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The Black Pastures:

The significance of landscape in the work of
Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry

Sarah Elizabeth Morse

Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Swansea University

2010

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THESIS SUMMARY

The Black Pastures: The significance of landscape in the work of Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry

This thesis examines how Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry interact with and respond to landscape and environment in their fictional and non-fictional writing. Exploring how the writers negotiate the convergence of the industrial and the rural/natural in the uplands of the south Wales coalfield, in particular the Rhondda Fawr Valley, the study considers the literary geographies their work creates. Examining the themes of the cultural and political use of landscape and rural imagery, the manifestation of authority in landscapes, the impact of industrialisation and de-industrialisation, the uncanny underground environment and its dynamic interactions with the ground above, and post-industrial environmental issues, the study re-positions two industrial writers of Wales to reveal the significance of landscape, place and environment in their writing.

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My parents deserve immeasurable thanks for having kept faith that the thesis would, finally, end. And, to Simon Long, my love and thanks for his support, encouragement and kindness.

List of Abbreviations Used

AFSE: A Few Selected Exits

ATBT: All Things Betray Thee

AWE: A Welsh Eye

BLHM: 'Below Lord's Head Mountain' (Manuscript of unpublished novel)

F&S: Flame and Slag

FMF: A Frost on My Frolic

FTA: The Full Time Amateur

HH: Hunters and Hunted

HGWMV: How Green Was My Valley

HWYL: History Is What You Live

PW: Peregrine Watching

SFTS: Sorrow For Thy Sons

SLHB: So Long Hector Bebb

WCHY: The World Cannot Hear You

Introduction

'Glamorgan as she is: black, green and grey mining villages'[1]

'This black pasture of industrialised Wales'[2]

Ron Berry's description of south Wales as a 'black pasture' goes some way to challenge the stereotyped images of the industrialised coalfield. Although the phrase conjures a spoiled environment it also functions to reassert the connection between mining and the land, a connection that is often obscured. Indeed, it almost prompts images of industry as a form of harvest. But significantly, Berry's description positions the coalfield as a landscape: it is a place of 'black, green and grey', despite the greenness of the area being often overlooked. The concept of the coalfield existing in, or as, a landscape is neglected in many depictions of the area. Rather it is presented as an industrial space apart. But as this study will explore, for both Ron Berry and Gwyn Thomas the landscape and environment of the coalfield are significant in defining their sense of place.

In effect, this thesis attempts to answer the following question: what vision (or version) of South Wales do these mid-twentieth-century writers (re)create in their writing? Or, put another way, how is the landscape of South Wales depicted and re-imagined in their work? What intersections appear between the geo-historical records and the imagined depictions? Or, again how are the landscapes of their fiction and non-fiction constructed, and what do these landscapes reveal? This study is not a comparative study of the writing of Thomas and Berry. Rather, it seeks to investigate how landscape features in their writing, and to what purpose. Indeed, as Matthew Jarvis

[1] Ron Berry, *The Full Time Amateur* (London: W.H. Allen, 1966), p.130
[2] Ron Berry, *History Is What You Live* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1998), p.36

remarked his recent study *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, 'it might be best to describe what I am trying to achieve in this study as a work of literary geography'.[3] That is to say, the thesis traces how the authors use fiction to engage with the earth's surface: its physical features, its social, cultural and political divisions, its natural environments, and how society interacts with, and uses, it.

Before further outlining the argument of the thesis, it is necessary to define what is meant by landscape. Various studies suggest that the word did not enter the English language until the sixteenth century.[4] A mutation of the Dutch *landschap*, from the German *Landschaft*, the word was first used to distinguish paintings of the land from those of portraits and the sea; it was only in the eighteenth century that the 'meaning shift[ed] from painting to the natural scenery itself, or significantly, to its depiction in words'[5]. Landscape paintings reflected 'what the eye [could] take in through one viewing, or what can be seen from a single perspective', emphasising landscape as something defined by observation, and what the artist, and the audience, wanted to see.[6] . Reflecting on the significance of the 'painterly origins' of the concept, Eric Hirsch notes that 'what came to be seen as landscape was recognized as such because it reminded the viewer of a painted landscape'[7]. Indeed, the 'initial appeal of rural scenery was that it reminded the spectator of landscape pictures [...] the scene was only called a "landscape" because it was reminiscent of a painted "landskip"'.[8] This blurring of the subject and its depiction was a catalyst for the land's subsequent improvement through processes of 'landscaping': the landscape needed to conform to the 'pictorial

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[3] Matthew Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p.7

[4] See Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (London: Fontana Press, 1996), Eric Hirsch, 'Landscape: Between Place and Space' Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon Eds. *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp.1-30 and Brian Stock, 'Reading, Community and a Sense of Place' *Place/Culture/Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp.314-328

[5] Brian Stock, p.317

[6] Ibid

[7] Eric Hirsch, p.2

[8] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

ideal' of its visual representation.[9] Given this context, landscape appears to be a dialogic concept: our understanding of it relies on the convergence, or divergence, between the physical land and its aesthetic manipulation and depiction. As Simon Schama observes in *Landscape and Memory*, in early Dutch landscape paintings 'the human design and use of the landscape [...] was *the* story, startlingly sufficient unto itself'.[10] Furthermore, Schama reminds us that this shaping of the land 'signified a unit of human occupation, indeed a jurisdiction, as much as anything that might be a pleasing object of depiction' (Ibid). Landscape, therefore, is innately linked to perception, perspective and power. It is, as Daniel Cosgrove explains, 'a way of seeing the world'; it is, he argues, 'not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world'.[11]

The Landscapes of Wales

The words *tirwedd* and *tirlun* in the Welsh language reflect the ambiguity of the concept of landscape. Both words signify landscape, but they also function to expose the real and the representation. *Tirwedd* describes the land itself, its shape, form, physicality and nature: essentially, its topography. *Tirlun* however reflects the image of landscape, and our perception and construction of landscape in social and cultural terms: aesthetic appreciation, and notions of beauty: that is, scenery. As the Welsh language reveals the duality of the landscape concept, it may follow that the awareness of landscape as cultural construct is perhaps more apparent in Welsh culture, both in the Welsh and English languages.

Peter Lord reflects that the Welsh landscape has had a significant influence on

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[9] Eric Hirsch, p.2
[10] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), p.10
[11] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998 [1984]), p.13

Welsh national life.[12] The economy of the nation was established on the natural resources of the landscape, first through agriculture, and later through the iron, copper and coal industries which were dependent on the mineral resources of the land: the land was transformed into capital. The *tirwedd* created the national economy. Although the economic contribution of both the agricultural and mineral-industries declined during the second half of the twentieth century the landscape exerts a strong influence on the imaging of Wales: tourism campaigns, for example, rely on Wales's natural beauty and also reference the 'heritage' legacy of industry: the economy has shifted to foreground the *tirlun*. The significance of land has been recently emphasised by the National Assembly of Wales's *Spatial Plan* (2004), and its 2008 update *People, Places, Futures,* which consider the influence of space, place and environment in current policy planning in Wales, thus shaping the national life of the future. But this consideration of the population's interaction with the land is a recent development. Although Wales has long been defined by its land and its features, the imaging of Wales 'as a landscape', particularly by those outside the nation, has often excluded the idea of 'Wales as home to communities with particular cultural characteristics'; Wales offered a pleasing scene, rather than a valid culture.[13] This is despite the Welsh concept of *cynefin*: 'not just landscape but a landscape with everything in it'.[14] As Matthew Jarvis explains, *cynefin* renders 'the physicality of the Welsh environment as a vitally *human* space [...] it sets itself against that long-standing and specifically English artistic approach to Wales.[15] But before examining the idea of *cynefin* in more detail, it is necessary to examine how the landscape of Wales is imaged.

The identification of Wales with beautiful scenes is 'the cumulative effect of a mass

[12] Peter Lord, *Industrial Society* [*The Visual Culture of Wales*](Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1998) , p.9
[13] Peter Lord, p.9
[14] Kyffin Williams, *The Land & The Sea* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1998) pp.16-17, as referenced in Matthew Jarvis, p.141
[15] Ibid

of visual images made over a period of more than 200 years': it is a cultural construction of the national landscape, but a way of seeing the nation from the outside.[16] The dominant image of Wales presented by artists during the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century was 'essentially rural or mountainous. The land was apparently unchanged in its form and the people unchanged in their behaviour since the mythic time of their creation'.[17] Thus, despite the industrialisation of the Welsh economy, landscape and population, industrial Wales was excluded from the imaging of the nation; rather than emphasising the modernity of the south Wales coalfield, Wales was instead presented in the image of its past. The landscape of Wales therefore signified a dichotomy: the real against the represented, the projected/imposed image against the lived experience.

Indeed, the industrialised south was problematic for the image-makers concerned with creating the landscape of the Welsh nation, and as a consequence, an image of Welsh nationhood. Lord observes that those depicting Wales 'found it extremely difficult to accommodate the industrial landscape or industrial communities within their intellectual framework'.[18] Thus the south Wales coalfield was often seen as a place removed from the bucolic Welsh nation, confirmed by Patrick Abercrombie's description of the Rhondda valleys in the 1920s as a place 'framed apart from the world by its hillsides; hung up on the fair wall of Wales as a complete picture for posterity'.[19] Although the Rhondda is here imagined as a landscape (it is 'framed' by hills), it is seen as one distinct from that of 'the fair wall of Wales'; it is excluded from the 'fair' image of nationhood. Such a portrayal of south Wales functions to enact and reinforce what Lord describes as 'the customary division of nineteenth- and twentieth-century

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[16] Peter Lord, p.9
[17] Peter Lord, p.14
[18] Peter Lord, p.13
[19] Patrick Abercrombie, 'Wales: A Study in the Contrast of Country and Town', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion 1922-23* pp.175-92, p.185

Wales between industrial and rural, often accompanied by a contiguous division between south and north, between English-speaking and Welsh-speaking'.[20] This longstanding division consciously overlooks shared historical and cultural experiences and continuities and is reinforced by both the industrial and rural identities. The Anglophone culture of the industrialised south has been perceived as a threat to the indigenous Welsh-language culture. The resultant hostility of rural Wales towards the Anglophone industrial areas reinforces the rural / urban cultural and linguistic divide: to discount the largely Anglophone south Wales allows the image of a Welsh-speaking nation to be projected, a constructed identity closely linked to the rural 'heartland' of the nation, but one which is also exclusive. However, as Peter Lord reflects, the portrayal of industrial Wales 'as if its evolution was unrelated to that of the rest of the country' is a device 'employed by many of those who have sought to undermine the concept of Welsh nationhood': modernity being seemingly incongruous to a nation defined by its rurality, industrialised Wales could be imaged as a cosmopolitan and progressive space by those defending it, and as anathema to the rural image of Wales by those deploring it.[21] Furthermore, Lord uncovers an additional facet of ambiguity in the visual cultural construction of the Welsh landscape: although there was no sustained attempt to 'image the industrial landscape and its people' until the early twentieth century, the 'earliest surviving Welsh landscapes are two industrial scenes'.[22] The scenes, two lead mines in Ceredigion, published in 1670 in John Pettus' *Fodinae Regales*, a study of the mining industry in Britain. 'pre-date the appreciation of landscape for aesthetic reasons and the tours of artists in search of the picturesque, which created the familiar image of the Welsh Arcadia'.[23]

Although the first portrayal of the landscape of Wales is as an industrial and

[20] Peter Lord, p.10
[21] Ibid
[22] Peter Lord, p.14
[23] Ibid

modern environment, many of the residents of nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrialised Wales happily consumed the historicist imaging of the nation: it recalled a pre-industrial idyll that they felt distanced from in the new urban society. Lord argues that 'for industrialists and industrial workers alike' historicist images of rural, mountainous, mythic Wales had 'additional layers of meaning' because, while they reflected the tastes of their 'nouveaux riches status in society', the images also provided an escape from 'the realities of their physical environment'.[24] Although the industrial environment was overshadowed by pollution, noise, danger and frenetic physical activity, the particular physical environment of the south Wales coalfield is an upland landscape: the surrounding landforms conform to the aesthetic of the image of the beautiful Welsh nation. Indeed, in an early nineteenth-century description of the pre-industrial Rhondda Fawr valley, the hills, river and streams of the area are said to 'communicat[e] a characteristic interest, to what may not improperly be termed the Alps of Glamorganshire'.[25] The alternative landscape of Wales is therefore readily accessible in the hills of the coalfield, despite the presence of heavy industry. However the coalfield has been imaged and imagined in a manner which often obscures this. Indeed, as Peter Lord reflects:

> As late as 1906 when a rare image of a pit was published [in the Welsh Language magazine *Cymru*] it was presented to be interpreted as representing 'The country of barren hills, the country of high chimneys, the country of tiny houses, the country of smoke and dust and soot'.[26]

There is no description of the people who live there or any suggestion that there is a resident community: there is little regard for any sense of *cynefin* that the industrial community may feel or engage with. Furthermore, the hills are 'barren', despite

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[24] Peter Lord, p.13

[25] B. Heath Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales: from materials collected during two excursions in the year 1803* (London : Printed for T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1804), p. 192

[26] Peter Lord, p.126. As Lord notes, only with the launch of the *Cymru* sister magazine, *Wales*, 'was an effort made to include the industrial community by occasionally presenting it in a positive spirit' in an attempt to develop national sentiment among the Anglophone population of Wales (Lord, ibid)

similarly unpeopled upland hills elsewhere in Wales being celebrated as a landscape appropriate for a nation to identify with. A similar image was portrayed in a journal article of 1923; the author argues that 'No one should attempt to improve the Rhondda – it should be kept, carefully sterilised of human life, as a Museum piece'.[27] The area is seen as an inconvenient artefact, rather than a community, a home, or *cynefin*. The sense that 'no one should attempt to improve' the area is striking: it is as though the industrialised south is beyond redemption and could never conform to the accepted and promoted landscape of Wales; indeed, as a sanitised 'Museum piece', the area would function as a didactic exhibit. However, Abercrombie also acknowledges how the 'obstinate persistence of Beauty' is evident in hills and moorlands of south Wales despite the heavy industry: the area retains, therefore, a sense or a suggestion of the Welsh national landscape.[28] It is this reflection of the coalfield as being a blurring between the industrial and rural spaces and definitions of Wales that will be explored in this study. The works of Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry negotiate this slippage between the industrial and rural, between the urban and the easily-accessible 'wilderness' of the hills. It is a landscape that traces the (r)evolution of a nation from a predominantly rural economy to an industrialised economy: it is a narrative written in the land and our way of seeing it. And as such, the works prompt a re-assessment and reinterpretation of the industrialised landscape of Wales.[29]

A 'way of seeing' the landscape that this study promotes is the use of the term 'south Wales coalfield' rather than the name, 'the valleys'. The metynomic 'valleys'

[27] Patrick Abeercrombie, p.185
[28] Patrick Abercrombie, p.177
[29] It is interesting to note that a recent campaign has been launched by Visit Wales to promote the former south Wales coalfield as a tourist destination. The campaign brands the area as the 'heart and soul' of Wales and suggests 'You might already have a picture in your mind of what holidays in the South Wales Valleys are all about. It probably needs an update. We'd like to introduce you to The Welsh Valleys of today. We are very proud of our Industrial Heritage, The Valleys were at the heart of the Industrial Revolution. Today you can follow the great stories and achievements of that age, history is all around, and on show in a range of Visitor Attractions, the only coal mine is Big Pit in Blaenavon where you can take a tour with an ex miner. What you will also see are country parks, lakes and forests, open hillsides and green mountains. ' <http://www.thevalleys.co.uk/> Accessed 25th July 2010

now often act to represent the Welsh nation as a whole, masking the rural population and culture of the nation. But in addition to reducing Wales to a homogenised whole, it defines the nation through valleys rather than the mountains that dominated the visual representation of the nation for over two hundred years: it marks a shift in perception. However, the term also obscures the distinct identities of the twenty individual valleys that constitute the industrialised south Wales.[30] Although this study considers the literary depiction of the most well known Welsh valley, the Rhondda Fawr, an area described by the Countryside Council of Wales as 'the most important industrial and cultural landscape of its kind surviving' in Wales today,[31] the thesis avoids the term 'valleys' to describe and delimit the wider area of industrialised south Wales. This is a conscious decision for a number of reasons. Firstly, as mentioned above, the term has become a casual metonym for Wales, obscuring the particular landscapes of the nation. Secondly, the term is increasingly used in the pejorative; too often it has been appropriated to conjure impoverished post-industrial communities of south Wales and social deprivation. Lastly, in the course of exploring the literary and symbolic geography of the area, it became evident that it is a place defined by its mountains and hills, rather than its valley bottoms. Although each valley has a distinct identity, it is the surrounding uplands that geographically define each community. This study could have attempted to recover and reappropriate the term 'the valleys', but that would have been to the detriment of the literary analysis. Instead, I hope that this study contributes to the re-alignment of the perception of the former south Wales coalfield, emphasising the dialogue between the urban and the rural in the old black pastures.

Although the visual aspect of landscape is significant to its imaging and imagining,

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[30] The Western Valleys (eastern Carmarthenshire and the former West Glamorgan): Dulais, Afan, Swansea, Upper Amman, Gwendraeth and Amman, and Lliw; The Central Valleys (the former Mid-Glamorgan) : Rhondda Fawr, Rhondda Fach, Cynon, Taff, Ogwr Fach, Llynfi, Ogmore, Garw, and Rhymney; The Eastern Valleys (formerly Gwent): Sirhowy, Torfaen, Ebbw Fach, Ebbw Fawr and Ebbw

[31] 'The Rhondda (Full Description) pdf' Countryside Council for Wales website Landscape & wildlife |Protecting our landscape| Historic landscapes <http://www.ccw.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/historic-landscapes/the-rhondda.aspx?lang=en >, para. .3 Accessed 20th July 2010

written and oral descriptions and accounts of landscape allow us to engage further with the social facet of the land – namely a sense of place and the sense of place in time. Daniel Cosgrove has argued that the ideological concept of landscape denies process.[32] Although his argument acknowledges that 'landscape denotes the external world mediated through subjective human experience', Cosgrove finds the representation of the temporal facet of landscape change to be troubling.[33] He reflects that 'when historical geographers have attempted to incorporate historical change into landscape study they have been forced into unconvincing methodological gymnastics [...]'.[34] (Ibid, 32). But this observation discounts the narrative that landscape itself embodies, and the historical consciousness of that landscape's inhabitants, which written (and imaginative) engagements with landscape and place can expose. Although Cosgrove was to revise this argument in a later publication, stating that 'verbal representations of landscape are not '"illustrations", images standing outside it', but rather constituent images of its meaning or meanings', this approach does not quite acknowledge the story written in the landscape.[35] Christopher Tilley's approach, however, as outlined in *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, explains how landscape, and our engagement with it, embodies process. He reflects that:

> a landscape has ontological import because it is lived in and through, mediated, worked on and altered, replete with cultural meaning and symbolism – and not just something looked at or thought about, an object merely for contemplation, depiction, representation and aestheticization.[36]

Landscape and place are therefore also a lived experience, and it is this that verbal narratives are able to capture and reflect.

