosen exile does seem to have led him to take a more active interest in his own native culture than he might otherwise have done. Possibly, too, being surrounded by a civilisation as ancient and rich as that of Egypt, had its effect. He comments in *ABC of (D)GW*:

> There can hardly be anywhere richer in such things [than] this borough of Afan. From the Stone and Bronze Ages, the Iron Age of the Celtic period, the Roman occupation, the stone crosses of early Celtic Christianity, medieval Welsh history and the Norman incursions and lordships, industry from the 16th century to the 20th, streets that remembered old field names, others the battles of the Crimean War, the fortunes of Margam Abbey, of all these things, at the Port Talbot County School, in those years of 1915-1922, I was told nothing ... And I think it must have been the growing awareness of the deprivation I had thus suffered at school that induced me later to delve below the surface of places I subsequently lived in.[31]

Since this was a deprivation that he must have shared with others of his generation, perhaps it also contributes to the tendency of the writers of Neddafan to become bridge builders, to translate and explain the languages and cultural backgrounds of the area to one another. Possibly, too, his Egyptian stay gave him time to work as much as motivation for that work.

On the other hand, being so far from home meant that he had limited resources when he was working on the translations, and since his main focus was on the Welsh poets of the Middle Ages, he left himself open to critical strictures.

> [By the University of Wales] I was regarded as an ill-equipped interloper into the closed shop of Welsh studies, especially since I had the audacity to get published from London, and my most generous critic, Saunders Lewis, remarked, if I remember correctly, "his translations are often poetry and they are often wrong." ... the Welsh departments of the university have become progressively kinder to me as I became more careful in my translations and interpretations.[32]

In practice, the fact that he was published by a major London publishing house

undoubtedly gave his translations, and therefore the Welsh bardic tradition, an audience they would not otherwise have had. His were the first translations to give a genuine idea of the poetic quality of Welsh-language poetry, and though *The Rent that`s Due To Love* gives only a small selection, its expanded sequel, *The Burning Tree,* provided sufficient material to show that this was a full literature, not the output of a single great writer, Dafydd ap Gwilym, with one or two pale satellites.

Williams remained in the Near East more or less continuously until he retired in 1969, settling then at his father`s home village of Trefenter, not Port Talbot (though he maintained his contacts with that town, and three of his later books were published there.[33]) This absence from Wales - plus, perhaps the occasional confusion with that other larger than life professor, Gwyn Alf Williams - is, no doubt, the reason why his contribution as writer, translator and critic has been so little noticed, but it was his pioneering work that inspired both Tony Conran and Joseph Clancy to enter the field. They were drawn in not simply by Williams`s translations, but also by the critical study that accompanied them, *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry* (1953).

However, poetry is a specialised field, not something likely to come to the notice of the average passenger on the Cardiff Shuttle bus or the housewife trundling her trolley round Tesco. The cultural history of Wales was another matter, one that was also in serious need of an interpreter. Here too Gwyn Williams opened doors; in 1976 he wrote and presented a television series, `The Land Remembers`. This, and the book of the same name that followed in 1977, subtitled *A View of Wales*, were once again pioneering work, well researched, but a very personal approach to the subject, eminently readable, full of colour and anecdote. Williams has little to say about industrial Wales - but even in the mid-Seventies there were more than enough studies available about that portion of our history. As to the purpose of the book, in the

introduction he writes:

> During my years of work in Cyrenaica and in Turkey ... I made as searching enquiries as I could into the prehistory and history of these countries and I found out that this gave the observable situations in those countries a profounder contingency ... So, since my return to Wales, concerned with the doubts, hesitations and enthusiasms of the people I meet and read about in present-day Wales, I have made a similar enquiry into the past of the land, for the past is summed up in the present and conditions the future.[34]

Gwyn Williams was never one to fit into neat categories. His prolific output, in both English and Welsh, included poetry, fiction, travel books, autobiography and critical studies as well as translations, some twenty-six books all told. Although his contribution was recognised in his lifetime - he was one of the Welsh Academy`s first Fellows, and received honours from the Welsh Arts Council - he was always too much his own man to be part of the literary establishment, and today mention of his name often produces little or no response. Oddly enough, this is due as much as anything to the success of his work; his translations opened the way for others, Conran and Clancy in particular. In the same way, `The Land Remembers`, a ground-breaking series in the Seventies, was overtaken by the later fireworks of `The Dragon Has Two Tongues`, fronted by Gwyn Alf Williams and Wynford Vaughan Thomas, a series that might not have been possible without the earlier, very successful venture. As for his own poetry, with its concern for form and pattern, and its textured grittiness of surface and subject matter, it deserves to be looked at again, by a new generation.

3. [William] Moelwyn Merchant (1913-1997)

Moelwyn Merchant was first cousin to Gwyn Williams, whose mother was Merchant`s aunt. The two writers make an interesting pairing, at some points their careers echo each other, at other times they are almost diametrically opposite. Both

were men for whom the Welsh language was important, both were, in their own different ways, outsiders on the Welsh cultural scene, both were academics as well as artists. On the other hand, where Gwyn Williams was an exultant pagan, Moelwyn Merchant was a devoted Anglican clergyman; and while Merchant clearly valued his Welsh heritage, one does not get the same sense of fierce patriotism from his work as one does from Williams`s poems and historical writing.

Merchant was born into the same Calvinistic Methodist intellectual milieu as Gwyn Williams, though the chapel where his father and grandfather were deacons and where his family worshipped, was Dyffryn Ajalon (usually known simply as Dyffryn), not Grove Place where Williams was baptised. In practice the two congregations were to a large extent part of a biological as well as a spiritual family - for instance Margam Jones was linked to both Williams and Merchant through his grandmother; when Dyffryn closed in the late nineteen nineties, most of its members moved to Grove Place.[35] In his autobiography *Fragments of a Life* (1990) Merchant describes being present as a child at a public debate in the chapel between his grandfather Evan Merchant, a former coal miner, and Richard Llewellyn, a tinworker, on the question of `the primacy of prevenient Grace over sacramental Grace`[36]. That apart, however, Merchant has little to say about the cultural activities of the chapels. He was nine years younger than his cousin, and though they lived in adjacent streets and both went to Port Talbot County School, they do not appear to have had much, if anything, to do with one another before Williams went away to university in 1922.

In due course Merchant went to University College, Cardiff, where he read for two honours degrees (English and History) as well as the University Teaching

Diploma - this latter being a standard fall-back option if other employment failed. At this point in the nineteen thirties teaching posts were hard to get and Merchant had submitted eighty-three job applications before he finally got his first interview. Eventually in 1937 he obtained a post as an English lecturer at Caerleon Training College, then in 1940 he moved to a lectureship in the English Department, University College, Cardiff, moving on again to become Professor of English at Exeter University in 1961. Numerous visits to America, researching Shakespearian material in the Folger Library, led to his being offered the Willett Chair at Chicago University; the holder could choose his own title, so Merchant became Willett Professor of Literature and Theology.

This distinguished academic career ran alongside that of Anglican vicar, first, while he was in Cardiff, at Llanhenog, near Caerleon, then, towards the end of his time at Exeter, as a Canon and Chancellor of Salisbury Cathedral, and finally as vicar of Llanddewi Brefi in Cardiganshire. His autobiography chronicles these posts without explaining why, from such a solidly Nonconformist background, he should have become a cleric in the Church in Wales. Possibly the ritual and artistic elements of Anglican worship appealed to him, because music, painting and sculpture seem always to have been important to him; in 1967, when he was fifty-four, he took up sculpture and shortly afterwards resigned his Chair at Exeter

> `In order to become more wholly a sculptor and to have more time for poetry (which seemed to be released by my working in stone and bronze) ... I had become physically and emotionally weary of academic life, with its many failures of creativity even in those who professed "the arts"; just at this point a happy accident brought me into contact with Barbara Hepworth and - quite swiftly - to one of those few friendships which wholly transform lives.`[37]

Hepworth was only one of the artists in his circle of friendship; among others were Josef Herman and John Piper, while his time at Exeter brought him into contact

with Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, and in America he met Ezra Pound. Nearer home he came to know Christopher Fry and R.S. Thomas and to meet David Jones.

In 1974 Merchant left Exeter and returned `to Wales, to become vicar of Llanddewi Brefi in Dyfed ... The first and most potent reason for leaving academic life and "retiring" to the country was to give me more time for sculpture and writing`.[38] He clearly found his new parish a very satisfying experience, particularly in the way in which it allowed him to rejoin and develop his Welsh traditions and language. However, he also used his time at Llanddewi to organise a four-day annual arts festival, of which there were three before he moved to live with his son in Leamington Spa.

Merchant spent four years at Llanddewi, a surprisingly short time for what was, in his own words, a time of `great happiness`. The reason he gives in *Fragments of a Life* for moving on is that it had become obvious to Merchant and his family that he `could no longer sustain the pressures of a parish, of sculpture and writing ... and [his] permanent craving to teach`.[39] This may be true, but one suspects that there may have been other reasons too. In the Sixties he had sat on the Welsh Committe of the Arts Council, and when he was organising the festival at Llanddewi Brefi he was a member of the Music and Fine Arts Panels of the Welsh Arts Council and of the West Wales Association for the Arts; the artists he invited to take part in the festival were of the highest quality. And yet somehow neither the Llanddewi Brefi festival nor Merchant himself were ever taken as seriously as they deserved and this must have been more than a little frustrating.

Perhaps this failure to recognise the value of his activities came about at least partly because he never quite joined the arts community in Wales; I was a member of

the Literature Panel of the West Wales Association of the Arts from its inception until the Association`s subject panels were disbanded in the early nineteen eighties, but I never remember being aware of Merchant as an active part of the scene. Equally, he did not buy in to the official view of Anglo-Welsh literature:

> `Some years ago, I aroused fury in parts of my audience, as I spoke to a conference of Arts Associations in Swansea. In the course of my talk I spoke of the three poetic landmarks in the history of literature in Wales: Dafydd ap Gwilym, Henry Vaughan and R.S. Thomas. Now, I was far from devaluing Dylan Thomas or his lively successors in both English and Welsh - poetry in Wales during the last two generations has been in exceedingly good shape and there have been volumes of outstanding quality. But my `landmarks` still stand.`[40]

Since he may also have expressed some disquiet at the amount of resources taken by the National Eisteddfod, to the detriment of his festival and other possible ventures, it is understandable that he was not among the heroes of the orthodox.

Although in *Fragments of a Life* Merchant writes in some detail of the poets he knew or interviewed - Christopher Fry, Sorley MacLean, Ezra Pound and Hugh McDiarmid among them - he says nothing of his own poetry, when it began, when he went public with it, how he ranked it as a form of artistic expression. He does include several of his own poems in the autobiography, but in every case but one these are associated with a piece of artwork by one of his friends or are poster poems; the exception is a poem dedicated to Saunders Lewis, whom he met when Lewis was a lecturer at Cardiff, after Penyberth, and which effectively catches its subject`s formality and intensity. Otherwise the poems quoted are very simple, descriptive pieces, perhaps because they all relate, one way or another, to the visual.

One has the impression that though the written word was important to Merchant, it generally took second place to his interest in art and his work as a sculptor. Writing was perhaps not his natural outlet, but rather a tool to be used for his

criticism and reviewing. This is evidently also true of his prose fiction - though possibly fiction is not quite the word for his five novels. The first of these, *Jeshua* (1987) is also the most substantial, some four hundred and twenty pages long, and had been, so he said, `brooded over for some forty years`.[41] It was sparked off by an occasion when he and a Jewish friend `had been talking of the Messiah and of Nazareth` and the friend asked whether, if they were both in first-century Nazareth, Merchant would have said to him, `You see that young man over there - he`s God, you know.` *Jeshua* is Merchant`s attempt to present the idea of the Incarnation, someone who is both God and man.[42]

Though technically a novel, *Jeshua* is perhaps better described as a slightly fictionalised biography. There is no serious attempt to create tension or character and the dialogue is more a matter of successive statements than the cut and thrust of normal conversation. The first third of the book deals with Jeshua`s life from birth to the point where he is about to start his mission, but it is a very uneventful childhood and youth, passed almost entirely in Nazareth, apart from the visit to Jerusalem when the twelve-year-old boy confounds the scholars in the Temple, and two later journeys to Capernaum and Mount Nebo when he is in his twenties. This Jeshua is unusually thoughtful and sensitive, but nothing more. The only very faint hint of something more comes when his friend and mentor, Rabbi Lazar, is talking about the first day of Creation:

> `In the depths of Jeshua`s own mind a memory seemed to stir and the dark formlessness of the void seemed palpable about him; he groped as if for the grasp of an act in the far past: let there be ! and there was. His mind reached for the clear memory beyond history, beyond the stream of time ... the unconscious centre of his being.`[43]

Even this, though, is ambiguous.

Book Two begins with Jeshua visiting his cousin John in order to be baptised

in the Jordan. From then on Merchant retells the story of Jesus quite straightforwardly, as given in the four gospels, interspersed with numerous quotations, mostly from the Old Testament. In *Fragments of a Life* he makes it clear that this austerity is deliberate:

> `In this quest I had determined on two constraints upon myself: that `fiction` be kept to the minimum *dramatis personae* that would flesh out the day-to-day living of the Gospel characters ... and the use of as much of the material of the four Gospels as could be compassed within the bounds of the narrative`[44]

Merchant also discusses three of his character studies, those of Justus the Roman centurion, Lazarus and Judas, but he deals with very basic points - how to make the centurion historically credible, did Lazarus regret being resurrected, what was Judas`s motive for betrayal[45]. In the text all the characters are seen from the outside - even, in many ways, Jeshua himself. The style of writing is not helpful either; the vocabulary is often Latinate, not Anglo-Saxon in derivation, so that at times the meaning gets lost in a mist of words.

Despite all of this, the cumulative effect of the narrative is almost surprisingly impressive, though this is not a Jesus to whom one can relate on the human level (seemingly one of Merchant`s goals). The author has not really solved the problem of demonstrating the Incarnation. Up until his baptism Jeshua is noble, sensitive to the needs of his fellow villagers, blessed with an enquiring mind and a liking for solitude, all very human; after baptism he immediately goes round healing the sick and raising the dead, with no comment on how or why he has acquired this ability, or what his new relationship with God actually implies. On the other hand, as a retelling of the four Gospels the book works well, even if it adds very little in the way of interpretation or explanation.

What it does add, and triumphantly so, is the picture of Jesus the maker, the

craftsman. Jeshua works with his father Joseph, first as a carpenter, then, following on from that, as an architect/builder. The descriptions of his craftsmanship are detailed and loving - the craftsman in Merchant, loving the materials he sculpts, reaches out to the carpenter creating a new ark for the Torah. Joseph speaks of his son:

> `His voice has the sureness, the command which I see in his grasp of the carving tool. He knows the wood`s grain, its growth, its thrust upward and around its core. He feels for the knot and its pattern, as, when he reads, he feels for the sense and pronounces it with assurance. I have rarely had that secure command, even of wood or stone and never of the Word`[46]

It is appropriate that when he describes the twelve-year-old Jeshua in the Temple, the question the boy asks of the elders is concerned with the making of images and why that is forbidden - and the answer he receives seems to allow this as long as the result of the making is not an idol. In fact, the restoration of the traditional place of the arts in the the buildings and liturgy of the Church was one of Merchant`s motives in writing *Jeshua.* (Perhaps it is worth noting here that both Moelwyn Merchant and Gwyn Williams came from families with a strong tradition of craftsmanship in wood and stone.)[47]

Merchant`s descriptions of the countryside of Galilee are equally rich, excusing the more prosaic patches that can occur even in the same paragraph:

> There was no urgency in the return journey. He avoided the populous highways, avoided even the villages. For there was much to garner, much to record in his mind of these forty days. The fatigue was little, his lips no longer parched, his loins no longer twisted in the pain of approaching starvation. Every ridge of mountain had now its sharp definition; the green of a wadi was now an unique green, the water had its new translucency, its new sibilance over the stones. The dawn song was sweeter than the quieter murmur as the birds settled for the night; the slither of the viper through the grass and stunted brush was no longer a menace; it was a pattern of colour as vibrant as a rainbow and with the rainbow`s grace`[48].

As has been suggested earlier, this is not a novel in the usual sense of the word, though it does qualify as a piece of storytelling. It was published in Wales, by

Christopher Davies, the more adventurous of the two firms that began serious English language publishing in Wales in the nineteen sixties and seventies, and though Merchant may have gone to them specifically as Welsh publishers, it is difficult to imagine any English publisher taking the book. Precisely those elements which Merchant forswears - Mary Magdalen as `Mrs. Jesus`, Jesus as bloodline descendant of the Herodian line of kings etc. etc. - are what might have made *Jeshua* acceptable in the metropolitan world. As it is, the book is clearly part of a very different tradition, that of the expository sermon, reaching below the theological niceties of debate to the basic story that they elaborate, bringing it where the non-theologian can see and appreciate it. In this tradition Merchant`s work has kinship with T. Rowland Hughes`s *The Story of Joseph of Arimathea* (1961), or with Margam Jones, friend and equal of the philosopher Bertrand Russell, yet author of what might be called `naive novels` (on the basis of the school of `naive` painters) for a non-intellectual readership. It is difficult in today`s climate to realise just how far the Methodist Revival of the eighteenth century has made religion and/or theology a living part of the Anglo-Welsh cultural and intellectual experience. One thinks of Emlyn Williams writing *The Wind of Heaven*, his retelling of the story of Jesus in a Welsh setting, sparked off by the biblical names of villages in North Wales - Nebo, Bethesda, Beulah. Even Allen Raine, a bestseller with an international readership, is part of this tradition, particularly in *Garthowen* (1900) which deals with the struggle of conscience of a Cardiganshire deacon - and where else would one find a figure like Caradoc Evans, who shocked a nation by `exposing` its religious failings at a time when Europe was heading into the sexual revolution of the interwar years.[49]

Jeshua was followed by a number of other biblical retellings. In *Fragments of*

a Life Merchant lists five, two of which had then been published: *A Bundle of Papyrus* (1989) and *Fire From the Heights* (1988). The version of *Inherit the Land* mentioned here, finished, but not published, included the stories of Cain, Abraham and Joseph, and it would seem that there was another, *Upon the King*, which dealt with Saul, David and Solomon; the last of the five, suggested by Josef Herman, was an account of Moses, to be called *The Wilderness - Refining Fire.*[50] Eventually the story of Moses was included with the other stories in *Inherit the Land* (1992), while *Upon the King* seems to have remained in manuscript. All of the published versions, even *Inherit the Land*, are much shorter than *Jeshua* - more novellas than novels - and it has to be said that they are much less impressive. Their style is oddly Victorian in flavour - very formal, never colloquial, even in conversation - and they are prime examples of the bad habit of telling, not showing. If anything, the novels are less dramatic, less immediate than the original scriptural narratives. Curiously, too, there seems to be an obsession with the wilderness, where the leading characters regularly seek refuge; towns and cities are evil. In *Jeshua* this makes sense and is not overdone, but by the end of *Fire From the Heights* one is left wondering what exactly Elijah did apart from moving around the deserts and the mountains.

Once the biblical novels were written, a bout of arthritis, which left him unable to do much sculpting for a while, made Merchant turn to writing, this time to what he calls `secular` novels. He completed three of these, of which one, *The Inheritors*, was published (as *Triple Heritage*) in 1994. Although he describes it as longer than the other two, it is really more of a novella in length, and not particularly successful as that. The story deals with the three heirs of an ancient estate; one son goes to Spain to fulfil his love for the guitar; the other pursues the origins of the medieval scholar Duns Scotus, and the daughter sets up a riding centre, partly to save

the estate and partly to help disabled children. The novel is apparently set somewhere in England in the present day, though the role of the daughter suggests that of the Lady Bountiful of the early twentieth century; there is no real development of plot or character and the dialogue is stilted, to say the least. Richard, the father, addressing his daughter Janet, who has just announced her engagement, says: `But now there are practical things we must talk about. I have not been careless of our future in this house and I have a substantial fortune to control.`[51]

We have looked here at Moelwyn Merchant`s career as a creative writer rather than at his work as a critic; though fiction was not really his genre, he is, nonetheless, an interesting figure in the context of Welsh writing in English, throwing light on an area which has so far been very largely neglected in favour of the socialist-orientated literature of the Valleys.

NOTES

1. Jones, C. (2003) `Red Mist: an interview with Janet Street Porter`, *Western Mail*, 30 August 2003. Interestingly, Street Porter sees South Wales as `much more cosmopolitan`, with `all sorts of influences`.
2. Elfyn, M. and Rowlands, J. (2003) *The Bloodaxe Book of Modern Welsh Poetry.*
3. *Companion,* p. 430, article on Gwyneth Lewis, and p. 212 on Menna Elfyn.
4. This is listed on the back cover of the English-language version of *Y Ferch o`r Scer* (1909)
5. Publisher`s note to *Maid of Sker*: `As I possess the sole right of publication in Welsh, I have frequently been asked to bring out an English translation of the Welsh edition of the popular story. I now venture to do so, having the utmost confidence that the story, with its thrilling narrative, its vivid depiction of Welsh life in the days of the past, and its pathetic ending, will obtain as widespread a popularity in English as it has done in Welsh` p. [3].
6. For a full account of Elizabeth Davies, see Chapter 3 below.
7. Jones, S.R. (1999) `The Margam Bando Boys`, *Roundyhouse*, No. I, pp 19-21.
8. Morgan, J.V. (1904) *Cofiant a Gweithiau Edward Roberts.*
   Jones, S.R. (1981) `The preacher and the critic: Margam Jones and Vyrnwy Morgan` *PTHS Trans.*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 15-21.
9. Evans, A.L.trans. (1987) *A History of Taibach to 1872 (Gemau Margam).*
   Evans, A.L. trans. (1992) *Cwmavon Then and Now (Aeron Afan).*

In both cases the books include updates and extra material as well as the translations.

10. Evans, A.L. trans. (1989) *Siencyn Penhydd.* This was an edited translation; the book also included Matthews`s biography of George Heycock, another early Methodist, but the original text was drastically pruned. The details about the memorial plaque are personal knowledge.
11. Roberts, G.M. and Morris, W. eds. (1974) *Gweision Gwahanol*, pp. 28-37. The chapter on Margam Jones is by the Rev. M. R. Mainwaring, his nephew.
12. Information from their nephew, M. R. Mainwaring, but also see Note 19 below.
13. Nicholas, J. (1910) *Hen Ddyffryn a Charmel a`i Ganghenau.*
14. Personal knowledge. In addition to its own library, Carmel acquired part of the stock of the Victoria Institute when that was demolished to make way for a branch of Fine Fare. At the time of Carmel`s own demolition in 1974, the books, which had been moved to the empty caretaker`s house, were damp and in very poor condition. What could be, was salvaged; the rest were bulldozed into the ground.
15. Gwyn Williams bears witness to this in his autobiography *ABC of [D]GW* (see below, Case Study No. 2), but a more unexpected tribute is in Clive Jenkins`s autobiography, *All Against the Collar* (1990), p. 5-6, describing his childhood experiences in Dyffryn Chapel, Taibach, as Sunday School teacher and debater.
16. Jones, M. (1939) *Ysgrifau Byr am Matthews Ewenni*; (1931) *Caniadau`r Pentref*; (1934) *The Village Lyre.*
17. Published in the *Glamorgan Gazette*, 10 June 1932. Copy made available by A.L. Evans.
18. *Siencyn Penhydd.*
19. Abse, J, ed. (2000) *Letters From Wales.*
20. Jones, M. (1910) *Stars of the Revival,* p. 272.
21. Jones, M. (1914) *Angels in Wales.* `Before long Sina`s dress grew too shabby to allow her to attend the Barn on a Sunday`, p.53; and `Too poor was she to go to an old barn to worship`, p. 67.
22. *Stars of the Revival*, pp. 94-95.
23. These are all quoted by the publisher at the beginning of *Stars of the Revival.* Jones`s preface to the novel makes it clear that he sees himself as a `cultural translator`, giving an idea of `Welsh sentiments and Welsh phrases` and of `the beauty of the simple life of the old Welsh village` pp. v-vi.
24. *Angels in Wales*, p. 12.
25. Ibid, p. 13.
26. Ibid, p. 43-4.
27. Ibid, p. 130.
28. Williams, G. (1981) *ABC of [D]GW,* p. 5-6.
    Merchant, M. (1990) *Fragments of a Life*, pp. 5-6. Although the connection was a little more distant, Margam Jones was also a member of the same family. (Information from Jones`s nephew, Rev. M.R. Mainwaring.
29. Williams, G. (1977) *The Land Remembers*, pp. 170-1
30. *ABC of [D]GW,* pp. 33-35
31. Ibid, p. 22.
32. Ibid, p. 35.
33. Ibid, p. 29. The three books published in Port Talbot, all by Alun Books, were *Choose Your Stranger* (1979), *Y Ddefod Goll* (1981) and *Flyting in Egypt* (1990).

Flyting was an account of a bardic contest he arranged in wartime Egypt between the poets of Cairo and Alexandria.

34. *The Land Remembers*, passim.
35. Ibid, pp. 17-18.
36. *Fragments of a Life*, pp. 3-4
37. Ibid, p.4.
38. Ibid, p. 199.
39. Ibid, p. 282.
40. Ibid, p. 100.
41. Ibid, p. 182.
42. Ibid, p. 348.
43. Merchant, M. (1987) *Jeshua*, p.60.
44. *Fragments of a Life*, p.349
45. Ibid, p. 349-51.
46. *Jeshua*, p. 72.
47. Their fathers and grandfathers were craftsmen in metal, stone and wood; tinworkers, miners, builders.
48. *Jeshua,* p. 133.
49. Williams, E. (1986) *George*, p. 43.
50. *Fragments of a Life,* pp. 356-8. Merchant`s description of the eight novels which he wrote after *Jeshua* does not quite fit with his actual published output.
51. Merchant, M. (1994) *Triple Heritage,* p. 81.

CHAPTER 3. WOMEN WRITERS OF NEDDAFAN

To judge from the accounts of D. Rhys Phillips and Brinley Richards, Neddafan has produced far fewer women writers than male authors.[1] This may be true, but it may simply be that those women writers who existed were much less likely to come to the notice of literary historians than their male counterparts. There are a number of possible reasons for this and it would perhaps be helpful to look at two examples of `lost` women writers.

Bronwen Evans would probably have been described as `an ordinary Port Talbot housewife`; she was also a poet, writing verses on a wide range of subjects, from family members and activities to public events such as the Aberfan disaster. Although she did not have a high public profile, her work was well known among her friends and neighbours, but she does not seem to have considered going into print, and kept her manuscripts in a carrier bag. When she died, her husband (who, it is said, had always been supportive of her writing) failed to realise what that particular carrier bag held and threw it out in the general clearance of clothes and personal effects. Only five of her poems still survive, though fortunately these are in the hands of Alan Davies, a distant cousin, who is himself a well-known Neddafan poet.[2]

A second example is Annie Margaret Mainwaring, sister of the novelist and poet Margam Jones. She was an accomplished musician and one of the group of singers who accompanied the revivalist Evan Roberts in the 1904 Revival, but she was also a poet, writing in both Welsh and English. Many of her Welsh verses were published in the denominational weekly newspaper *Y Goleuad*, and in this she echoed her brother, whose poems also first appeared in newspaper poetry columns. However, unlike his work, hers never appeared in book form. She also wrote plays on biblical themes for performance by the various chapel groups - one of these was `The Pearl of

Great Price`. Copies of her poems are still held among the family papers, and her son, Rev. M.R. Mainwaring, uses them from time to time as illustrations to his sermons.[3]

It would be easy to assume that `hidden` or `lost` women writers of this kind became so because of a failure of recognition on the part of a patriarchal literary establishment. However, even apart from the fact that their male relatives, at least, seem to have been supportive, it would not be difficult to find male writers from the same background (i.e. rural or urban working class) whose work has also disappeared. Thomas Bleddyn Jones, author of the bilingual *Margam Bando Boys Song*, produced a body of verse in both Welsh and English but almost nothing seems to have survived; his ancestor, Evan Jones (1741-1832) also wrote verses which were still being quoted in the early twentieth century, but by 1930 had been lost even from the oral record.[4] Again, a number of the Llynfi Valley writers listed by Brinley Richards seem never to have got into print, so that accessing their work is problematical.[5] At a slightly more elevated social level, though Mary Pendrill Llewelyn, wife of the vicar of Llangynwyd and recorder of the Cefn Ydfa tradition, had her poems and translations published in local papers, her work was not gathered into book form, and so she remains in memory largely because of her supposed support for the story of the Maid and Professor G.J. Williams`s attack on the story.[6]

It is difficult to tell whether this failure to move into book form - or in some cases, even into print - is due to the persistence of an oral folk tradition, so that getting published is not an inevitable goal, or whether it is a product of the frequent English assumption that literature is something only for the middle classes. Possibly both considerations are involved; for instance folk verse is often produced for a very particular audience, and would not circulate far outside that, so that there would be

little point in a more permanent record. As for the second consideration, although it is clear that the `Anglo-Welsh` tradition was much closer to Welsh-language writing than has usually been recognised, the English-language writers did borrow certain attitudes from their English counterparts, and one of these, it would seem, was not simply the division between verse and poetry, but the association of verse with a popular, uncultured audience and, very often, popular, uncultured writers. Hence, though verses might be circulated orally, and sometimes in manuscript form (as was The *Margam Bando Boys Song),* they would not be seen as worthy of the permanence of print. It is surely relevant here that where the work of these local poets does appear in book form, the writers almost always wrote in both languages, very often with Welsh as their first language.

As it happens, the social composition of Neddafan has been basically working class, and this also applies to many of those women writers who have emerged. There have been occasional representatives of the gentry or professional classes: Maria Jane Williams of Aberpergwm, Mary Pendrill Llewelyn, Ruth Bidgood (whose father was vicar of Aberafan) and the ladies of the Quaker industrialist families of the Vale of Neath, but more typical are figures like Barbara May Walters, Rachael Ann Webb and Elizabeth Davies, whose work and background will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Perhaps one should also add at this point that there are other, purely practical reasons for the loss of some women`s writing, and although she was not from Neddafan, it would be appropriate to look at the case of Ann Griffiths (1776-1805), the Welsh-language hymnwriter and mystic.[7] Griffiths was literate and is said to have `sometimes jotted [her hymns] down on odd scraps of paper`, but she seemingly made no fair copies, and the scraps were not preserved. Her work survived via the oral

tradition, when her maidservant Ruth Evans, who had learned the words by heart, passed them on to John Hughes, through whom they got into print. Ann Griffiths was a farmer`s daughter and a farmer`s wife, always busy and occupied with a round of daily duties which, unlike that of her menfolk or of ladies of the middle classes, had no convenient winter breaks or quiet mornings in which to polish one`s creations and consider presenting them to a wider audience. The poem would be written, and then put aside, perhaps for later consideration. Fair copies might have survived Griffiths`s early death, but her scraps had little chance once their author was gone.

At present the earliest recorded woman writer from Neddafan appears to be Mrs. Ann Bevan of Neath (1731-1803). She was born a Miss Jenkins, a connection of the Thomas family of Cwr-y-Waun, Llangadog, and married Richard Bevan, `the notable Neath surgeon and magistrate`, but found time to write `several poetical pieces of very considerable merit, which, if collected and published, would probably meet with general approbation.`[8] In the circumstances it is difficult to tell whether this judgement (by Theophilus Jones in his *History of Brecknock*) is merely complimentary or whether it holds water, but her obituary states `She possessed a solid and well-cultivated understanding and evinced a considerable degree of genius.`[9] The only example of her conversation which we have is quoted in D. Rhys Phillips` account; he notes that shortly before her death she commented, "If Napoleon invades this island, I hope I shall seize on my little portion of it before he comes."[10] Her son, another Richard, was a barrister, and `was well versed in the history and antiquities of the Neath district.`[11]

Even from this brief notice common themes appear. She was not the only literary member of her family - at least one other, Lt. Col. Thomas of Cwrt-y-waun, produced a Latin poem, an ode on Llanwrtyd - and her son took an interest in local

history and antiquities. Had she lived a century later, she might perhaps have published her poems in the local newspapers as did `two graceful women writers of the late nineteenth century`, Mrs. John of Merthyr and Neath (who seems to have had a bardic name, `Rhianon` [sic] and Mrs. Roderick of Pontneddfechan.[12] Their main outlet was the *Bridgend Chronicle*, but Mrs. Bevan`s work seems to have remained in manuscript - though at least it was taken seriously enough for her to be mentioned in Theophilus Jones`s *History*. It is worth noting that though Mrs. Bevan came from the landed/professional gentry, Mrs. John was the wife of an inspector on the Great Western Railway and Mrs. Roderick`s husband was an overseer on the Bute estates at Rhigos; neither lady was exactly working class, but their backgrounds, taken with that of Mrs. Bevan, do show a wider social spread than one might have found among English women writers at that date.

The earliest woman writer to leave any substantial evidence of her work is Elizabeth Davies (1769-1857), and her background adds still further elements to the social mix. Her father, Richard Jenkins, was a farmer and would-be mining entrepreneur; his inexperience left his family bankrupt at his death, and Elizabeth, who married a Mr. Davies, but seems to have been widowed fairly early, became the proprietor of a sweet shop in Wind Street, Neath. At the end of her life she was described as `a pauper` and was living in one of the local almshouses. She was bilingual, the author of ballads, lyrics and hymns; her work and life will be considered in more detail later on.[13]

Maria Jane Williams of Aberpergwm (1795-1873) was not strictly a writer herself; her artistic talents lay in the field of music.[14] However she was a keen collector of folk songs, publishing many of these *in Ancient National Airs of Gwent and Morgannwg* (1844), and her correspondence with figures such as Taliesin ab Iolo

(Taliesin Williams, 1787-1849) had an influence on the development of the stories of the Maids of Cefn Ydfa and Sker, and thus on later writers like Michael Gareth Llewellyn and Alun Morgan. (Curiously, these two folk narratives do not seem so far to have inspired any of the women writers of Neddafan, though they would seem to be ripe material for either a full-blown romantic saga or a study of female repression.)

Slightly younger than Davies and Williams was Mary Owen (1796-1875) , Welsh-language hymn-writer, born at Ynysymaerdy, Briton Ferry, into a strongly Nonconformist household belonging to the Independent (or Congregational) denomination.[12] She married twice, firstly Captain Thomas Davies, a ship-owner and builder, and then, in 1836, the Rev. Robert Owen, minister of Seion Chapel in Cwmafan from 1834 - 41. Her hymns were published in 1839, and a number are still in regular use. She had two daughters by her first husband; it would seem that domesticity was not a bar to literary production for any of these early writers.

Mary Pendrill Llewelyn apart, neither Port Talbot nor Tir Iarll seem to have been producing women writers at this point, perhaps because, unlike the Vale of Neath, they were in process of rapid expansion. Industry was of course expanding everywhere in the first half of the nineteenth century, but the process of industrialisation began much earlier in Neath, and the writers who emerged at that point usually came from relatively stable, well-to-do backgrounds. Further east, the Talbots at Margam showed no great interest in literature and there were few families with the same professional gentry background as that of Mrs. Bevan. The new housewives of Taibach, Cwmafan and Maesteg often lacked any family support network and, even if they wrote, would have had little or no access to an audience.

Meanwhile the Quaker families of the Vale of Neath did produce three woman writers.[16] Anna Rebecca Tregelles lived at Neath for many years and in 1856 published anonymously *The Ways of the Line*, `based on her experience of spiritual work with the navvies who made the S. Wales Railway through Neath`[17]. She was the sister of Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, scholar, preacher and keen advocate of the Welsh language, and accompanied him on a visit to Brittany in the summer of 1865. However, it was Tregelles`s cousin, Anna Letitia Waring (1823-1910) who left the greater legacy for posterity, in her case as a hymnwriter. The Waring family moved to Cardiff in 1835 and Waring spent the latter part of her life at Clifton, near Bristol, but the family links with Neath remained strong, and her father, the journalist and preacher Elijah Waring, returned to the town in about 1855, dying there in 1857.

The third of these Quaker writers (all of whom later left the Society of Friends and joined other denominations) was Mary Howitt, née Botham (1799-1888). Her father, Samuel Botham, was an ironmaster from Uttoxeter who, in 1795, while acting as surveyor of the Margam estate, met Ann Wood, `a convinced Friend` from Swansea. They were married at Swansea in the following year. Their daughter Mary was born at Coleford in Gloucestershire, and in 1821 married William Howitt from Derbyshire, a prolific author. Mary Howitt was equally prolific; the Dictionary of National Biography lists well over fifty titles under her name, many of them written for children. She travelled a great deal and taught herself Danish and Swedish, translating the novels of Fredrika Bremner in 18 volumes, as well as a number of the stories of Hans Andersen.[18]

Her links with Neddafan were through her family rather than by residence, though her *Reminiscences* include valuable material about her father`s time as surveyor for Thomas Mansel Talbot (not Lord Talbot, as some accounts of her career

state). However, the *Reminiscences* also contain several intriguing references to Wales. In 1844 she visited Anglesey and comments, on viewing Snowdon, `Enraptured by the view, I thought that I was actually in the land which had been the object of my childish desires and fancies. I kept silently repeating what my parents had often said when I was young, "We really will sometime or other take a cottage in Wales and spend a few summer months there."[19] Ann Mary Howitt, who was with Mary and William in 1858, on their first stay in North Wales, wrote to her uncle Richard:

> "We only wish that some great Welsh writer would arise and do for beautiful Wales what Sir Walter Scott has done for his native land ... Alas ! this difficult Welsh language is a terrible bar for any English visitor conversing with the country people, and unless a person can talk with them there is no writing well about them. It is a Welsh man or woman born and bred who should be the chronicler of the strange, wild, simple, and affecting stories to be met with in the cottages and farmhouses of those solitary valleys and hillsides."[20]

Despite this, Howitt did publish *The Cost of Caergwyn* (1864), a three-volume novel, `Welsh in colour`.

Letitia Ann Waring and Mary Howitt both earned a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography,* and they were the first women writers with Neddafan connections to be recognised in the wider world. In one sense, of course, their achievements are marginal; Mary Howitt`s memories of Margam were secondhand, and Letitia Ann Waring spent much of her life elsewhere. On the other hand, both women were remembered locally and included in accounts of the history of the area, literary or otherwise and they certainly have a stronger claim to inclusion than, for example, T.E. Lawrence, who is sometimes described as an Anglo-Welsh writer because he was born at Tremadoc during a brief interlude in his parents` travels. They do also represent a point of intersection between the native tradition and the wider world of travel and external cultural influences which was part of their Quaker

heritage; it is appropriate that one of Elizabeth Davies`s earliest poems was a tribute to Anna and Peter Price of Neath Abbey, Letitia Ann Waring`s grandparents.

Although Neddafan cannot claim Mary Howitt`s novel *The Cost of Caergwyn*, and produced no Gothic novelists, it did provide the setting for at least one early historical romance, *Margam Abbey: an historical romance of the fourteenth century* (1837). The novel was published anonymously, but a reference in the *Margam and Penrice Papers* suggests that its author was a Mrs. Caroline Williams of Bridgend.[21] There *was* a Caroline E. Williams of Coed-y-Mwstwr, Bridgend, a descendant of Rice Price, the Maid of Cefn Ydfa`s uncle, who published *A Welsh Family from the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century* in 1885 and has often been claimed to be the author of *Margam Abbey* but her dates (she died in 1908) make it impossible that it was she who was the author of *Margam Abbey*. It was almost certainly her mother, also Caroline, originally a native of Bawtry in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

The novel begins in the present day (i.e. 1837), with the narrator `seated on a bench in the cloister` at Margam and imagining that she hears `a voice speaking from the ruins the history of by-gone days` Once again the spirit of Sir Walter is invoked: `What a pity Wales has no Scott to find out and adorn with his imaginings her many picturesque castles and abbeys.`[22] But just then a Cistercian monk appears and guides the author round the miraculously restored Abbey buildings. This is Margam in the reign of Edward II, and the monk, Father Andrew, proceeds to narrate the story of Edmund, foster-son of the abbot. Edmund believes himself to be a simple Welsh peasant, in whom the Abbot had taken and interest, but he is in fact the younger son of the Earl of Pembroke, concealed at birth and intended for the Church in order to avert an ancient family curse. By the end of the book Edmund`s father and elder brother have both died, and the secret is revealed - he is Earl of Pembroke. However,

he has already distinguished himself so much, both in battle and in gentlemanly behaviour, that he has won the hand of Lady Emmeline, the Queen`s half-sister. Although the middle section of the novel takes place in England and France, it then returns to South Wales and follows the story of Edward II`s flight, capture and murder. Finally Edmund, defeated in his attempt to rescue the king, resigns his earldom to his sister, Lady Cecil, and retires to Margam with his beloved Emmeline.

The story is standard historical romance, with a few mildly Gothic touches such as the secret of Edmund`s identity; the Margam setting is accurately portrayed, and there is a lively description of a shipwreck at Sker. However, there are still some echoes of the eighteenth century Gothic view of Wales as a land both savage and innocent:

> `[The king] found himself, on the second day, in that part of the country called Langunnoyd. Hunger and fatigue obliged him to trust himself to the mercy of some cottagers; whose miserable huts, scattered over the plain, though they promised no very tempting viands, offered at least the chance of appeasing his appetite, and of refreshing his worn-out frame with rest. After having wandered irresolutely several times past one or two of these hovels, he was at length induced to stop by the kindly-pronounced `Dewchy meron` of one of the inmates; a merry, good-tempered, black-eyed lassie, who, having for some time watched the tired and care-worn stranger, had conjectured that he was in want of food and rest. The kind tone in which she uttered `Dewchy meron`, by the aid of the universal language of sympathy, rendered the outlandish words perfectly intelligible to the tired and hungry king. The best fare which the house could boast of was immediately set before him; and he was kindly pressed by the cottager, his wife, and their good-tempered daughter, to partake.`[23]

These friendly natives are not merely hospitable; even the sight of the king`s `splendid and well-filled purse`, though it reveals the royal identity, does not tempt the `kind-hearted peasant`, who refuses any reward and goes off, at some personal risk, to let the king`s followers know where he is.

We forget sometimes that the habit of visiting stately homes, either in

literature or real life, is not new; perhaps the most famous example is Elizabeth Bennett`s visit to Pemberly in *Pride and Prejudice*, while most travellers passing Margam called in to see its abbey ruins and grand gardens. The author of *Margam Abbey* seems to have had the run of the grounds, though probably not of the `present elegant mansion`[24]: the new house had only just been built and may not yet have been open to respectable visitors, but one suspects that Caroline Williams (if she was indeed the author) may not have belonged, quite, to the Talbots` social circle. Whether she produced any further novels is unknown; certainly there are none listed under Caroline Williams. This is regrettable. *Margam Abbey* is a very respectable attempt to emulate Sir Walter Scott, and though it would seem the author was not a Welsh-speaker, she evidently had some sympathy for the Welsh people, and researched the history of medieval Margam and the adventures of Edward II in the area. (The book includes six pages of extracts and notes from travellers` accounts.)

Although Mary Howitt earned her own quite substantial entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography,* she is more often remembered as part of the Howitts, the writing partnership that she shared with her husband. In fact, the Howitts were only marginally local, but Neddafan did have its very own literary couple in the shape of Richard and Mary Llewelyn.[25] Richard was vicar of Llangynwyd from 1841-1891; he himself was an antiquarian and local historian, collecting material and writing about it, though he was also well-known as a poet and adjudicator at eisteddfodau and other similar events. Mary (1811-1874) was both an English-language poet and a translator of poems from the Welsh. Her own literary career will be considered below, but one should note here that the extensive antiquarian library her husband built up was made available to the two best-known local historians and story-tellers, T.C. Evans (Cadrawd) and Thomas Morgan

(Llyfnwy), who both later acknowledged the encouragement they received from the two Llewelyns. Indeed, Cadrawd and Llyfnwy might be described as the Llewelyns` apprentices. When one speaks of `the poet`s (or the writer`s) craft`, it is easy to forget that this is literally true; the poet - and the Welsh-language poet in particular - works with words, not wood or clay, but the skills to be learnt are closer to those of the potter or the carver than to those of the academic (though in practice many academics are also poets or novelists, using the skills of the one craft to shape the argument of the other). This kind of artist to artist apprenticeship is particularly strong in the Welsh literary tradition - though whether it was as accessible to women writers in Wales before the second half of the twentieth century is another matter.

At the moment it would seem that there was something of a gap between the women writers of the mid nineteenth century in Neddafan and their successors from 1950 onwards. This may well be because the writers who existed still have to be identified - the hiatus also applies to male writers - but it may also be the result of economic and social pressures, and the changing nature of the audience as immigrants came increasingly from outside Wales.

It was not until the nineteen sixties that Neddafan once again began to have a visible number of women writers. Ruth Bidgood (1922-) was born at Seven Sisters, on the fringe of the Vale of Neath, and then moved to Port Talbot, where her father was vicar of St. Mary`s, Aberafan, and where she went to school.[26] In later life she lived in England for some years, but then moved to mid-Wales, to Abergwesyn, where she established a reputation as one of Wales`s leading English-language poets. Although she does not currently live in Neddafan, in many ways her work picks up on the themes outlined above; history is a main interest, but it is the history of particular places and families that forms the subject matter of her poetry, rather than tales of

kings and queens or political intrigues. She is also a noted local historian, recording the life and culture of her adopted Abergwesyn; appropriately enough *Parishes of the Buzzard* (2000), a substantial study of that area, was published by a small press in Port Talbot.

However, the genre that has attracted most of the Neddafan women writers of recent years has been autobiography. There have been exceptions to this rule. Elaine Crowley, originally from Ireland, married into a local family and has been a successful author of family sagas; in her early, pre-publication days she was an active member of the Port Talbot Writers` Circle, but her sagas draw on her own Irish background, and though her books are popular locally and her success is a matter of some local pride, her career lies mostly outside the Neddafan tradition.[27] Another novelist, Margaret Lewis, began by contributing material to *Punch*, but in the nineteen eighties she began to publish romantic novels, not as formulaic as the Mills and Boon brand, but basically light reading.She did have ambitions to produce something more weighty, but sadly developed Alzheimer`s Disease, leaving at least one unpublished novel with a Welsh theme and setting.[28] Meanwhile Porthcawl has produced its own answer to the best-selling historical sagas of Iris Gower in the shape of Cynthia Roberts, who has produced a series of novels based in the nineteenth century port and its hinterland.[29]

All writers draw from their own emotional experience in one way or another, but there is a difference between this generalised use and the specific genre of autobiography, writing about one`s own life and/or family history. This can include using one`s background in fiction, as Elaine Crowley does, but generally speaking, autobiography in Neddafan is more direct in style and purpose. As it happens, recent years have seen the publication of several autobiographies by men from Neddafan,

and it is interesting to note the difference between these and their female equivalents. On the whole the men write about their working lives or their war-time activities; though some of the material is colourful enough to be developed into fictional shape or used as the basis of a drama script, the authors themselves have shown no particular interest in doing this. Their concern is very much one of recording what they experienced in the way they experienced it, with few flourishes of any kind.

The women autobiographers, on the other hand, whether consciously or not, see the potentiality for story-telling in their material, and in at least one case developed the facts of a life into a sequence of stort stories and poems running from early childhood in the nineteen twenties to the aftermath of the Miners` Strike of 1984. Even Marilyn Winstone`s *Before the Roundabout* (2002), an account of growing up in Cwmbwrla in the nineteen fifties before part of the village was destroyed to make way for a roundabout, though doggedly factual, cannot exclude at least a taste of the characters who made her family memorable.