Christopher Tilley has observed that narratives of place are particularly resonant: they

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[32] Denis E Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998 [1984]), p.32
[33] Denis E. Cosgrove, p.13
[34] Denis E. Cosgrove, p.32
[35] Denis E. Cosgrove & Stephen Daniels *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.1
[36] Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p.26

cement our experiences in the landscape. He reflects that

> [W]hen a story becomes sedimented into the landscape, the story and the place dialectically help to construct and reproduce each other. Places help to recall stories that are associated with them, and places only exist as (named locales) by virtue of their emplotment in a narrative. Places, like persons, have biographies in as much as they are formed, used and transformed in relation to practice. It can be argued that stories acquire part of their mythic value and historical relevance if they are rooted in the concrete details of locales in the landscape, acquiring material reference points that can be visited, seen and touched.[37]

The reciprocal relationship between narrative and landscape defines our interaction with place as it extends landscape beyond what we see. Indeed, the process that Tilley explains is very similar to the Welsh concept of *cynefin*, which captures the way in which a sense of place is created, disseminated and maintained through engagement with the histories, stories, cultural practices and traditions that come to define a place. It is how we come to feel a sense of belonging in a landscape: we inscribe the landscape with our actions, and thus it reflects the stories we tell. As Robert Macfarlane has observed, we read landscape and places in order to understand them, 'we interpret their forms in the light of our own experience and memory, and that of our shared cultural memory'.[38] Landscape, therefore, as well as being a product of a natural and geological history, is also a product of social and cultural history. It is a narrative, a 'means of understanding and describing the world in relation to agency. It is a means of linking locales, landscape, actions, events and experiences'.[39] But this experience of a 'whole' landscape is one reserved for those who reside in it: it is transmitted through, or learned by, the resident community as it locks together 'human time and place', and belongs to the insiders, rather than the observers of landscape.[40] As Cosgrove observes:

> For the insider there is no clear separation of self from scene, subject from

[37] Christopher Tilley, p.33
[38] Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind* (London: Granta, 2003), p.18
[39] Christopher Tilley, p.32
[40] Denis E. Cosgrove, p.19

> object. There is, rather, a fused, unsophisticated and social meaning embodied in the milieu. The insider does not enjoy the privilege of being able to walk away from the scene as we can walk away from a framed picture or a tourist viewpoint. He is [...] an 'existential insider' for whom what we may call landscape is a dimension of existence, collectively produced, lived and maintained. (Ibid)

It is this complex social and cultural aspect of landscape and place that Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry attempt to convey in their writing of the south Wales coalfield, as their work reveals, and revels in, the way in which 'spatial and textual stories are embedded in one another'.[41]

Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry are writers whose work has long been overlooked, and in the case of Berry, undervalued. Both authors offer a range of writing to examine, including novel-length and short fiction, autobiographical writing (and indeed, creative / imaginative autobiographical writing), and non-fiction work, thereby providing a breadth of material in which to consider engagements and interactions with landscape. More significantly for the purposes of this study, both writers are from the same area, indeed, the same valley, and so the narrow scope of the case-study allows for a deep engagement with place, landscape, and its narratives, as well as its literary depiction. In addition, both Thomas and Berry offer different perspectives of the Rhondda Fawr valley: Thomas was raised at the mouth of the valley in Porth, and Ron Berry lived at the head of the same valley in Blaencwm and Treherbert throughout his life. Furthermore, although born only seven years apart (Thomas in 1913, Berry in 1920), their circumstances offer an insight into two very different experiences. Both sons of miners, Thomas was sent to Grammar school, and then went to Oxford to read Spanish, and returned to south Wales to follow a career as a teacher, whilst Berry followed his father to the colliery aged fourteen. Their writing therefore reflects two very distinct experiences of the coalfield – Berry with the perspective of the insider, Thomas with

[41] Christopher Tilley, p.31

the insight of someone once removed. The work of both authors also provides a 'long view' of the history of the area, a perspective spanning over one hundred and fifty years: Thomas's first published novel, *All Things Betray Thee* was published in 1949, but is set in the 1830s; Berry was first published in 1960, and his last work was published in 1996. Their work charts the area of the coalfield from the establishment to the dismantling of heavy industry and the related communities: it maps a long narrative of place.

Indeed, both Berry and Thomas observed that they felt deeply connected to their locale. In his autobiography, Berry describes the hills of the Upper Rhondda as his 'trusty inscape' (*HWYL*, 136), and in Berry's last published novel a character reflects on how he stands as '[b]oy inseparable from man in his time, in his place', reflecting the author's own predicament.[42] Thomas, too, revealed in a televised interview n 1977 that the loss of his mother in his early childhood affected his connection to his *cynefin*: 'My mother died when I was very, very young, but I've never lost the sense of belonging to this magnetic woman that I never truly knew. And it's manifested itself of course in this kind of geographical complex, I'm never happy unless I'm in this county of Glamorgan'.[43] This feeling of embededness in a landscape and a place is reflected in the fictional writing of Thomas and Berry. Both writers present literary geographies of the Rhondda and the wider south Wales coalfield of the mid-twentieth century: it is their place of birth, and their familiar familial landscape. It is their *cynefin*,. But although both Thomas and Berry feature versions of the same (geographical) area in their work, their engagements with the landscape are very different, indicating that like visual representations of landscape, textual responses frame the scene for an audience through its narrative. The landscape presented is always a subjective one, as the

[42] Ron Berry, *This Bygone* (Gomer Press: Llandysul, 1996), p.202

[43] Interview with Wyn Calvin, 1977, clip featured in *Welsh Greats: Gwyn Thomas* BBC Wales (Series 3) Producer: Dafydd O'Connor. Broadcast 8th February 2010

physical world is mediated through human experience: it is always and inescapably a way of seeing.[44] In texts published from 1949 onwards, Thomas presents a contemporary and a historic rendering of the industrial community in its landscape. But Berry, whose first novel was published in 1960, presents a landscape and those who inhabit it. This subtle difference in their work reflects each author's way of seeing their landscape.

This thesis does not aim to complete a comparative study of the writing of Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry, but the intersections between their work merits comment. Berry's archive suggests a dialogue – albeit brief – between the two authors. A letter dated 13th November 1970 from Gwyn Thomas thanks Berry for sending on a copy of *So Long Hector Bebb* and observes that the novel 'looks exciting, [and as it deals with] a theme that has always tickled the edge of my mind'.[45] Although Thomas does not explicitly identify the theme that interests him, a principal concern of Berry's novel is the wildness that society functions to veil, and so, by implication, society's engagement with nature. Berry, too. revealed admiration for Thomas's work. Dai Smith recalls in his introduction to *History Is What You Live* how Berry had surprised him by praising the work of Thomas, a writer whose

> flights of surreal fantasy, have, at first sight little in common with Ron's [*sic*] own unremitting take on the grimness of Welsh industrial lives. Yet he valued Gwyn as 'the greatest aesthete of all of us'. It was an odd, and yet strikingly accurate description. And, to my mind, Ron [*sic*] clearly thought of himself in the same way – not by any means a dilettante but, strongly and precisely, someone with a sense of taste for the true and the good, someone who was fastidious about the portrayal of our lives whose success in finding that way earned him the right to judge and, if necessary, coldly dismiss those who failed, or, worse, took refuge in trickery and cheapness and fashionability because they could not or would not try hard enough.[46]

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[44] Denis E. Cosgrove, p.13

[45] Gwyn Thomas, letter to Ron Berry, 13th November 1970, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE 1/10/2

[46] Dai Smith, 'Introduction', Ron Berry, *History Is What You Live* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1998), pp7-11, p.9-10

Although Berry's remark is a positive one, the word 'aesthete' requires unpacking. Although Thomas in no way took 'refuge in trickery and cheapness and fashionability', his work is resolutely an aestheticised depiction of life in the coalfield. Thomas's work does uncover the beauty of the coalfield in his fiction: in addition to his appreciative accounts of the landscape, his writing also reveals the author's enchantment with industrial labour, its skill, craft, and its transformative nature. His work emphasises the darkly comic aspects of life in the community, creating caricatured characters and situations. But Thomas's work also reveals a deep engagement with literary traditions: the pastoral mode in particular. As such, the depictions of landscape that feature in his work function as metaphoric devices to explore the way in which ideologies are made manifest in the land, and in society's various engagements with it. Berry's own literary engagement with the land, however, takes the form of attempts to portray his landscape, community and experiences as accurately as possible. Indeed, in interviews he was keen to assert the veracity of his work, arguing that other industrial writers, including Thomas, 'existed *outside*' of the industrial environment and 'never sampled the muck and the mire'.[47] He positions his work against aestheticism, and seeks to replicate the true experience of his landscape. In their different approaches to the landscape they portray, both authors expose different facets of the social construct.

The non-fiction texts of both writers are used throughout the study to inform and compliment readings of their fictional output. For example, for the first time the extensive archive of Ron Berry's unpublished papers is used to interpret his work as ecocentric-writing and Gwyn Thomas's recollections of his time in Spain in the years before the civil war, as featured in his autobiography, inform a discussion of his treatment of land ownership and enclosure in his fiction. Central to the study of the work of both authors is the dichotomous character of the industrial environment they

[47] John Pikoulis, 'Word of mouth cultures cease in cemeteries', *New Welsh Review* 34, pp.9-15, p.12

portray. Gwyn Thomas is seen to explore the intersection of the rural and the industrial in *All Things Betray Thee, The World Cannot Hear You, A Frost on my Frolic, Sorrow For Thy Sons* and his short fiction. In addition to engaging with the issues concerning the twentieth-century industrial communities of south Wales, his work examines the establishment of early industrial communities, reflecting the first wave of industrialisation in south Wales. His work also considers the concurrent rural issue of land enclosure and the forcible expulsion of tenant farmers, exposing the power of the ownership of the means of production and the similar experiences of the rural and industrial proletariat. In doing so, Thomas accentuates the idea of landscape as design and construct: he reveals the networks of authority that function to shape society's interaction with the land and to reaffirm social hierarchies. Thomas's work also re-peoples the historical industrial landscape and traces the development of a community and a shared proletarian consciousness and identity. It considers how immigrants to the centres of industry come to see their new location as home, drawing on their rural experience to negotiate their new environment: it traces how the industrial space becomes a *cynefin*, a place of community.

The idea of the rural idyll is interrogated in both historical and contemporaneous contexts in Thomas's work, as he examines the persistence of rural and pastoral motifs. The thesis examines the way in which Thomas engages with, and challenges, three pastoral motifs in his work: the shepherd, retreat, and resolution. The device of retreat in particular is employed by Thomas to expose the cultural and political manipulation of the pastoral, which extends to a consideration of the impact of the Welsh *gwerin* – the folk – and the way in which the concept has informed cultural and political movements in Wales, in particular the 1930s Back to the Land movement as supported by Plaid Cymru, a movement that relied on the dichotomy of the industrial and the rural.

Although Berry's work also engages with the confluence of the rural and the industrial, this analysis argues that his work negotiates the convergence of the human and the non-human. Berry's work, this study argues, highlights an overlooked dialectic in the coalfield, that of the uncanny dynamic between above ground and below. The chapter 'Uncanny Catastrophes' considers the impact of this peculiar environment, and also explores the way in which Berry, and other Welsh industrial authors before him, engage with such key features of colliery accidents as the rebellion of the controlled land, the uncanny nature of being trapped, and the responsibility of the testimony of the survivor. Furthermore, informed by Berry's diaries, the chapter frames his 1967 novel *Flame and Slag* as a reaction to the 1966 Aberfan disaster. Consideration of his work also reveals his fascination with the natural world. Indeed, even that which appears to be conventional industrial fiction at first glance, explores humanity's engagement with the natural world: even mining is repositioned as involving an intimate interaction with the land.

To approach Berry's fictional work through the optic of his autobiography, *History Is What You Live*, and his natural history writing, *Peregrine Watching*, is to expose an ecological and environmental concern that has hitherto been overlooked. Furthermore, examination of Berry's private papers reveals a long campaign of environmental protest, in particular his concern at the Forestry Commission and Rhondda Borough Council's proposed Rhondda Recreation Project country park development in the Upper Rhondda Fawr area. The depth of Berry's engagement with his habitat that is evident in his campaigning is also seen to be reflected in his fiction, and in addition to looking at Berry's published work, the manuscript of 'Below Lord's Head Mountain', an unpublished novel, is also examined. The texts reveal how Berry excavates the narratives of his *cynefin*, his habitat, tracing the stories embedded in the landscape from the pre-historic and pre-human to the manscapes of the pre-industrial, the industrial, the

de-industrial and the post-industrial. In doing so, he seeks to help his community to come to reinhabit its landscape, to learn to read the 'shared cultural memory' of their land-based inheritance.[48] Literary depictions of landscapes function, as Jarvis observes, as:

> a discursive response to the physical world [. T]he text constitutes an active engagement with that world in the sense that the linguistic act offers a *judgement* upon the world, a judgement on how that world (or, at least, the part of it under consideration) should be seen, understood, or conceptually approached. Rather than being reduced to a process of mimicry – which will always, of necessity be entirely partial – each act of writing the environment, has at its core, an argument about how the world should be seen: it is nothing less than an invitation to understand, to approach the world in a particular way.[49]

Both Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry invite the reader to see the landscape they present – in this case, the south Wales coalfield – in different ways. Indeed, they offer 'a judgement on how' their world, their landscape, their *cynefin*, should be seen and understood. For Thomas, it is a social landscape, one made by its inhabitants and transformed by social hierarchies: it reflects the society that occupies it. For Berry, this industrialised landscape remains a natural one, shaped by society's interactions and engagements. It is these hitherto overlooked aspects of the writing of Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry that this thesis seeks to explore.

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[48] Robert Macfarlane, p.18
[49] Matthew Jarvis, p.10-11

Contested Landscapes:
Socio-economic Geographies and Networks of Authority

In his 1964 account of his autobiographical experience of Wales, *A Welsh Eye*, Gwyn Thomas describes the changes in the landscape as observed on the route from the pastoral Vale of Glamorgan to the industrial Glamorgan upland *blaenau*:

> The hills grow less gentle. The fields lose grace and lushness. The first coal tips sit fatly on torn slopes. [...] Pass Tonyrefail. [...]Then you reach the broad, reedy moorland, the Waun [...]. And beyond the Waun, the great barrier ridge that marks the southern limit of the Rhondda. There is a deep hostile stare about that wall of grey and green. These mountains do not like what has been done to them. Too much has been taken from them. They proclaim it in sight and sound. Their rims are shot through with outbreaks of defensive rock and most of the winds that blow off them are husky with recollections of storm, outrage and ancient battles that nobody could possibly have won.[50]

His description stresses the unusual nature of the south Wales coalfield as the only mountainous centre of heavy-industry in Britain, outlining the unique conflation of the rural and industrial experiences in this particular landscape and environment. The passage also recounts the history of the area as inscribed on the landscape, a feature that Thomas refers to as the 'geology of remembrance'(*AWE*, 18).[51] In offering a voice for the mountains of the Rhondda valleys ('These mountains do not like what has been done to them. Too much has been taken from them. They proclaim it in sight and sound'), Thomas indicates that it is the geological characteristics of the area, namely the formation of bituminous steam coal from sedimentary organic matter during the Westphalian Geological epoch, the natural resources that fuelled the industrial development of the area. The reference to the wind's 'recollection of storm, outrage and ancient battles' not only evocatively depicts the modern industrial activities of coal

[50] Gwyn Thomas, *A Welsh Eye* (London: Hutchinson, 1964) p.9. Henceforth referenced in the text as *AWE*

[51] It is interesting to note that in *Landscape and Memory* Simon Schama coins a similar term in reference to socio-historic and cultural interaction with landscape: he notes how 'Before it can ever be a repose for the senses landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock' (London: Fontana Press, 1996), p.6-7

mining and the production of iron, and the associated frenetic activities. But it also suggests what Dai Smith has described as the other raw materials of south Wales: 'single-industry communities, a male bonded society, political and industrial strife, life underground, raucous popular culture, evangelical religion, tragedy, disasters, explosions, illness, unemployment'.[52] However, Thomas's description of the area also emphasises the importance of the landscape to the narrative of the coalfield, an aspect often overlooked in histories and considerations of the south Wales industrial society.[53]

Thomas's exploration of the convergence of the traditional rural landscape and its associated practices, an aspect heightened by rural in-migration to the centres of industry, the 'new' industrial activities, and the emergence of the proletariat, will be central to this chapter. As Thomas goes on to note in *A Welsh Eye*, in the south Wales coalfield 'Society and nature have come together [...] to achieve some amazing patterns and they should be told not to do it again'(*AWE*, 10). The rural and industrial landscapes are contested territories within Wales, since both conjure a particular image of the nation, and in the course of the chapter particular attention will be given to the idea of 'national symbolics' and the role of landscape in the formation of national, and collective, identities.[54] Thomas's fictional writing – and its treatment of both the landscape and the sense of place – will be the focus of the analysis. The central texts considered will be the 1949 novel *All Things Betray Thee* and *Sorrow For Thy Sons* – a novel that was written between 1936 and 1938, but which remained unpublished until

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[52] Dai Smith 'A Novel History' in . Tony Curtis ed. *Wales the Imagined Nation*, (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), pp.129-158, p.135

[53] Many histories of the Rhondda mark industrialisation as the advent of the area's social history, and therefore emphasise the emergent socialist sentiment of the area (see Dai Smith). Also, as I will examine later, nineteenth-century accounts of the landscape of the south Wales coalfield tend to obscure the social networks of the area and instead presented a largely 'unpeopled' landscape – see B.H. Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales* (1804) and G. Borrow, *Wild Wales* (1901)

[54] The 'shared spatial and temporal experiences [that] reflect, perform and/or affirm' a national subjectivity, 'the common language of a common space' L Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia and Everyday Life* (Chicago; Chicago University Press, 1991), pp 4-7, p.19-p.23, p.32 as cited in Elizabeth. K. Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1997), p.11

1986 when the manuscript was discovered after Thomas's death.[55] *All Things Betray Thee* is based in a mid-nineteenth century-town, Moonlea, which has much in common with Merthyr Tydfil, and draws on the story of Dic Penderyn and the Merthyr Rising of 1831.[56] The principal theme of the novel is the establishment of an industrial community and a shared proletarian consciousness; the iron foundries of Merthyr were part of the first phase of the industrialisation of south Wales during the late eighteenth century (the Cyfarthfa works were established in 1765) and it is this early process of industrialisation that Thomas considers.[57] In writing of this experience he is able to highlight how the process of industrialisation differed in the Rhondda valleys as the collieries were part of a later phase of rapid industrialisation during the mid to late nineteenth century. Although the first colliery was established by Walter Coffin in 1807, it was not until the mid nineteenth century that the Rhondda surpassed the coal output of the Cynon valley.[58] Furthermore, as M. Wynn Thomas has noted, 'Merthyr was an early, and by and large culturally indigenous industrial settlement, whereas the Rhondda was later, more cosmopolitan, culturally mixed and rapidly radicalized'.[59] Moonlea, like Merthyr, remains an identifiably Welsh (language) community, as the majority of the workforce have been drawn from the neighbouring agricultural counties; it reflects a more transitional shift from working in agriculture to working in heavy industry. In writing of the establishment of industrial settlements in the nineteenth century Gwyn Thomas emphasises that the experience remains relevant; as Raymond Williams noted, 'it is not only the history [of industrialisation], it is the

[55] *All Things Betray Thee* and *Sorrow For Thy Sons* will be referenced in the body of the text as *ATBT* and *SFTS* respectively. See Dai Smith's account of the discovery and publication of *Sorrow For Thy Sons*. 'Introduction', Gwyn Thomas, *Sorrow For Thy Sons* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986) pp5-10 and M. Parnell, *Laughter From the Dark: A Life of Gwyn Thomas* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997)
[56] See Parnell p.110 for a detailed account of the significance of the history of Dic Penderyn
[57] John Davies, p.330
[58] John Davies, p.401
[59] M.W. Thomas, *Internal Difference* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), p.27

contemporary consciousness of the history'.[60] Dai Smith has noted how in *All Things Betray Thee,* Thomas 'transmitted the 1930s into the 1830s', revealing how Thomas reflects contemporary issues in a historical context and reflecting how the concerns are intrinsic to a capitalist industrial society.[61] In re-imagining and re-reading the process of the establishment of industry in Merthyr Tydfil, informed by the contemporary experience of south Wales industrial communities, Gwyn Thomas facilitates a cultural materialist reading of the history, exploring in particular the socio-economic geographical context of the time of composition, and of the historical period considered in the texts.