For the purpose of this thesis, we will be looking at four autobiographies by women: *From Caerau to the Southern Cross* (1987) by Rachael Ann Webb, *Grownups Don`t Cry* (2002) by Barbara May Walters, *Before the Roundabout* (2001) by Marilyn Winstone and *Martha Jane and Me* (1991) by Mavis Nicholson.

CASE STUDIES

1. Elizabeth Davies (c.1769-1857)

Elizabeth Davies was born Elizabeth Jenkins, c. 1769. She was the daughter of Richard Jenkins of the Paper Mill, Llangyfelach, who seems to have been a substantial farmer with a coal level on his land and entrepreneurial ambitions. Sadly, his ambitions were greater than his abilities, and when he died, on August 14th, 1788,

he left his family destitute. Elizabeth was then about nineteen years old; some time between that date and 1825 she married a Mr. Davies, but it seems likely that she was widowed while still quite young, since there is no mention of Mr. Davies apart from her change of name, and she appears to have had no children. She eventually went into business as the proprietor of a sweet shop in Wind Street, Neath. In the 1851 Census Davies is listed as a widow and a pauper, and she was by then living in the Almshouses in Water Street. She died in the Workhouse - probably moved there when she became ill, because there were medical facilities available. She died on April 27th, 1857, aged 88.[30]

At present there are some twenty-one of Davies`s poems and ballads extant. One ballad can definitely be dated to March, 1824, and two other poems come from that period, but the rest seem to belong to 1845-50; it is unlikely that she wrote no poems for twenty years, and so one must assume that a large part of her output has disappeared. We know very little of her life history, and she does not say when or where she began to write, but we do know now that her first published poem was a ballad inspired by a particularly sad crime that occurred on July 14th, 1822, the murder of Margaret Williams by a person or persons unknown. The event at once took hold on the popular imagination, perhaps because the murderer was never caught, though there were strong suspicions as to who he might be, and in 1825 a memorial stone, known to this day as the `Murder Stone`, was placed over Margaret Williams`s grave at Cadoxton. Its inscription was written by Elijah Waring, and it is worth quoting in full as an example of local legend meeting national author:

> To Record Murder. This stone was erected over the body of Margaret Williams, aged 26, a native of Carmarthenshire, living in service in this parish, who was found dead, with marks of violence upon her person, in a ditch, on the marsh below this churchyard, on the morning of Sunday, July 14th, 1822. Although the savage murderer escape for a season the punishment of man, yet

> God hath set his mark upon him either for Time or Eternity, and the Cry of Blood will assuredly pursue him to certain and terrible but righteous JUDGEMENT.`[31]

This first published ballad was in Welsh, some seventeen stanzas in length, and though a simple retelling of the story, it is clearly too accomplished to be a first effort at writing. Since the poem mentions the making and placing of the memorial stone, it must be dated, in this form at least, to 1825, the same year as Davies`s first published English-language ballad. We have a picture then of a woman who was a busy shopkeeper, but who was also, by 1825, a competent versifier in two languages, and whose main inspiration came from the events and characters of her native valley. In 1825 she was fifty-six years old; although there is no definite evidence, it would seem likely that her work had already been circulating in manuscript, hence the comment in the last stanza of the `murder ballad` that this was her first *published* poem. The other poem which can be certainly dated to 1824/5 was published by public demand; it described the building of the Neath and Red Jacket Canal and it was the canal workers who asked to have it in print so that they could give copies to their families and friends. Davies tells us herself that this ballad was written on March 1st, 1824; the information on this - and most of what we know about Davies - comes from a letter which she wrote to George Tennant, the man behind the canal scheme, asking for his permission to print her poem. A shorter poem, to the memory of the Quaker ironmaster Peter Price, seems likely on internal evidence to have dated from the eighteen twenties.

Eleven of Davies`s surviving poems are, or can be, dated; these are mostly ballads, and where there is no actual date on the poem itself, the date of the event celebrated - for instance, the arrival of the Great Western Railway at Swansea in 1850 - serves the same purpose. As far as one can tell, her poems were never published in

book form; they appeared on what might be called `poem sheets`, a single sheet of paper, some eight by eight and a half inches in size, folded to make a four page booklet. Each of these includes either one long poem/ballad, or a longer poem and a shorter one. Where these were sold has still to be researched - in Davies`s shop, perhaps, or by her printers, George and Mary Whittington, whose firm also had a stationer`s shop. In fact, it is probable that we owe at least part of her survival as a writer to the Whittingtons, since they kept copies of some of the ballads, which were later passed to D. Rhys Phillips, who mentions them in his *History of the Vale of Neath,* as well as reprinting Davies`s very informative letter to George Tennant - though where he found this is a mystery.[32] The Whittington connection probably came much later than 1825, but possibly the letter had survived as a curiosity in the Tennant archives, to be discovered by Phillips during his researches. Phillips and the Whittingtons were not Davies`s only admirers; someone unknown had fifteen of the poem leaflets bound up in book form, and there may still be more to be discovered.

Davies was not the only woman ballad writer of the period, and in his introduction to *Baledi Morgannwg* (1951) Ben Bowen Thomas mentions twelve of these, including Davies whom he counts as the most famous example from South Wales. Many of the male ballad writers whom he lists travelled to fairs and other gatherings to perform their songs and then sell them to the audience; whether the women did this is not clear, but since his list of woman balladeers includes two of the daughters of John Hughes, Pontrobert, minister and editor of the hymns of Ann Griffiths, it seems unlikely. (In fact Jane Hughes, whom he describes as the mid-Wales equivalent of Davies, was mainly a hymnwriter.)[33]

Elizabeth Davies`s poems and ballads are not great literature; she herself

admitted: `there is nothing in them but plain simple truth that suits [the workers`] taste and understanding better than the fine language of the great authors.`[34] On the other hand, to read them on the page does them less than justice; what seems awkward on the page, flows relatively smoothly when read aloud. (Which suggests that even if she did not travel round to fairs to perform her work, she did read it aloud, perhaps in local concerts or penny readings.) Her Neath and Red Jacket Canal ballad is nineteen stanzas long, but these four verses give a general idea of the style and content:

1. O! Could I make verses with humour and wit,
   George Tennant, Esquire`s great genius to fit;
   From morn until even, I would sit down and tell,
   And sing in the praise of Neath Junction Canal.

2. To his noble genius, great merit is due,
   The increase of traffic he`ll daily pursue;
   Employ to poor Labourers, it is known full well,
   He gave them by making Neath Junction Canal.

****

5. Where two crystal rivers in union do meet,
   The skill of the builder must be very great;
   All for to contend with the torrents that swell,
   By building the arches of Neath Junction canal.

****

6. All you that are lovers of gazing around
   On the grand works of nature where `tis to be found,
   Rich woods, pleasant valleys, groves, rocks, hill and dell,
   You can view as you walk by Neath Junction Canal.

It is the repetition in the last line of each stanza that gives the ballad what one assumes to be its unconsciously comic effect, but it does also suggest that Davies`s reading may have included Ann of Swansea`s ode, `Swansea Bay`, which uses a similar device and would have been available to the Neath poet. If one compares Davies`s Canal poem with Ann of Swansea`s ode,

In vain by various grief opprest
I vagrant roam devoid of rest
With aching heart, still ling`ring stray
Around the shores of Swansea Bay.

****

Then Kilvey Hill, a long adieu
I drag my sorrows hence from you:
Misfortune, with imperious sway,
Impels me far from Swansea Bay.[35]

then `Swansea Bay` is smoother, more elegant, but not totally beyond the skill of Davies in the lyrical mode of `Reflections on the Grave of a Young Officer who destroyed himself in a fit of despair at Neath, and was interred in Neath Churchyard, With all respect due to a British Soldier`:

Where the long grass obscures yon lonely grave,
And deadly weeds of poisonous odours wave,
A gallant soldier with the silent dead,
Unnoticed, unlamented, rests his head.

No weeping friends was (sic) seen to deck his bier,
No mourning kindred shed a tender tear,
But buried in the grave, sad mouldering heap,
His sorrows and his fate in silent sleep.

****

Fond love and passion turn`d to a furious rage
Brought him thus low e`er in the bloom of age,
When all most dear to him was lost but death,
In moody madness he resign`d his breath.

Some idea of the public nature of Davies`s poetic role can be seen from the note beneath the title of the `Reflections`, which explains that `Though an entire stranger to the place, a Subscription was made for a respectable funeral, and the most respectable Tradesmen of the town followed him to the grave in a solemn procession.` Even when being lyrical, she does not indulge in personal emotions - with the possible exception of the Christian faith which was clearly an integral part of her

existence.

Though the workmen appreciated her Neath Canal ballad, it seems to have attracted mainly derision from the local literati. When Walter Whittington presented his set of ten poems to Rhys Phillips, he described then as `Mother Davies`s doggerel`, while a later historian, Elis Jenkins, presenting his own batch of the poems to Neath Borough Library in 1965, comments of the Canal ballad: `these verses must surely rank with the worst ever written; even as pure doggerel they have never been excelled`[36] - which suggests that he had only a limited knowledge of the possibilities of folk verse! D. Rhys Phillips himself is more generous: `Jerome says that the singer of the hedgerows, if his note ring true, deserves a hearing; and such was Elizabeth Davies. Her sincerity and loyalty is her best commemoration.`[37] Perhaps the last word here belongs to the public that Davies herself looked to; when the Canal ballad was read to a group of local housewives about ten years ago, one of them, who had formed a musical partnership with her husband and went round entertaining O.A.P.s, asked if she could use the poem in their act, which she duly did, it seems to very good effect. The question as to whether Elizabeth Davies`s work merits any serious consideration in the wider literary world has been addressed elsewhere, but her place in the literary tradition of Neddafan is clear.

One of the themes of this study is the relationship between the Welsh and English literary traditions as demonstrated locally, and in this context it is important to notice that Davies was a first language Welsh speaker and writer. This is plain from her letter to George Tennant, which is fluent enough, but has a number of constructions which are clearly from the Welsh, while her spelling is often phonetic, the creation of someone going by sound, not the dictionary: `It gave great satisfaction to hear the leas was sind ... the gentleman that had the manigment of the workes did

not understand to manig it well ... `[38] In the poems, too, she often uses the third person singular with a plural subject, as Welsh does:

> The nation`s arms and kings of yore
> Was richly laid down on the floor.

Interestingly, either she took more pains with her verses than with her letter, or someone - her printer ? - copy-edited them for spelling errors, but the Welsh grammatical constructions remain. As her `Verses to the Ivorites for their Great love of the Welsh language` makes clear, she was a firm supporter of that language - and saw the link between that and her other passion:

> In Welsh brave Welshmen do delight
> To talk both night and day,
> In Welsh they love to read about
> The cross on Calvary.
>
> They have got the holy scriptures
> In their native tongue ...

The last stanza, offering the poet`s good wishes for the Ivorites (a Welsh Friendly Society) sums it up neatly (with perhaps a judicious sting in the last line - the society was `men only`):

> I hope that God will prosper them,
> Both succour and defend,
> To keep their native language
> Quite perfect to the end.
> And whilst they sojourn here on earth,
> What pleasure more`ll they need,
> Than Welsh to sing to Christ our King,
> The woman`s conquering seed.

Happily, we do not simply have to speculate as to Davies`s own competence in the Welsh language, since apart from the early ballad on the sad fate of Margaret Williams, two of her Welsh poems (or more appropriately hymns) have survived, with her own parallel English translations. Whatever one`s judgement of her English verses, the Welsh hymns have a claim to be at least on the fringes of poetry proper, as

can be seen from the following extracts:

> Fy nghalon ddilyn Iesu tra byddwyf yn y byd,
> Trwy ffydd i dramwy`r llwybrau sy`n myn`d i`r ddinas glyd;
> A phan gyrhaeddwyf ben fy nhaith, mi gaf orphwysfa wiw,
> A gwel`d y gair fu ar fronnau Mair, uniganedig Duw/
>
> **********
>
> If I`ll be still and silent, the stones will shout and sing,
> Hosanna and salvation to Christ, my God and King,
> Who freely left his Father`s throne, and died upon the tree,
> The atonement made, the ransom paid, that sinners may be free.

2) Mary Catherine Llewelyn (1811-1874)

Mary Llewelyn was born Mary Catherine Rhys, the daughter of Thomas Rhys, Master of the Eagle Academy, Cowbridge. These `academies` are a relatively unexplored area of the educational provision of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they were an alternative to the grammar schools, and generally had a more practical, vocational curriculum. Some, like the famous Dissenting Academy at Brynllywarch, near Maesteg, were training grounds for the Nonconformist ministry; others, like the Eagle Academy itself, or the Aberafan Academy, aimed to fit their pupils for a business career rather than for academia. Llewelyn probably received her earliest education at home, after which she was sent to one of the schools for young ladies in Swansea. Whether she found this congenial is not known, but at home she had been `particularly close to her great uncle, Thomas Williams, the previous owner of the Eagle Academy`[39] and in his company she had met Iolo Morganwg, poet, antiquarian and forger, who frequently called to see his friend when in Cowbridge. In later years she recalled to Iolo`s son `the pleasant evenings of my childhood, passed with your gifted father, Robin Grey, as I used to call him.`[40]

Possibly Mary Llewelyn found these evenings particularly pleasant as a refuge

from her father`s `unpredictable temper`. Her mother had died when Llewelyn was four years old and she was brought up by her stepmother, who also died young. She was not an only child, but was said to be much the most talented of the family, with a literary bent. Presumably she met her future husband, Richard Pendrill Llewelyn (1813-1891), while he was a pupil at the Eagle Academy; he enrolled there some time in the late eighteen twenties, when both were still in their teens. In 1833 Richard Llewelyn moved to the Divinity School attached to the Cowbridge Free (Grammar) School and began to train for the Church; this background would fit him to be curate or possibly vicar in a parish which either had an absentee incumbent or had lost most of its revenues. In September 1836 he was ordained as a deacon and sent to the parish of Glyncorrwg to act as curate, with an income of £60 per annum. Meanwhile Mary had acquired another suitor, one fully acceptable to her father, who had no time at all for his penniless former pupil, a man with no real prospects. Rhys was a landowner as well as a schoolmaster, and felt that his daughter could do much better for herself. However, Mary had made up her mind, and on January 25th, 1837, she married Richard at St. Andrew`s Church, Clifton. It was a quiet wedding and Thomas Rhys never forgave his daughter for her defiance; he cut her out of his will.

Mary thus began her married life in Blaengwrach. At that date her husband`s parish included this area of the upper Neath Valley, and the village, with its thriving Venallt ironworks, was a more congenial home than the parent settlement of Glyncorrwg. In October 1837 Richard was ordained as a priest and decided to take in pupils `to educate in the usual branches of Classical Literature etc.`[41] (This was common practice; R.D. Blackmore`s father also supplemented his income in this way.) Possibly would-be pupils balked at the idea of travelling to Blaengwrach, but in any case, in April 1838, with the couple`s first child on the way, they moved to

Cuckfield in Sussex, where Richard was appointed Master of the Endowed Grammar School. Before the end of that year they had moved to Climping, also in Sussex, and he was licensed as a curate there, where their first two children were born. However, they evidently loved Wales too much to stay in Sussex, and by May 1841 they had returned to Neddafan, where Richard acted as curate at St. Michael`s Church, Cwmafan. At this point the family was living in Talbot Street, Aberafan, where Mary presided over a household of herself, Richard, two (soon to be three) children and her mother-in-law Jane. So far, in her first four years of marriage, Mary had lived in four different places and no doubt her initial response to news of yet another move was at least partly one of exasperation. This time, though, it was to be permanent, and when Richard accepted the post of vicar of Llangynwyd in October 1841, it was the couple`s final move.

Llangynwyd was no sinecure. The previous vicar had neglected the parish, and there was also the challenge of providing for the rapidly expanding town of Maesteg, which until 1853 had no proper church, only a rented room. Richard`s activities, as he sought to improve conditions, can be traced through records of committees and public meetings, but there is only the barest record of the vicar`s wife`s duties as she coped with the needs of the parish and cared for her nine children and her mother-in-law, all of this on an income so small that sometimes they could not pay their bills, let alone provide funds for unemployed parishioners when the iron trade slumped. Charity was part of the job, but on some occasions it had, perforce, to begin at home. Not only this, it is evident that she took an active part in the administration and fund-raising demands of the National School, writing letters and reports on behalf of her husband.

It is worth going into this much detail because it would be easy to assume that

Mary Llewelyn, as a vicar`s wife, was in comfortable circumstances. Indeed, in his centenary tribute to Richard, Dr. Lynn Jones comments, `Mary Llewelyn can be identified with that group of lay persons such as Augusta Hall (Lady Llanover), Charlotte Guest and Maria Jane Williams, associated with *Yr Hen Bersoniaid Llengar*, the Anglican clergymen who largely sustained Welsh culture over the forty years to about 1860`[42] - though he also points out that Mary herself was far from a member of the wealthy, leisured classes.

Despite her various burdens of care and administration, Mary Llewelyn soon established a name for herself as a translator of Welsh literature (which at this point in time meant chiefly poetry) and as an original poet. She contributed to a wide range of periodicals, from *Archaeologia Cambrensis* to the *Cambrian* newspaper and the Church of England magazine, and her translations were well received. One reviewer wrote of her *Hymns Translated From The Welsh* (1850), `the spirit and in most instances the metre of the original are most faithfully and successfully preserved`, and the Rev. John Jones (Tegid) had commented in 1846 that Mary was `one of the most successful and the very best translators of Welsh poetry`.[43]

Although her collection of hymns was published in book form, most of her work, both original poems and translations, remains scattered in a wide variety of journals. The *Hymns* largely consisted of translations of the work of the always popular Williams Pantycelyn, and perhaps this is why the collection was given more permanent form, but as to the rest, the poems were available to the public and that was perhaps sufficient. She was soon too busy with her nine children to look for a literary career or personal fame. Richard too had literary talents, and like his wife contributed to a number of magazines and newspapers, but he too left no gathered writings. His own interest may have been less in writing than in adjudicating

at eisteddfodau and similar events, and he amassed a fine library in the vicarage, which he made available to promising young writers like Cadrawd and Llyfnwy, whom Mary also encouraged in their literary ambitions. When he died, almost twenty years after his wife, his books and papers were inherited by his two eldest children, Olwen and Arthur, the only two who had remained close to him; the books were sold to Alfred Thomas, Lord Pontypridd, but his papers, perhaps including those of his wife, were apparently destroyed.

Though it produced nothing as prolific as the hundred or so titles listed under the names of Mary and William Howitt, the Llewelyns also had a lifelong literary partnership. The best-known example of this is their joint contribution to the *Cambrian* on the story of the Maid of Cefn Ydfa. Mention has been made above, in Chapter One, of the various books and plays that originated from this folk tale, and of the way in which the story was slowly elaborated and romanticised, and it may be that it was the technicolour nature of some of these elaborations - messages in blood, imprisonment in non-existent cellars - that caused occasional scepticism. However, it was the critical pen of Professor G.J. Williams which first attacked the scholarly reputation of Mary Llewelyn. Professor Williams is perhaps best-known for his work on Iolo Morganwg, the extent of whose imaginative forgeries he first demonstrated at length - though he was not the first to have doubts about Iolo`s bardic histories.[44]

Iolo himself does not seem to have left notes on the Cefn Ydfa story, though he did write about its poet-hero, Wil Hopcyn, and this seems to have been enough to prompt Professor Williams to write two articles on Cefn Ydfa, first published in Welsh in *Y Llenor* in 1927/8, and later, in an English translation, in the *Glamorgan Historian.*[45] The major portion of the two articles is devoted to discrediting the

Souvenir of the Wil Hopcyn Memorial, a book published in 1927 to mark the two hundredth anniversay of the death of Ann Thomas, the Maid. Williams describes how Taliesin ab Iolo, Iolo`s son, co-operated with Maria Jane Williams of Aberpergwm when she was collecting folk songs for *Ancient Airs of Gwent and Morganwg;* among these were the words and music of *Bugeilio`r Gwenith Gwyn,* and ab Iolo, seeing that the words had been attributed to Wil Hopcyn, went to ask the Llewelyns for help in learning more about the poet. Williams comments: `It is said that Mrs. Llewelyn was an able woman and that she took an exceptional interest in the folk-lore and traditions of Llangynwyd and the neighbourhood.` He then quotes Dafydd Morganwg (1832-1905) as saying, `As far as I have found after fairly close study, Mrs. Penderel (sic) Llewellyn started the story in its tragic form.`[46]

The first reference to Mary Llewelyn might almost be described as respectful; later, however, Williams says, `Like so many gifted ladies of the time, she was exceptionally fond of romantic stories. Indeed, her own life was a romance. She came of a wealthy family and was well educated. Her parents wanted her to marry a gentleman from Scotland, but she chose to follow her own inclination and marry a poor curate. Thus it is not surprising that she took an interest in tales of romance. Undoubtedly it was she who completed the work of connecting the traditional lore of the parish with Wil Hopcyn, its love poet.`[47] It has to be said that this is not Professor Williams at his best, being both chauvinistic and sloppy scholarship. He gives no source for his assessment of her character, though he does say that her son, Dr. J.P. Llewelyn, provided information about her family background. It would appear that in a letter Dr. Llewelyn also called the story, `idle nonsense`, and said, `I have never believed it`; for all the evidence to the contrary, this was also his mother`s view of the legend. Certainly Cadrawd, who was Mrs. Llewelyn`s protege, had his own

reservations about many of the details, and continued to correct his version as new information came to hand. (Professor Williams describes this process as `rewriting the story to make it agree with the new facts which were discovered from time to time`[48], a somewhat disingenuous comment.)

In one sense, of course, this was a storm in a scholarly teacup, and Professor Williams was quite clearly carried away on this occasion by his own animus against Iolo and all his works. On the other hand it does leave an unfortunate stain on the reputation of a woman who was evidently very far from being the Mills and Boon style romantic that Williams describes. (One tribute, offered when she died in 1874, claimed `She had many of the eccentricities of genius, and as the wife of the vicar of Llangynwyd, showed a supreme contempt for the conventionalities of society.`)[49]

The Llewelyns (and it is worth pointing out that this was a joint venture) contributed four letters to the *Cambrian* between August 15th and October 6th, 1845.[50] They were occasioned by a notice of the death of Mr. Edward Mathew, son of one of the characters in a satirical song, *Cân Tarw Maescadlawr* (Song of the Bull of Maescadlawr), `composed by that excellent lyric poet, William Hopkin`. This notice had evidently not been sent in by the Llewelyns, because their first letter is a correction - Edward Mathew was the grandson, not the son of Thomas Mathew - together with notes on the background to the song and the complete Welsh text of the verses. The second letter is a translation of the song, with the promise of further information on `William Hopkin`. In fact, letter number three adds little beyond commenting that many examples of poetic flyting between Wil Hopcyn and Dafydd Nicolas of Aberpergwm were still recited `by the peasantry even to this day`. The rest of the letter quotes at some length from Jenkin Treherne, `from whose reciting the

song has been printed`, about the characters and incident described in the satire, together with various entries from the parish registers concerning those characters, and some material on the Rev. Samuel Jones and the spelling of Llangynwyd.

It is the fourth and final letter that contains the reference to the Cefn Ydfa story, together with the Welsh words of *Bugeilio`r Gwenith Gwyn* and an English translation of them, and which identifies William Hopkin as a tiler and plasterer, buried in Llangynwyd churchyard. The reference is quite brief, and has already been quoted in part in Chapter One above, but it is appropriate to repeat it here in full:

> [William Hokin] unfortunately fell in love with a lady far his superior in rank, a daughter of the Thomases of Ceven Ydva. She returned his love, and being compelled to marry another - she lost her reason. Tales, teeming with romance, are related by the hill folk of the attachment of this lady and her humble lover. The love songs of William Hopkin to `the maid of Ceven Ydfa` are excessively beautiful, and it is a subject of regret that many of them are now nearly lost.[51]

The letter goes on to say that Maria Jane Williams included a poem `universally attributed among his native hills to William Hopkin, in honour of "the lady of Ceven Ydva"`, and gives the Welsh words in full, together with `an attempt to give it in English words`, adapted to the old Welsh air.

Mary Llewelyn`s translation of this poem is accurate, but flowery, and her description of it as `an attempt` suggests that though she might appreciate the beauty of Wil Hopcyn`s love songs, they were not her own kind of verse. The first of the four stanzas will give an idea of the whole:

A simple, youthful swain am I
Who love at fancy`s pleasure;
I fondly watch the blooming wheat,
And others reap the treasure.
Oh ! wherefore still despise my suit ?
Why pining keep thy lover ?
For some new charm, thou matchless fair,

I day by day discover.[52]

The four letters from the Llewelyns were followed by several others from various correspondents, including Thomas Stephens, most of them discussing the translation (not by Mary Llewelyn) of the line *A thra v`o ngwallt yn tyfu* - `And while my hair grows`; the letter-writers had presumably never heard of the folk belief that hair continues to grow after the person concerned is dead, and therefore the line means `even longer than I live`.

Two sentences in the Llewelyns` fourth letter are particularly relevant to this thesis. Firstly, `The love songs ... are excessively beautiful, and it is a subject of regret that many of them are now nearly lost`, which echoes the remarks at the beginning of this chapter on the ease with which such folk verses can be lost, particularly where they are transmitted orally. Secondly, `The sentiment of this song is exceedingly simple - purely Welsh - and of that kind which must be translated literally, without sinking to common place and paraphrase, which would be to destroy its peculiar beauty.` A critic in the *Independent* newspaper put it more harshly recently when he described an English translation of Cynan`s *Mab y Bwthyn* as `doggerel`, but the judgement is the same.[53] Although the English language can convey simplicity, it can have difficulty in making plain statements and still remaining poetic, largely, perhaps because its sound patterns do not lend themselves to this in the way, for example, that Welsh or French or Italian do. In this context, the brief introduction in the second letter to the translation of *Cân Tarw Maescadlawr* is of interest: `This translation is intended to convey to the English Reader the ideas of a song popular among the native, unsophisticated peasantry of the hills. Naught approaching Haynes Bailey must be expected.`

The Bull of Maescadlawr is a major contrast to the romanticism of *Watching*

the Wheat, and one suspects that its rollicking satire was much more congenial to Mary Llewelyn`s poetic gifts. The poem consists of thirteen eight-line verses, and the following selection will give some idea of its colourful style and subject matter:

Draw near, my friends, list while I tell
A tristful tale of what befell.
In Cynwyd`s parish aught so dear
Has seldom chanced in any year.
By the vicar`s house of holy fame
(Good Morgan Thomas is his name)
On All Soul`s eve there was a sight
Which beats all English battles quite.

This reverend man had in his mead
A Bull as fierce as battle steed,
Which being fat as beast e`er stalled,
A host to slay him soon were called.
They gathered there, so runs the tale,
Like heroes clad in battle mail,
To kill this beast of monstrous fat
As quickly as they would a rat.

* * * * * * * *

The first who ventured on that feat
Was he most fit - the Butcher neat,
Well known as Howell Thomas here,
Who did perform this deed of fear.
This being done, the beast is tied,
And each to strike him first then vied,
Said David Nicholas with an oath,
"I`ll knock the monster down i`troth.

* * * * * * * * *

The Butcher, whom the fates preserve,
Has trembled since in every nerve,
And rumour runs that from his heart
That dread, he says, will ne`er depart !
For six long days, from this sad cause,
His tongue he turned not in his jaws,
Then his first words, in accents full,
Were - "God preserve me from the Bull."[54]

That this, and not the sugary style of *Watching the Wheat*, was likely to be her

own preference can be seen from her translation of the fifteenth century poem *The Saxons of Flint.*The anonymous poet has gone to Flint in the hope of earning a fee for performing at an English wedding feast, but the mean-spirited Saxons scorn his art and jeer at him:

> My polished ode forsooth they hissed,
> And I midst laughter was dismissed.

Instead they call for `Will the Piper`:

> He stares - he strives the bag to sound;
> He swells his maw - and ogles round;
> He twists and turns himself about,
> With fetid breath his cheeks swell out
> What savage boors ! his hideous claws
> And glutton`s skin win their applause !
>
> * * * * * * * * * *
>
> The churl did blow a grating shriek,
> The bag did swell, and harshly squeak,
> As does a goose from nightmare crying,
> Or dog, crushed by a chest when dying;
> This whistling box`s changeless note
> Is forced from turgid veins and throat;
> Its sound is like a crane`s harsh moan,
> Or like a gosling`s latest groan;
> Just such a noise a wounded goat
> Sends from her hoarse and gurgling throat.
> His unattractive screeching lay
> Being ended, William sought for pay;
> Some *fees* he had from this mean band,
> But *largess* from no noble hand;
> Some pence were offered by a few,
> Others gave little halfpence too.
> Unheeded by this shabby band
> I left their feast with empty hand.[55]

This vigorous satire is not exactly the kind of translation, in subject matter or style, that one might have expected either from a conventional Victorian vicar`s wife or the literary romantic of Professor Williams`s article.

Although Mary Llewelyn is included in this section as an example of one of

Neddafan`s women writers, she could have fitted equally well into either the section on historians or that on translators. Whether she would have followed the path she did if she had not settled in Tir Iarll with its rich hoard of poetry, legend and folklore is not something that can be determined now, but it is noteworthy that she and her husband also took on the role of mentor to others, in particular Cadrawd and Llyfnwy.

3. Rachael Ann Webb (1903-1993)

Rachael Ann Webb, née Bowen, was born in Ogmore Vale and spent most of her life in Maesteg and Caerau, apart from a few months in London and six years in Australia in the early nineteen thirties. Her father`s illness and early death left the Bowen family in impoverished circumstances and Rachael Ann left school at fourteen to train as a nurse; later she worked as a landgirl and as a housemaid in London, before marrying a miner, Ivor Webb.When the Webbs returned from Australia, to which they had gone on an assisted passage scheme, they started a bakery in premises inherited from Ivor Webb`s father, and eventually built this into a successful grocery and drapery business. Then, in the last seven years of her life, Rachael Ann published three volumes of autobiography: *From Caerau to the Southern Cross,* (1986), *Sirens Over The Valley* (1989), and *A Tree Grew In Caerau* (1992).[56]

Webb`s literary career came at the end of her life, sparked off by the early death of her eldest son in 1984 ; she felt the need then to set her life-story down on paper, chiefly, it would seem, as a means of coping with her losses (Ivor Webb had died a few years before). By this time she was in her mid-eighties and registered blind, so that she could not write down her story herself. Instead she dictated it to a helper, and then passed that manuscript to an editor who could turn it into a publishable text.

As it happened, the editor who was approached was myself. I had already been commissioned by the Welsh Books Council to edit several autobiographies, though this had normally been a matter of tidying up the first few chapters of books by first time authors who were new to writing, but grew into it as they proceeded. Webb`s book was different. Her dictation was fluent and the stories she told had become so crafted over the years that they came out in almost identical words at each telling. However, the spoken word (and her narrative style was essentially oral) relies on pauses and emphases in the voice for its `grammar`; these have to be supplied in other ways when the material is written down, and repetitions which pass unnoticed in the telling have to be removed on the page. There is also the matter of audience; once the story is in print, the author cannot control who reads it, and therefore it has to be screened both for accuracy and for possible offence to those mentioned in it, family or otherwise.

There was a further practical problem in this case. The original helper had written down exactly what was dictated to her, as precisely as a tape recorder, though with no need for an audio-typist. However, half-way through what would become volume two of the trilogy, the helper found full-time employment elsewhere, and the amanuensis who succeeded her tended to add literary flourishes of her own; for instance, people no longer spoke, now they declared or responded or announced. These flourishes had to be removed, not necessarily because they were bad writing in themselves, but because they undermined the author`s own `voice`. Ghost-written celebrity autobiographies do not have to consider this; authenticity either to the celebrity`s own way of speaking or, at times, to the facts, are more likely to be a liability than a priority. In the case of an autobiography like Webb`s trilogy, however,

it is vital that anyone else involved, whether editor or copyist, should remember that they are there only as a facilitator - a successful collaboration of this kind should show no evidence at all of any presence other than that of the autobiographer.

The particular circumstances of this assignment were unusual, but not unique. Almost one hundred and fifty years before, in 1857, Jane Williams, historian and journalist, had performed a similar service for Elizabeth Davies, better known as Betsi Cadwallader. Betsi, like Rachael Ann Webb, could read and in all probability write - in her case it was perhaps old age and the effects of her nursing service in the Crimea that made it necessary for Jane Williams to be involved in the production of her book, *The Autobiography of a Balaclava Nurse*.[57] There were strong similarities between the two women; both had a strong religious faith, both travelled to the other side of the world and experienced other ways of life, and yet both retained a certain naïveté with regard to the people they met. Betsi was courted, so she believed, by the cousin of the Emperor of Brazil; Rachael Ann`s doctors, working in Maesteg and Bridgend, but members of the various Royal Colleges, were therefore `the Queen`s own doctors`. If their stories sometimes seem almost incredible, it is in most cases the unconscious inflation that results from such naïveté which is responsible. There is, for instance, Webb`s Aunt Margaret, `a lady doctor, and the first ever to practise in Blackwood` (this would have been about 1910).[58] Some of her cures were simple common sense or inspired improvisation, like the tube from a baby`s bottle used to help a child choking to death with diphtheria to breathe, but some sound more like the wilder reaches of dark age superstition. One example is the girl, believed by her family to be possessed, who was covered in bruises; Aunt Margaret ordered her to be starved for twenty-four hours, then wrapped in a sheet covered with bread dough. When the dough was removed, the girl was free of bruises, but `the dough was covered in black

beetles`.[59] This may well have been a combination of psychiatry and hygiene, but as seen by a very young girl and reported some eighty years later, it sounds more like the tall tale of a mediaeval chronicler.

When one speaks of storytellers today, one tends to think of professionals who retell traditional tales, using patterns and themes that are often almost ritualistic in style. Webb, too, is a storyteller, but of a different kind. She might be better described as a chronicler, picking out the important events and customs of her community and working them over time into narratives that represent the communal experience. Hence, when she speaks about the breakout of German prisoners of war from Island Farm Camp, Bridgend, Webb has her own encounter with one of the runaways, who turns up at her back door asking for food. Whether this actually happened as described, or whether it grew in the telling, is something that cannot now be confirmed, but it is a valid piece of communal history. In their own way, too, stories like these were as practised and formalised as any traditional tale of Anansi or Coyote; their fantasy is simply more domestic.

Even when she is speaking of family events, there is a sense of the wider community in which these take place. The early death of Webb`s father meant that her elder brother became the family`s chief support and had to leave school and go down the pit; the description of his first day underground is specific to the Bowen family, but also speaks for all the families in that situation (as so many were).

> `[Ben] kissed Mother, and said, "I can`t be a barrister, Mammy, but I am not afraid to work for you."
>
> And so at five thirty on Monday morning our brave Ben, in his long white ducks, with his oval tommy box containing his lunch in one pocket, and a man`s red flat cap on his head, set out to earn his living as a miner. I went with my mother on to the road to wave him off, then Mother said, "You go to bed now Rit, I`ll come up later." I went to bed, and when I got up again at eight o`clock, my mother was still standing on the road, following the route

> that Ben had taken with her eyes. I heard it said many times after that, that my mother did not go back into the house again that day until she saw Ben coming back up the road again after his first shift down the mine. She said she could not go inside the house and lock the door on Ben.`[60]

It will be evident from what has already been said that in many ways Webb`s trilogy represents a crossover between the oral and the written tradition. She had evidently told the stories included in the trilogy so often that they could be repeated almost word for word, and the three books effectively exhausted her stock of material. As to her audience, one has to assume that it was basically her family, but it is also possible that her role as a shopkeeper played a part in the development of her storytelling ability. When we first began on the process of producing a text, Webb needed to be persuaded to include the material on her early childhood; she felt that it was her Australian adventures that were worth telling, not her childhood experiences, and one can easily imagine how well her customers would have reacted to what were then exotic tales of the Bush.

There was one other book, *A Storyteller from Caerau*,[61] a slim volume published to mark her ninetieth birthday, but this included chiefly some additional anecdotes about Webb`s childhood and her years in Australia. Most of these could be told as they were, but there were two or three which had to be `fictionalised` to avoid causing distress or annoyance to the families of those involved. Webb was aware that this kind of censorship was necessary, particularly in the later volumes, but left it to her editor to select or to alter names and other details where appropriate, feeling she was too close to the material herself. In practice, very few people recognise themselves in such cases, or if they think they do, they are often demonstrably mistaken; our self-images often have only tenuous connections with the way the world sees us. However, it is likely that discretion of this sort is one root of fiction.

Webb had already considered the possibility of developing her stories into either full length fiction or drama, and had even worked on a play script about a family`s attempt to deal with the effects of the Depression. (The family concerned was not her own.) On several occasions she suggested that once the autobiography was completed, the next step would be to produce novels based on some of the events in the three books, and certainly there were possibilities in the material for a range of approaches, from family saga to supernatural thriller. On the other hand, though she had polished and elaborated her stories over the years, it is doubtful whether she had a sense of structure sufficient to move these on from reportage - or whether she would have been happy to see them reworked or used as a basis for new work, even by an editor she trusted. Whatever elaborations she had made over the years, basic authenticity was important to her. Even where naïveté or the lapse of years had affected her narratives, she believed them. This is not unusual; I have come across a number of men and women in South Wales who are firmly convinced that women - and possibly children - were still being forced down the mines to work in the nineteen twenties when they themselves were young. This becomes an interesting historical loop: a novelist like Alexander Cordell researches his fiction in part by interviewing elderly people who often have little historical perspective; he puts their confusions into his fiction as authentic material and then they or their children read this and accept it as true because it is in print. (In fairness, this is as much due to the novelist`s lack of perspective as to that of the people he interviews; no historian would expect to gather authentic detail on the Merthyr Risings of 1831 from even elderly men and women in 1970, a hundred and forty years later.)

Interestingly, what might be called the oral method extended into the marketing of the trilogy. Although a reasonable number of copies were sold in the

normal way via bookshops, libraries and the Welsh Books Council`s Distribution Centre, the bulk of the sales were made by Webb herself and her daughter. Webb gave talks about her experiences to women`s groups of all kinds throughout South Wales and used these to sell the books; to the best of my knowledge this activity began in order to sell the books, and had not happened (certainly not regularly) before publication occurred. She was undoubtedly charismatic - small, dainty, but possessed of a driving force strong enough to shift obstacles that would have defeated most people.

It is difficult to know how she saw her audience. Certainly her family was part of it, and beyond that the local community. The books sold, as local history does, world-wide - Australia, of course, because her sister`s family lived there, but also anywhere there were exiles from Caerau and its neighbourhood. She did not, clearly, see herself or the life she described as being in any way separated from that of her neighbours. Hence the need for discretion; it is instructive to compare Webb`s autobiography with Lorna Sage`s *Bad Blood* (2000). Sage did not remain in her community, and was looking back on it from the viewpoint of an `expatriate`; her audience was her peers in the academic and middle class community in England, not her former neighbours in the Flintshire village where she had grown up. Hence, what is, to non middle-class English readers, the disagreeable note in *Bad Blood*, which stems not from the actual events or the people described, but from the author`s attitude to them.(The Tuesday Writers reading group, mentioned below, took *Bad Blood* as one of the titles on their list, and their comments on the book were illuminating.)

This question of audience, of course, relates not simply to Webb`s own work,

but to Anglo-Welsh literature more generally. Although writers like Glyn Jones, Gwyn Thomas, even Dylan Thomas, were published outside Wales, they never quite removed themselves from their own community in the way that Lorna Sage, or more locally, Mavis Nicholson, were to do. And though, as suggested above, the likelihood of offending one`s neighbours is often more anticipated than real, the fear does exist. It is one thing not to be prevented from exposing cruelty or corruption in, for instance, the local council or quango; it is another thing entirely not to cause unnecessary pain or embarrassment within a tight social group. The impulse to autobiography, the recording of one`s own experience as part of the experience of society as a whole, is strong in Wales, but the need for tact if one remains within the area may well be a strong encouragement to turn one`s own experience into fiction. It may also have considerable relevance to the many child heroes or child`s eye view narrators in Anglo-Welsh fiction; to be an adult, looking through adult eyes, is dangerous.

4. Barbara May Walters (1926 -)

Barbara May Walters (more commonly known in poetry readings and writers` groups as Babs Walters) was born in Glyncorrwg at the upper end of the Afan Valley in 1926.[62] Her family background was typical of the mining community in which she grew up. Glyncorrwg is literally the end of the line, at the head of the valley, with no major road leading out or onward. Unlike many of the Upper Afan Valley communities, Glyncorrwg is an old settlement, dating back at least to the Middle Ages, but the latter half of the nineteenth century saw it transformed from a handful of farms and cottages and a church into a thriving mining village serving several pits.[63]

Walters left school at fourteen, just before the Second World War, and at first went to work on a farm, taking the milk from door to door with a horse and cart, but

soon she was called up and went to be a landgirl on an estate in Radnorshire, in mid-Wales. When the war ended, she returned to Glyncorrwg and married her childhood sweetheart, who had been in the Navy, but now went back down the pit (much later he transferred to the steelworks in Port Talbot).[64] They had two sons and a daughter. As a couple, their interests were political and cultural; David Walters was active with the local brass band and involved in the setting up of the South Wales Miners` Museum at Afan Argoed Country Park, while both were strong supporters of the Labour Party, attending meetings and conferences. In 1984, at the time of the Miners` Strike, Walters became Chairperson of the Glyncorrwg Support Committee, organising soup kitchens and supplies of food and clothing, but also entertainment for the community.

She had always enjoyed writing, but her serious interest in it did not start until her children were grown up; this seems to have coincided more or less with the activist years leading up to and including the Miners` Strike. To some extent this helped her to find an audience for her work, since sociological and political interest in the Strike led to a number of anthologies such as *Black Harvest* (1992)[65] and *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages* (1986).[66] Getting into print here came by way of academic studies of the collapse of the mining industries formed by it, but she also contributed to literary publications such as the short story magazine *Cambrensis* and had work broadcast on the BBC *Morning Story* series. She is also an excellent reader of her own work and has taken part in numerous `From the Floor` poetry readings thoughout South Wales.

Once again I have to disclose an interest, since it seems to have been through one of the local writers` groups with which I am involved that Walters` first collection, *Grown Ups Don`t Cry*,[67] came to be published. The book includes seven

short stories and thirty poems, and is illustrated with nine black and white drawings by Dr. Julian Tudor Hart. (Dr. Hart was the G.P. for Glyncorrwg for a number of years; he was very much concerned with the community there and had a particular interest in social medicine, publishing books on aspects of the subject and lecturing on it. He stood as the Communist candidate for the Aberavon constituency in several elections.) The arrangement of the stories and poems is roughly chronological in order of subject matter, with the first four stories covering the period up to the end of World War II; `Best Suit` is more of a meditation, contrasting the dead pit and its machinery post 1984 with the days when it was in full production. `A Little Trip` is also set in the nineteen eighties, and deals with a protest over increases in school bus fares, while `The High Button Shoes` is perhaps the nearest to a conventional short story, with beginning, middle and end. The poems, which are grouped between the stories, also follow this chronological order.

The actual order of writing of the stories is another matter, and in practice they seem to have developed over a period of time; certainly some of the poems were being worked on right up to publication. None of the stories, except for `Best Suit` are straightforward autobiography; names and circumstances are changed, sometimes, no doubt, as a matter of discretion (tact, as already discussed, being essential in a small community), sometimes to shape the story more effectively. And there are no stories which deal with the period of and after the Miners` Strike. The bus fares protest was in the nineteen eighties, but it was only one of many from the nineteen sixties on, and though the women of the community are shown as the leaders in this case, it probably had more to do with their being mothers and grandmothers and being able to take time out during the day than it had to do with women`s personal development as a result of

the Strike. (The same pattern could be seen in our Welsh Medium School campaign for more schools, though the bulk of the families concerned there came from Port Talbot town and Swansea suburbs and had no direct link with the mining communities.) Indeed, the stories are notable for their lack of direct political comment, though the poems do often tackle the relevant socio-political aspects, as well as showing an awareness of the world beyond Glyncorrwg, in poems on Chernobyl or in the contrast, in `Savouring Seasons`, between the seasonal beauty of the valley and the drought and heat in Africa or India where mothers

> flick flies
> from suckling babies`
> drying eyes.[68]

Walters` stories could be described as the next stage on from the straightforward autobiographical approach of Rachael Ann Webb. Like Webb, she writes about her own family and her community, but she uses these as a base, altering and developing where necessary, but also keeping to the underlying truth of the events and characters about which she writes. This is a kind of storytelling which seems to belong particularly to women, partly a record of what happened, but partly a shaping of it into a story that will be remembered; there seems to be an ability to pick out those details and characters which make the narrative memorable. Perhaps this grows out of the need to entertain fractious children, to hold their attention and pass on what they need to know of family history, to record the ancestors. Certainly male autobiographers from the same social background are far more likely merely to report what happened to them; the books produced are history, not literature.

Although the poems often include political or social comment, the stories are more detached, in the tradition of `show, don`t tell`. For instance, in `The Oxo Tins`, Gwen, the narrator, is horrified when she sees a boy eating earthworms. The reader`s

initial response is to see this as a typical, if gruesome, laddish exploit, but it is the nineteen thirties, and the story continues less comfortably:

> `I didn`t tell of the school yard happening until the following morning, but the boy`s bloated face and scrawny neck had worried my night`s sleep. "Do you know ... " I began the telling of the incident, keeping my voice calm like a grown-up, " ... a boy from the Sinkers` Hut - he had trousers made out of potato sacks and the soles of his shoes were from old car tyres."
>
> Jessie was pouring boiling water into Johnnie`s tin bath. When I`d gone to school he would bathe in front of the fire.
>
> "Well, the master caught him at it again - eating earthworms ! I saw him. He hides them under his jersey in an Oxo tin. They`re alive ! His name is Viv Griffiths, and I seen him swallowing them and ... " I got no further. Jessie was sobbing into Johnnie`s clean vest, which had been hanging on the brass rod below the mantel shelf.
>
> "Hush now," Johnnie turned to me. "Off to school with you, you`ll be late."
>
> He hurried me to the front door. I waved my goodmorning, but they`d forgotten me. Johnnie was patting Jessie on the shoulder. "Hush now - just thank God our child has a full belly."[69]

Although *Grown Ups Don`t Cry* is a more literary piece of writing than Webb`s *From Caerau to the Southern Cross* and its sequels, it still shows signs of the oral tradition from which it ultimately stems. All of the stories are narrated in the first person, as are most of the poems, and their rhythm is that of speech rather than the written word. This is particularly true of the first four stories, with their relatively short uncomplicated sentences and plain vocabulary. Work that is to be read aloud needs to make an immediate impact:

> "Dick stretches his long legs nearer the hearth. His supper and the tea have made him a sober man now. Soon Bob will come off afternoon shift; he`ll bundle his working clothes and place them under the stairs. Dick will stay up after my mother and I have gone to bed, to wash Bob`s back - the water for his bath is in a tin boiler warming on the hob. (Bob is the lodger from the Rhondda. He came to stay with us for a fortnight, but will stay for forty years.)[70]
>
> `The Back Kitchen`

`Best Suit` is less of a story, more of a meditation on past times, and its sentences are appropriately more complex. The language is still plain and simple, but

used in a more metaphorical style - the silent pithead is `a giant toy octopus`, the debris at its foot `the cruel torture implements of some medieval age`[71]. `A Little Trip, on the other hand, draws much of its impact from its dialogue - although personal experience suggests that it is a reasonably factual account of a sit-in at County Hall, the lively interchange of views and the effective characterisation of the women and the officials turn it into a miniature drama. As for `The High Button Shoes`, this is what might be called a standard `well-crafted story`; it reads well aloud, but yields even more when read on the page, where its characterisation and plot development can be better appreciated. The story itself is the kind of tale that one might find in the more traditional women`s magazine - the conflict between a bedridden mother-in-law and her son`s widow who cares for her; perhaps interaction is a better word than conflict, since the daughter-in-law has resigned herself to her duty with a good grace and one suspects that she is not entirely surprised by the final twist. The pleasure lies, once again, in the lively dialogue and the characterisation of the two women and their satellites.