The 1930s novel *Sorrow For Thy Sons* offers an account of the legacy of the rapid development of the Rhondda valleys. Set in the early 1930s, it considers the effect of the Depression and the impending process of de-industrialisation on the community; indeed, Dai Smith notes that in the novel there are 'no collieries, only tips, waste, the unemployed and the detritus of decay'.[62] The village featured in the novel is unnamed, which allows it to exist as a space that all south Wales mining communities occupy, rather than merely having a specific rooted location. In both *Sorrow For Thy Sons* and *All Things Betray Thee* Thomas explores the changing relationships with the landscape as prompted by industrial development, the dynamics of population im/migration, Romantic aesthetics and treatment of landscape, and the issues of land ownership. The divergent industrial and rural experiences are captured not only in the imagining of Moonlea and the un-named village that features in *Sorrow For Thy Sons*, but also in the relationships between the characters of the texts. Alan Leigh and John Simon Adams in *All Things Betray Thee* represent the clash between the traditional pastoral and the dynamic industrial, and the transition from one to the other. Equally, the space between

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[60] Raymond Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', in Daniel Williams ed. *Who Speaks for Wales?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp.95-111, p.111
[61] Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff : University of Wales, 1993), p.121
[62] Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales,* p.153

the socialist-realist, petit-bourgeois and historic-romantic perspectives is explored by Thomas through the relationship between Alf Evans and his brothers Herbert and Hugh in *Sorrow For Thy Sons*.

All Things Betray Thee and *Sorrow For Thy Sons* present a microcosm of the south Wales coalfield, and invite an examination of two of the most persistent symbols of Wales – the valleys of the Glamorgan *blaenau* (uplands), synonymous with the industrial revolution and a modern, typically anglophone Welsh identity, and the mountains, traditional emblems of romance, nature, and beauty. Helsinger notes in her study of the significance of images of landscapes in the creation of national identity that such scenes operate as 'national symbolics': 'a repertoire of practices and representations through which a changing, contested sense of the nation is accessible, at a given moment, as the language of national consciousness or imagining the nation'.[63] The close proximity of the contested national symbolics in the south Wales landscape facilitates a reading of the interaction of both the spaces. Throughout both novels Thomas challenges the perception and portrayal of rural Wales as an idyll. He is keen to explore the factors which pushed the migrants from the rural areas, as well as those which drew them to the centres of industry. The narrative encourages a re-reading of the landscape by foregrounding the industrial activity at work in it. From his initial 'outsider' perspective, Alan Leigh perceives a fracture between Moonlea and the surrounding landscape, describing the town as having an 'air of sullen detachment from the joyful beauty of the hills around' (*ATBT,* 16). As himself an emblem of traditional Wales, he advocates an organic sense of nation, a sense which, like him, is rooted in the 'empty and unsullied' valleys of the north and west of Wales (*ATBT*, 31). John Simon Adams, however, already affected by the shadow of the foundries, is a catalyst for the development of the new industrial community's collective consciousness (*ATBT*, 23).

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[63] Elizabeth Helsinger, p.11

Of particular interest is Thomas's treatment of the rural landscape and practices in his fictional writing; in both *All Things Betray Thee* and *Sorrow For Thy Sons*, rural Wales is portrayed as a place left behind. It is unprogressive, and represents an experience that the migrants have literally moved away from. On the subject of mythical space and place, the cultural geographer Yi Fu Tuan considers how the idea of the 'misty west' was established – an idea that Thomas evidently engages with and questions. Tuan notes:

> Western thinkers stressed the contrasts between north and south, between cold and hot countries. However, like many other people, the Greeks also recognized the sun as a source of life. In the course of time a host of legends accrued to the sun and to its daily passage across the sky. [....] East, the place of sunrise, was associated with light and the sky; west, the place of sunset with darkness and the earth. The right-hand side was identified with the east and the sun, the left-hand side with the 'misty west' (*Iliad*). Pythagorean thinkers coupled 'right' with 'limit', and 'left' with the evil of the 'unlimited'. Isles of the Blest, and later on the Middle Ages, the Fortunate Islands, were located in the west.' [64]

Tuan adds that the west offered 'idyllic places in which men lived effortlessly', but as dead heroes also travelled in a westward direction, the area also had connotations of death, and of the past.[65]The perception of the west as idyll, and as a repository of a previous Golden Age, is evident in the representation of Wales within the United Kingdom. But the west has also functioned in this manner within Wales. The rural (western and north-western) Welsh landscape has long been held as the 'true' motif of Welsh experience and identity, as rural scenes function to localize the wider national experience. As Helsinger reflects:

> Rural scenes possess peculiar power to give the abstract conception of nation a local, lived meaning. For that very reason they can be a particularly dangerous form of the misrepresentation that abstraction necessarily involves: naturalizing historical transformations, obscuring social and economic relations, and ignoring local differences. Rural scenes may also limit what a nation might

[64] Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 1977), p. 98
[65] Ibid

> become by tying it to communal models of homogeneity and exclusivity.[66] (Helsinger, 19)

Thomas plays with the sense of a localised and idealised national experience through his consciously romantic imaging of Welsh history and of traditional Welsh identity. Early in *Sorrow For Thy Sons*, he offers a romantic image of a spring in the valley: 'It sprang from the heart of the mountain, red with iron, red, some made out, with the blood of the Celts who had crawled away to die in the mountain's heart, away from the bludgeonings of either Roman legionaries or Saxon coalowners' (*SFTS*, 20). The image binds Welsh identity to the land. This has obvious similarities with the opening scene of Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy,* as Big Jim and Len sit on the mountain summit looking down into the valley:

> "Do you see that red grass over there?" he asked, pointing a huge forefinger vaguely into the distance. Len looked in the desired direction and fancied he saw the red patch.
> "Ay," he said, "you do mean that place where the sheep is, dad?"
> "That be it. Well by there a big battle was once fought between the Cymro and the English. A awful lot of blood was spilt that day and the grass have been red with it ever since."[67]

In revealing an awareness of the persistence of myths in Welsh history, both Jones and Thomas can be seen to reject the romantic and create a narrative for establishing the modern industrial Welsh identity. Thomas develops his analysis and interrogation of romantic myth in a later scene in *Sorrow For Thy Sons*, when Huw, the youngest Evans brother, suggests a romantic image of the pre-industrial Rhondda:

> When we were kids we wrote essays on what the valleys must have looked like before there were any pits here. You remember. Paradise. All trees. Shepherds. Clear brooks. Druids. Blood-sacrifice. Nature worship. Un-smoky skies. Perfect peace and more than perfect beauty. I won a prize for writing an essay on those lines. Then they realise that I had taken the whole damn lot, commas, and all, from a book published by the Cymmrodorion Society, and I had to give back as much of the prize money as I hadn't spent. (*SFTS*, 97-98)

[66] Elizabeth Helsinger, p.19
[67] Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), p.3

The romantic Cymmrodorion perception of the Welsh landscape is undermined by Hugh's youthful plagiarism, much as it has been undermined by the impact of industrial activity in the area.[68]

The Establishment of Industry: the 'peopling' of the landscape

Raymond Williams notes in the essay 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' how nineteenth-century fictional and non-fictional accounts of industrial landscapes are unpeopled: 'within the panorama there are as yet no men, or men are there only as figures attendant on this landscape. The apparent chaos of their labour has within this perspective obliterated or incorporated them'.[69] Williams goes on to chart the development of the industrial writing of Wales, examining how descriptions of 'what it is like to live in hell' slowly developed into accounts of 'what it is like to get used to it, to grow up in it, to see it as home' as a sense of societal order and collective identity was established (Ibid). This process of coming to see – and write – the area as home is explored by Gwyn Thomas in the narrative of the experience of the migrants to the centres of industry. The characters of *All Things Betray Thee* are immigrants to Moonlea as the novel considers the establishment of a south Wales industrial community.

The figure that offers the narrative of the recent immigrant (or visitor) is the harpist, Alan Leigh. During the course of the novel we see his transformation from a firmly rural character who perceives the industrial centre and its community as something alien – a 'dark pool of men and women,' (*ATBT,* 16) – to someone who comes to understand the situation of the burgeoning industrial community and its 'promise of a new enormous music' (*ATBT,* 318). Alan Leigh's 'authentic sense of

[68] The Cymmrodorion Society's contemporaneous (early twentieth century) perception of the industrial landscape is outlined in Patrick Abercrombie's essay 'Wales: A Study in the Contrast of Country and Town', from the *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion 1922-1923* pp.175-192 Abercrombie notes how the 'obstinate persistence of Beauty' is evident in hills and moorlands of south Wales, unlike the 'milder charm' of Lancashire, which has been subsumed by industry (Abercrombie, 177). The ideas introduced here will be further explored later in the study
[69] Raymond Williams, 'Industrial', p.96

shock at the unaccustomed sight of an industrial landscape' is striking as the foundries of Moonlea are the antithesis of his agricultural experience.[70] However, Thomas's initial description of the foundries is brief. Instead, Alan Leigh's sensory perception is highlighted: 'Beyond the far eastern side of the town were the foundries. The air above them was faintly shaded and my sense reached out and smelled the powerful acridity of their fumes well in advance' (*ATBT*, 16). Thomas would later return to this description in *A Welsh Eye*, reflecting that:

> the book opens with the harpist striding over the last ridge that divides him from the region where the furnaces alternately darkened and reddened the sky. It was not until several years later that I understood fully what the physical impact of that experience would have been. (*AWE*, 146)

It is not until Thomas had himself seen, twelve years after the publication of *All Things Betray Thee*, the 'central diamond of brilliant light' of the Ebbw Vale steel works at night, that he comprehended the visceral reaction of Alan Leigh, a rural harpist (*AWE*, 146). Despite their brevity, both descriptions share strong similarities with George Borrow's account of the Merthyr he encountered in 1854, later recorded in *Wild Wales*:

> Turning round a corner at the top of a hill I saw blazes here and there, and what appeared to be a glowing mountain in the south-east. I went towards it down a descent which continued for a long, long way; so great was the light cast by the blazes and that wonderful glowing object, that I could distinctly see the little stones upon the road. [...]More and more blazes, and the glowing object looking more terrible than ever. It was now above me at some distance to the left, and I could see that it was an immense quantity of heated matter like lava, occupying the upper and middle parts of the hill, and descending here and there almost to the bottom in a zigzag and tortuous manner. [...] I now perceived a valley below me full of lights, and descending reached houses and a tramway. I had blazes now all around me, I went through a filthy slough, over a bridge, and up a street, from which dirty lanes branched off on either side, passed throngs of savage-looking people talking clamorously, shrank from addressing any of them, and finally, undirected, found myself before the Castle Inn at Merthyr Tydvil [*sic*].[71]

[70] Raymond Williams, 'Industrial', p.96

[71] George Borrow, *Wild Wales* [1854] (London: John Murray, 1901), p.687. The image of steel works at night is a significant one in the visual culture – and depiction – of Wales, as Peter Lord notes: 'An American painter, Lionel Walden, had visited Wales before the turn of the [twentieth] century. His *Steel*

Despite the nightmarish vista of Merthyr the area held many attractions for increasingly impoverished rural labourers. The 'push' factors at work at the time of the later phases of industrial development have been well documented: the rural decline of the 1870s – 1880s, poor harvests, and low prices caused by the increased importation of food from North America and Australasia as transport costs reduced. This crisis prompted landowners to reduce their labour-force and the unskilled labourers moved to the coalfield in search of an income. But similar socio-economic factors were at work during the earlier first wave of the industrialisation of south Wales.

Between 1801 and 1851 the proportion of men employed in agriculture in the five counties nearest to the south Wales coalfield fell from 42.5 p.c. to 24.0 p.c.; a fall which occurred before the agricultural crisis of the late nineteenth century.[72] Labourers were drawn to the new centres of industry; the wages offered by the ironworks were roughly three times that of an agricultural labourer and as well as attracting permanent migrants, the ironworks also drew temporary economic migrants (often farmers) who would join the labour force of the foundries for the winter before returning to their farms for the summer harvests. To some extent, Alan Leigh of *All Things Betray Thee* can be seen to represent this temporary migration, as until ambiguity is introduced in the closing stages of the novel he is keen to return to his own 'personal acre'. John Davies has further outlined the appeal of the foundry towns, reflecting how:

> Despite the arrogance of the owners, the perils of the work-place and the filthiness of the environment, the coalfield was an exciting place. Although Merthyr was described by a Meirionydd preacher as 'a kind of Samaria – the

Works, Cardiff, at Night, which was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1897, clearly illustrated the potential of industrial subject matter to enhance the national revival by presenting to the world a modernist image of Wales to set side by side with the unsullied mountain landscape and the Nonconformist folk. That outsiders were willing to see Wales in these terms was demonstrated by the purchase by the Musée d'Orsay of the same artist's *Les Docks de Cardiff* in the previous year'. Peter Lord, *Industrial Society [The Visual Culture of Wales]* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1998), p.180

[72] Trevor Boyns, and Colin Baber, 'The Supply of Labour, 1750-1914', in Glanmor Williams, ed., *Glamorgan County History Vol V Industrial Glamorgan* pp.311-362 (Glamorgan County History Trust: Cardiff, 1980), p.317

> place to throw one's rubbish', rural young men were attracted by the experience of living in a crowded, cheerful and Welsh-speaking society. Despite the inadequacies of the houses they were better then the primitive cottages of the countryside and they were warm, for coal was cheap in the coalfield. There was pride there too – pride in understanding the ways of the furnace and the vagaries of the seam. Above all it was a place where a livelihood could be obtained. [...] In Merthyr, even a labourer could earn a watch [...].[73]

In the essay 'The Supply of Labour 1750-1914' Boyns and Baber draw attention to the transitional nature of much of the early migration. They note how the migration of agricultural labourers to the centres of industry was often completed in two or more phases. Labourers would first move to farms in the counties closer to the industrial areas as wages there would be higher in order to compete with the higher wages of industry; workers would then move into the industrial centres as the relative stability of employment, a better standard of housing, and the opportunity for higher wages continued to prove attractive.A further aspect of this form of migration to consider is the effect of industrial pollution. In Merthyr Tydfil especially, the smelting furnaces caused environmental damage, affecting the land and crops, which would in turn increasingly push people towards working in the furnaces and foundries themselves.[74]

The land also provided a further significant factor in the establishment of industry, namely the land rights and the procurement of land to develop for industry. The parish of Merthyr contained all of the raw materials necessary for the production of iron: iron ore, coal, timber, limestone and water. Indeed, one commentator noted how 'the whole district seems to have been intended to be one great ironwork'.[75] John Davies in *A History of Wales* explains how the ventures of the ironmasters in Merthyr Tydfil benefited from inexpensive leases as the potential of the industrial sector in the area was underestimated for many years. He notes in particular the case of Vincent Windsor,

[73] John Davies, p.351
[74] Evan David Lewis, *The Rhondda valleys : a study in industrial development, 1800 to the present day* (London : Phoenix House, 1959), p.236
[75] John Davies, p.329

beneficiary of the Welsh estates of the Earl of Pembroke who in 1748 granted a 'ninety-nine year lease of the minerals of the common or of the lordship of Senghennydd Uwch Caeach to a group of industrialists at a rent of twenty-six pounds a year'.[76] By 1765 the Cyfarthfa works had been established on the site, a development which engulfed twenty of the ninety-three farms in the parish of Merthyr Tydfil, thus creating an industrial workforce as it subsumed agricultural land.