Two further, very practical points should be noted. Firstly, though some of the work in *Grown Ups Don`t Cry* had been broadcast or published in anthologies before the book was put together, there was still the need in some cases not so much of editing as of mentoring, particularly in the case of the poems. If, as happens in Wales, one has what might be called `folk writers` who have not gone through the training of the usual English literature courses, then it is often useful for them to be apprenticed, as it were, to a more established writer who can explain the rules of the craft. For instance, most people, even if they are not confirmed poetry lovers, understand the patterns of rhyme and rhythm in a sonnet or a ballad - they may even think that this is

the only authentic way of writing verse - but much modern poetry depends on the poet`s own personal voice rhythm, and someone coming new to this may need to learn how to gauge the pattern of the poem on the page. (This can happen, with great advantage to the student, at all levels. In my own case my father, who had been a student of the writer and critic Sir John Morris Jones at Bangor and was aware of the system of bardic apprenticeship, arranged for me to meet the Welsh-language poet and novelist T. Glynne Davies, who provided me with my first professional critical input.)

The other practical point relates to distribution. As with Webb, Walters largely took over this activity, and was able to place copies of her book with audiences who would have shown a mere publisher the door.

5. Mavis Nicholson (1930 -)

One of the themes that has emerged from this study of the literary tradition of Neddafan is that of audience. Many of the writers included have been concerned to present a picture of their own native patch, first and foremost to their neighbours, and only then, if at all, to the wider world. They are not unsophisticated, but they are writing primarily out of shared experience for those who had shared it and in some cases for those later generations who might otherwise never realise their full social and cultural heritage. A relevant non-local example is Jack Jones[72], whose `folksy` Rhondda narratives, much enjoyed by his fellow South Walians, were also best sellers in the United Kingdom as a whole. His case can be contrasted with that of Richard Llewellyn[73] and *How Green Was My Valley* (1939); Llewellyn`s authenticity as a native chronicler of South Wales may be suspect, but the novel, and the film that followed it, are compromised not by their author`s background, but by the input from

his publishers and the director of the film. The elements of the film are authentic - miners, choirs, boxers, unions, a Welsh mam, a child narrator - but a metropolitan viewpoint and/or a Hollywood gloss has transformed them.

One local example of addressing an external rather than a local audience is Mavis Nicholson`s autobiography *Martha Jane and Me*[74] (1991). Nicholson was born Mavis Mainwaring in Briton Ferry, and grew up in a small three-bedroomed terrace house in Mansel Street there. In due course she sat the Scholarship examination, passed it, and went to Neath County School, from which she moved to the University of Wales, Swansea. After graduating, she became an advertising copywriter, and then married a journalist, Geoffrey Nicholson. This led to ten years as a full-time mother, with three children, but in 1971, when she was forty years old, she began a new career as a television presenter and interviewer. When *Martha Jane and Me: a girlhood in Wales* was published the Nicholsons were living in Powys.[75]

Nicholson`s book makes an interesting contrast with the work of Webb and Walters. It was published by Chatto and Windus, still in 1991 a major London publisher, and though it is very much Nicholson`s own work, a well-written and intriguing account of her early life, and not one of the currently popular genre of ghost-written celebrity [auto]biographies its author`s media career may well have eased her way to publication. This is relevant because of its likely effect on the kind of audience whom Nicholson was addressing. Valerie Grove, writing originally in the *Sunday Times*, but quoted on the back cover of the paperback edition of *Martha Jane and Me*, sums this up for us:

> `She was always a storyteller, who for years had held dinner tables in thrall with the tales of her Welsh childhood, now set down here in spare unmannered style ... The evocative details ... are all splendidly recalled.`[76]

The comment has a double significance. Firstly, though she was writing in a very

different setting than that of Webb and Walters, Nicholson still had the same ability to tell a good story. Secondly, it defines the audience that the stories were at least initially meant for as metropolitan dinner parties.

Storytellers build on the truth, but inevitably they colour it and select the details to suit their audience. This is entirely legitimate - a story is not a fully authenticated and documented piece of history - but it does affect the way in which the story is told and the viewpoint from which it is told. It is of interest, therefore, to see how Nicholson`s audience may have affected the content of her book and her attitude to the things she describes in it. There are strong similarities between *Martha Jane and Me* and Lorna Sage`s *Bad Blood* [77](2000), another early autobiography by someone who had moved out of her original community, this time in rural Flintshire, and had become a naturalised member of the academic/metropolitan middle class.

For that audience Wales is often still, as it was for the eighteenth century women novelists discussed in Moira Dearnley`s *Distant Fields*[78], a `foreign`, perhaps slightly barbarous place. When I was in London in the nineteen sixties, I remember being told how the young Dylan Thomas had been taken up by the Sitwells and their circle for his novelty value as much as his talent. John Tripp, perhaps more aware of the world around him and drawing on his own experience, comments on the same attitude in a more recent decade in his poem`Enigma of Welshness`:

> `Sometimes I respond
> like a tired court clown, the sad performer fulfilling
> his appointed rôle.`[79]

Just as the eighteenth century saw Wales as a cross between barbarism and Eden, so the twentieth century picked up on poverty and eccentricity; Valerie Grove`s review underlines the way in which *Martha Jane and Me* is likely to be, at least in part, a contribution to that external view of Wales.

Briton Ferry, even today when most of its industry has disappeared, is not notably poorer or less community minded than neighbouring areas. Indeed, Neath, of which it counts as a district, is in some ways culturally richer than Port Talbot. Yet Nicholson stresses the lack of cultural stimulus, for example in her account of visiting the local public library to borrow Mills and Boon romances[80] (though in practice very few libraries at that date would have stocked this kind of `popular` literature, which was easily available from the numerous chain libraries around). School, too, which one might have expected to provide some hint of culture, equals the craze for collecting autographs and the general unpleasantness of showering in company after games or P.T. Even Miss Sims, the teacher who tutors Nicholson in Latin, is not shown as providing any cultural input:

> `Simsie was my Miss Moffat, the teacher in Emlyn Williams`s *The Corn is Green* who turns a working-class lad into an Oxford scholar. I had seen it as a play on stage in Britin Ferry and as a film with Bette Davis. And to heighten my conviction that Simsie was exactly like Miss Moffat, with faith in an equally pathetic waif, she told me one Saturday that she thought I`d be notable in some way.`[81]

Morgan in *The Corn is Green* begins, of course, as an illiterate miner, not a grammar school educated teenager, and he is, as Emlyn Williams undoubtedly knew, a historical anachronism, but the comparison reinforces what one *South Wales Evening Post* reviewer (also quoted on the cover of the paperback edition of the book) describes as `a frank and enchanting account of growing up in a poor overcrowded terrace house, blessed with richly varied characters among her family and friends.`

And the picture of deprivation that Nicholson paints is not simply cultural. When she passes the scholarship and is preparing to go to Neath County School, she is too upset at what she sees as the family`s poverty to enjoy her success: `I was hardly ever free of this shame of being poor now that I was going into a richer world.`[82] In

practice the family seem to have been more or less typical of their background; Briton Ferry is largely a working class community, but not more deprived than the rest of the borough of Neath. And if providing the right uniform for the County School was a strain on the family resources, for many working class children of that period, it was an impossibility.

On the other hand, whatever her reservations, Nicholson did go to the County School, and later to university, and this rather more sophisticated educational background shows in her writing, which is more calculated, more meditative than the direct narratives of her local fellow writers.

> `If bluebells were out, we went home carrying armfuls. Such big bunches that their perfume clung to us. We were innocent scavengers since no-one told us that we shouldn`t pick them. At least not until word got round that the white lower part of the stems was the food of the flower, and if we destroyed that none would ever grow there again.`[83]

Though the vocabulary is relatively simple in itself, the way in which it is used is not, nor is the phrasing (in the musical sense) of the sentences. There is a slightly breathless quality to the narrative, perhaps resulting from the frequent piling up of short sentences, often beginning with `And` or having no verb: `She had far more clothes than my mother. Many hats. A new one for practically every season. And her fox fur.`[84]

Although Webb`s three volumes of autobiography and Marilyn Winstone`s *Before the Roundabout* are all centred round their respective families, they also give a strong sense of community, and here too *Martha Jane and Me* is something of a maverick. The narrative concentrates on Nicholson`s family and the relationships within it, particularly those between her parents and her grandmother (the Martha Jane of the title). Even her brother and sister, twins born five years after Nicholson, hardly appear in the story; when she says goodbye to her sister on the evening before she

leaves for university, Nicholson comments:

> `I longed for her to break down and say she couldn`t bear to see me go. But how could I have reasonably expected that when she and I had led such separate lives ?`[85]

`Separate lives` or not, the overall impression of the Briton Ferry household is one of almost claustrophobic closeness, with very little connection to the outside world.

In this context it is enlightening to see how Nicholson deals with World War II. She was almost nine years old when it began, but it seems to have made very little impression on her. Chapter 21 is entitled `The Faraway War`, and this neatly sums up the few pages she devotes to such things as air-raid shelters and `Digging for Victory`. The only suggestion that the war did actually come to an end is a small photograph captioned `Victory Celebrations in Mansel Street`, while the bombing of Swansea, a major local tragedy, still very much alive in the communal memory is dismissed briefly: `Though there was one night when the action was close. A night when they bombed Swansea and an incendiary bomb fell in the Old Road nearby`[86].

One can compare this with an account by Eira Northcott, contributed to an anthology of writing about West Glamorgan in the first half of the twentieth century:

> `In the summer and autumn of 1940 bombs began to fall regularly on Swansea. Sometimes the warning sirens did not sound, and the raid was over before we knew that it had happened. During the daytime raids the siren would sound and we children would grab our gas masks and follow our teacher to the air raid shelter ... On night, when we were all in the garden shelter [at home] a bomb fell on the school, the blast bringing down our kitchen ceiling in a heap of plaster. Morriston escaped most of the bombing, but Swansea was not so lucky.`[87]

For Northcott, writing basically for a very local audience, these things are significant, but for Nicholson, creating her account for an audience for whom local detail has no particular relevance, personal relationships are more important.

(Perhaps it is appropriate to add that, whatever audience she may have had in

mind, and whether this wasconscious or unconscious, *Martha Jane and Me* proved to be as popular in Nicholson`s home town as it was elsewhere; the intended audience may affect how a story is told and what it includes, but not its readability.)

6. Marilyn Winstone (1948 - 2002)

It would be difficult to find a greater contrast than that between Mavis Nicholson`s *Martha Jane and Me* and Marilyn Winstone`s *Before the Roundabout: a Swansea Childhood.*[88] Although she spent much of her later life in Cwmafan in the Afan valley, Winstone grew up in Cwmbwrla, `situated about two to three miles north of Swansea in West Glamorgan`,[89] and this is the area about which she writes in her autobiography. Strictly speaking, this is the story of one particular year, 1957, when the Cwmfelin Tinplate Works, the major local employer, closed down, and when a number of streets were demolished to make way for a major roundabout and new road layout.

In the mid-nineteen nineties Winstone became a member of the Tuesday Writers Group, which met weekly in the Port Talbot Arts Centre.[90] Whether she had previously cherished dreams of becoming a published writer was never, I think, discussed, but in due course the various assignments she completed for the class developed into the autobiographical account that became *Before the Roundabout.* Each week a further section would be brought in and read to the group, which commented on the sections. Grammar and punctuation, not Winstone`s strong points, were supplied where necessary. This could prove frustrating; the technical points were accepted, but beyond that Winstone was determined, to say the least, and attempts to get her to include more sensory information, more atmosphere, rarely succeeded. Ultimately the heaping up of unadorned detail produces its own atmosphere:

> `Not long after Dad has gone, Dadcu, who has been sitting quietly in his chair, starts singing `Si-lent night, Ho-ly night`, while Mam goes to the pantry in the corner of the room to get the yellow earthenware mixing bowl which is white on the inside. She puts it on the table and starts rubbing the bread which she carried in it until it becomes tiny pieces of breadcrumbs. Margaret and I sit on the settee by the window watching as she continues to make the stuffing for the big fresh chicken Joe Cullen brought when he brought the bread. She chops an onion and the smell fills the room while Dadcu continues to sing ... and Mam finally adds the thyme and parsley before rubbing butter into the mixture and stuffing the chicken.`[91]

The details here - the `yellow earthenware mixing bowl ... white on the inside`, the `smell of the chopped onions`- were the result of suggestions from the group, but this was as far as it went. The `smell` remained just that, without further definition or association.

The use of tenses was originally a little uncertain, but the final decision to write in the present tense throughout also helped to give the writing an immediacy and a validity that it might not otherwise have had.

As with Webb and Walters, Winstone was fully involved in the marketing of the book. It was published by its author, with the aid of the Swansea Citizenship Millennium Scheme, and under the terms of the scheme it had to be non-profit-making, but since Winstone was anxious to raise funds for local cancer support, she was, if anything, even more determined to see that the book sold. By the time of her death a year later, from a recurrence of cancer, only a handful of copies were left unsold. Unlike Webb, she had rarely been well enough to go round promoting her work, though she did manage an occasional visit to a school or church group, and would undoubtedly have done more of these in other circumstances. Instead she used the networks of her community, her family connections who had remained in Cwmbwrla, and her chapel as alternate methods of distribution.

In all of this Winstone was typical of a particular kind of `community` writer,

one who may perhaps harbour dreams of Harry Potter style success, but whose writing is actually aimed at his/her local community, and whose likely success remains largely within that community and its overseas echelons. In most cases lack of wider promotion means that the success of such a book remains narrowly parochial, but interestingly, given the opportunity, such works can communicate perfectly well with a much wider audience. One such example is *Give Me Yesterday*;[92] an enjoyable but fairly unremarkable memoir of a childhood in Llangranog, published by Gomer Press at a time when book design as a concept was still new to Welsh publishing. The author lived next door to the journalist Maurice Wiggin; he gave a copy to his neighbour, who enjoyed it so much that he gave it a glowing review in the newspaper for which he worked. The book then connected so profitably with the metropolitan audience that its publisher was able to build an entire new wing on the proceeds - or so the story goes ! This kind of writing is relatively common in Wales in both languages, but rare in England, where authorship is seen very much as a middle class activity - hence, no doubt, the contrast between the work of Nicholson and of Winstone.

It is clear that Winstone`s background was very similar to that of Nicholson; there was an almost twenty-year age difference, but that was balanced by the old-fashioned flavour of Winstone`s home circle. Both women grew up in small terraced houses in `sub-urban` communities on the edge of a large town, and the main difference seems to have been the major part played by Libanus Welsh Baptist Chapel in Winstone`s family life.

There is, however, a vast difference in attitude between the two writers. One could never imagine Winstone experiencing shame because of her household arrangements, though she too shared a bed, in her case with her sister Margaret, and

the two girls slept in the same room as their parents. The family`s comments on the possibility of moving to a new home are illuminating; they are discussing whether their own house is likely to be one of those demolished:

> "I wanted to move to one of those posh houses in Penlan or Clase like Heather O`Brian`s gone to live in," I interrupt.
> "What the heck is posh about the council houses in Penlan and Clase ?" exclaims Dad.
> "They got bathrooms and gardens, and I wouldn`t have to go out to the back to the toilet."
> "Well, I wouldn`t like to go to one," states Mam. "I`m happy by here. Come on Margaret, you wash the dishes, and you dry them Marilyn, before you get ready to come to town with me."[93]

Once *Before the Roundabout* was completed, Winstone began work on a novel and again she brought it to the Group for comments and advice, but it was clear from the start that fiction was not her medium. She had previously written several short stories, often based on incidents from her own experience, and it was plain that she had no real understanding of the need for structure or pacing, no idea of building to a climax. This had also been true for Rachael Ann Webb, whose own short stories were also basically accounts of her own or her neighbours` experiences. Webb did have a greater awareness of atmosphere and emotion, but both women were essentially chroniclers of the families and social circles in which they lived. In her novel (which was not completed when she died) Winstone ventured to use subject matter which was not part of her own life; her heroine, a church-going teenager just starting work, becomes involved with the tearaway who has just murdered her grandmother, and she later becomes pregnant by a young evangelical minister whom she duly marries. Winstone might perhaps have got away with this over-melodramatic plot, but although she had children of her own and, until her illness took hold, worked in an office with young people, her image of modern youth was at least forty years out

of date, so that she could not redeem the lack of technique by the social realism of her narrative.[94]

Perhaps the main difference between Winstone and Webb was that the latter had learned, if not how to construct a piece of fiction, at least how to give her stories a satisfactory shape as anecdotes. Winstone was not a storyteller - though it is possible that this was because she never had the same kind of audience as Webb, and therefore never had the stimulus to develop her narrative skills. On the other hand the piling up of the concrete details of a scene or a character, so typical of her style, can be surprisingly effective:

> `At that age I had never seen a dead body, but going by what I heard older people saying, Auntie Alice, with her white complexion and white hair was what I imagined a dead person to look like, if they were able to walk. As I opened the door to Auntie Alice`s living room, in the terraced house at the end of Stepney Street, a few doors down from Cwmbwrla Infants School, where she rented rooms from Mrs. Martin, I saw her laying straight out on the settee, by the window at the side of the table, dressed in her usual shapeless and colourless style.
>
> I stood the other side of the table for a few seconds, with the sweetbreads in my hands between two saucers, wondering what to do, `Auntie Alice !` I screeched, as I thought, if she doesn`t move, I`ll drop these sweetbreads and run.
>
> Slowly she rose, `Oh !` I screeched, `I thought you were dead !` and nervously put the sweetbreads on the table as she started laughing.`[95]

NOTES:

1. HVN pp. 567-8. Those women writers who *are* acknowledged are mostly included under the family history chapters.
   HLV pp.292-335. The first woman mentioned (and the only one from the 19th century) is Mary Pendrill Llewelyn, for whom see below, Case Study 2.
2. Personal knowledge; Alan Davies reported the story to the monthly meeting of the Afan Poets group and read one or two of the poems to us.
3. Information from the Rev. Morgan Mainwaring, Margaret Mainwaring`s son. He gave me copies of some of the Welsh poems, mostly paraphrases of the psalms, but did not have his mother`s English language poems or plays to hand at the time.
4. Evans, A.L. (1990) `Some Local Personalities: Thomas Bleddyn Jones`, *PTHS Trans.* Vol IV, 1, pp. 24-26. This note includes the text of a humorous poem of 1858 about the bell of St. Mary`s Church, Aberafan, and a Welsh-language quatrain from a flyting contest.
5. HLV pp. 317-9 for examples of this.

6. See below, Case Study 2 for full details.
7. *Companion*, p. 279. Article on Ann Griffiths; there is a useful bibliography, but most of the writings about her are in Welsh.
8. HVN p. 567.
9. HVN p. 567.
10. HVN p. 567.
11. HVN p. 568.
12. HVN p. 568.
13. See below, Case Study 1, for details of Davies`s career and publications.
14..HVN pp. 367-70.
15..HVN p. 457.
16. HVN pp. 438-447 passim. This is an account of the Quaker families of the Vale of Neath in general, but it shows how literature was an integral part of their background.
17. HVN p. 439.
18. *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 28, pp. 122-3, entry for Mary Howitt. Harries, F.J. *Famous Writers and Wales,* pp. 136-8 gives the details for the Margam connection.
19. Harries, p. 137.
20. Ibid pp. 137-8.
21. The reference for this is a letter dated 11 April 1837, from C.R.M. Talbot, in London, to his agent,Griffith Llewellyn, asking `Who is Caroline Williams of Bridgend who has been writing a novel called Margam Abbey ?` The letter is apparently among uncatalogued papers at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, and the reference was passed to me by Mr.J.V. Hughes.
22.. [Williams, C.] *Margam Abbey,* p. 2.
23. Ibid pp. 268-7.
24. Ibid p. 4.
25. See below, Case Study 2, Mary Pendrill Llewelyn.
26.. Jones, S.R. and Trowbridge-Matthews, A. (2001) `A Poet in Her Place: an interview with Ruth Bidgood`, *Roundyhouse* 7, pp. 21-25.
27. Personal knowledge.
28. Personal knowledge. The unpublished novel had the campaign against the flooding of Welsh valleys to provide water for England as its background.
29. This series of novels began with *The Running Tide* (1988).
30..I first came across Elizabeth Davies through one of her poems included in a MSS collection of ballads made by Walter Haydn Davies. Very little of her work is currently in accessible print - there are extracts from two poems in HVN. A fuller account of her life and work is in: Jones, S.R. (2004) `The Lesser of the Least: Elizabeth Davies (c.1769-1857), an Anglo-Welsh *bardd gwlad*`, *Welsh Writing in English*, Vol. 9, pp. 170-9
31. Thomas, B.B. (1951) *Baledi Morgannwg*, pp. 70-7 (Though four verses have been omitted. Thomas does not give his source for the ballad.)
32. HVN pp. 705-6.
33. *Baledi Morgannwg*, pp. 17-18
34. HVN p. 705.
35. Davies, J.A. (1997) *A Swansea Anthology*, Bridgend: Seren.
36. HVN p. 568; Elis Jenkins`s letter, which is in the Neath Library Local Collection was brought to my attention by J.V. Hughes, formerly Local Studies Librarian for

West Glamorgan Library Service, and the owner of a collection of Davies`s ballads which he kindly photocopied for me.

37. HVN p. 568.
38. HVN p. 507.
39. Jones, D.R.L. (1991) *Richard and Mary Pendrill Llewelyn: a Victorian Vicar of Llangynwyd and his Wife*, p. 26. This booklet was produced as part of the centenary commemoration of Richard Pendrill Llewelyn`s death.
40. Ibid p. 26.
41. Ibid p. 11.
42. Ibid p. 27.
43. Ibid p. 27.
44.. *Companion*, p. 791, article on G.J. Willliams, and p. 475-6, article on Anne Maddocks.
45. Williams, G.J. (1969) `Wil Hopcyn and the Maid of Cefn Ydfa`, *Glamorgan Historian,* Vol. 6, pp. 228-49. The Welsh-language version of this article was published in *Y Llenor* in two parts in 1927-8; this English translation was made by Professor Williams`s wife, specifically to provide a wider audience for her husband`s view of the legend. It prompted a rebuttal from Brinley Richards, a native of Maesteg.
46. Ibid p. 233.
47. Ibid p. 245-6
48. Williams, G.J. p. 242.
49. Jones, D.R.L. p. 33.
50. These letters were reprinted in Hill, G.V. (1990) *Cefn Ydfa: a Who`s Who and What`s What,* pp. 159-70.
51. Ibid p. 168.
52. Ibid p. 169.
53. Glover, M. `A Fine Lyricism Bedevilled by Brooding` *Independent* 13 November 2003.
54. *Cefn Ydfa: a Who`s Who and What`s What*, pp. 163-5. It is perhaps worth noting here that Hill includes a series of letters, also to the *Cambrian*, in 1846, about the copyright to the air and words of `Y Gwenith Gwyn`, according to which the link between Cefn Ydfa and Wil Hopcyn goes back at least to c. 1806, before Mrs. Pendrill Llewelyn was born.
55. Jones, G. ed *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English*, pp. 51-53.
56. The information about Webb`s `writing` methods etc, is personal knowledge, gained over several years as part of the editing and publishing process.
57. Davies, E. (1857) *An Autobiography of Elizabeth Davis* (sic)*: a Balaclava Nurse.* The Honno Press edition of 1987 omits the preface by Davies`s editor, Jane Williams, describing the work of producing the autobiography, but Deirdre Beddoe`s new introduction summarises the process. (Honno brought out a new edition of the book in 2007.)
58. Webb, R.A. (1987) *From Caerau to the Southern Cross*, p. 9.
59. Ibid, p. 11.
60. Ibid, p. 67-8.
61. Webb, R.A. (1993) *A Storyteller From Caerau.* The stories in this collection are of particular interest because they illustrate the transition from historical fact to fiction. In this case the stories were often about friends and neighbours rather than Webb herself and from slightly more recent years, so that it was sometimes

necessary to be creative to conceal the identities of those who might otherwise be recognised.