In contrast to the Welsh industrial writers of the 1930s, Thomas explores and interrogates the ways in which various networks of authority are evident in the landscape of industrialised south Wales. The hillsides are no longer a space of freedom and leisure in Thomas's representation; rather they are delimited and often prohibited spaces controlled by capitalism. It is likely that Thomas's experience of, and links with, Spain in the 1930s are likely to have significantly influenced his perception of landscape, access and ownership. While reading Spanish at Oxford University, Thomas undertook a term's study at Madrid's Universidad Complutense, the first secular university in Spain built by the Second Republic. As Thomas later reflected, it was 'furnished out of the few shillings left in the Treasury by the absconding Alfonso XIII'.[77] Thomas briefly recounts his experience of Spain in 1933 in *A Few Selected Exits*, but his account of the time is more concerned with his experience of studying at the university than with the wider political context of Spain. He does however illustrate a dramatic instance of the politics of space at play in the nation, noting how during the Madrid riots in the aftermath of the 1934 election, 'the dream embodied in the University took a fearful beating. It became one of the fronts in the siege of Madrid. Loyalists [Republicans] in the Faculty of Arts building, Moors and other Franquistas in

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[76] John Davies, p.330. See also Moelwyn I Williams, 'The Economic and Social History of Glamorgan 1660-1760', *Glamorgan County History IV: Early and Modern Glamorgan*, p.372

[77] G. Thomas, *A Few Selected Exits*, p.67 Henceforth referenced in the text as *AFSE*

the Faculty of Medicine' (*AFSE*, 68). Also, in a later interview Thomas recalled his awareness of the Second Republic of Spain as 'something completely new':

> Everybody's face radiated somewhat, because in 1931, the King, Alfonso XIII, with nobody's blessing had left Spain [...] They had the feeling, all the intelligent people of Spain, that these great thick shrouds that had been weighing upon them for three or four hundred years had been shaken off and they were doing the most remarkable things.[78]

The year before Thomas's visit the Republican government passed the Agrarian Law, which saw the distribution of land to Spain's peasants, millions of whom had lived in poverty under the near-feudal system of authority employed by the aristocratic Catholic landowners.[79] In an exhaustive study of the influence and implications of Spanish Agrarian Reform, Edward Malefakis proposes that the reform law of 1932 was a catalyst for the revolts that would result, four years later, in the Spanish Civil War. The complex bill, Malefakis notes, was not as severe as the agrarian law of Mexico and the 'Green Revolution' legislation in Eastern Europe but nevertheless, as it 'envisaged so profound a transformation of the existing system of land tenure, the law must be considered revolutionary in its implications'.[80] Redemption for the peasantry of Spain was to be central to the bill, as *The Times* reported:

> Private property is guaranteed by law and is consequently not expropriable except for public utility with due indemnity. Nevertheless the Government, conscious of the conditions in which the immense mass of peasants lives, the neglect of the rural economy and the incongruence of rural rights and present legislation, adopts as a norm of policy that agrarian legislation should

[78] Gwyn Thomas, 'The Colliers' Crusade', part 1, BBC Wales TV, 1981. As referenced in M. Parnell, *Laughter From the Dark*, p.37-38

[79] Robert Stradling notes the significance of religion in the Spanish Civil War, and notes of Welsh opinion at the time that'To the majority of Welsh people whether or not Franco was actually a fascist was immaterial: beyond dispute was his role as the champion of Rome, the harbinger of absolutism, Inquisition and Index, the representative of an irresponsible monarchy, an obscurantist clergy and a feudal aristocracy', *Wales and the Spanish Civil War: The Dragon's Dearest Cause* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.23 . Thomas also reflects in *A Welsh* Eye how 'To anyone who has known a country like Spain where you have a profound imposed religious unity, the brittle spiritual body of a place like Wales is a thing to wonder at. If the theological vigour of even fifty years ago had kept its impetus, the denominational ratio would by now be running somewhere in the region of one sect per man' (*AWE*, 122)

[80] Edward E. Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain: Origins of the Civil War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 205

correspond to the social function of the land.[81]

Although it has been argued that Gwyn Thomas was never overtly 'political' and that during his time in Madrid he resisted being drawn into Spanish culture, it has also been suggested that Thomas 'always wanted to write a novel about the Spanish War. .[82] I would strongly suggest that the influence of the Spanish Civil War, and in particular the significance of land ownership and land reform in the conflict, can be seen to have influenced Thomas's vision and analysis of the geography of capital of the south Wales coalfield.

The enclosure of common lands had a significant effect on the rural communities of south Wales; nearly one hundred acts authorising the enclosure of 80,000 hectares of land in Wales were passed by parliament between 1793 and 1818.[83] As Davies notes, some of the common land was improved – drained and cultivated – into fertile land. However, much of the land was 'enclosed' in order to intensify the rights of landlords: 'As the enclosures were carried out by the agents of the great estates, and as small landowners lacked the legal resources to insist upon their share, the greater part of the old commons passed into the hands of the leading landowners').[84] Thomas examines this issue in *All Things Betray Thee* and indeed can be seen to allude to the impact of the enclosure bills. Although Moonlea is a version of Merthyr, it is also a synthesis of a more general industrial south Wales experience and history. Through the development of the figures of Richard Penbury (the owner of the Moonlea ironworks) and Lord Plimmon (a prominent landowner in the region), and the peasant farmers turned foundry-workers, Thomas is able to illustrate the effects and power-dynamics of the

[81] *The Times* (London, 16th April 1931) as referenced by Edward E. Malefakis, pp.165-66
[82] Robert Stradling, p.82, p.123 Stradling's study offers a comprehensive account of the connections between Industrial South Wales and the Spanish Civil War
[83] John Davies, p.334
[84] Ibid. In the south Wales coalfield the 1869 enclosure of Waun Hir, a 3,000 acre common at Hirwaun, and the subsequent end of the free-grazing rights of the farmers of the Upper Rhondda, saw many families pushed into the centres of industry during the second phase of industrialisation (Lewis, 18)

process of enclosure. In one of the most striking narratives of forced migration Wilfie Bannion recounts how his family's land was seized:

> Your roof is stripped off; you've got to get out of the rain. Your food is torn away; you can't hire out your stomach. Look. Five years ago, my father and brothers and I had a hill-farm. A good farm, and our will and muscles made the hard land soft and made wheat grow where people said it would not. The land was enclosed by a speech-making, soldierly leader of men called Lord Plimmon, who has made a name for himself with a few radical speeches in the Parliament about the crime of working kids to death in mines. [....] He enclosed our farm with the blessing of his friends in Parliament, said we had not the means to make the land yield as much wealth as it might. We refused to budge. In his role of military commandant of the garrison at Tudbury he brought up a little platoon of mounted Yeomanry and chased the whole tribe of us around the hillside as if we were foxes. [....] They got us off at last but only after my father had made a leap at one of the Yeomen and got a sword thrust that helped him to die within three weeks. And now I'm in Moonlea. Lewis and Leyshon there will tell you similar things. I tell you, harpist, there is no choice. There is the innocent rear of the people as they nibble their fertilized meadow and there is the shod foot of the smart ones who kick them into a more meagre pasture. (*ATBT*, 31)

The tenants are powerless to act against the authority of Lord Plimmon and are treated like animals as they are hunted out of the land and home they inhabit. Disenfranchised, they have 'no choice' but to move to the centres of industry to find work. Raymond Williams noted in *The Country and the City* how the process and method of 'enclosure' was the 'more visible establishment of a long developing system'; the tenant farmers had long been exploited by their landlords, but

> [t]he many miles of new fences and walls, the new paper rights, were the formal declaration of where the power now lay. The economic system of landlord, tenant and labourer, which had been extending its hold since the sixteenth century, was now in explicit and assertive control.[85]

In recounting the actions of Lord Plimmon as an emblem of the actions of the 'explicit and assertive control' of the landlord, and emphasising the inequality between the peasant farmers and the estate-owners, the foundry labour-force and the ironmasters,

[85] R. Williams, *The Country and the City,*(London: Hogarth, 1993 [1973]), p.107

Thomas can be seen to create his own myth of the inception of socialist thought. The long process of land enclosure, for both the cultivation of pasture and the creation of parkland, was more typically a Liberal concern than a socialist one, but in re-reading the history of the south Wales coalfield Thomas emphasises how the process of enclosure, largely prompted by economic forces, created what can be considered from a twentieth-century perspective to be a rural proletariat.[86] Thomas can be seen to echo this reading of the rural labour force as the rural proletariat forms a large proportion of the labour force of the Moonlea foundry.

On the status of pre-Enclosure peasant farmers, Neeson notes that they were 'independent of the wage',[87] because they owned, or more commonly tenanted, land and worked it to earn a living; they worked the land themselves, rarely employing anyone else, but did rely on neighbours and friends during ploughing, harvest and lambing seasons, as well as in old age.[88] The peasant farmers also shared a common culture. Their 'common rights supported customary behaviour, joint agricultural practice, mutual aid, and on occasion, a sense of political solidarity' (Ibid); the most notable example in Wales was the Rebecca Rioters, or *Merched Beca.*[89] In his study of rural revolt, Eric Hobsbawm notes how the process of the 1750 – 1850 enclosure of land, and its conversion to pasture, was prompted by an 'agricultural boom' as both domestic and export markets developed.[90] The loss of land, the introduction of cash-nexus contracts, and the shift in status from independent peasant farmer to employed

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[86] See J. Neeson, *Commoners : common right, enclosure and social change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993) and E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', *Captain Swing,* eds Eric Hobsbawm & George Rudé (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969)

[87] In his analysis, Neeson notes the connotations of the word peasant and states that his use of the word is not to imply that eighteenth-century English agriculture was feudal, but rather to highlight the continuity with the past, a continuity based on the occupancy of land rights in the common-field system' (Neeson, 297)

[88] J. Neeson, p.297, p.300

[89] Indeed, Thomas also alludes to the radical tradition of rural Wales, as it is noted that the great-grandfather of the Evans brothers of *Sorrow For Thy Sons* was a Rebecca Rioter

[90] Eric Hobsbawm, p.15

labourer 'proletarianised' a significant proportion of the rural population and deprived that sector 'of those modest customary rights as a man (though a subordinate one) to which he felt himself to have a claim'.[91] Hobsbawm goes on to note however, that an agricultural labourer was

> proletarian only in the most general economic sense. In practice the nature of his labour and most of the rural society in which he lived and starved, deprived him even of the relative freedom of the urban and industrialised poor and certainly made it difficult for him to develop or to apply those ideas and methods of collective self-defence which the townsman was able to discover.[92]

Thomas was to also reference the experience of the rural poor in *Sorrow For Thy Sons*, the protagonist arguing that:

> [...] people who work on farms are slaves. Rotten wages, no pleasures, nothing. Early to bed and out of the bloody thing before you've had time to go to sleep. And three times to chapel on Sunday. That's some life. Your old man did right to come here [the coalfield] (*SFTS,* 76)

Despite the impact of the depression in the South Wales coalfield Alf is able to see the advantages of an impoverished industrial society over rural isolation.

Raymond Williams argued that the process of enclosure and the contemporaneous development of industry in Britain cannot be explained as the 'fall of one order and the institution of another', and in *All Things Betray Thee* Thomas considers the process of the establishment of industrial society.[93] Drawing on the rural legacy of the new society the novel dramatises the growth of the proletariat and one of the central themes is the need to replace the modes of consciousness of rural society with modes of consciousness appropriate to new industrial society. The industrial experience of many of the inhabitants of Moonlea is defined by their previous rural existence and Thomas emphasises this dichotomy in the imagery used to describe and define the development of the industrial centre and in particular the power struggles between the proletariat and

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[91] Ibid

[92] Eric Hobsbawnm p.16

[93] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.98

their employers. Early in the novel John Simon reflects the opportunities for social cohesion that the new centres of industry present:

> Here in Moonlea and places like it the people for the first time are not quite helpless. They are close together and in great numbers. Their collective hand is big enough to point at what is black and damnable in the present, at what is to be wished in the future. Back there in the fields they were in a solitude. They could be picked off at the leisure of anyone who wanted to do his own bit of private mangling. Hunger could rage among them all it wished, and never were there more than five or six lean distracted clowns with pitchforks to say it nay. (*ATBT*, 31-32)

The rural workers are isolated and vulnerable and share no common consciousness. But although Thomas again emphasises the rural 'solitude' in this passage, there is a suggestion that those who experienced hardships in rural areas, due to the enclosures or other factors, can draw on the experience of isolation to strengthen their sense of community. The new communities are a catalyst for a dormant shared identity: they are 'for the first time not quite helpless'. Indeed, Thomas portrays the new concepts of an industrial society and a collective proletarian identity as something which is also rooted in rural traditions. As John Davies notes, although a mass society developed in the south Wales valleys:

> it happened in a frontier world, a world lacking the graces of civic life. The people who created the communities which grew up under the shadow of the ironworks brought with them the traditions and the values of the countryside from whence they came. [94]

The most resonant, and contested, image used by Thomas to mediate the development of Moonlea is that of the harvest. The minister's speech – part of

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[94] John Davies, p.331. Stephen Knight addresses the significance of rural history in the formation of industrial society in his analysis of the politics of the late nineteenth century, noting how syndicalism emerged in Wales from traditional Welsh culture and 'values' as well as from international theorists: 'In Wales however, the syndicalists drew not only on international theorists: the principle that the local community had the right to seize power in its own terms, and answered to nobody, neither a coal-owner nor a union or party leader based in Cardiff or London, was an industry-adapted version of that fierce and strong communality that was itself the basis of the *gwerin* culture' (Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction,* 59). Knight goes on to argue that syndicalist traditions are far more prevalent in Welsh writing than previously realised, and reflects how this 'new and Anglicized settlement was, in mode as well as location, in some ways deeply Welsh' (ibid)

Penbury's efforts to calm the residents' unrest – best illustrates this:

> Mr. Bowen said it was the time of harvest. [...] Harvests [he said], were the token of faith, knowledge and strength. Every wain that lumbered along a land with its great golden load was a token of the unity in action of these three forces. This was the team of human genius, blessed by the holy sweat from every ploughman's limbs. The faces of Mr. Bowen's listeners grew sorrowful at this, for they, like him, still had the smell and feel of the earth on their minds. They, said Mr. Bowen, they with their patient labouring hands were the seed that Mr. Penbury, acting for God, had placed in the furrows. Unless some wicked wind blew through the earth and stripped it to an obscene nakedness the time of peace and abundance would come once again for him and them. But let them not forget that he without them would be little the poorer: they without him would be fully destitute and damned. (*ATBT*, 106)

The rural imagery so familiar to Moonlea labour force ('they[...] still had the smell and feel of the earth on their minds') is adopted by an emblem of authority; it recalls the earlier observation that 'God and remembered fields' are the principal concerns for the people of Moonlea (*ATBT*, 38). Furthermore, the minister's standing in the community is expressed through the incessant repetition of his name, which conjures formality and deference. The industrial ruling class attempts to reinforce the residual 'rural' consciousness of its workforce and thereby to perpetuate that subservient and deferential position of the poor characteristic of rural society. The rural imagery is deployed to persuade them that subservience is the 'natural', divinely ordained order of things.[95] This contrasts with the industrial imagery used by John Simon and the other workers, who attempt to persuade the Moonlea community that they can 'forge' their own new identities, provided they have solidarity. Indeed, promotion of the growth of a sense of common purpose, collective identity and worker solidarity being inseparable from the birth of a proletariat is a principal argument of the novel; as John Simon reflects, 'the sky won't fall if they let us have our own unions and give us a say about the way in which we want to live' (*ATBT*, 211). The same metaphor that empowered

[95] Early in the novel John Simon reveals how pervasive the appropriation of natural imagery to express the 'natural' order of society is. He describes how '[f]or as far back as we can remember big farmers and the landlords have been putting the boot into small field folk making them flow like rivers from the West lands into valley towns like Moonlea' (*ATBT*, 29). The disenfranchised are dehumanised by those in authority, but find the possibility for unity in moving to the centres of industry

the Proletariat is now used as a force of control and subjugation. The concept of the organic development of society is twisted to accentuate the supposed 'natural order' of humanity, thus inverting the proletarian assertion of the man-made community. The minister reminds his audience of their reliance upon, and duty to, their master, described as 'acting for God', by planting the seed that has created the Moonlea community once again reminding the workers of their subservient position. John Simon later echoes the minister's language, reflecting that 'To them, at present, we are of no more moment than the life in soil which makes their wheat' (*ATBT*, 211). This image reveals the workers' growing awareness of their predicament.

The processes of farming provide a framework for the community to negotiate their proletarian position, but such devices also have an ironic function, indicating what the industrial labour force have experienced before arriving in Moonlea.[96] The harvest imagery also evokes the harpist's description of the 'crass unripe age' that the industrial revolution has created (*ATBT*, 175). Such imagery conjures the potential of the emergent community, but also signals how the workforce, as well as the iron they produce, is reduced to units of capital and yield. Furthermore, in the context of the narrative of *All Things Betray Thee* the agricultural references also simultaneously, and contradictorily, expose the changes in agriculture, encouraging the audience to recall the shift from peasant farming to a sector more dominated by yeoman farmers. Indeed, later in the novel Jeremy Longridge, the other leader of the workers' insurrection, examines the similarities between the position of the industrial and rural proletariat, and considers the importance of owning the means of production. A character reports that Longridge argues:

> that for men to live in their thousands simply to enrich the Penburys and Plimmons is to betray life. Therefore, he says, let the nation of the poor be rid of

[96] Later in the novel, the impact of metaphoric language itself is also considered : 'As it came forth from his mouth there were harps and clavichords, angels' wings and God knows what of persuasive beauty festooned around it. Most of the folk in the front were crying with a kind of tremendous joy' (*ATBT*, 106)

> its besiegers and make its life a serene and clear and fruitful being. He says it is good that those who forge the iron should be the masters of the foundries in which it is forged. He says is likewise good that the fields should belong to those who wish to till them, as once they must have done (*ATBT*, 189).

Longridge does not distinguish between the situations of the rural and industrial inhabitants and calls for change to make the lives of the poor 'serene and clear and fruitful'.

By examining the human interaction with the landscapes of industry, Thomas is able to illuminate the networks of authority at work in such areas, a particularly significant projection of his socialist beliefs. In a masterful twist on the plot in *All Things Betray Thee*, it is revealed that it is the recently-enclosed lands of Lord Plimmon that are providing increased work at the Moonlea foundry: 'John Simon went early to the foundry. A new order has come in for the great railing that is being put around the park of Lord Plimmon' (*ATBT*, 65). The cause of the removal of the Bannions from their agricultural livelihood and tradition is now providing (and sustaining) their new, industrial existence, further indicating the injustice of their situation. The Moonlea proletariat are made complicit in the process of their ejection from the land, as by contributing to the production of the railings, they confirm and consolidate the newly-enclosed tracts of land and the authority of the upper classes. In a microcosm of the geography of capital of the industrialisation of the south Wales coalfield Thomas reveals how the process of the enclosure of land has come to define the lives and experience of the foundry workforce, thus illuminating how the status and position of a social group facilitates and characterises its interaction with the land.[97] Furthermore Thomas exposes how landscape can be preserved as 'rural' and beautiful

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[97] Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geography: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), p.102 Denis Cosgrove has also observed that landscape ' represents a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature, and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to external nature'. Denis E Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998 [1984]), p.15

to the detriment of those who work it, thus revealing the exploitation of the poor in both rural and industrial areas, and emphasising the disenfranchised position of the proletariat. As Alan Leigh reflects of the situation:

> Plimmon is out to be a prince and a scourge to all unworthy yeomen who disgrace the countryside with their shabby fields and half-empty bellies. He does that by seeing that they have no countryside to disgrace and dumps them in handy packets of fertilizer in his own furrows or shackles them as furnace fodder to the knob of Penbury's door. (*ATBT*, 72)

The disenfranchised immigrants no longer occupy the land due to Plimmon's social, economic and political dominance, and in manufacturing the fence they create both a physical barrier to restrict their access to the once common lands, and the link which binds them to the foundry rather than the land. The workers are the producers of the wealth – and power – of the ironmasters such as Penbury, and in turn, Lord Plimmon himself.