62. Personal knowledge.
63. Very little has been written about the Upper Afan Valley; the best available source is probably *Afan Uchaf*, the magazine of the Cymmer Historical Society.
64. Some of the background given here is from *Grown-ups Don`t cry,* some from personal knowledge. David Walters is also writing an autobiography, though this is currently (summer 2007) in progress and in typescript.
65. Evans, J. ed (1992) *Black Harvest: an anthology of contemporary poetry from the South Wales Valleys.*
66. Samuel, R., Bloomfield, B. and Boanas, G. (1986) *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages in the Miners` Strike of 1984-5.*
67. Walters, B. (2002) *Grown-ups Don`t Cry.*
68. Ibid, p. 93.
69 . Ibid, p. 12-13.
70. Ibid, p. 65.
71. Ibid p. 72.
72. *Companion,* p. 384.
73. Ibid p. 452-3.
74.. Nicholson, M. (1991) *Martha Jane and Me: a girlhood in Wales,* The paperback version, published in 1992, includes some ten extracts from reviews on its back cover and flyleaf.
75 . Ibid passim and note on flyleaf..
76. Ibid, review on flyleaf.
77. Sage, L. (2000) *Bad Blood,* London: Fourth Estate.
78. Dearnley, M. (2001) *Distant Fields..*
79. Tripp, J. (1969) *The Loss of Ancestry.*
80. Nicholson, p. 86.
81. Ibid pp. 262-3.
82. Winstone, M. (2001) *Before the Roundabout: a Swansea Childhood.*
83. Ibid p. 7.
84. The Tuesday Writers Group is the current incarnation of the Port Talbot Literary Society, founded in 1967.
85. *Before the Roundabout*, p. 37.
86. Williams, J. (1973) *Give Me Yesterday.* The story behind its success was common knowledge at the time, quoted in various articles.
87. *Before the Roundabout,* p.30.
88. The Tuesday Writers had been involved in the evolution of *Before the Roundabout* from the beginning, and page by page. The novel was a different matter; only selected passages were brought in for comment and this time criticism (whether positive or negative) of the storyline or setting was not acceptable.
89. *Before the Roundabout,* p. 29.

CHAPTER 4. WRITERS OF THE LATER 20th CENTURY

Although some earlier writers from Neddafan reached an audience wider than the narrowly local - R.D. Blackmore obviously, Michael Gareth Llewelyn and Margam Jones because of their London publishers, Letitia Ann Waring and her father Elijah through their hymns, are all examples - it is not until the last quarter of the twentieth century that one finds a substantial number of what might be called `professional` writers in the area. Alun Morgan, first writing local history and folklore, then turning to historical fiction about Porthcawl, and being published locally, fits neatly into the local model. Now, though, one also has Cynthia S. Roberts producing a series of novels also set in the Porthcawl area and using much the same material as Alun Morgan, but published by Headline and winning compliments from such sources as the *Bolton Evening News* and *Woman`s World.* However, although born in Tonyrefail, and so not originally a native of Porthcawl, Roberts is well versed in the topography and history of her adopted home; despite her London publisher and the greater sophistication of her writing, *The Running Tide* and its sequels are in the same tradition as Morgan and Isaac Craigfryn Hughes.[1]

It is instructive to compare Roberts`s tales with Margaret Evans`s two novels set in early twentieth century Port Talbot. Evans apparently has Valleys connections (or so she said at a local book-signing) but began her writing career in North Wales with *The Hall in the Field,* a non-fiction account of the house in which she was then living. She followed this with historical novels set in North Wales, but then moved to the very popular family saga genre with *Song of the Hills* and *Inheritors.* Possibly she was influenced by the success of Swansea`s Iris Gower and Catrin Collier, but though she acknowledges the assistance of John V. Hughes, Local Studies Librarian for the area, the two novels could be set anywhere, and what little local detail she uses is

rarely quite correct.[2] Another successful saga writer with local links is Elaine Crowley, but though, as mentioned elsewhere, Crowley was a member of the Port Talbot Writers` Circle, and possibly gained something from her membership, her novels and short stories are set in her native Ireland and do not contribute to the Neddafan literary tradition. Another `visitor` who should perhaps be mentioned here is the poet Neal Mason, who comes from England but lived in Neath for several years and was a tutor for a number of creative writing classes there; he had links with the Neath Writers` Circle, but his own writing does not seem to have taken on any local flavour.[3]

Generally speaking, Neddafan seems to have been more congenial to poets than to novelists in recent years. Gwyn Williams and Moelwyn Merchant both had novels published, but as far as Williams was concerned, these were a minor part of his output, while only *Jeshua* properly qualified as a novel out of Merchant`s five pieces of prose fiction. There was at least one `lost` prose writer, in the shape of John Naish (1923 - 1964?) from Taibach who published a fictionalised autobiography, *The Clean Breast* (1961) under the same Hutchinson`s New Writers scheme which saw the launch of Leslie Thomas, Ron Berry and Eirlys Trefor.[4] (English novelists launched by the scheme included Stanley Middleton, Andrew Salkey, Marilyn Duckworth and Julian Mitchell.) Naish left Port Talbot when he was called up for service in World War II, and when he was demobbed he `drifted to London`.[5] In 1950 he emigrated to Queensland, where he worked as a sugar-cane cutter, though in the slack seasons he worked at a variety of jobs, including navvy, grave-digger, fettler, miner, axeman, bookmaker, barman, clerk and fruit picker. He did publish other books after *The Clean Breast*, but died in the cane fields of a snake bite before he could establish his reputation.[4]

A more substantial contribution was that of John James, who brought out six novels between 1969 and 1989.[6] *Votan* (1969) is the first instalment of the adventures of the Greek traveller, Photinus, among the Northmen; it was followed by *Not For All the Gold in Ireland,* further adventures of Photinus, this time in Britain and Ireland, and drawing on the story of Rhiannon and Pryderi from the Third Branch of the *Mabinogi.* Both novels went into paperback. A third novel, *Men Went To Cattraeth* (1972), based on the story of the Gododdin, had an excellent welcome from the critics and, probably because of its subject matter, was given some prominence in Welsh reviewing sources. James`s fourth novel was *The Bridge of Sand* (1976), set in the early years of the Roman conquest of Wales. It tells of the adventures of the poet Juvenal, serving as a cavalry commander in Agricola`s army at the point when the general intends to invade Anglesey. Juvenal is sent ahead, to establish a bridgehead, but he finds himself in a strange, uncanny land, haunted by the gods of the Celts, and when he does find the `bridge of sand` between the mainland and the island, his troops are drowned by the incoming tide. In one sense, this is fantasy Wales, the modern version of those eighteenth century Gothic novels set in deepest Cambria, but the characters are realistically brutal for their time and background:

> `People came to us, where we sat on the shore. They brought us food: wheatcakes and cold beef and flasks of barley beer and the apple wine of the country. We ate and drank. Then we looked on them with new eyes. They were Brits and they had betrayed us. We killed them, every man and woman we could find, on the seashore.`[7]

There was a gap, then two further novels appeared, *Talleyman* (1986) and *Talleyman in the Ice* (1989); these were straightforward historical novels, of which the first was set in nineteenth century Ireland. The three earliest novels were all reprinted in paperback at this point. John James had moved away from Port Talbot before the first of his novels was published, and so he made no obvious impact on the

local tradition - or, sadly, the Anglo-Welsh tradition in general, becoming one of the last of that earlier generation who were published outside Wales and so were forgotten (or never registered) at home.

An earlier prose writer was B.L. Coombes (1894 - 1974). According to the *Companion,* Coombes was born in Herefordshire, and came to Resolven in the Neath valley when he was eighteen, to work as a miner. There he married a local girl, learnt Welsh and stayed in Resolven for the rest of his life. However, research carried out by Barbara Prys-Williams for *Twentieth Century Welsh Autobiography* (2005) has made it clear that Coombes `reconstructed` his early life to suit the image he wished to offer to the public. He was actually born in Wolverhampton, the son of a grocer, and almost everything he asserted must be regarded as provisional.[8]

He began to write at the time of the various strikes and lockouts in the nineteen twenties, and his four books, his short stories and essays all grew out of his experiences as a miner. They caught the public mood in the late Thirties and Forties, and he became something of a radio pundit, talking about the possible restructuring of society after the 1939-45 war, but by the Fifties fashions had changed and though Coombes was never forgotten, his books were no longer in print. His main literary output, *These Poor Hands, I Am A Miner, These Clouded Hills* and *Miners Day*, was complete by 1945, though he continued to contribute a column to the *Neath Guardian* until shortly before his death.

Although the subtitle to *These Poor Hands* is `the autobiography of a miner working in South Wales`, it is clear that the book is in fact closer to being an autobiographical novel. Coombes was evidently determined to become a published writer; he approached the publisher Victor Gollancz and offered an idea for a novel.

Over time, however, and with the advice of Gollancz himself, and Gollancz`s fellow left wing editor and publisher John Lehmann, the proposed novel turned into the apparent autobiography which was published in 1939 as a contribution to the Left Book Club. Coombes did live and write in Neddafan, but he belongs to another tradition, that of the international proletarian literature of the nineteen thirties. Although Welsh writers made a substantial contribution to that tradition, it was as members of an international movement rather than as natives of Wales and though West Glamorgan produced its own share of trades union activists and volunteers for the Spanish Civil War, that particular philosophy never became as generally relevant as it did further east, in Merthyr or Ebbw Vales.

One might, perhaps, suggest that autobiography is a format with a particular appeal to the writers of Neddafan. A number of examples of the genre have already been discussed in the section on women writers, but its practitioners were and are by no means exclusively female. Some contributions are simply memoirs, plain records of the writers` careers, like Stan Robinson`s account of his years in the Royal Navy, *Memoirs of a Matelot* (2003) or Roy Coleman`s *From Cregan to Corrwg* (2005), covering his time as a miner and in the Home Guard. Others, however, are more consciously literary; G.O. Jones`s *The Conjuring Show* (1981) falls between memoir and short story sequence. Jones grew up in Cardiff and Porthcawl, but his father, an HMI, sent him to the Secondary School in Port Talbot (now Dyffryn Comprehensive School); later he became a physicist, spending that part of his career outside Wales.[9] During that period he published three novels with Faber: *The Catalyst* (1960), *Personal File* (1962) and *Now* (1965); they could be described as belonging to the school of C.P. Snow whose novels of academia and politics were best sellers at the time.. Then, in 1968 Jones was apppointed Director of the National Museum of

Wales, a post he held until his retirement in 1977. From 1978 - 81 he was Chairman of the English Language Section of Yr Academi Gymreig, leading it through a largely Welsh Arts Council prompted reorganisation of aims and structure.

The Conjuring Show was published in 1981. It had been preceded by *The Lecture* (1980), a short story pamphlet, the title story of which used the academic setting of his earlier career. The shorter second story, however, seems likely to have been inspired by his experience at the National Museum, dealing with intrigue and incompetence among bureaucrats and committees. Jones describes *The Conjuring Show* as `part autobiography, part fiction`[10] but it would be very difficult for anyone but the author to separate the two. Possibly it is not so much the content as the way in which it is presented, a style very similar to that used by Dylan Thomas in *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Dog:*

> "Owen, just a minute, my boy," called Mr. Morgan, as soon as the Sunday School was dismissed. "I`d like to have a word with you - and Mr. Thomas." I noticed that he had not tried to stop Tony.
>
> I already regretted our trick, because I would miss any chance of catching Gwyneth. She lived just across the road from the chapel. But it was obvious that Mr. Morgan had come to a decision, and that I would be detained for some time.
>
> "Owen, we feel ... Mr. Thomas and I both feel, that you are not fully *engaged* in the young men`s class. Not enough *competition,* perhaps. *Mentally* engaged, I mean."
>
> " ... Oh, *they`re* all right, Mr. Morgan. I don`t know if they`ll find *me* stimulating, though. I`m an *atheist* and I don`t know if they`ll appreciate that."[11]

What is, perhaps, surprising is the amount of space given to the chapel and its activities; the world that Jones describes is a long way from the stereotype of the Anglo-Welsh novel.

Another Neddafan autobiographer with a similar approach was John Ackerman (1934 - 2004). Ackerman`s main career was as an academic, specialising in the work of Dylan Thomas, about whose life and poetry he published several critical

studies.[12] *Up the Lamb* (1998) is a warm and appreciative picture of his family and of the community of Maesteg in which he grew up. The `Lamb` of the title is the local public house where his maternal grandmother held court every afternoon:

> `Titus Evans, the landlord, respected and feared my grandmother, and she enjoyed the complete freedom of the pub ... The middle room, called the kitchen and where `the Kitchen friends` drank, always boasted, even in high summer, an open fire. It was furnished, like most sitting rooms of the time in this mining valley, with a variety of surprisingly comfortable wooden, but cushioned armchairs placed near the fire-place, a large old-fashioned table covered with a plush cloth, and at the far end some high-backed chairs used only by strangers who entered this privileged haven by mistake, and seldom entered again. It required several years` regular attendance to become a kitchen friend.`[13]

(The authenticity of this picture is guaranteed, though in my parents` North Walian pub there were no women.)

Ackerman describes his book as `A Fictional Autobiography`. This may be because it is a partial account - his parents feature relatively little, and it is clear that their relationship was difficult; concentrating on his grandmother and her circle allowed him to bypass that situation. Equally it may be because he covers only the period up till the end of the war in 1945, when he was eleven, and it is likely that much of his picture of the earliest, pre-war years is an imaginative recreation, drawing on what he heard later from his elders. On the other hand, he may simply be referring to the format of the book. If one did not know that this was autobiography, one could quite easily read it as fiction, perhaps a version of the stereotypical Anglo-Welsh novel `all seen, naturally, / Through the eyes of a sensitive boy who never grows up`, to quote Harri Webb.[14] The events described in the book are given a shape, the dialogue is dramatic, the narrative, intentionally or not, written for reading aloud. *Up the Lamb* is both a celebration of its author`s native place and an example of that story-making impulse which seems to be inherent in so many of the writers of

Neddafan.

`Native place` here, as for those other writers, is not simply a geographical description. It includes a whole society, its people and its customs. In his relatively short account of this world Ackerman speaks mainly of the people who shared it with him and does not draw from the palimpsest of myths and associations that underlie the everyday activities of Maesteg. However, another writer from that town has made this kind of palimpsest his main focus. Iain Sinclair`s father was a local G.P., who came originally from Aberdeenshire, but his mother`s ancestors:

> `had been a farming family from west Wales and drifted into the industrial valleys, working in mines - and they also had a very vivid tradition of writing poetry and telling stories and myths. It wasn`t that artistic activities felt alien to them - what was alien was that you could attempt to make a living by it. They assumed these were the things people did while they got on with their real lives.`[15]

Sinclair moved to Hackney in London, where he has been based ever since. It seems that he did not leave Wales because he felt alienated, but rather because there were no opportunities there for the kind of career that he wanted to pursue - initially film-making. He also seems to have found the impersonality of London a creative factor: `London gives you anonymity, you can spook about the place like a spy with no problems at all.`[16] Over the years he developed his own particular genre of psycho-geography, growing out of an awareness of the many layers that go to make up any specific location. He has written about Jack the Ripper and the East End, about the M25 in *London Orbital* (2002), and his latest book, *Edge of the Orison* (2005) is about the poet John Clare`s journey from Dr. Allen`s private asylum at Claybury in Epping Forest to Northampton Asylum where he ended his life. Sinclair`s work has influenced writers such as Peter Ackroyd, whose novel *Hawksmoor* grew out of Sinclair`s writings on the Hawksmoor-designed churches in London, and Alan Moore,

whose graphic novel *From Hell* picked up on the Jack the Ripper connections.

Although he had settled in London Sinclair had not forgotten his point of origin. `At the back of my mind was a long term project ... to do four books of a particular kind, the second one of which would go back to Wales.`[17] This `Welsh book`, first attempted in 1987, finally took shape as *Landor`s Tower* (2001); growing out of a series of visits to Llanthony Abbey, the novel draws in what might be called the `London Welsh connection`, with David Jones and Arthur Machen:

> `I am a man in search of memory,` David thought. Memories provoked by cloud shadows racing across the anvil-shaped hill, Y Twmpa; memories he had not earned. The woods, with their abbreviated branches, were loud with ghosts. Robert Graves had walked Offa`s Dyke, weeping and grinding his teeth and talking to his comrades, the ones with wounds instead of faces. He shuddered from the impact of the guns. Tanks churned the slanting fields into mud. This was Annwn, the hidden kingdom of the dead. The tank was Twrch Trwyth, a boar whose ferocity had no limits, one of the hunted who becomes a hunter.`[18]

It would be appropriate here to mention another writer with strong family links to Neddafan who also wrote about his travels. Edward Thomas tends to be categorised as an English poet with Welsh associations, perhaps because so much of his travel writing is ostensibly about the South of England, but this was largely a matter of economics, together with the fact that he married an English wife.[19] His parents had moved to London, where his father worked as a civil servant, but they employed Welsh-speaking nursemaids and maintained their connection with Wales and with West Glamorgan; there was even talk of sending one of Thomas`s brothers to Watcyn Wyn`s academy in Pontardulais. However, Thomas, like Sinclair after him, followed a career path which did not allow him to work in Wales. His one definitely `Welsh` book, *Beautiful Wales* (190), was contributed to a publisher`s series where the text was an accompaniment to the illustrations; these were mostly of North Wales, the artist`s home, so that Thomas, whose links were with the South, had little choice but

to produce a romantically blurred portrait without specific detail. His essay on Swansea shows what he might have given to Wales had opportunities existed there for him to support his family.

However, it is Neddafan`s poets who have been the area`s most outstanding literary figures in the last fifty or so years. A number of those mentioned above are poets as well as prose writers, some more distinguished than others: Gwyn Williams, Moelwyn Merchant, John Ackerman and Iain Sinclair have all published collections of their work, though the sequence really begins with Vernon Watkins. Watkins is best known now for his connections with Swansea and Gower, as well as for his long friendship with Dylan Thomas - indeed, Thomas has come (quite unfairly, because Watkins is a fine poet in his own right) to overshadow his friend. In fact Watkins was born in Maesteg, where his father was a bank manager.[20] By the time he was seven the Watkins family had settled in Swansea, to which they had moved via Bridgend and Llanelli, and one might not have expected Maesteg to have left any echoes in his work. Yet his first published volume was *The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd* (1941) which ends with a long poem for voices based on a Welsh folk custom particularly associated with the Maesteg area. In a note on the poem Watkins comments:

> `This ancient custom, traceable perhaps to the White Horse of Asia, is still prevalent in many parts of Wales. The singers came every year to my father`s house; and listening to them at midnight, I found myself imagining a skull, a horse`s skull decked with ribbons, followed and surrounded by all kinds of drunken claims and holy deceptions.` [21]

In practice, though the custom had once been widespread, by c.1905 it had almost disappeared, a victim of Nonconformist prejudice. The village of Llangynwyd also briefly lost its annual festival but here it was revived, at the behest of Cadrawd. One can imagine, though, the effect that the mummers, with their sheet-draped horse`s

skull could have on a small child. It should be noted too that the first poem in this first book is a ballad, `The Collier`, which retells the story of Joseph in terms of a lad condemned to go down the pit. The clarity, vigour and driving rhythm of the poem are certainly not typical of Watkins`s work, but they are recognisably his, despite the strong echoes of Wordsworth:

> `When I was born on Amman hill
> A dark bird crossed the sun,
> Sharp on the floor the shadow fell;
> I was the youngest son.
> .....
>
> The tall black hills my brothers stood;
> Their lessons all were done.
> From the door of the school when I ran out
> They frowned to watch me run.
> .....
>
> Soon as I went from the County School
> I worked in a shaft. Said Jim,
> "You will get your chain of gold, my lad,
> But not for a likely time."
> .....
>
> They changed words there in darkness
> And still through my head they run,
> And white on my limbs is the linen sheet
> And gold on my neck the sun.[22]

The second poem in the book, `Sonnet (Pit Boy)`, takes up the same theme, though this time it is far more typically Watkins in style.

As has been suggested above, Neddafan`s poets tend to be versatile, producing prose as well as verse. Thomas, Sinclair and Ackerman all fit this pattern, and at least three of the established poets of the area in the late twentieth century also contribute to it. Robert Minhinnick is a compelling essayist, with themes drawn from conservation and travel, while his first novel has just been published; Ruth Bidgood and Sally Roberts Jones are both local historians of some standing; only John Davies

has seemingly kept solely to poetry as his medium. All four, however, are very much poets of place.

Ruth Bidgood (1922-) was born in Seven Sisters on the far side of the Vale of Neath. but her father soon became Vicar of St. Mary`s, Aberavon, and Bidgood attended Port Talbot Secondary School, where she had Philip Burton as a teacher.[23] Later she moved to England, but eventually returned to Wales, to settle in Abergwesyn in mid Wales. Her poems are constantly informed not just by the geography of the places about which she writes, but also by the people and their history. She writes of the old pump house at Llanwrtyd Wells, first of the deserted spa building:

> `This sociable place has died through lack of visiting.
> A pungent drip, still slowly forced from the spring`s heart,
> has grown a fungus-garden in the great mirrored basin.[24]

This is, or could be, tourist`s observation; but then she draws in the background:

> `Sheep-farmers, knitting wives, holiday miners
> from the black valleys, jam-packed the houses,
> ate meals in shifts, and sat outside singing hymns
> on the suddenly hushed street of evening.`[25]

The geographical place cannot exist without the human dimension, the layers of past experience that make up a society.

However, this is not simply the result of Bidgood`s interest in local history. In England poets generally come from the middle classes, and the middle classes have both a degree of mobility and an inward-centredness which militate against the sort of social involvement that most Welsh writers, in either language, take for granted. If an Anglo-Welsh poet had written Rupert Brooke`s `The Old Vicarage, Grantchester`, the servants, and probably the village community as a whole would have inhabited the poem alongside the church clock and the honey.

Robert Minhinnick (1952 -) and John Davies (1944 -) are also poets of their *filltir sgwar,* in Porthcawl, Port Talbot and Prestatyn, though Minhinnick, particularly in recent years and as editor of *Poetry Wales* magazine, has also made his mark as one who operates on the international scene. To do justice to these writers would take considerably more space than is available here, but their contribution to the tradition should be noted. There are others, too, among them Lewis Davies, whose first book, *Work, Sex and Rugby* (1993) established him as a writer to be watched; he then expanded into publishing, with Parthian Books, a highly successful venture which, like Seren in Bridgend, has made the breakthrough into the publicity networks of the London literary media.

One of Parthian`s authors is George Brinley Evans from Banwen on the edge of the Vale of Neath; a former miner, mining was the background to his first collection, *Boys of Gold,* but his latest book grew out of his years in the army in Burma. Evans`s short story writing was encouraged by Neal Mason and another poet who has acted as mentor to others in this way is Chris Torrance who came originally from Scotland, but has been settled in Glynneath since 1970; his work draws on the history and myth of that area.[26] Another ex-miner author was Terry Hetherington (1935 - 2007), also from Neath, a poet and inspirer of poets.[27] His published output was not large, but he regularly took part in the poetry-reading scene based roun the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea, and his enthusiasm lay behind a variety of literary competitions and other initiatives.

Strictly speaking, I should include myself in this chapter. However, it would obviously be difficult to provide the kind of neutral critical account offered for Neddafan`s other writers, and I have therefore been happy to adopt Professor M.