Land, Access and Authority

The figure of Plimmon also functions to interrogate the concept of the typical Welsh landscape as definer of Welsh identity. Stephen Knight notes that the character's name seems to be a conflation of the figure of the Earl of Plymouth, a south Wales land-owner, and the idea of Mammon, a biblical motif of avarice and greed (Knight, 104). I would like to extend Knight's reading of the significance of the name and suggest that the name is also a contraction of the name Plynlimmon (or the Welsh Plumlumon). In playing with such an iconic feature of the Welsh landscape as the Plynlimmon hills (the source of the Severn and therefore linked to the delimitation of Wales), Thomas highlights the changing national symbolics at work within Wales. There is a shift in the way Wales and its landscape is imaged both within and outside its borders as the industrial landscape comes to supersede the dominant rural image of the country. In

naming his character Plimmon, Thomas is able to explore how authority is made manifest through the land in rather absurd ways.

Thomas also addresses the legacy of the many enclosure bills in *Sorrow For Thy Sons* in the continuing privatisation of once common land. One hundred years later, Plimmon's iron railings have become the 'low, roughly built wall[s]' of hill farmers; Thomas notes how 'The mountains all around were cut into pieces by those endless walls, intersecting each other like the veins on a hand' (*SFTS,* 137, 138). This sentence simultaneously presents two interpretations of agricultural practice. The image of the walls, and by association farming, as a life-force of the landscape (the veins) is combined with an awareness of how this network is destructive, cutting into the landscape and creating a fractured, rather than a unified space. The hand grasps the landscape and controls it. Once again, Thomas both upholds and interrogates the romantic and conventional way of seeing the land, drawing the reader's attention to the obscured and concealed networks that function on (and in) the landscape, beneath the veneer of the aesthetic. The web of walls over the mountain again functions to curtail access to the hillsides and to protect the privately owned land. The walls also attempt to dictate the behaviour of those who navigate them. As Alf and his friend Bob walk on the mountain-side, Alf climbs the wall and Bob chastises him: '"Wait a minute, Alf. You're not supposed to climb over the wall. There's a gate a quarter of a mile along"'. To which Alf replies '"A gate? Look here, Bob. Do you realise that if this wall wasn't here we wouldn't have to climb over it?"' (*SFTS,* 138).[98] In the act of trespassing, Alf also transgresses the social distinction between those who own land and those who do not; the boundaries both promote and rely upon this distinction to maintain the authority they have come to represent. As the scene develops, Gwyn Thomas continues

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[98] In 'Oscar', a similar act of protest is recounted, as the tip-owner's wire fence is kicked down by the villagers 'because they did not like the idea of [him] covering the mountain with wire as well as owning it'. Gwyn Thomas, 'Oscar', in *The Sky of Our Lives* (London: Quartet Books, 1973 [Hutchinson, 1972]) pp1-74, p.2 Henceforth it will be referred to as 'Oscar' in the text

to play with the supposed dominance of the farmer-landowner, Rufus. The name has connotations of authority, calling to mind both governors of the Roman Empire (for example Lucius Virginius Rufus) and also William II Rufus, medieval King of England who led a campaign of unsuccessful battles in Wales. Most significantly, however, the name signifies red, thus imaging Rufus as a stereotypical farmer, whose ruddy face contrasts with the faces of the miners. The suggestion of redness also signals how Rufus functions as a mirror for Alf's socialist beliefs, something emphasised as Alf ridicules the farmer:

> "Who's this chap?" asked Alf, half turning his head towards Bob.
> "That's Rufus. He's the farmer. He owns this mountain."
> "The whole mountain?"
> "I think so."
> "What's he like?"
> "Funny. He gets moods."
> "That's what comes of owning mountains. Why don't he own something he can carry about [sic]." (*SFTS*, 138)

The perceived absurdity of land-ownership is further highlighted by Rufus's defence against the trespassers: 'this is my field. I got the deeds. Prove to me that I haven't got the deeds and I'll talk different. But till then, you just take my word for it and get out' (*SFTS*, 139). A similar tone towards landownership is adopted in the 1946 novella 'Oscar', in which the eponymous coal-tip owner's labouring boy, Lewis, explains how 'I always thought it odd that a man could point to a thing like a mountain and say, "That's mine", just as you would with a shirt or a woman or a pot. But that is what Oscar could do with this mountain' ('Oscar', 5). Lewis's suspicions are shared by the various 'elements' of the village:

> Nobody liked him in the valley. The elements who went to chapel thought he was on a par with the god Pan, who was half goat. The elements who did not go to chapel thought he was all Pan or all goat, or they were red revolutionary elements who thought that all such subjects as Oscar, who got fat out of stolen land, should have a layer of land fixed over them in such a way as to stop their breathing. (Ibid)

In the mutual Non-Conformist-Liberal and Socialist disapproval of Oscar and his aggressive authority over the mountain, Thomas can be seen to be developing the approach to landownership, and in particular the process of enclosure, that he introduced in *All Things Betray Thee.*[99] There is the suggestion that the land is 'stolen' in its appropriation by Oscar's family, removing it from the community and those who worked it: the means of production and economic agency is removed from the proletariat. Throughout the course of the novella Thomas explores the authority Oscar claims through his ownership of the mountain and the 'huge cake of black refuse' that crowns it. The narrator, Lewis, insists that Oscar believes that as he 'owns a mountain' he is an over-arching authority: 'He can jump on that and he thinks there's nobody as important as a mountain [...] Anybody who owns a mountain can jump anywhere' ('Oscar', 16). Oscar's belief in his ability to control a mountain instils a belief that he can subjugate those he employs; indeed, Lewis is resigned to reflect 'he owned me too, I suppose' ('Oscar', 5).

In *All Things Betray Thee* Thomas also considers the encompassing authority of Plimmon and Penbury, and how this power is manifested in the landscape they control. Thomas stresses how Plimmon and Penbury assert their superiority by controlling and monitoring access to the surrounding hillsides; a character notes how 'they are growing taller than the hills' (*ATBT*, 67). In describing Penbury and Plimmon dominating even the hills of Moonlea, the phrase emphasises their agency in manipulating the landscape and in controlling the lives of the labour force. They overpower the topographical features that have so far shaped the development of the area. Indeed their influence has come to define the industrialised area. Alan Leigh attempts to comprehend the extent of the authority embodied by the industrialist and the landowner and ponders:

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[99] Although written after both *Sorrow For Thy Sons* and *All Things Betray Thee* , 'Oscar' can be viewed as a bridge between the two novels as it appears to be located in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century

> "Plimmon? What is he king of?"
> "Many mountains, many fields. He's a great scourge for poachers."
> "Poachers?" It took me a whole minute to get the concept behind that word in full view. "You mean he's got a kind of personal brand on all the creatures in his streams and woods?"
> "Oh yes. And he wants it respected too. He and Penbury are Justices, and they see to it between them that the ironworkers get their food from iron alone. In the old days a man could live easy, but Plimmon and Penbury are cutting some mighty capers and they are growing taller than the hills. It's hard for a man to get out of sight to them, to fill his bag and draw his breath in the old easy way. There's many a lad in TudburyGaol or over the sea for forgetting that the old days are done for (*ATBT,* 67)

In positioning Penbury and Plimmon as Justices, the aristocratic, mercantile and legal authorities are conflated, creating a superstructure of control which secures the social structure of the wider Tudbury area, including Moonlea. Access to the hillsides is limited and the ironworkers are made to 'get their food from iron alone' by the totalitarian authority of the industrialist and the aristocrat. To borrow Hugh Collins' phrase, Thomas envisions law as 'tangential to a predominant focus on the general mode of social organisation and the material circumstances in which men are placed'.[100] Indeed, Thomas extends his Marxist critique of the legal system to include the accounts of savage violence that trespassers are subject to: Alan Leigh is beaten for trespassing while fishing (or poaching), while Sammy Bannion is killed, echoing the violence the tenant farmers experience when they were 'hunted' and expelled from their homes (*ATBT*, 35). In addition, there is the sanctioned violence of the authorities, envisioned in the 'Yeomanry and the mounted county Militia' (*ATBT*, 167), as well as the violence made manifest in Tudbury gaol, a signifier of authority that will be considered below. As Hugh Collins notes in his study of twentieth-century Marxist

[100] Hugh Collins, *Marxism and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984 [1982]), p.9 It is also interesting to note that Gwyn Thomas extends the custodial metaphor into his later fiction, as in *The World Cannot Hear You* the town of Meadow Prospect is described as a 'prison' for the local children, stifling their opportunities. *The World Cannot Hear You* (London: Gollancz, 1951), p.240

interpretations of law, 'criminal courts, prisons, the scaffold and the guillotine were hardly distinguished from the use of brute force. It was easy to perceive law as a system of institutionalized violence. The legal system thus shared the task of class repression along with the other institutions of government'.[101] Thomas illustrates the all-encompassing authority of those that control Moonlea – industrialists, aristocratic landowners, and the legal system – through the subjugation of the disenfranchised proletariat.

An emblem of the authority of 'institutionalized violence' is Tudbury castle where Alan Leigh and John Simon Adams are later imprisoned, and Adams executed. The prison invites a reading of the Moonlea social hierarchy in the terms of the Panopticon, which exposes Tudbury gaol as a signifier of social, economic and political authority. The reader is informed that the castle had not been used as a prison in the twelve months preceding the capture of John Simon Adams and Alan Leigh. Thus by incarcerating the two characters and presenting them as 'a hammer unto traitors', Plimmon further demonstrates his status and power of authority (*ATBT*, 291). The castle, as Gwyn Thomas emphasises, is a historic emblem of subjugation and authority: 'emblematic of oppression at its most crass' and 'the heaviest knuckle in the looting baronial fist through many centuries of border-war' it overshadowed the town (*ATBT*, 224, 223).[102] As already noted, throughout the novel Tudbury's position as the seat of power is emphasised: it therefore functions as a panoptical mechanism of discipline in the district. Indeed, it is reported that Tudbury, dominated by the spectre of the castle and gaol, is a subdued place: '[t]he livelier spirits [having] been / deported ten years ago after a riot in the surrounding countryside against rack-renting on the part of the town's chief landlord' (*ATBT*, 225). As well as noting the contemporaneous authority

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[101] Hugh Collins, p.28
[102] It is not unreasonable to suggest that if Moonlea is a fictionalised Merthyr Tydfil it is likely that Tudbury is the fictional equivalent of Brecon

manifested in the castle, Thomas also notes the historic dominance it symbolises. John Simon Adams and Alan Leigh discuss the Norman conquest of Wales, and draw comparisons between it and the power of the nineteenth-century industrialists: 'They were the ironmasters of their day [...] Their crown was made up of such castles as these. They crumbled' (*ATBT*, 238). Alan Leigh's response to this remark – 'they seem to be hanging on here' – again re-emphasises the enduring potent influence of the castles as instruments of governance, control and subjugation. Although the gaol itself is not of Bentham's panoptic design (the captives are held in dungeons in the castle) it does function as a 'mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form'.[103]

The panoptic gaze of Tudbury castle extends to Moonlea, as authority is primarily made manifest in the landscape through surveillance. The village almost echoes the geography of Tudbury as signifiers of authority are prominent. In Alan Leigh's first description of the town and its power-dynamic, he notes how the iron foundries and Penbury's mansion dominate the village:

> Beyond on the far eastern side of the town were the foundries. The air above them was faintly shaded and my sense reached out and smelled the powerful acridity of their fumes well in advance. The cottages flanking the well-made road were tiny, uniform, attached one to the other as if to secure them more firmly to Moonlea. To my right, a hundred feet up the hillside was a large gracious house with broad windows and two bold milk-white columns on each side of the main door. Those columns spoke out from the dark green hillside and were the most confident things in all that valley. (*ATBT*, 16-17)

The 'confident' mansion contrasts with the humble, 'uniform' cottages of the foundry workers; indeed, it is suggested that more care has been taken in constructing the 'well-made road' than the housing. As Alan Leigh leaves the village, following the path to the Briers' cottage, his description reflects an awareness of the various networks of power at work in Moonlea. The perspective provided by the hillside, and his initial and

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[103] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* (London : Allen Lane, 1977), p.205
A symbol of a gaol also features in 'Oscar': Lewis, the narrator, notes how Oscar's house ' was not much to look at, but it was quite big, with a stone yard in front and a lot of windows. If jails were built smaller [Oscar's] house would have looked just like a jail' ('Oscar', 23)

brief experience of the village, leads to the exposure of another triangulation of institutions of authority at work in the village: the non-conformist chapel, the county officials and judiciary and the economics of iron:

> I paused in my climb and looked back to the town. I could see the house of Penbury with its beautiful proportions and bewildering columns: the big new greystone chapel in which Mr Bowen kept hell on a gilt leash; the Town Hall, also a building less than ten years old in which rested the long tricky rent-documents that kept a fair slice of Moonlea's working lives in a thoughtful state about the County Gaol. (*ATBT,*25)

It is only from the position above the village that the harpist is able to see this network of authority and how it functions.

The importance of the perspective offered by the hills was also explored by Thomas in *Sorrow For Thy Sons.* Alf, once more meditating on the issue of access, reflects:

> [Y]ou talk to any of the old chaps about here and they'll tell you that when they were young they could walk anywhere they pleased on these mountains, and there wasn't anybody to tell them they were trespassing. Is it the same now? Oh, no. They take our paths away from us. We waste hours walking around walls that should never have been built, like we waste hours down there in the valley crying over derelict pit-shafts that should never have been sunk. It's some sort of plot, don't you think so? (*SFTS,*141)

Alf's assertion that the manipulation of the community's access to the surrounding landscape is 'some sort of plot' is illuminating, again revealing how an interaction with the landscape both defines, and is defined by, status. As '[t]hey take [the] paths away', the alternative position and perspective offered by the hillside paths is also confiscated, thus removing the opportunity for the population to identify with the other industrial communities in the surrounding valleys. The elevated perspective is reserved for those in authority and as such, like the cells of the panopticon, the valleys can be read as 'so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible'.[104] The physical shape of the valleys had not only hampered initial industrial efforts – the mountainous terrain made both accessing the

[104] Michel Foucault, p.200

area and transporting materials difficult – but the ribbon development along the lengths of the narrow valleys, clustered around foundries and collieries, hampered a cohesive sense of community. It has even been proposed that 'a healthy pattern of urbanisation failed to develop' which 'militated against the emergence of a healthy, communal environment'.[105] But Gwyn Thomas challenges this perspective and imagines the hills as unifying rather than dividing the industrial communities, creating a stronger sense of a wider community.

The panorama offered from the hill-tops revealed that the experience of each valley's industrial labour force was not isolated, but replicated from valley to valley; as Thomas noted in *Sorrow For Thy Sons,* 'As they climbed they saw sections of different valleys coming into sight, each a duplicate of the next' (*SFTS*, 135). This idea was later developed by Thomas in a scene in *All Things Betray Thee*. John Simon Adams and Alan Leigh subvert the panoptic authority of Plimmon and Penbury and look over the valleys from the summit of South Mountain, marking the emergence of the making of a proletarian consciousness which augmented the working class, the vanguard of (industrial) social progress:

> "You see no occasional smoky patches behind each line of hills? [...] Under each smudge. There is a town like Moonlea. A centre of new work, in mine, mill or foundry."
> "What of it?"
> "It bears on what you were saying."
> "I see no link."
> "Strings of towns, just like Moonlea, separated as yet by short hills, long ignorance and a little fear. If those townships were once to act together we'd be more than a bubble in the mud. As far as the eye can see from here, Alan, a dozen hill ranges and behind each range a score of Moonleas. And in each Moonlea, a few thousand people whose pattern of feeling and experience whose impulse of misery are precisely as ours.[...]" (*ATBT,* 99)

Rather than divide the communities, the hills offer a perspective that unites them, thus forming an awareness of a larger industrial society and offering opportunities for

[105] Boyns and Baber, p.332

proletarian cooperation. Thomas would revisit the subversion of the panoptic gaze in 'Oscar'. In that novella the coal tip crowning the summit of the mountain offers an even more extensive view of the south Wales Coalfield. The industrial waste produced in the excavation of coal provides this wider panorama, facilitating the acknowledgement of a shared proletarian existence. It can therefore be seen to signify the shared experience of the proletariat and the potential strength of the labour force of the area's collieries. The camaraderie and solidarity of the experience of working underground is replicated, and expanded, by the perspective of the summit of the tips, a development of Thomas's earlier motif of the significance of the perspective offered by the mountains.

Lewis is at first disappointed by the view, noting that

> I liked being being on top of that tip. It was high. [...] From this summit I could see for great distances. [...] To the north ran ranges of hills till the eye lost them. On each new hill there would most likely be some element like Oscar owning it, and between two hills, on the valley sides, elements like Danny getting it in the neck and going black in the face because of it. It all seemed very endless and unsweet and I never felt that I would like to leave the mountains on which I stood and travel over the mountains I could see to the farthest distance. There was no mystery in them. I knew and did not love the life that crawled between the cracks. ('Oscar', 38)

He sees little to distinguish one village from another, and sees exploitation and subjugation replicated on each mountain. But the panoptic view that the mountain offers also empowers Lewis, as from that vantage point he sees Oscar shooting and killing Danny, a coal picker he employs, as he works on the tip ('Oscar', 43). The position allows him to witness an event which threatens to destroy Oscar's authority; indeed it is the reason why Lewis takes revenge on his employer at the conclusion of the story, encouraging a drunken Oscar to climb over a fence and fall to his death in his quarry.

In Thomas's work, landscape is not separated from society; indeed, social issues are reflected in the manipulation and management of the landscape itself. Thomas emphasises how landscape is a 'cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings', as he exposes the ways in which landscape can be seen, constructed and used.[106] In his 'way of seeing' the south Wales industrial landscape we see the dialectic between the rural and the industrial and the dynamic between those in authority and the disenfranchised. It is a work that explores how landscape – positioned by Thomas as another means of production – is bound to power and how it reflects various ideologies at work in society. It is not an innocent background to society it is a contested extension of it. The possible influence of Thomas's study of Spain and the impact of the Spanish Civil War in particular, offer overlooked critical lenses through which to read Thomas's fiction. But a consideration of how land and land ownership became such politically and violently contested subjects in Spain in the 1930s chimes with Thomas's treatment of social hierarchies at work in the contemporaneous (and historic) south Wales landscape, and allows the author to draw out parallels between positions of the nineteenth-century urban and rural proletariat.

In re-envisioning the establishment of the south Wales industrial society Thomas reasserts the significance of the land and the landscape. The importance of the natural raw materials, the perspectives offered by the topography, and the powerful cultural resonance of the imagery of the land and nature are emphasised in his work; this third aspect will be examined in detail in a later chapter in this study. Thomas reasserts the importance of the proletariat to the establishment and development of industry. There is little industrial action featured in *All Things Betray Thee* and *Sorrow For Thy Sons*, but both are undoubtedly industrial novels. The experiences of Thomas's characters re-

[106] Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, 'Introduction', in Denis E. Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels eds *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp 1-11, p.1

people the industrial revolution: they are not only signifiers of the labour force, but signifiers of a community and the potential that offers. Indeed in his fiction, Thomas reflects the emergence of the persisting proletarian consciousness, giving meaning to a history that, though he had not lived, had forged the present he inhabited. In emphasising the historical context of the community he represents, Thomas offers a modern mythology to reconnect that community with its past: it is not a spontaneous organic community, it is the product of a new society. The next chapter will consider how he further explores the continuing dialectic between the rural and the urban landscapes, and his awareness of the persistent cultural resonances of rural imagery and motifs, in particular the concept of the pastoral idyll.

Moonlea, Mynydd Coch and Meadow Prospect: Gwyn Thomas and the Complex Pastoral

> The men of the valleys live in two worlds. They know, on the one hand, the noise, the disfigurements, the failures of industrial man, and just up the hillside over the ridge, a pastoral calm that has never seriously been breached.[107]

In the first chapter of *Some Versions of the Pastoral* William Empson considers proletarian texts in relation to the pastoral tradition, arguing that 'good proletarian art is usually Covert Pastoral'.[108] Empson expands the definition of proletarian art beyond what he terms the 'propaganda of a factory-working class' of Marxist theory to include 'such folk-literature as is by the people, for the people, and about the people'.[109] This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that the work of Gwyn Thomas can be seen to match this wider classification. Thomas was of course aware of the class connotations of the term 'proletarian', and with his first novel, *Sorrow For Thy Sons* – which remained unpublished until 1986 – he attempted to position himself as the author of political-proletarian fiction by entering the Victor Gollancz competition for 'the best genuinely proletarian novel by a British writer'.[110] Although, as one critic notes, the novel did not fit the typical 1930s genre of the Welsh proletarian novel that had been established by authors such as Lewis Jones, who worked in the industries they wrote of, Thomas's writing was unarguably intended at least to be 'by the people, for the people, about the people'.[111] The title of that first novel, like many of the novels that followed it, is a reflection of Thomas's enchantment with, and affection for, the south Wales coalfield communities. *Sorrow For Thy Sons*, *All Things Betray Thee* and *The World Cannot Hear You* all demonstrate the author's empathy with his proletarian subjects

[107] Gwyn Thomas, *A Welsh Eye* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p.145 Henceforth referenced in the body of the text as *AWE*
[108] William Empson, *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979 [1935]), p.6
[109] William Empson, p.6
[110] Dai Smith, 'Introduction' to *Sorrow For Thy Sons*, pp.5-10, p.7
[111] Ibid

and his role as a voice for the people his characters embody. But the titles also signal the author's distance from his subject. The slightly archaic words 'thy' and 'thee' add a sense of history, but also a suggestion of formal politeness as the writer is positioned slightly outside the industrial workforce. Although Empson observes that 'the pastoral is a puzzling form which looks proletarian but isn't', the mode is deployed by Thomas to represent and to reflect on the situation of the south Wales proletariat and the issues the population encounters.[112]

In the vivid imaging of the sense of space and place in his writing, Thomas demonstrates the landscape dialectic at work in the south Wales centres of industry. The area, he notes, is Janus-faced: 'the man-made face of mighty industries and brutally inadequate townships, and the face of moorland, wood and field [...] has changed little except in rateable value since time began'(*AWE*, 174). In his study of the Welsh industrial novel, Raymond Williams also reflects on the implications of the convergence of the rural and the industrial:

> [The] familiar experiences of the hills above [the industrial settlements] are profoundly effective, even when they are commonplace in so much Welsh feeling and thought. But in this specific environment they have a further particular effect. There are sheep on the hills, often straying down into the streets of the settlements. The pastoral life, which had been Welsh history, is still another Welsh present, and in its visible presence – not as an ideal contrast but as the slope, the skyline, to be seen immediately from the streets and from the pit-tops – it is a shape which manifests not only a consciousness of history but a consciousness of alternative, and then, in a modern form, a consciousness of aspirations and possibilities.[113]

The proximity of the contemporary pastoral alternative, suggesting the Welsh past and imbued with socio-cultural and political significance, is a defining aspect of Thomas's construction of the towns of Moonlea, Meadow Prospect and Mynydd Coch. In the novels *All Things Betray Thee* (1949), *Sorrow for Thy Sons* (completed 1937, published

[112] William Empson, p.6

[113] Raymond Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', in Daniel Williams ed., *Who Speaks for Wales?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp.95-111, p.104-5

1986), *The World Cannot Hear You* (1951), and *A Frost on My Frolic* (1953) Thomas emphasises this consciousness of contemporary alternative through a range of literary devices/techniques that I will be analyse through the prism of the pastoral.

Occupying a position slightly outside of the industrial communities – but retaining close and empathetic interactions with them – Thomas was able to identify the aesthetic and ironic resonances in the centres of industry. As such, his industrial fiction is imbued with traces of the peculiar heterogeneous nature of the south Wales coalfield. In the names of his fictional towns Thomas captures the incongruity of the location of heavy industries and settlements in a mountainous landscape; Moonlea, Meadow Prospect and Mynydd Coch (red mountain) may conjure rural scenes, but the towns are versions of Merthyr Tydfil and Porth, and form the centres of Thomas's fictive geography of the Rhondda and Taf valleys. The disjunction of the names reflects a wider phenomenon in the south Wales coalfield, namely the bucolic names of collieries and settlements drawn from the farmland and natural landscape the developments now occupy; the towns Ferndale, Oakdale, Mountain Ash, and the Cae Glas (green field), Oakwood and Fernhill collieries all provide traces of this over-written pastoral history. Stephen Knight has noted that 'ironies lie beneath' the names of Meadow Prospect and Mynydd Coch.[114] Meadow Prospect has been described by Knight as a 'symbolic Rhondda village', but he adds that the 'Meadow is definitely anti-pastoral; it becomes clear that The Black Meadow, the graveyard, is the local prospect both for eyes and bodies'.[115]. Mynydd Coch, Knight observes, is 'presumably *coch* (red) [...] for politics'.[116]. But the name Moonlea also functions with a similar irony. 'Lea', as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a tract of pasture but is normally reserved

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[114] Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.98
[115] Ibid
[116] Ibid

for 'poetical or rhetorical use'.[117] This fragment of the place name therefore functions doubly, suggesting a rooted rural pasture, but also an imagined and / or aestheticised landscape. 'Moon' further reflects the playfulness of the name, as it at once a celestial satellite, a symbol of 'a place or thing that it is impossible to reach, influence, or attain', and also the act of daydreaming, 'to indulge in sentimental reverie.[118] The name Moonlea provides Thomas with means of emphasizing the artifice of the image of the rural idyll with its associated sentimentalism.[119] Indeed, the name is a microcosm of Thomas's complicated, hybrid pastoral vision.

In *All Things Betray Thee* Thomas explores ways of seeing the networks of authority and economy that landscape can manifest. This chapter will extend this reading to consider his exploration of the cultural and political power ascribed to the physical landscape, and how that power is used. Through the pastoral, a mode associated with the use of idealised motifs of rural society to appraise the dominant, 'civilised' culture, Thomas exposes traditions and representations as social, cultural and political constructs. This chapter will examine the ways in which Thomas uses the traditional pastoral devices of the shepherd, retreat and resolution to unsettle the sentimental interpretation of the pastoral, interrogate representations of rural Wales and its population, and to also reveal the industrial communities as a development of their rural predecessors, rather.

Before turning to consider Thomas's novels, it is necessary to outline the

[117] *OED*, 'Lea' (*n*) http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50130870?query_type=word&queryword=lea&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&search_id=sKnB-LWINqc-4605&result_place=4 Accessed 18th November 2008

[118] *OED* 'moon' (*n*), 'moon' (*v*), http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00315353?query_type=word&queryword=moon&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&search_id=sKnB-V5Rl4J-4839&result_place=1 Accessed 18th November 2008

[119] It is interesting to note that the fictional Moonlea has a resonance in Welsh industrial writing. Chris Meredith uses a variation of the name - Moonlow – as the surname of an early ironmaster in the novel *Shifts* (Bridgend: Seren. 1988) . The industrialist is the subject of research by the steelworker Keith: 'In a sense, Moonlow had put him there on the clapped out gearbox watching men struggling with an irrelevant job. It wasn't quite the same industry nor the same valley even, but there was a connection' p.138

theoretical approaches that inform the reading of Thomas's negotiation of the environmental dichotomy at work in the south Wales coalfield. Like the area Thomas seeks to capture in his fictive geography, the mode of the pastoral is also a space of discordance, a discursive space where conflicting concepts collide. As Terry Gifford has observed,

> [S]ince Theocritus the pastoral has defined itself and declared itself as a literary discourse that has retreated from both the sophisticated discourse of the court and the illiterate discourse of the real shepherd. Meeting between the two, pastoral discourse is a linguistic borderland that constructs the artifice of Arcadia.[120]

The pastoral therefore creates a space of contemplation and reflection. But the 'artifice of Arcadia' is a similarly contested space, as Leo Marx's concept of the complex pastoral illustrates. Marx's rather elusive concept is explored in his seminal study *The Machine in the Garden*. Although Marx's study explores the significance of the pastoral in American culture, it offers illuminating insights into the social and cultural construction of the pastoral, and the Edenic myth, and offers a new way in which to consider Gwyn Thomas's engagement with the notion of the pastoral in a Welsh context, especially given the conceptualisation during the early twentieth century, of the coalfield as an 'American Wales'.[121] The complex, or imaginative, pastoral, Marx explains, is not be confused with the 'popular and sentimental' pastoral of the romantic with its 'inchoate longing for a more "natural" environment'.[122] Rather, the complex pastoral works against this more emotional mode, and in doing so exposes the space between the actual and the imagined landscapes, the real and the idyllic visions. The resultant liminal space is one that contains further contradictions as writers invert, critique, and play with the conventions of the tradition; as Lawrence Buell notes, the

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[120] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.46
[121] Alfred Zimmern, *My Impressions of Wales* (London, 1921), quoted in Dai Smith *Anerurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), Preface
[122] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1964]), p.5

pastoral is an aesthetic of 'multiple frames'.[123] For Leo Marx, the idea of a counterforce, or opposite, is central to the effect of the complex pastoral. Such works, he argues,

do not finally permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery. In one way or another, if only by virtue of the unmistakable sophistication with which they are composed, these works manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture.[124]In juxtaposing the pastoral idyll and the pastoral reality, and therefore restoring the text or image to its context of creation, its reception, and its continuing social perception, the complex pastoral 'embraces some token of a larger, more complicated order of experience'..[125] Thomas introduces this in the movement of characters between the rural and industrial environments, and their negotiation and awareness of the liminal space between the two situations.

Terry Gifford, in the study *Pastoral*, develops aspects of Marx's theory to reflect on the anti-pastoral. The way in which Leo Marx developed William Empson's suggestion of the irony at work in the pastoral to formulate the complex pastoral (to be examined below in relation to the figure of the shepherd), is similar to the 'counterpoint' concept that Gifford develops in the anti-pastoral. Gifford perceives how complex pastoral's exposure of the distance between the pastoral image and the reality it occludes can also create an additional space of interpretation. He argues that the anti-pastoral 'break[s] the possibility of the pastoral', and that the tradition[126]

> might appear to be based simply upon exposing the distance between reality and the pastoral convention when that distance is so conspicuous as to undermine the ability of the convention to be accepted as such. But that distance can be caused, not only by economic or social realities, but by cultural uses of the

[123] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press), p.36
[124] Leo Marx, p.25
[125] Leo Marx, *Machine*, p.23
[126] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.119

pastoral that an anti-pastoral text might expose.[127]

Leo Marx's complex pastoral too exposes the 'cultural uses' of the pastoral, as well as the 'economic and social realities' of the pastoral subjects, through its consideration of irony and counterpoint. Consequently, rather than viewing the anti-pastoral as a distinct means of defining a form of the pastoral, for the purposes of this discussion I shall refer to it as a facet of the complex pastoral.[128] From Marx and Gifford's definitions then, the juxtaposition of pastoral reality and the imaginative representation of the pastoral in both the complex and anti-pastoral modes creates a space of deconstruction in which to consider pastoral conventions. Both Marx and Gifford's appraisals of the development – and complication – of the pastoral mode use the critical lens of dialogue to explore how the mode functions. Gifford remarks that the anti-pastoral writer faces a difficulty in finding a suitable voice that 'can be celebratory whilst corrective, that does not adopt the very vices it is criticising, [and] that avoids overstating its case whilst accepting that its case is inevitably a counter one', and as such, finds a resolution of sorts in the modes of the dialectic and the dialogic.[129] This observation is a clarification of Marx's earlier assertion that in a complex pastoral text 'the ideal is inseparably yoked to its opposite'.[130]

The exposure of the 'cultural use', function and manipulation of the pastoral is a central tenet of Thomas's pastoral-themed writing. The figure of the harpist from *All Things Betray Thee*, and the Hemlock brothers and the projects of Sylvester Strang

[127] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.128
[128] Terry Gifford, Pastoral, p.134. Arguably, the anti-pastoral mode is consistent with the model of the complex pastoral, but the complex pastoral is not always strictly anti-pastoral. Also, the prefix 'anti' presents the 'anti-pastoral' as a somewhat negative and antagonistic mode, undoing, rather than interrogating, conventions of the pastoral. Although Thomas critiques the pastoral idyll, his engagement with it is largely investigative and probing rather than combative. The complex pastoral mode is dialogical rather than antithetical.
[129] Gifford illustrates this argument with a consideration of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) observing, that 'By adopting the form of the Sunday School homilies, Blake was able both to show the way the sentimentalising pastoral worked and to undercut it to expose the hypocrisy upon which it is based. He was able to give true innocence its importance, whilst indicating the experience required to recognise it (Gifford, *Pastoral*, 134).
[130] Leo Marx, *Machine*, p.318

from *The World Cannot Hear You*, are examples of Thomas's engagement with the cultural role, impact and influence of the (perceived) rural traditions. *All Things Betray Thee*, *The World Cannot Hear You* and *A Frost on My Frolic* vacillate between, and amalgamate, the complex and the anti-pastoral as Thomas's characters imagine – and indeed seek – the idyll of the sentimental form, but ultimately fail to enact it. It is this narrative of failed pastoral fulfilment that reveals Thomas's work to be starkly complex pastoral; the inclusion of the sentimental dream is ironic, as circumstances prevent its realisation. It is this approach that Thomas uses in what I propose is his complex pastoralism, a discourse engineered to describe, and reflect, the dichotomous landscape of the south Wales coalfield.

The Shepherd

In his study of the pastoral Peter Marinelli examines the role of the shepherd in the tradition and traces how this role has evolved throughout the phases of the tradition. In the classic pastoral mode, he observes, the shepherd is the universal distilled into an individual, an 'emblem of humanity' whose 'simplicity of life is the goal towards which all existence strives'.[131] Marinelli traces how the figure of the shepherd develops in romantic pastoral, emphasising the role of the individual: '[it] begins with the individual figure, concentrates on his hard lot in life, and then magnifies him, almost insensibly, into a figure of titanic proportions, an emblem of general Humanity'.[132] In the modern pastoral the shepherd is absent, Marinelli notes. Instead, the figure is replaced with a 'relatively simple figure, sometimes the worker, more usually the child'.[133]In the industrial-pastoral of the novel *All Things Betray Thee*, Thomas can be seen to include aspects of these forms of the shepherd in the characters of Alan Hugh Leigh and John Simon Adams. Alan Leigh, the harpist, resembles a shepherd of the

[131] Peter Marinelli, *Pastoral* (London: Methuen, 1971), p.6, p.5
[132] Peter Marinelli, p.6
[133] Ibid

classical mode, a troubadour and peasant farmer, his harp replacing the traditional Pan flute. John Simon is an amalgam of the romantic and modern shepherds, a magnified industrial worker-figure, who leads his fellow workers in what he intends to be a peaceful rebellion against the foundry owners.

Alan Leigh, for much of the novel, is a figure representative of simplicity and a bygone age. Early in the narrative, the character states his hope for 'ways of making meadows eternally secure and contriving freedom for the body and sustenance for the guts'(*ATBT,*31), a sentence that well reflects the bucolic idealism of the harpist and his initial disregard for the development of economic networks. Alan Leigh is a motif of the past, symbolising the rural communities and practices that the immigrant population of Moonlea have left behind. However, although the character is one that evokes a specific community, the harpist is a figure who stands removed from the communities he encounters. The opening passage of the novel emphasises the peripatetic nature of the character, describing the harpist as a roaming, emotional artist with the ability to give voice to the anxieties of his audiences: 'Around my harp [...] had crystallized whole layers of expressed longings and regrets' (*ATBT*, 7). But this cathartic and empathetic interaction is at once presented as a performance as Alan Leigh states that as his playing ends, he 'felt the layers peel away under the aseptic brush of wind and sun, for there was within me which set a fence around my pity and bade all other men and women let me be and pass' (*ATBT*, 7).[134] Thomas later returns to the issue of the performative aspects of the harpist when Alan Leigh plays for Penbury, the foundry owner, and this will be considered below.

By representing him as a troubadour, or a nineteenth-century model of a Welsh bard, Thomas constructs Alan Leigh as a shepherd figure that shows an occasional

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[134] The word 'fence' can also be seen to subtly allude to the fences of the newly-enclosed land, the effects of which I have already considered in an earlier chapter.

awareness of the implications and responsibilities of the role.[135] Throughout the novel, Thomas is keen to remind his reader of the rural origins and habits of Alan Leigh, as rather clumsily, if nevertheless comically, the harpist frequently nibbles a grass stalk while deep in thought. More significantly, and more subtly, Thomas also aligns Alan Leigh with a 'sage old shepherd' when the harpist reminisces about his life in north Wales:

> I thought of the long days [John Simon] and I had spent on like hillsides in the North, but looking down on valleys that were empty and unsullied, passing the hours in talk about the heart of man with an uncle of John Simon, a sage old shepherd, sending the sheep to sleep with windy wisdom and me with them as often as not. But those hours of wonder had always ended with laughter and an agreement that as long as each night found us with the core of our own gladness still untouched there would be no chronic weeping over the stupefying cruelties of earth. (*ATBT*, 32)

The northern hills and their people are presented as peaceful and uncomplicated, far removed from the unease of the Moonlea community. Furthermore, the act of remembering his time with the old shepherd reveals how the shepherd's values are reflected in Alan Leigh, especially by his longing to return to a rural idyll of his own efforts. This recollection also underscores the association between the pastoral, the figure of the shepherd and the concept of resolution that Thomas explores in the conclusion of the novel, which will be considered later in this chapter. This serves to remind the audience of the shepherd's – and indeed the bard's – role of social witness, a facet of the figure that Thomas explores earlier in the novel.

On his journey south, Alan Leigh bears witness to the changes in rural society, in particular the implications of the enclosures acts. He observes 'empty cottages and quiet fields', deserted by those who chose, or who were forced, to move to the new centres of industry, and also those 'dark little towns' they now inhabit (*ATBT*, 11, 8).