Wynn Thomas`s suggestion that I should explore the effects on my writing of living in this particular cultural community.[28]

In practice, though I grew up in South-West Essex, on the fringes of London, the Welsh tradition was not unfamiliar to me when I moved to Port Talbot in March, 1967. My father was a Welsh-speaker from Holyhead, at one point a pupil of Sir John Morris Jones at the University College of Wales, Bangor; in 1953, when we were living in Llanrwst and he was compering the Coronation festivities in the local park, he asked me to write a poem for the occasion, to introduce the day. It was at Llanrwst, too, that he arranged for me to have poetry master classes with T. Glynne Davies, one of our customers at the Red Lion, who had won the Crown at the National Eisteddfod in 1951. Later, when we moved to Llangefni, I was asked to write a memorial verse for the funeral leaflet of the young son of a family friend; the Welsh language equivalent was written by Rolant o Fôn, a recognised poet on the eisteddfod circuit; his literary group, immortalised by Bobi Jones in his poem `To the Poetry Societies in Wales`, met in our residents` lounge for a short time.

From this (and my grandfather`s devotion to *Ymryson y Beirdd*) I had learned that in Wales poets were craftsmen, part of the social scene, not remote geniuses or inspired romantics. (Both types *could* appear, but they were an exception; the bank clerk Vernon Watkins fitted neatly alongside the tailor and civic dignitary Daniel Owen or any number of sober nonconformist minsters.)

In 1959 for family reasons I had to move back to London, and spent the next eight years there, working as a librarian. I led what might be called a triple literary life during this period, firstly as part of the metropolitan poetry scene, then as an active participant in the London end of the Anglo-Welsh `Second Flowering`, and finally as one of the local writers of South-West Essex. It was a lively and very fulfilling time.

Unfortunately, when I moved to South Wales in 1967, to take up a post as Borough Reference Librarian at Port Talbot, the metropolitan connection more or less came to an end, but the other two `lives` underwent a sea change. Not surprisingly the Anglo-Welsh connection increased substantially, particularly as the London-based Guild of Welsh Writers transformed into the English-language Section of Yr Academi Gymreig, of which I became the first Secretary/Treasurer (1968-1974/76). On the other hand, this was in many ways more of the same, and it was the third `life` that showed the most difference.

In Essex local writers had been identified and their work collected whenever possible. Edward Thomas qualified as a local writer because of his time at High Beach and Hare Hall; William Morris was linked with both Walthamstow and Woodford; Denise Levertov grew up in Ilford. These links were interesting, often a source of local pride, but, even when the authors were alive and living locally, not an active element in local cultural activities. Published authors might be invited to the annual reception in Arts Week, but that was all. In my own case, I identified `local authors` and gathered their books for the appropriate section of the Reference Library, but active participation in readings and arts events happened elsewhere, in Central London, not in Romford or Chingford. Even the Havering Poetry Group, to which I belonged, functioned more on the metropolitan level than as a local group in Hornchurch, and if my own writing played any part in local culture, it was through articles and pamphlets on local history; my first published book (beating the poetry collection *Turning Away* by a month or two) was *A History of Romford in the Nineteenth Century.*

As it happened, my first contact in Port Talbot was with drama, in the shape of

the Taibach People`s Theatre. I had actually enquired about local literary or poetry groups, but the enquiry had been misunderstood, and I found myself committed to going to at least one rehearsal,to explain that though I enjoyed going to the theatre, I couldn`t see myself `on the boards`. However, they were looking for support staff and I soon found myself drafted in as assistant property mistress.

Taibach People`s Theatre (originally `Young People`s Theatre` until its teenage founders matured) was part of a network that in its time nurtured Richard Burton and Anthony Hopkins, and more recently Michael Sheen (whose English and Drama teacher, Ken Tucker, joined the Taibach group just after I did). The standards of performance were high, particularly as against the enjoyable but *very* amateur dramatics I had enjoyed in Essex, and the plays mounted ranged from Brecht and Ionesco to Ray Cooney farces.

In fact, by joining Taibach People`s Theatre (and being effectively co-opted at about the same time into the Port Talbot Historical Society) I became part of the cultural nexus of the area. `Port Talbot` was originally formed in 1921, when the town of Aberavon, on one bank of the river Afan, united with Margam District Council on the other bank to form a new borough. Though never as large as its neighbours Neath and Bridgend, the market town of Aberafan had a history reaching back to the Middle Ages, and had been the only Welsh-governed lordship in lowland Glamorgan. Margam, on the other hand, had grown up around the Cistercian abbey founded by Robert, Earl of Gloucester, in 1147. Some six hundred years later Margam parish also became the site of a major industrial complex, the works of the English Copper Company at Taibach (later owned by the Vivian family). Even today Aberafan tends to produce leading figures in local government, while Margam is home ground for many of those, both individuals and families, who contribute to the cultural life of

the borough. This is not entirely surprising. The pre-1921 borough of Aberavon had always been run by the burgess families mentioned in the town`s 1304 charter and their descendants, and this was still the case at the end of the twentieth century; there had been few outside influences until the building of the vast Sandfields estate c. 1950 onwards, and very few, if any, of the steelworkers for whom the estate was built seem to have become fully assimilated into the cultural and social networks of the borough as a whole.

Margam/Taibach, on the other hand, had a long history of cultural activity. As has been shown earlier, Margam Abbey was a centre for the bards, and though the Mansels and the Talbots who followed the monks at Margam do not appear to have been culturally active in the way that the Williamses were at Aberpergwm, this may be partly because there has been no serious study of the subject. For example, there is some circumstantial evidence that the Talbots may have acted as patrons to the young Edward Thomas, as they did to the musician John Morgan Nicholas, and offered to do for Margam Jones`s brother William, but so far the family papers have provided no definite proof. Later, as Taibach developed from the two small cottages that gave it its name, the mixture of native stock and incoming experts produced or gave a home to a wide range of poets, historians and novelists: A.L. Evans, Ronald Welch (né Felton), Margam Jones, Richard Burton (born at Pontrhydyfen, but brought up in Taibach), Ruth Bidgood, John Davies and John Naish all had links with the area. Incomers included Philip Burton, a writer as well as a producer of plays, and the Gray family from Northumberland, who came to sink the Morfa pit for the Vivians, but stayed to become local historians in their adopted home.

Taibach People`s Theatre produced its own playwright in the shape of Leo

Arthur, author of the script for the Margam Passion Play, which took place in Margam Park at roughly two-yearly intervals from 1977 - 2002. (My husband, whom I met through Taibach People`s Theatre, my three sons and I all took part in the Passion Play between 1977 and 1986). Leo Arthur was an accomplished actor, but he also wrote at least two plays for radio, one of them based on the Morfa Pit explosion of 1890. Sadly, it did not prove possible to persuade him to deposit copies of the scripts in the library`s local history archives before his unexpected early death, and unless the B.B.C. retained tapes, the plays are now lost. Another literary member of the drama group was Alan Davies, writer of innumerable scripts for local pantomimes and concerts, but also a founder member of the Afan Poets and organiser of poetry readings, technically for good causes such as Labour Party funds or the National Children`s Home, but also as an opportunity to connect with an audience. The emphasis is on entertainment, but the audience responds equally well to the more serious items. The Afan Poets developed out of a W.E.A. course on creative writing, and its core members have been Alan Davies himself; Nigel Jones, gardener and herpetologist; Brynmor Evans, steelworker and paramedic; and the present writer. They have also published a short introductory collection of the work of all ten of the poets who have been connected with the group.

Nineteen sixty seven was a good time to settle in Port Talbot. The economic boom resulting from the establishment of the steelworks had not yet passed its peak and the Council still had money to spend on cultural frivolities. The week after I arrived in the town, Jack Jones was the guest of honour at the annual literary luncheon, to be followed in later years by Alexander Cordell (with whom I worked while he was researching *The Fire People*), Russell Braddon and Glyn Daniel. I was able, too, to import some of the activities I had enjoyed in London, and Tony Curtis,

later Wales`s first Professor of Poetry, gave his first public reading in the restaurant of the Afan Lido, along with John Stuart Williams, Herbert Williams and John Idris Jones. Later events brought rising stars like Gillian Clarke and established figures like B.S. Johnson to the town, and John Tripp was a regular visitor. On one occasion John came to read on a Tuesday, was carried off after the reading to Taibach Working Men`s Club (President A.L. Evans) and did not get home till the following Saturday, never quite sure where he had been, but certain he had enjoyed it.

All of this activity was supported by the newly founded Port Talbot Literary Society, an initiative of Mrs. Mair Davies, branch librarian at Baglan and, like myself, a new arrival (she had previously worked at Croydon). Her fellow sponsor was Len Turner, head of Glanafan Lower School, and father of the *Western Mail* journalist Robin Turner. Although the Literary Society was initially a mildly academic group, listening to lectures on *One Flew Over the Cuckoo`s Nest* and other syllabus-related subjects, it also gave space to readings and even to drama, when Taibach People`s Theatre presented Ionesco`s one act play `Jacques` in Baglan Library. Over the years the group mutated and became a writers` group rather than a readers` symposium. It still exists, almost forty years later, as the Tuesday Writers Group, and has just published *Ordinary People*, a collection of reminiscences of life in the area between 1900 and 1950. Its guest speakers over the years have included James Kelman, fresh from his Booker Prize triumph, as well as a variety of native Welsh poets, critics and short story writers. The novelist Elaine Crowley tried out some of her earliest work on the Society - and was apparently heavily criticised; whether she took the criticism to heart or not, she soon afterwards arrived in the bestseller lists.

I was involved in most of these activities, sometimes as organiser, sometimes

as performer, sometimes as both. At the same time I was building a second `career` as a local historian. This was partly a development from the research I had carried out as reference librarian, but I had read History at Bangor, and have never lost my interest in the subject.In due course all of these strands came together when I was asked to contribute to the B.B.C. series of `Radio Odes`, half hour verse plays on a subject of the poet`s choice. I chose the coming of the Irish to Port Talbot circa 1850 and their gradual assimilation into the community, a theme suggested by the work I had been doing in recording the inscriptions on the gravestones in St. Mary`s churchyard, Aberafan. My time with Taibach People`s Theatre had given me some idea of how drama worked, and I was able to develop that when I was asked to contribute to the series for a second time in 1977.

A rather longer-term project which began about the same time was Alun Books, a small press publishing venture which to date has produced about a hundred titles. The basic aim was to bring out books which, for one reason or another, might otherwise not appear, but which merited publication. Hence in the early nineteen eighties the press produced a number of short story collections, short stories being just then highly unpopular with publishers, though not necessarily with readers. More recently, with other publishers picking up the short story genre, production of local history and autobiography has been a major feature; increasing globalisation and standardisation, plus the increasing fragmentation of families and social groupings have made people much more aware of their own personal history. However, most of this work is produced by writers who are amateurs with a story to tell, but often not the technical skill to make the best of their material. The trick is to help them to speak in their own voice, but without the rough edges of inexperience.

There is another constant when it comes to selecting manuscripts for the Alun

Books list, and that is that the contents and/or the author should have a Welsh connection. Although the position seems to be improving slowly, and Welsh publishers like Parthian Books or Seren do even get their publications reviewed in the London media, having a Welsh element can still be a negative quality when it come to getting a book into print. (One remembers the novelist Russell Celyn Jones commenting in 1995 that he preferred not to emphasize his Welsh background.) One example of this is Frances Thomas`s Taliesin trilogy. The first book, *The Blindfold Track* (1980), a retelling of the Taliesin legend, was published by Macmillan and won the Tir na nOg Award for the best English-language children`s novel with a Welsh setting in 1983, but Macmillan refused to publish the two sequels, which dealt with post-Roman Celtic history. More recently we were able to put Aubrey Burl`s excellent study of Barti Dddu, *That Great Pyrate,* into print; it might otherwise have faded away in Dr. Burl`s attic, but has now been picked up by Alan Sutton Publishing for a paperback edition.

It is safe to say that Alun Books is never likely to become a profit-making activity; most of the books published were ineligible for any sort of grant aid, and insofar as the press receives a subsidy, it comes indirectly from the fees received for the various creative writing classes I have run over the last twenty years, and from payments for readings, book reviews etc. It is also safe to say that Alun Books would not exist if I had not come to Port Talbot. It is difficult to quantify the amount of creative energy in one place, but this apparently drab, uninteresting town has considerably more than its share. (In fairness I should also add that through the press I have also come into contact with writers from Neath, Porthcawl and Maesteg, whose books we have published and/or edited, while the editing process itself has fed into my own writing.)

When I first began to write poetry, c. 1950, it was not the custom to teach any modern poets in school or college; Keats and Wordsworth were as contemporary as it got, and my main models were the hymns we sang at morning assembly. Since the authors of these hymns included poets as distinguished as George Herbert and John Milton, this was not the worst apprenticeship that I could have had, but it meant that my early poems were very formal and structured, and I was uncomfortably aware of this. In the sixties other models appeared, particularly American poets like Ferlinghetti, William Carlos Williams, Theodore Roethke and the confessional trio of Lowell, Plath and Sexton, all of whom helped to free the subject matter that I could encompass. Taking part in public readings was another factor moving me away from the stiff formality of earlier years to a more colloquial style.

Being in Port Talbot underlined that movement. At London readings one could be reasonably sure that the audience would share the same vocabulary and the same broad level of literary knowledge, but this was not the case if one was reading to Salem Chapel`s Sisterhood or a Round Table fund-raising evening. One learnt to be very aware of the audience, of the need to hold them, and to vary one`s programme with light and shade. Here the formal writing that I had moved away from once again became relevant, lending itself much better to comedy and satire than the open structure of my more consciously literary work. In an odd sense it was a process of becoming a bard, combining professional skills with public accessibility. On the other hand, this was not altogether a new development. Nigel Jenkins once told me that he did not think of my poems *as* poems, but rather as stories. At the time I was not sure how to react to this, but looking back now, I can see, I believe, what he intended to say. Growing up outside the Welsh tradition, with its strong oral influences, I quite unconsciously adopted it, writing not for the literary, class-based audience of the

English tradition, but for the storyteller`s audience that I would eventually find when I returned to Wales.

NOTES

1. Roberts, C. (1988) *The Running Tide.* This was followed by six other novels in the same series. Information on Roberts`s background comes from the author biographies in her books.
2. The information on Margaret Evans comes from publicity at the time of Evans`s local booksigning for *Song of the Hills* and from the introduction to that book.
3. Personal knowledge.
4. Naish, J. (1961) *The Clean Breast.* Information on the New Writers scheme comes from a note in Naish`s book and from lists of New Writers` titles in books by Ron Berry and Eirlys Trefor under that imprint. A.L. Evans has a short note on Naish in *The History of Taibach and District* (1963).
5. This reference comes from the author`s note on the book jacket.
6. James is included in *Authors of Wales Today* (1972); his entry is very brief, listing him as a civil servant, born in Aberavon.
7. James, J. (1976) *The Bridge of Sand.*
8. The chapter on Coombes in Prys-Williams, B. (2005) *Twentieth Century Autobiography* is the most up-to-date and considered account of Coombes`s career; the *Companion* entry was produced before Prys-Williams`s research became available.
9. There is a brief account of Jones`s career in the *Companion*; this has been augmented by personal knowledge, having read his novels when they came out, worked with him on the Executive Committee of the English Language Section of Yr Academi Gymreig , and published *The Conjuring Show.*
10. This is from the author`s note on the book jacket.
11. Jones, G.O. (1981) *The Conjuring Show,* pp. 83-4.
12. *Companion,* p. 388, gives a short account of his career (under John Ackerman Jones, his full name).
13. Ackerman, J. (1998) *Up the Lamb*, p. 28.
14. Webb, H. (1969) `Synopsis of the Great Welsh Novel`, *The Green Desert,* p. 34.
15. Sinclair, J. (2001) Interview, Serpent`s Tail Publishing Ltd., Private Lives Series. http://www.serpentstail.com/interviews/- P=INT 10429
16. Pilkington, M. and Baker, P. (2001) `City Brain: Iain Sinclair Interview. http://www.forteantimes.com/articles/147-iainsinclair.shtml
17. Ibid.
18. Sinclair, I. (2001) *Landor`s Tower.*
19. Jones, S.R. (1987) `Edward Thomas and Wales` in Barker, J. ed. *The Art of EdwardThomas*, pp. 77-83.
20. *Companion*, p. 767-8 gives a useful basic account of Watkins`s life and work, with a guide to further reading.
21. Watkins, V. (1941) *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd*, p. 90.
22. Ibid, p. 11-12.
23. Jones, S.R. and Trowbridge-Matthews, A. (2001) `A Poet in Her Place`, *Roundyhouse* 7, p.21-25.
24. Bidgood, R. (1982) *Lighting Candles*, p.6.

25. Ibid.
26. Brief biographies of Lewis Davies and George Brinley Evans are included in Davies, L and Smith, A. eds. (1999) *Mama`s Baby (Papa`s Maybe): new Welsh short fiction.* Chris Torrance is included in the *Companion.*
27. The sources for this section are inevitably personal knowledge and papers in my personal collection (for example, a programme for a reading at the Ros-a-Mar Rooms in 1974 which included B.S. Johnson and Gillian Clarke among the readers).

CHAPTER 5. A TRADITION OF OTHERNESS

One question which has been hovering on the fringes of this study is that of what might be called relative quality. If one looks at the literature of England, the pattern is clear: there are writers who qualify as part of the literary canon, are reviewed, included in literary histories and made the subject of critical studies; some of these may be minor figures, but even then they fulfil purely artistic criteria. Then there are other writers whose output and readership may be substantial but who are classified as `popular` and are therefore not appropriate subjects for any kind of critical attention; though they may be highly skilled in their own field, they are seen as storytellers, not artists. To some extent these two categories are defined by their assumed audiences - literary authors belong to the middle classes and the intellectual element in society, whereas popular writers (a group which also includes all genre writers, from Mills and Boon romances to crime and science fiction) are for the proletariat.[1] Literary writers aim for intellectual eminence, popular writers for financial rewards. In practice there are always overlaps - P.D. James is a best-selling crime writer, but her audience is clearly middle class and her books are reviewed, while the character-driven emphasis of her writing and that of others like her, might be held to subvert the genre itself. Equally Daphne du Maurier was a writer of popular romances, but her best-known work, *Rebecca*, is read and dissected for undergraduate essays and accounts of the Gothic novel.

It should be noted that these are not entirely intellectual distinctions; both James and du Maurier belong to the middle classes as well as writing for them, whereas Catherine Cookson, an equally `popular` writer, was the illegitmate child of a working class family. Cookson`s earlier novels of working class life on Tyneside,

produced before she became trapped by popular demand and her publisher`s financial ambitions into the `trouble at t`mill` stereotype, were as worthy of reviewers` attention as those of James and du Maurier, but were never likely to receive it.

However, when one turns to English-language writing in Wales, the picture is very different. In Neddafan, as elsewhere, there are writers who qualify for the literary category - Robert Minhinnick, Ruth Bidgood, John Ackerman, John Davies to begin with - and others who belong to the `popular` category - Elaine Crowley and Cynthia Roberts are the most obvious examples - but most of the writers discussed in this study belong to neither group and would find no home in the English model.

Initially it seemed that this was a matter of audience. The social structure in Wales, even today, is different from that in England, and the appreciation of literature at any level or in any genre is not mediated by the same social assumptions. This obviously plays a major part in differentiating between the two literatures, but it seems likely that there are also other factors underlying the situation.

The word `literature` is inevitably associated with written material, and mostly, nowadays, with the printed word on the pages of a book. There is no collective noun for work which was or is oral, though most of the earliest examples of what is now included under the term literature were not composed for the written page, but for the voice. Equally, though over time much of this originally oral composition was written down, writing itself was a slow and cumbersome activity until the invention of printing; only the wealthy or the clergy could afford books, and even they possessed only a very few, mostly religious texts, Books of Hours and the like. As time went on, histories like Geoffrey of Monmouth`s *History of the Kings of Britain* and romances like the Grail romances of Chretien de Troyes were copied so frequently that they could be described as best-sellers, and by the later fourteenth

century the rise of a mercantile middle class had led to wider literacy and a greater range of subject matter, with, for example, practical manuals on such topics as hunting, fishing and etiquette. Meanwhile the production of manuscripts had become almost industrialised, with copying `factories` making books more readily available and affordable.[2] Yet at this point the oral base of literature was still evident. There is an illustration once very popular in school textbooks which shows Geoffrey Chaucer, `the father of English literature`, reading the *Canterbury Tales* to Edward III and his court, and it was still true at that date, c. 1370, that public performance was the easiest way to reach the wider audience.

The general availability of books in the Middle Ages (or the lack of it) is something which is often ignored by historians, literary or otherwise, hence the common assumption that our ancestors were illiterate, when it would be more correct to say non-literate. One cannot be chivalrous without a horse; one cannot be literate (or illiterate) without access to books.[3] However, since, as has already been mentioned, there is no collective noun for stories, poems, fiction or non-fiction which have not been written down, these categories are normally described as part of `literature`, resulting in a number of misguided conclusions.

For us today, in twenty-first century Britain, literacy is the norm. The written word is so prevalent that a two-year-old can learn to decipher the word `supermarket` entirely without tuition or prompting, presumably by linking clues given in conversation and in advertisements. However, our own literacy is misleading. According to Walter J. Ong, only 106 languages have ever become sufficiently written to produce a literature, and of three thousand spoken languages today, only some 78 have a written version.[4]

Obviously those cultures which do not have a literature in this strict sense, i.e. creative work which is written down, do have a wealth of song, story and accumulated wisdom which can be a fully sophisticated product, but as Ong points out, there are major limitations on what can be achieved. In oral cultures the emphasis is on the practical - one learns by observing and copying the actions of those who are expert in the desired skill.[5] As for the poet or the storyteller, learning any substantial piece by heart without a written text is not possible and other methods of holding the text in memory have to be found: `In an oral culture, knowledge, once acquired, had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost; fixed, formulaic thought patterns were essential for wisdom and effective administration.`[6]

In practice one suspects that Ong, himself deeply rooted in literacy, over-emphasizes the limitations of orality. Clearly one cannot have detailed analytical study of a text unless there is a written version to study, but being part of an oral culture does not make abstract thought impossible. However, it is true that, as Milman Parry made clear in his work on Homer, oral `literature` depends heavily on the use of formulae and clichés, both in the language used and in the situations that occur - the council meeting, the coming together of the army, the revealing of the hero. Indeed, for orality the cliché is a necessary element and originality something to be used sparingly or even avoided.[7]

This brings us to a further point. An oral culture is inevitably a `popular` culture, and the artist must cater to the needs and abilities of a wide audience. Edward III`s court was privileged in terms of wealth and power, but not necessarily with regard to intellect, and if Chaucer was to succeed, he needed, like Shakespeare after him, to satisfy both the `university wits` and the `groundlings` of his own day. The use

of formulae was not only intended to make the poem or story memorable for its creator and those who followed him, it also helped to make the piece of work more accessible to an often unsophisticated audience. However, to say this is to look at the practice of orality from the standpoint of literacy. A storyteller`s audience is not merely a group of passive receptors, spoon-fed into understanding, it is itself part of the storytelling process. Storytellers may or may not retell a set story - Cinderella, Bran`s invasion of Ireland, King Arthur`s quest for the treasures of Britain - but even if they are adding together a selection of traditional elements to make a new whole, the audience is fully aware, acknowledges each new theme as it emerges and appreciates the skill with which the twists of the plot are concealed or revealed. The final `happy ending` is not a sentimental cliché, but the archetypal restoration of natural justice to the world picture. Perhaps the nearest common equivalent to this is the interaction of actors and audience at a pantomime; in one sense the storyteller`s hearers are themselves creating the story. (`Listeners` is too passive a term; one can listen, but not hear, whereas `hearers` implies reaction.).

On the other hand this does not exclude written texts. Although the storyteller, using memory and voice as tools, is free also to use gesture and expression to bring the narrative to life, a similar effect can be produced when reading aloud to an audience; movements are more constrained, but the reader/performer can still act out the text. Perhaps the best-known example of this is Charles Dickens, but the late Emlyn Williams, author and actor combined, created similar unions of orality and literacy in the personas of Dickens and Dylan Thomas. And though they rarely perform publicly, this pattern of formulae and convention is exactly what `popular` writers use. By the time one gets to the strict production demands of Mills and Boon novels,[8] the process is becoming a strait-jacket rather than a pattern, but the

reader`s part is still that of the storyteller`s audience.

However, less than a century after Chaucer`s death, the printed book was introduced to England and the situation changed completely. This new format was small and portable; its products could be read in private - in fact reading almost demanded privacy and space - and ironically enough, though potentially easier to acquire, they opened up the possibility of elitism. The writer no longer had to tailor the work to suit the wide-ranging audience of earlier centuries. Now s/he could write specifically for those whose social setting and experience matched the writer`s own background - but in doing so, they were also likely to exclude those whose background was different. Then again, anyone with the necessary resources to buy books and set aside space in which to enjoy them was also likely to have the time to consider and absorb complexities which would be irrelevant in an oral setting. (The poems used in a successful poetry reading need to be chosen for directness and immediate impact; if one wishes to include something that is more complex in thought or in format, then it is prudent - often essential - to provide a copy of the text.)

However, the older, oral tradition was not eradicated, and even found its way into the new literature in the shape of picaresque tales such as Nashe`s *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) or Thomas Deloney`s proto-novels.[9] Perhaps its last and finest flowering (so far, at least) was via the nineteenth century serial publication which nurtured Dickens - though Dickens may not have realised it consciously, his reading tours were a tribute to the oral tradition and its audience. By the twentieth century, however, literacy had apparently conquered, and one finds the two categories: `popular` writing and `Literature` existing as two separate genres. I say `apparently conquered` because over the last forty years Literature has begun to reach out to the

oral audience again via poetry readings and the increasingly popular audio books, television and radio dramatisations of classics and so forth. An audience that would never have seen a Dennis Potter play on the stage sees it on television cheek by jowl with `Eastenders` and `Big Brother` - the latter a tribute itself to the power of orality to reach the masses - and experiences it de-mystified and in a people-friendly setting. Perhaps it should also be admitted that, in many cases, presenting Literature to the wider public also involves simplifying it, though mostly for purely practical reasons of length, not because this wider public is assumed to be stupid.

For the moment, though, the two categories are still, at least for the critics, quite separate. Popular literature is clichéd, sentimental, stereotyped, not worth reviewing; the qualities to be looked for are originality, depth of thought, complexity. Ironically enough, the book so frequently voted the `best book of the century`, *The Lord of the Rings*, is an almost perfect synthesis of the two types; it has the recurring situations and heroic clichés of the oral tradition, and yet is totally dependent on written sources for the detailed world it creates, and for the appendices that have spawned a host of trilogies, pseudo legendary histories, across the world.

As has been suggested earlier, this is not entirely a matter of literary judgements, and this can be illustrated from my own experience as a librarian. In the mid-Sixties I worked for Essex County Library Service and was based in Chingford in North-east London. South Chingford was a `between the wars` extension of Walthamstow, itself the Edwardian extension of the more respectable East End; North Chingford, `up the Mount`, still called itself a village, with grand houses and a village green. Every Monday morning in the North Chingford branch library there would be a queue of bridge-bound housewives with lists of books they wanted to order, culled from the Sunday newspaper review supplements. South Chingford had the same book

stock, in more or less the same proportions, but no queues. It would be unfair to suggest, without more evidence, that the latest Iris Murdoch was more likely to be actually read if borrowed from the South Chingford branch, but read or not, one has to suspect that many of the North Chingford-ordered books ended up on coffee tables, fuel for games of one-upmanship .

This kind of socio-literary background is very English. The tradition is one of exclusion; going to university, for instance, is something associated with privilege, and the term `auto-didact` for a self-taught student is mostly pejorative, not admiring. It would be difficult to imagine a character like the quarryman-bibliophile and historian Bob Owen Croesor in an English setting; Isabel Emmett, writing about the Croesor community, sees him as a W.E.A. lecturer, correct in its way, but scarcely appropriate for a workman who became an international authority on Welsh Americana. [10]

The Welsh tradition, by contrast, is one of inclusion. It is possible to romanticise this, of course, and to say that everyone *can* be included does not mean that everyone *wants* to join in, but the possibility does exist. In Wales writing is not something for an élite audience; it is an artisan skill as much as an art. This is fully recognised in the Welsh language, with the roles, for instance, of the *bardd gwlad* and the *bardd teulu*, and as we have already seen, this tradition occurs in English language writing too, even if mostly unrecognised. There are, certainly, `specialist` audiences in Wales - Cynan`s chapel-educated readers would have had no difficulty in picking up the theme of the Prodigal Son that lies behind his Eisteddfod-winning poem *Mab y Bwthyn* - but these were not élites; in fact, extending their circle, rather than limiting it, was their aim in life.

Although some of this difference may be due to the differing social structure

of the two countries, it seems that the orality/literacy contrast may also be relevant here. English Literature was literate from its beginnings; Chaucer, to all intents and purposes its founding father, read to the King`s court from a written text, and when the new craft of printing was established at Westminster some seventy years later, Chaucer`s poems were among the first printed books to be published.

There was a slight hiccup in the progress towards Literature in the later sixteenth century, when the predominant literary mode was the theatre. Though Shakespeare`s actors worked from a written text, his audience was the broadest possible, and it may well be that the actors` memories were as important as any `book` in preserving the plays. His long poems were another matter, printed during his lifetime; even the sonnets, though published later, came from an established written text. Although the division was never absolute, one can see the slow development of two traditions, `popular` and Literary. No-one seems to have queried the silk-weaver Thomas Deloney`s credentials as a proto-novelist[11], but two centuries later the fact that John Clare was a peasant was an important factor in his rise to fame.

Welsh-language literature was quite another matter. It had already been in existence for some eight hundred years before printing came into use, and though it had always existed alongside written texts, it is quite possible that it remained largely oral, at least for its first six hundred years or so. Equally, the bards who produced the literature probably had more in common with groups like the Beatles or U2 than with T.S. Eliot or Iris Murdoch. They had a social role to fulfil and a living to earn. This in turn meant that they could not afford to limit their audience; whether they were praising their patron or commemorating a victory, everyone needed to know. It seems likely too that they were performing to an audience which appreciated their skill. Although English language poetry has its set forms, these do not have the craft skill

element of *cynghanedd*, and bearing in mind the number of Welsh folk customs that involve extempore rhyming, together with the use of the *englyn* and the *triban* for epitaphs and social comment, a knowledge of the twenty-four metres of Welsh poetic tradition seems much less likely to have been something esoteric than an equivalent knowledge of the structure of a sonnet.

Since the Welsh language is something created by the people of Wales, it is a reflection of their habits of mind, beliefs, social structures and history, and it is not surprising, therefore, that much of this also appears in the usage of the English language by writers with a Welsh origin. This is not always something that can easily be demonstrated. Some Anglo-Welsh writers knew of and/or had studied *cynghanedd* and this can be demonstrated from external evidence; in other cases it has been suggested that the particular verbal exuberance of writers like Dylan Thomas, Glyn Jones or Gwyn Thomas is in some way `Celtic` - `the lovely gift of the gab`.[12] What is also interesting is the extent to which the use of language by many of the more homespun writers of Neddafan echoes the impulse to *cynghanedd* in the balancing of lines and the echoing (particularly) of consonants in a way that is not quite alliteration.

Another element which has carried over from the Welsh language tradition is the social role of the poet. This is not, generally speaking, something which applies to fiction. The novel was a late arrival in Welsh literature, something with no oral background, and neither language can be said to have developed a fully-fledged alternative `Welsh` format. There were novelists circa 1900, of whom Isaac Craigfryn Hughes and Margam Jones are the most obvious local examples, who were clearly writing for the same popular local audience as a poet like Thomas Bleddyn Jones, but their descendants today, if they have any, are either popular writers in the English

tradition, working in the fashionable domestic saga genre, or wouldbe authors with no literary background, funding their own work with a commercial publisher like Gwasg Gomer. Perhaps the highest point of the native tradition was the work of Jack Jones, whose audience-friendly, cumulative fiction was London-published, but aimed first and foremost at a Valleys audience. Jones is an excellent example of the crossover of orality into literacy. His sagas draw on family history, tales told by the fireside or at family gatherings, and he is always present as narrator/story-teller (not necessarily the same thing). An example is his description in *Off to Philadelphia in the Morning* of the musician Joseph Parry being acknowledged at the National Eisteddfod:

> `Seven thousand people on their feet appplauding and waving their hats and programmes. Have any of you ever been applauded by as many as seven thousand people ? If you have then you will know what you felt like and are in a position to judge what Joseph felt like that summer`s day long gone.`[13]

Jones`s purpose is to praise and record the community of which he writes and this is also the case with a writer like Glyn Jones, but Glyn`s novels and stories, like those of his friend Dylan Thomas, are less artless, aimed at a more literary audience; both men play games with language and delight in its exuberance, but their work is less broadly accessible.

In this context it is relevant to note the place of publication of a number of the earlier Anglo-Welsh novels. Isaac Craigfryn Hughes was published in the Rhondda, but Margam Jones, like Jack Jones, found a London publisher, as later did William Glynne-Jones of Llanelli and B.L. Coombes of Neath. Possibly this was due to the proletarian element in their work, which appealed to the left-wing metropolitan audience in a way that Craigfryn Hughes`s novelised folk-tales did not. Later authors either chose not to publish in London or were not able to find a home for their work there. This is probably why Gwyn Williams published *Two Sketches of Womanhood*,[14]

two novellas with a Welsh setting, with ChristopherDavies; they had been written several years before, but perhaps did not fit the metropolitan pattern. His other two novels, *The Avocet*[15] and *This Way to Lethe*,[16] also went to Welsh publishers, but this may have been because at that point a number of writers (like myself) consciously chose to publish in Wales in support of the suddenly expanding scene there. Moelwyn Merchant, too, turned first to Christopher Davies and then to Gomer Press for publication of his retellings of Biblical stories and his collections of verse, though his critical works had been published in England.

One can imagine a metropolitan critic being totally bemused by Merchant`s *Inherit the Land*[17]. Here one has a Shakespearean critic of some standing producing a non-controversial account of four of the leading figures of the Old Testament in a style that is neither dramatic nor experimental. In the Welsh context, however, it can be seen alongside a novel like T. Rowland Hughes`s *Yr Ogof (The Story of Joseph of Arimathea)*,[18] or, bearing in mind its theological/moral element, *The Master of Penybryn*[19] or Allen Raine`s *Garthowen*[20]. It has to be admitted that Merchant`s fiction is not inspired, either technically or imaginatively, but one suspects that the above-mentioned metropolitan critic would discard it for its subject matter and approach long before matters of style and structure were considered.

This attitude does not apply only to metropolitan critics. The bulk of the critical work in the field of Welsh Writing in English to date has been carried out on a relatively few authors who, very often because of their politico-social relevance, fit into the pattern of mainstream English literature.[21] Hence there are a number of studies of the poet and short-story writer Alun Lewis, but only an occasional reference to the poet Huw Menai, and then mostly because of his mining background.

Interestingly, at least two of the Anglo-Welsh writers who do feature in mainstream criticism, do so almost always in a somewhat apologetic style. These are W.H. Davies and Idris Davies. W.H. Davies combines the formulae of oral composition with the satirical note of the bards, while Idris Davies`s apparent awkwardnesses disappear in performance; his poems are effective on the page, but far more so when read to, and so shared with an audience.

However, since critical attention is so largely focussed on those writers who fit into the English mainstream, the `otherness` of the Anglo-Welsh tradition as a whole has tended to be overlooked.

It is instructive, for example, to look at the work of Dylan Thomas and notice how far it was orally based. His writing techniques were clearly very much `paper-bound` - all those painstaking work sheets - but the end product was performance-based. Our image of the poet identifies him with his voice, through his readings and radio broadcasts, far more than with the diligent craftsman working away in his cliff-top shed. And it is probably not a coincidence that so many of the leading popular novelists/storytellers today are from Welsh backgrounds:
Ken Follett, Craig Thomas, Leslie Thomas, Ellis Peters, Catrin Collier, Iris Gower, Rosie Thomas, Bill James/David Craig, Andrew Davies, Russell T. Davies and Bernard Knight, to name only the most illustrious. Though as storytellers they are seen as `popular` writers, there is generally a note of authenticity, of depth in their novels and screen plays that one would not usually associate with the English popular tradition.

Then there is the sense of place. When the Welsh Office project on the teaching of Anglo-Welsh literature in secondary schools[22] was being prepared, it was agreed by those involved that one way of drawing teachers in to the scheme would be

to emphasize the regional aspect. The theory was that teachers in the Rhondda, for instance, would welcome the idea of teaching the work of Rhys Davies, Jack Jones, Lewis Jones and their fellows; sadly, the report that emerged was so poorly promoted that there was never a serious chance to research the theory. However, the work carried out did demonstrate the importance of place in Welsh writing in English.

English authors do, of course, set their work in places they know; one thinks of Hugh Walpole`s Lakeland Herries novels or Daphne Du Maurier`s Cornish tales. However, these are mostly geographical places, not communities. This may be due to the fact that the middle-class metropolitan background of so many English authors separates them from the day to day human dimension of the locations where they set their novels or poems; there is a parallel here with the way in which so many Welsh gentry families became to some degree estranged from their native habitat by the demands of politics and the social round.

There are exceptions, naturally - one thinks of Thomas Hardy; but then, whatever the social level to which he finally attained, his roots and his family`s roots were deep in the Dorset of which he wrote. (It is useful to compare him with the Brontës; their Yorkshire is geographical, and the local colour they offer is just that, material for tourism.) But here too Wales is different. People tend to be identified by where they are from - Owain Gwynedd, Huw Menai, Dic Penderyn; they are, quite literally, `placed`. Farmers go, not by surname, but by the name of their farm - `Penlan`, `Henblas`, `Penybryn`. There are, of course, craft `surnames` - Jac y Gof, Nans y Brics, Robyn y Soldiwr, but these are often people who have no land, whose trade is perhaps peripatetic, while puns like `Dai Central Eating` for the man with one tooth, are mostly comic riffs on conventional practice.

However, the identification is not simply geographical. It implies involvement with one`s community, whether positive, as with Jack Jones`s celebration of the Rhondda, Merthyr and Cardiff, or negative, as with Caradoc Evans`s excoriation of his native Cardiganshire. On the other hand, this does not imply parochialism; Rhys Davies`s influences were English (D.H. Lawrence) and European, yet the setting and often the subject of the bulk of his writing is the Valleys community of his youth, while Raymond Williams, an academic operating on the international level, chose in his fiction to write about the Monmouthshire border country where he grew up. In Neddafan we have Robert Minhinnick and Ruth Bidgood; for Minhinnick, his native Porthcawl evokes some fine poems, while Ruth Bidgood draws themes and inspiration from her adopted Abergwesyn in mid-Wales. These writers are not simply poets; they are chroniclers, recording the places/communities with which they identify.[23] Earlier, one has Margam Jones; his villages go under pseudonyms, but are as easy to locate as the Christchurch of Hardy`s *Jude the Obscure*. Gwyn Williams even shaped his autobiography, *An ABC of DGW*, round the places he had inhabited, twisting the geography a fraction so that he could begin with Aberafan and not have to be born halfway through the book when he reached Port Talbot.

In all of this, one should not forget the criterion of artistic quality; there is, for instance, no real doubt that Alun Lewis is a more accomplished writer than Huw Menai, with a wider range of skills, formats and subject matter, or that Ruth Bidgood is operating on a much deeper level than Elizabeth Davies. Yet it is also important to compare like with like, Elizabeth Davies with Thomas Bleddyn Jones, to understand what the writer wishes to achieve and how well they do so within their own category and to their own audience. An illuminating example of this is the two novels retelling the story of the Maid of Cefn Ydfa. Isaac Craigfryn Hughes`s version is highly

coloured and dramatic, not particularly well-written, whereas Michael Gareth Llewelyn`s *White Wheat* is much more elegantly written, with carefully drawn characters and a high degree of historical accuracy. And yet, when readers were questioned, many said they preferred Hughes`s version, old-fashioned though it was. Clearly this does not mean that Hughes`s novel is `better` than Llewelyn`s, just that it appeals to the `story-telling` instinct, is, in written form, part of the genre that also occurs as soap operas or domestic sagas. Hence appropriate comparisons would be between Hughes and Iris Gower, Llewelyn and Edith Pargeter, though one would also have to consider the wider scope and intended audience of Gower and Pargeter. The important point here is that none of these books or authors should be cast out because they are not `literary`; they need to be judged on their own terms.

NOTES

1. Bloom, C. (2002) *Bestsellers: popular fiction since 1900.* Chapter 1, `Origins, problems and philosophy of the Bestseller` provides a useful background to this. Bloom, who never finally defines `bestseller`, is clearly slightly out of his depth here, including Mary Webb, Somerset Maugham, D.H. Lawrence, Bernice Rubens and Salman Rushdie alongside Ethel M. Dell, Edgar Wallace, Jackie Collins, Barbara Cartland and Jeffrey Archer. The underlying assumptions of his approach are illustrated by his comment: `Mass literature has nothing per se to do with merely working class readers, and mass culture has nothing per se to tell us about working class life in any clear sense. Rather, popular fiction when it reaches bestseller level tells us about a condition of reading which has been *proletarianised,* whoever reads such work and from whatever background`. (p. 28)
2. A useful short account of this process is the entry on publishing in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (1998) Vol. 26, pp. 416-425.
3. Ibid, p. 420. `Before the invention of printing, the number of manuscript books in Europe could be counted in thousands. By 1500, after only 50 years of printing, there were more than 9,000,000 books.` (The saying that one cannot be chivalrous without a horse is attributed to the historian N. Denholm Young.)
4. Ong, W.J. (1982) *Orality and Literacy*, p. 7. Ong`s source is Edmonson, M.E. (1991) *Lore: An Introduction to the Science of Folklore and Literature.*
5. Ibid, p. 9
6. Ibid, p. 24

7. Ibid, pp. 20-30 for an account of the work of Milman Parry and those who developed his work.
8. Mills and Boon notoriously issue instruction sheets to would-be authors, listing their requirements for every detail of their romance novels, even to the kind of names suitable for the heroes.
9. Saintsbury, G. and Henderson, P. eds (1929) *Shorter Novels: Vol. I: Elizabethan and Jacobean,* London: Dent, is a useful introduction. It includes *The Unfortunate Traveller* as well as Deloney`s *Jack of Newberie* and *Thomas of Reading.*
10. Emmett, I. (1964) *A North Wales Village: a social anthropological survey.*
11. Saintsbury`s and Henderson`s introductions to the *Shorter Novels* are useful here; although Saintsbury sees Deloney as `crude`, he does not dismiss him as a writer.
12. During the 1965 Commonwealth Poetry Conference in Cardiff the Welsh Theatre Company mounted a programme of poetry and prose by Welsh writers (in both languages). They called it `The Lovely Gift of the Gab`, the Celtic stereotype offered to the world.
13. Jones, J. (1947) *Off to Philadelphia in the Morning.*
14. Williams, G. (1975) *Two Sketches of Womanhood.*
15. Williams, G.(1970) *The Avocet.*
16. Williams, G. (1962) *This Way to Lethe..*
17. Merchant, M. (1992) *Inherit the Land..*
18. Hughes, T.R. (1961) *The Story of Joseph of Arimathea.*
19. Davies, E. T. (1975) *The Master of Pen y Bryn.*
20. Raine, A. (1900) *Garthowen..*
20. Some idea of this imbalance can be gained from looking at the length of the various author bibliographies in John Harris (1994) *A Bibliographical Guide to Twenty-Four Modern Anglo-Welsh Writers.* Alun Lewis scores 110 critical articles (though this figure would be much higher in 2007); David Jones several hundred, Harri Webb 19 and Alun Richards, like Alun Lewis one of the authors included in the Library of Wales, just 3.
21. Mathias, R. and Jones, R.B. eds. (1984) *The teaching of Anglo-Welsh literature in Secondary Schools.*
22. Bidgood, R. (2000) *Parishes of the Buzzard: an account of the history, lore and legend of Abergwesyn* is a good example of a writer`s identification with their adopted home.

CONCLUSION

This study began with the intention of testing what could be called the standard view of English-language writing in Wales, which is that it is a very recent growth, beginning in 1915, and one largely confined to the anglicised industrialised valleys of South (east) Wales. A rider to this, though not specifically outlined in the introduction, is the assumption that English-language writing in Wales has no connection with its Welsh-language equivalent, and that any Anglo-Welsh writer will look towards England, not Wales, for their inspiration and audience.

In order to test these assumptions one geographical area was selected and its writers, history and traditions explored to see whether they fitted the standard model. The territory described here as Neddafan includes both rural and urban areas. Its industrial history goes back at least 400 years, but though it has seen considerable immigration, its local traditions are still strong. Also, although like most of South Wales, it was colonised by the Normans after 1100 A.D., which brought a foreign linguistic element into the area, the lordship of Afan, which makes up half of Neddafan, remained under the control of a native Welsh prince for another 250 or so years, thus ensuring the continuance of Welsh [language] cultural activities.

The study started by looking at how, when and in what quantity the English language arrived in Neddafan. It became clear that though its audience was initially mainly limited to the gentry and their associates, there was a steady low-key growth to a broader public, particularly as industrialisation developed. The research then turned to the Welsh-language tradition, to see what its characteristics were, and whether these might be in any way reflected in English-language writing.

After this general survey of the literary, historical and social background, the study looked at a series of specific areas, to see what kind of writers Neddafan had

produced, and who were their audience. In particular, one section looked at the `bilingual tradition`, not simply in the linguistic sense, but also in that of `translating` the cultural background to make it accessible both to immigrants and to those natives who had, for political and social reasons, not already known of it. The study also considered those writers who used history as subject matter, especially those who produced historical fiction, and then went on to discuss the women writers of Neddafan and to give a brief account of the writers of the twentieth century, particularly its latter half, together with a survey of literary-cultural activities in the community as a whole.

By this point it had become clear that though Neddafan had produced a number of writers who fitted the English model and even appeared in literary histories in England - R.D. Blackmore, for instance, or Vernon Watkins - there were also many writers who did not do so. Very often their audience and their type of writing was far closer to the Welsh-language model, and even in some of those who found a publisher and therefore an audience in England - Michael Gareth Llewelyn is an example - Welsh influences were clearly very strong. In recent years Neddafan has been the point of origin for a number of poets and prose writers who have received critical attention outside the immediate region - often outside Wales - Robert Minhinnick, John Davies, Ruth Bidgood, Iain Sinclair, John Ackerman, Lewis Davies, B.L. Coombes, are among these writers. However there has also been a strong literary presence at a different level, one that is intimately bound to the local community through the kind of activities that in Welsh-language tradition attach to the *bardd gwlad*. The audience, too, is different - not necessarily more or less intellectual, but with different expectations. From this conclusion, the study went on to consider the influence of the oral tradition and of the very strong sense of place among Welsh

writers, and to consider the effects of these things on the writers of Neddafan.

Ultimately, I believe, it became clear that the English-language literary tradition in Neddafan goes back well before 1915, and also that though some of the English-language writers can be made to fit the conventional English literary model, even they have a firm continuity with Welsh-language writing. There is no reason to believe that Neddafan is unique and it would be valuable to see similar studies of other areas. Equally, there may well be other writers to be discovered in Neddafan itself - Iain Sinclair`s relevance only came to light towards the end of this research, and for the reasons described above, many others were discovered through historical sources, not via literary histories.

As with any country, world-wide, the most talented writers of Neddafan (or of Wales), if they aspire to the literary, not the popular field, will find themselves part of an international tradition. But even those cannot, I believe, be fully understood or valued without an understanding of where they came from; this study has attempted to throw some light on those origins.

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