[135] The figure of the harpist also bears similarities to the 'ancient minstrel' to whom Thomas dedicates his collection of short stories *Where Did I Put My Pity? Folktales from the modern Welsh* (London: Progress Publishing, 1946). 'Iolo of the Scarlet Fancy, an ancient minstrel of Mynydd Coch [...] this book goes out to all who, like Iolo, hummed a little harmony with desolation'.

But peculiarly, and significantly for Thomas's critique of the pastoral, the harpist's experience of rural depopulation, and the testimonies of those expelled from the enclosed areas, do not threaten his dream of achieving a rural retreat. Rather, his ambition of refuge and retreat to his 'private acre' is emboldened, allowing Thomas to reflect the persistence of the wider cultural myth of the rural golden age throughout the development of urban society, and consequently its role as a social construct. This is an idea that Thomas explores in a specifically Welsh context, as will be considered below.

Thomas adds a facet of brief, and intriguing, ambiguity to the character of the harpist in the opening pages of the novel. After presenting the character as a paragon of rural sensibilities, he fleetingly introduces a suggestion of industrial enchantment. This sentiment is prompted by Alan Leigh's meeting with a drover, a character whose reliance on trade challenges the traditional role of the shepherd as Thomas once again re-inscribes the economic aspects of farming in his complex pastoral narrative. The drover is presented in conflicting terms, a signifier of the countryside, but existing in the shadow of industry:

> [A] drover arrived, a prosperous yeoman in charge of his own herd, and a giant. He stood at least two feet and a fortified stomach above average peasant-level. He was a solid and broad as a hillock and as dense. I watched the food and drink go down him as down a pitshaft. He was on his way to a market centre in one of the border counties where the new industrial towns had created a legion of lean bodies begging for his stock. (*ATBT*, 8)

The description of the drover as a broad 'hillock', but also as a 'pitshaft', reveals the character to be a liminal one, whose rural existence relies on an engagement with the industrial settlements through the mechanism of trade. As such, he is a new mercantile shepherd figure, evidence of the influence of market forces on the rural ideal. Indeed, the mercenary facet of the drover is expressed when he destroys Alan Leigh's harp in a rage prompted by the 'lyric impulse' of the harpist, and then offers to reimburse him for the damage caused (*ATBT*, 9). This incident frees the harpist from his role:

> The harp's death left me free. My life of wandering was at an end, anyway, and I would need it no longer. [...] My journey to Moonlea would mark the induction of a brand new type of to-morrow into my days, a to-morrow resting on a diligent security and assurance, purged of my ancient vagabondage and sorrowful bardry. (*ATBT,* 9)

Alan Leigh seems enchanted by the 'security' of the 'new type of to-morrow' offered, and symbolised, by the new industrial settlement of Moonlea. However, this brief suggestion of industrial enchantment is punctured in the next scene, as the shepherd figure confides that he 'would never be found squirming in the life-traps' of the industrial towns, adding also that 'foundry work's a pen for the idiot and the life-sick'. (*ATBT,* 11, 13). Once more the rural imagery of enclosure is used ('a pen') to mediate the harpist's opinion. With his awareness of the restriction of the new industrial order, Alan Leigh is representative of personal freedom. He reflects that 'some men put on a coat of dirt and servility too swiftly for my taste. When a man accepts a master's hand or a rented hovel he's fit for the boneyard' (*ATBT*, 13), which leads Helen Penbury, the daughter of the industrialist, to question whether the character is 'a savage or a radical' – a particularly ironic question given that Alan Leigh becomes her father's private harpist. Leigh is a character that lies between these two definitions: a rural peasant ennobled by the bardic, pastoral and troubadour traditions, but one who reluctantly joins a radical rebellion against the foundry- and land-owners.

The character of John Simon Adams sees Thomas create a modern shepherd figure. In the course of the narrative, the character is described as embodying Marinelli's romantic shepherd, the figure magnified into an emblem of humanity: 'in some men the winds of joy drop quickly and in their silence all the grieving of the earth seems to find an echo. Such a man, I think, is John Simon' (*ATBT*, 41). The foundry worker is also the character that most emulates Empson's model of the pastoral proletarian, the 'mythical cult-figure' of the skilled (if, in this instance, rebellious) worker (Empson, 15). The harpist arrives in Moonlea having been told during his encounter with Helen

Penbury that John Simon Adams is a 'deadly nuisance' and 'Moonlea's leading thorn' (*ATBT*, 14, 15). But on meeting with his friend, the harpist learns of the situation 'boiling up' in the town:

> Some time back the world stopped calling for iron; its gullet seemed to be choked with it and hundreds of furnaces went cold. Since then we've worked in fits and starts. With work scarce, Penbury has tightened his grip and wages have shrunk. The cottages are his, and although most of them are no bigger or better than coffins, he says the people must pay more because he is not now having his old golden return on his investment. (*ATBT*, 30)

This image of industrial decline and suffering succinctly illustrates the reasons for John Simon's unease and his efforts to call for change. The reference to the wage the inhabitants once earned reveals that for the first time they experienced, although briefly, a sense of empowerment as material improvement from disenfranchised rural poverty was made accessible. This is juxtaposed with the control Penbury exerts over the trade that their wage now facilitates through his influence over the local shopkeeper, an arrangement which evokes the nineteenth century truck system. This portrayal of Moonlea starkly contrasts with John Simon's retrospective description of the early years of the settlement, an account obviously imbued with a nostalgic sense of an industrial idyll:

> There was money for the people, more than they had ever had from their ploughs and their crops. Their bodies ached like hell with the strain of new labour and their lungs might have turned to rust in the heat and smoke, but they still thought that life had taken a turn for the better. (*ATBT*, 29-30)

This description constructs an industrial arcadia. The description of the physicality of the labour is one loaded with admiration and it conveys a sense of dignity and pride in participating in the hard foundry work.

Thomas's representation of industrial labour is imbued with a sense of enchantment. This is in evidence later in the novel when John Simon again expresses the pride that the workforce takes in the foundry work:

> The only thing in [my father's] life since the day he walked away from my mother up in the North to run into the shape he wanted was that liquid-iron. He was mad for it. When he died [...] I found the moulding yards dragging me like a magnet. Deep down I probably had something of the old man's elaborate misery, and it might have been calling for the same cure. So I didn't resist. Penbury liked the skill of my hands, and I liked the job. My father was right. Under the dirt there's a lot of beauty. (*ATBT,* 43-44)

This description features what William Empson refers to as 'pastoral feeling about the dignity [...] of labour'.[136] The sense of skill and craftsmanship the account conveys re-enchants the iron industry with the suggestion of its transformative properties.[137] The image of John Simon's father as molten metal running 'into the shape he wanted' while he worked the 'liquid iron' reveals the connection of the worker with the material, and by implication the industry, he shapes. The sense of dignity that the workforce of the foundry is imbued with is reflected later in the novel as John Simon outlines his plans for the protest he is due to lead. He seeks to 'remind the King and his Government that their soldiers could be passing their time more usefully than they are doing here' and that 'the skies won't fall if they let us have our own unions and give us a say about the way in which we want to live' (*ATBT*, 211). Thomas's enchanted descriptions of the foundry work ('under the dirt there's a lot of beauty') reflects his position in relation to industry. As the son of a miner who grew up in a mining community, Thomas was exposed to all aspects of heavy industry. Although not an industrial worker himself, Thomas' respect and reverence for the workforce and their labours is obvious as his writing expresses his sense of wonder, but is tempered by his awareness of the

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[136] William Empson, p.8

[137] Thomas's admiration of those who work with iron can also be seen to allude to what Iorwerth Peate described as the 'love of craftsmanship' in Welsh culture, and the craftsman's 'honourable place in Welsh life', *Guide to the Collection of Welsh Bygones* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1929), p.1

hardships and exertions of the activities of heavy industry.

Thomas also includes complex pastoral counterpoint to his appreciation of the skilled industrial worker, figure of the merchant. On his release from Tudbury gaol, Alan Leigh takes a coach to Moonlea, and on this journey he encounters the domestic-hardware seller. The merchant strikes up a conversation, recalling the prosperity of the Moonlea area in his youth, a sentiment that echoes the earlier nostalgia of John Simon. The merchant expresses his expectations for his hardware sales, which prompts Alan Leigh to consider the processes of the iron foundry:

> [The merchant] told me the moulders of Moonlea would be world-famous by the time his firm of vendors had completed their selling campaign. [...] I remembered that John Simon was a moulder. I recalled the fervour in his eyes as he had tried to demonstrate the details of his craft on that patch of brown earth outside Katherine Brier's cottage, with me leaning back on my elbows [...] wondering what all John Simon's talk and fervour were about. (*ATBT*, 263-4)

Unlike the harpist, the merchant takes no interest in the production of his hardwares. With little interest in the production process, he is enchanted only by the product: 'Domestic hardware is eternal. Its eternal forms will change but its principle is deathless' (*ATBT*, 265). Like Ortega y Gasset's model of the *naturmensch*, the merchant's perception of the product is informed by the concept of product itself, which obscures the reality of the means of its production.[138] The *naturmensch* offers a classic Marxist critique of capitalism – the separation of product from process is cause and symptom of the 'alienation' of the workforce. The worker is distanced from the fruits of his/her labour and is thereby alienated from the fullness of his/her humanity. It is therefore an 'unnatural' state. Thomas was a Marxist of sorts – or, more correctly, probably with Anarchist leanings – and the inclusion of a signifier of capitalist consumption reveals that Thomas's presentation of the industrial community does not

[138] José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), cited in Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p.7. Gasset suggests that the *Naturmensch* 'does not see the civilisation of the world around him, but he uses it as if it were a natural force. The new man wants his motor-car, and enjoys it, but he believes that it is the spontaneous fruits of the Edenic Tree'

slip into the realm of the sentiments of the *naturmensch*; the processes of civilisation and industry are not presented as an organic or natural force, but as a construct. The associated hardships are not idealised, despite the sense of a reverence for the labours of the foundry workers. Emphasis is placed on the physicality of their work, and the effects of this on their bodies. As he has already underscored the physicality of agricultural labour, this juxtaposition sees Thomas once more remind readers that the rural idyll is a myth and that the transformative and complex nature of industrial labour is not as removed as it seems from the plough and the crops of cultivation and agriculture.[139]

The merchant is a signifier of consumption and as he encourages his customers to buy and consume the wares he sells, so he too consumes the landscape of Tudbury and Moonlea. As he talks to he harpist he enjoys the picturesque aspects of the panorama:

> 'Beautiful hills here,' said the hardware seller. 'I like these low soft hills. The high rugged ones further north repel me. Rather too much grandeur, I say. But these round little foothills, they are perfectly to my taste. Man might have made these.'
> 'I like all hills.'
> 'Even those tall, rough, rugged ones?' I stared at the tall crown of my silent neighbour's beaver hat.
> 'The lack of urban amenities does not bother you then?'
> 'Not at all. I live right in the middle of the mountain, so far in, the goats chew at us in protest when we are too human.' (*ATBT,*264)

The merchant can only appreciate the 'low soft hills' in terms of human involvement: 'man might have made these' he reflects. This exposes the hypocrisy of the salesman. Although he is enchanted by the products he sells and does not care for the means of production, he is seemingly enchanted by the possibility that man could have modelled and created the hills. The 'rugged', Sublime mountains however 'repel' him, as they reveal few traces of man's interaction and indeed suggest man's frailty and mortality. The merchant views the landscape in the strict terms of the Picturesque; as one study of

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[139] In Thomas's work, this aspect is only a faint facet of the representation of industry. Ron Berry's deconstruction of industry examines this link more thoroughly, as I examine in a later chapter

the Picturesque in Wales notes, the aesthetic regards 'the features of a view as if they were the materials an artist might employ in the creation of a designed landscape'.[140] It is only through the commodification and controlling of the landscape that the merchant is able to appreciate its beauty. The study goes on to note that

> This aesthetic was first fully expounded nearer the end of the eighteenth century by William Gilpin, 'the travelling salesman of the Picturesque', whose various *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* were published between 1782 and 1809. These were descriptions of various parts of Britain which Gilpin visited in order to find examples of the kind of scenery which best fulfilled Picturesque criteria.[141]

Griffiths notes that in his *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales* Gilpin proposes 'a new purpose', a way of seeing the countryside, 'by rules of Picturesque beauty: that of not merely describing but of adapting the description of natural scenery to the principles of artificial landscape; and of opening the sources of those pleasures which are derived from the comparison'.[142] Thomas's salesman, therefore, can be read as a literal evocation of Gilpin, selling his wares while simultaneously commodifying the landscape and promoting this commodified image, as Gilpin had done before him. Reading the figure of the salesman in these terms also illuminates the character of Lemuel in *All Things Things Betray Thee,* the aspirational baker and shop-keeper (and puppet of Penbury and Lord Plimmon). As a character who does not work on, or in, the landscape, he is only able to read the landscape in domestic terms, and describes how the grass is like a mat, rather than noticing how different it is

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[140] Miriam Griffiths, 'Wider Empire for the Sight: Picturesque and the First Tourists' in William Tydeway ed. *The Welsh Connection* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986) pp 67-88, p.70

[141] N. Nicholson, *The Lakers: The Adventures of the First Tourists* and Willliam Gilpin *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales*, cited in M. Griffiths, p.70. A similar picturesque description of the Rhondda Fawr valley was offered in Benjamin Malkin's 1804 publication, *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales*: 'The bottom [of the valley] is much encumbered with brushwood, through which the Rhontha Vawr [*sic*] takes its course, sometimes visible, and sometimes concealed; the sides are formed of a rocky chain, as has been described, alternately bare and woody; the front of this narrowing dell is filled up by a single cliff, high and broad at the top, and as it were regularly and architecturally placed, appearing as much the result of design, as those on the sides seem to indicate the fortuitous vagaries of sportive nature'. B. H. Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales* (London: Longman and Rees, 1804), p.192. The cliff appears to have been 'architecturally placed' and seems 'the result of design', conforming with conventions of picturesque depictions of landscape

[142] William Gilpin, cited in M Griffiths, p.60

to the 'rough earth of the fields' beyond Penbury's boundaries (*ATBT*, 50). The commodification and classification of the land and its contents is also highlighted during this scene, as the cultivated silver birch of Penbury's grounds, which demarcate his home from the fields, the mountain and Moonlea as they are 'hugged to his chest like chainmail'), are juxtaposed with the traditional (and presumably wild) trees on the valley slopes, that 'had been torn and carted down to give heat to his foundry' (*ATBT*, 50).

Alan Leigh's interaction with the land is more active than that of the merchant and the shop keeper. He is frequently presented as being part of the landscape; not only does he 'live right in the middle of a mountain', but his feelings reside in a 'small field' of him (*ATBT*, 61). That is not to say that Alan Leigh does not consume the landscapes he engages with; rather his consumption is more profound. He finds solace and a restorative force within the rural vista, as the passage below illustrates:

> I turned my eyes towards the endless hill range of the south and west. My spirit surrendered all its whimpering questions, yawned over on to its side and slept. I sat with my back to a knoll and deliberately drank every drop of serenity I could distil from the sight of those hills. (*ATBT*, 96)

It is as if the harpist is ingesting the serenity he perceives in the hills in order to better prepare himself to cope in the uncertain and uneasy environment of Moonlea. The hills therefore become a refuge of sorts, and the harpist a signifier of a pastoral calm. The industrialist Penbury realises this and asks the harpist to 'harp [him] into a long, fuzzy, emotional doze', a brief retreat from the foundry politics (*ATBT*, 62), as the industrialist seeks what Leo Marx defines as the sentimental pastoral, the 'yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life'.[143] The rural/industrial interplay of the novel is further developed by the interaction between the antonymic characters, the harpist shepherd figure and the industrialist. The archetypal motif of the pastoral is adopted by the industrialist as he seeks to recapture his personal Arcadia, 'the tranquillity of the

[143] Leo Marx, *Machine*, p.6

days before my father passed the iron mania on to me' (*ATBT,*60). Penbury's descriptions of how the harp's music soothes his mind rely on pastoral imagery; he hopes that the sounds may 'turn over a lot of old soil' in his mind and the 'fresh morning smell of it' will cure his insomnia (*ATBT,* 60). Penbury's need for a psychological retreat mirror's Alan Leigh's own quest to retreat to his farm in north Wales. As Sigmund Freud noted, the 'mental realm of phantasy' shares many of the characteristics of the creation of nature parks and other pastoral retreats.[144] Such establishments, he noted, sought to 'maintain the old condition of things which has been regretfully sacrificed to necessity everywhere else'.[145] The industrialist also seeks to bring a similar calm to what he perceives as the 'intemperate' and melancholic people of Moonlea, and asks that the harpist perform in the town to 'persuade [the people] to sing and dance their way into a forgetful jollity' (*ATBT,* 62). What shifts this scene into the complex pastoral is the harpist's awareness of Penbury's manipulation of his vocation and the naivety of his plan. Alan Leigh knows that the rural idyll he is asked to recreate does not exist, but he nevertheless participates in the industrialist's scheme in his role as emblem of the pastoral. The harpist later reflects, 'I'm to be his hired lullaby, and I'm to keep the people reeling around the maypole until they get so giddy they won't give him a thought' (*ATBT,* 64).[146]

The character of Alan Leigh also allows Thomas to explore what William Empson identified as the 'essential trick' of the pastoral, namely to 'make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about

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[144] Sigmund Freud, cited in Leo Marx, *Machine,* p.8

[145] Ibid

[146] The scene also recalls David playing for Saul (1 Samuel 18:10), and the connotation of the responsibility and knowledge that accompany power. The biblical imagery, I would suggest, encourages the reader to contemplate the 'original, religious sense' of the pastoral, namely 'the identification of Christ with the sacrificial Passover lamb of Jewish ritual which opened up a vein of pastoral typology deriving from Latin *pastor* as shepherd', and in turn, to view John Simon as an emblem of sacrifice. John Goodby, ' "Very profound and very box office": [Dylan Thomas's] Later Poems and *Under Milk Wood*', in John Goodby and Chris Wigginton eds, *Dylan Thomas: New Casebooks* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001) pp192-220, p.197

everybody) in learned and fashionable language'.[147] The simple and melancholic music that forms the language of the harpist is able to convey the anxieties of the industrialist, and seem to offer him comfort. However, Thomas extends this 'trick' to demonstrate what Leo Marx refers to as the 'ironic distance' at work in the complex pastoral.[148] In the act of the harpist playing for Penbury, Thomas presents a clash of high and low cultures, the learned and the spontaneous, which emphasises the incongruity of the industrialist – a figure of modernity – finding comfort in the songs of a rural tradition. Furthermore, as the harpist reflects on the simplicity of the music and the function he performs, an additional facet of irony appears, exposing the gap between the perceptions of the artist and the audience. Penbury attempts to hum the tunes he wishes Alan Leigh to play and the harpist realises that the song is unremarkable, despite the industrialist's urgent enthusiasm:

> " 'When will sadness have an end?' Do you know that? [...] it goes like this."
> He began to hum in an urgent way and he walked towards me. It was like a hundred other songs I knew, a downright affair with a recurrent four-note phrase for which even the least subtle ear could foresee the harmonies. It would not have surprised me if Penbury had made up this particular item himself to dignify the crudeness of some common flat-footed regret.' (*ATBT*,60)

The song that the cultured Penbury reveres is a simple tune that has little to distinguish it from the many traditional songs that the harpist plays. Its simplicity is exposed by the harpist's brief deconstruction of the song, describing it as a 'downright affair with a recurrent four-note phrase', and characterised by an obvious harmony that the 'least subtle ear' can identify. Both the reader and the harpist anticipate Penbury will prefer a more elegant, complicated tune, but the act of his unsophisticated choice creates a space of irony as the wealthy industrialist prefers a song simpler than the tastes of the

[147] William Empson, p.11
[148] Leo Marx, *Machine*, p.129

humble harpist.[149] Of course, the act of the harpist playing for Penbury is an instance of creating a retreat and attempting to find resolution, and it is these two aspects that I shall next consider.[150]

Back to the Land: Reflections on Retreat

> "We are going out there, to the fields, to the open country. The decadent commercialism of towns is to be left behind. This is a kind of rebirth. You've heard of the slow rhythm of satisfaction in a peasant's life, haven't you?"[151]

In his 1953 novel, *A Frost on My Frolic*, Thomas again returns to consider the antithetic landscape of the Rhondda valleys, and the allure of the pastoral. Set during the Second World War, the novel sees a group of Mynydd Coch school boys sent to a nearby Vale of Glamorgan village to help the Home Guard's support of the harvest efforts. At the outset of their journey, Mr Rawlins the boys' teacher, who, we later learn, dreams of a 'pre-industrial paradise' (*AFF*, 224) outlines the restorative effects of the 'peasant's life' they are about to encounter, describing how the 'vulgarity' of industry and commercialism will 'flake' off them. Despite the children's initial bemusement 'Peasant Calm [...] What kind of graveyard notion is that?' (*AFF*, 174)

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[149] Thomas would return to music as a means of examining the expression of complexities in simple terms in *The World Cannot Hear You.* The shepherd figure Omri Hemlock reflects how 'I've always loved birds. I know that their lives are short and that their hunger and weariness must often be terrible but I think they can show the voters a thing or two. I'd like to be able to whistle like Jethro Manley and I'd like to be able to sit with the Meadow Prospect Jubilee silver band when they are playing "In a Monastery Garden"' and whistle the part of the birds' (*WCHY,* 224-5). Technology allows Omri to fulfil his simple pastoral ambition with the warbler, 'a contraption made out of thin golden pipes' or 'some kind of brass bagpipe' that recreates bird song (*WCHY*, 226, 229). The complexities are transformed into a simple mechanism of blowing through pipes resting in a cup of water. In an absurdly comic scene, Omri joins the band on stage, plays the warbler and is pronounced as 'king of the woodland' by the audience (*WCHY*, 231)

[150] Music is also aligned with rebellion throughout the novel. The caretaker-come-chief-gaoler of Alan Leigh and John Simon recalls his days as 'quite a radical', singing 'revolutionary hymns' in 'bitter burning protest' (*ATBT*, 224). But Bartholomew's strings are now 'slack, tuneless and filthy'. However, he and the harpist continue to use music as a form of revolt: 'we made an impressive sight crooning this rhyming litany of defiance and revenge against the walls in which I was imprisoned, against the men who paid Bartholomew to keep guard over us, while the tears ran fast down his face [...] while I smiled up at the oblong of sky I could see through the grating' (*ATBT*, 225)

[151] Gwyn Thomas, *A Frost on My Frolic* (London: Gollancz, 1953) p.167: henceforth referenced in the text as *AFF*

they soon echo the sentiments of their teacher as they rest on the summit of Mynydd Coch and admire the view:

> We throw ourselves down, our backs resting against the cool soft knolls that abound on our hills and we watch the enchantment of mountain and heat-haze all around. North to the Black Mountains; south across the sea to Somerset and Devon. [...] We can feel our minds peel off the grime and staleness. We are singing in our gladness at being up here, on this tall mountain that has the changeless serenity of a flawless thought. (*AFF*, 176)

The teenagers are confronted with the contemporary pastoral alternative, and embrace it, 'singing in their gladness' as they note the 'changeless serenity' of the landscape. However, the pastoral alternative has already been undermined in the narrative of the novel. In a preceding chapter, while on Fire Watch at their school, the boys walk home at dawn and discover 'even Mynydd Coch in its hollow has the beauty of utter harmlessness and peace' (*AFF*, 133). The description functions to disrupt the image of industrial settlements and imbues the village with a sense of pastoral calm. Thomas revisited this incongruity in the short story 'Gazooka', based on his recollections of his childhood in Porth.[152] By the time Thomas composed 'Gazooka', the sense of the summer of 1926 as a pastoral reprieve was a well-established literary trope in Wales with the publication of Gwyn Jones's *Times Like These* in 1936, and Idris Davies's epic poem *The Angry Summer* in 1943, and thus the industrial-pastoral can be seen as a mode of the writing of the coalfield.[153] 'Gazooka' returns Thomas to the 'long, idle, beautifully lit summer of 1926', as he recalls the sense of peace the five month closure

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[152] Gwyn Thomas, , 'Gazooka', *Gazooka* pp.64-128. Henceforth referenced in the text as 'Gazooka'

[153] Jones's novel in particular drew upon the Classical pastoral mode, as illustrated by the Horse Washings scene. The scene recalls the already carnivalesque atmosphere of the coalfield during the summers, as the miners in this particular scene are not striking, but celebrating the end of their shift: 'Sometimes in the summer at the Horse Washings the bloods would put in an appearance for an hour after work, strip off their working clothes, and with vitality kindled anew, Anteus-like at the touch of their bare feet on the grass by the river, lark, horseplay, and dive like lunatics. All the youngsters then left the pool, and sat bare or shirted, watching their particular heroes as their strongly-muscled bodies rolled under the coaly web and sweat-spray'. (Gwyn Jones, *Times Like These*, 35) Anteus gained his strength from his contact with the soil, and similarly the miners are reinvigorated by their barefoot contact with the landscape; from this scene it is evident that a prolonged period of freedom from their labours would obviously heighten this experience.

of the collieries caused:

> By the beginning of June the hills were bulging with a clearer loveliness than they had ever known before. No smoke rose from the great chimneys to write messages on the sky that puzzled and saddened the minds of the young. The endless journeys of coal trams on the incline, loaded on the upward run, empty and terrifyingly fast on the down, ceased to rattle through the night and mark our dreams. The parade of nailed boots on the pavements at dawn fell silent. Day after glorious day came up over the hills that had been restored by a quirk of social conflict to the calm they lost a hundred years before. ('Gazooka', 64)

The silencing of industry, if not socio-industrial conflict, restores a pastoral calm heightened by its incongruity. Thomas's list of the noise and activities of industry emphasises their brief absence, reinforcing the misalliance and the irony of industrial action ceasing industrial activity. Although the children 'took to the mountain tops, joining liberated pit-ponies among the ferns on the broad plateaux', this restored pastoral was reserved solely for the young, as Thomas reminds the readers that '[f]or our fathers and mothers there was the inclosing fence of hinted fears, fear of hunger, fear of defeat' ('Gazooka', 64). Once again Thomas returns to the motif of the enclosure fence to illustrate the social factors enacted by issues of land access. Indeed it is a motif that more recently Ron Berry also used in his portrayal of the modern Rhondda landscape to be considered in a later chapter.

Thomas recalls the formation of marching bands and the rivalries between the neighbouring villages, and satirises the fears of those who believed that the carnivals brought a 'scorch stain of depravity' to south Wales ('Gazooka', 68). He outlines how this brief absence of industry prompted a carnivalesque atmosphere as people sought distraction from their fears. But in addition to the escapist retreat of the jollity of the various bands, there is a poignancy to the story. At its conclusion, the defeated Meadow Prospect Matadors retreat to the mountain path to walk home, the 'macadamed roads [...] too hard after the disappointments of the day'('Gazooka',127). The defeat that the Matadors feel anticipates the unsatisfactory ending of the south Wales miners' strike in

the November of 1926, and this intensifies the experience of retreat. In the mountainside idyll, the crowd are 'touched by the moon and the magic of longing' and sense 'friendliness and forgiveness in the loved and loving earth' as they briefly participate in the contemporary rural alternative ('Gazooka', 128). Throughout the story, but particularly in the closing scene, Thomas succeeds in including all three social tropes of the pastoral, defined by Gifford as follows:

> The pastoral can be a mode of political critique of present society, or it can be a dramatic form of unresolved dialogue about the tensions in that society, or it can be a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension [...] (Gifford, 11)

The context and setting of 'Gazooka' frame the short story as a political critique of both the circumstances of the 1926 strike and (by the 1950s) the continuing unrest in the nationalised industries. This persistent cycle also therefore illustrates the 'unresolved dialogue' of industrial social and economic tensions. The 'aesthetic landscape' of the mountain top is seemingly a place that evades conflict, an aspect emphasised by the sentimental moonlit mountain top rendition of 'All through the Night', complete with a chorus of children. But as the penultimate sentence of 'Gazooka' reveals, the walk home to Meadow Prospect has allowed the opportunity to think 'about the night, conflict, beauty, the intricate labour of being and the dark little dish of thinking self in which they were all compounded' ('Gazooka', 128). It is evident that the aestheticised mountain top, representative of another time and way of life, has created a space where the individuals are able to retreat into their selves and consider how the social conflict has become an internalised one.

Thomas also explores contemporary pastoral possibilities in his earlier novels *All Things Betray Thee* and *Sorrow For Thy Sons*. In *Sorrow For Thy Sons,* the dichotomy between industry and the pastoral alternatives of life on the hillsides above is encapsulated in the family of Tom Forbes, who live in a small cottage – near a slag

waste tip – on the slope above the village. Tom Forbes has moved to the valley from Somerset and his instincts remain firmly rural as they find expression through his tending of his hillside garden.[154] The cottage forms Forbes's retreat and refuge, as it is noted that he considers 'the eight hours he spent daily pushing trams of rubble and emptying them as a mechanical gesture that had no meaning. It was the hours he spent gardening or teaching his children that he regarded as his chief link with living' (*SFTS*, 43). Indeed, the cottage is a development of the concept of the machine in the garden, as Forbes uses his work in the machine of industry to sustain his garden retreat. The cottage allows him to experience more space than those in valley below in their 'beetle traps' (*SFTS*, 23), his location being 'as near an approach to solitude as you could get in the valley if you didn't have the money to buy a farm' (*SFTS*, 42). However, his retreat is threatened. His children laugh at his accounts of the 'paradisal peace and placidity of the countryside he had left as a boy, of the beauty and security of living simply by the crops one raised from the earth' (*SFTS*, 43). It is the possibilities offered by the valley beneath them, rather than the hills above, that holds their attention:

> They kept their eyes fixed on the streets below, where their schoolmates lived and played, where civilisation, in the form of a standardised squalor that tasted sour at first but sweet when you had a bellyful, made life safer and easier. (*SFTS*, 43)

The connection between the Forbes children and the 'pits, stacks and streets of the mining valley' is made manifest in the novel by the path that links the cottage to the village below (*SFTS*, 43). Built at the demand of an undertaker, the pathway was meant to ease the passage of the coffin of Forbes's first child to the cemetery. Since then the path had 'been broadened and stamped smooth and hard by thousands of evening walkers' keen to experience their own brief retreat on the hillside (*SFTS*, 43). In

[154] As well as being an alternative to the industrial valley below, the Forbes's cottage is also in sharp contrast to the coal tip beside it; I will consider the significance of the images of the coal tips later in the study

growing up Forbes's children make a similar journey and reject the cottage retreat: 'Once gone, they had never returned. It was the completeness of their treachery that made Tom ache. [...] They had gone, as absolutely as that first child, for whom the path had been built, had gone' (*SFTS*, 43). As such, Forbes's retreat represents the shift in twentieth-century industrial society, and the experience of the second generation immigrants, who choose the industrial present they know instead of the pastoral retreat. Thomas developed this character into the caricature-like figure of Davy Briers in *All Things Betray Thee.* The 'friendly but vacant' Davy is afraid of the foundry;[155] the fearful Davy instead works on the hillsides hauling timber to fuel the furnaces, tending his idyllic garden, and basket-weaving (*ATBT*, 25). His mother explains to John Simon how her son becomes 'distracted and sad after an hour or so in the dirt and heat and home he comes. Mr Radcliffe, that is the manager for Mr Penbury, he told Davy to stay away. Now he does' (*ATBT*, 65). Through the motif of the traditional cottages on the fringes of centres of industry Thomas is directly referencing the (perceived) rural idyll of the Glamorganshire *bro*, which provides a sharp contrast to the environment of *y blaenau.* Boyns and Baber note a study of eighteenth-century Vale of Glamorgan housing, that commented how 'comfortable cottages were very general, constructed with stone, well laid in mortar, thatched with wheaten straw and provided with gardens';[156] they concede that such accounts 'exaggerate the delights of rural housing', but nevertheless, the perceived charm of the idyll of *y fro* remains influential, as is

[155] Thomas does not describe the frenetic activity of the ironworks, but George Borrow outlines his experience of a visit the mid-nineteenth-century Cyfarthfa works in *Wild Wales*, and the account provides an insight into the foundry environment: 'What shall I say about the Cyfarthfa Fawr? I had best say but very little. I saw a long ductile piece of red-hot iron being operated upon. I saw millions of sparks flying about. I saw an immense wheel impelled round with frightful velocity by a steam-engine of two hundred and forty horse power. I hear all kinds of dreadful sounds. The general effect was stunning.' G. Borrow, *Wild Wales* (London: John Murray, 1901 [1854]), p.689

[156] W. Davies, *General View of the Agriculture and Domestic Economy of South Wales* (London: 1965), p.139, cited in T. Boyns and C. Baber, 'The Supply of Labour 1750-1914', *Glamorgan County History V*, pp 277-310, p.333

evident in Thomas's depiction.[157]

But Thomas's most sustained analysis of the concept of retreat features in *The World Cannot Hear You.* Described by Stephen Knight as a 'forgotten masterpiece of Welsh writing in English', the novel retreats from the contemporary industrial debates and tensions, as there is little heavy industry evident in the narrative.[158] The novel is not however a retreat from the political debates of the time as Thomas adjusts his gaze to engage with mid-twentieth-century 'back to the land' policies. Within the novel there are two instances of retreat, the homestead small holding established by the Hemlock brothers, and the Social Settlement, known by the inhabitants of Meadow Prospect as the Cottage of Content, an educational settlement for the unemployed.[159] The Cottage of Content is the project of Sylvester Strang, Meadow Prospect's incumbent aristocrat, who is 'serving [his] apprenticeship in the good life' as he seeks to 'refertilise [his] days by being passionately concerned with and involved in the welfare of others' (*WCHY*, 26). Bodvan Hemlock, who has 'grown sick of industrialism, its vicious

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[157] Thomas also explores a more hostile image of rurality in both *Sorrow For Thy Sons* and *A Frost on My Frolic*

[158]Stephen Knight argues that some of the characters 'to their surprise, [are] employed in a new strip mill – a rare sign of an improving economy' (*A Hundred Years of Fiction,* 107). This is however a misreading of the novel. The characters apply for jobs at the steel strip mill, but they are 'placed high on their list of applicants' and not actually employed (*WCHY*, 195); indeed, the reader is soon informed that the group continue to be employed at Picton Gethin's crisp factory

[159] Throughout the novel the small-holding is described as the 'Hemlock homestead', or the 'homestead on the hill'. The use of the word 'homestead' is typically associated with North-American cultures and traditions rather than a Welsh peasant tradition. Combined with Bodvan Hemlock's frontiersman clothing - the rabbit pelt hat which lends a 'fierce and independent air' (*WCHY*, 63) – and the description of a large porch, the word acts to suggest the 1862 Homestead Act which transformed land ownership in the United States of America. The act saw the distribution of public land to any adult head of a family, in return for agreeing to live on and improve the land for a minimum of five years, and paying a small fee, each applicant received one hundred and sixty acres of land. One motivation of the act was to 'draw off poor urban workers from eastern cities', but this was not achieved in any significant numbers. (Scott C. Zeman and Peter Iverseon, *Chronology of the American West: from 23,000 B.C.E. Through the Twentieth Century* (Santa Barbara; ABC-CLIO 2002), p. 144). The Hemlock brothers' retreat can be seen to emulate this model, as the former industrial labourers move to work the land, and the social development aspect of the project differentiates the homestead from Thomas's earlier criticism of the enclosures acts. The success of the legislation was also marred by seizures of homesteads by land speculators, and Thomas can be seen to explore this through the introduction of the character Picton Gethin, and the influence he exerts over the Hemlock brothers is an aspect I shall examine shortly. The parallels between the Hemlock project and the perceived promise of America are emphasised by the emigration of young men from Meadow Prospect to California, 'to take their place in the fruit picking industry, which, they had heard, was expanding almost as fast as our activities were being whittled' (*WCHY,* 62)

brittleness and meanness', wishes to 'escape to a healthier, more bucolic medium' and establish a small farm (*WCHY*, 35). He dreams of a settlement located outside Meadow Prospect, as

> [W]hen I set up in my new life, carving out a fine beautiful future, I want to have this place in view, to curse at it, spit on it, to hate it with real pomp for having brought me so low [...] (*WCHY*, 27)

He is keen to define his new pastoral project against its opposite, in a manner similar to Tom Forbes's cottage in *Sorrow For Thy Sons*. It is Strang's philanthropy that facilitates the brothers' farming enterprise, when he gifts a rough patch of land to Bodvan and Omri Hemlock; however, there is a gap between Bodvan's expectations of the gifted land and the actuality of the isolated patch of stony soil and near-ruined dwelling. Strang attempts to defend his selection of that specific area of his estate, explaining that 'the further up, the lonelier it will be and I saw clearly the moment I set eyes on you that you were a spirit who would thrive on solitude' and claims that 'the stones [....] are the seal of virginity, and virginity is richness' (*WCHY*, 33). The rugged terrain subverts the typical rural idyll, and Strang's defence of the poor land further subverts logic. The homestead project echoes the land (re)settlement schemes of 1930s Britain, when up to 5000 people were relocated from declining centres of industry in Cumberland, Northumberland, Yorkshire and South Wales to rural areas, where 'through contact with the land and "rural modes of living", miners and their families were expected to transform into "farmers"'.[160] The programme was initially supported by the Communist Party as a scheme that engaged with the ideology of collectivism and cooperation. As the economic difficulties of the 1930s continued, however, the socialist approach to national economic reconstruction focused on new investment in industry; the land settlement schemes were deemed palliative programmes and the

[160] Denis Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Unruly topographies: unemployment, citizenship and land settlement in inter-war Wales', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29. 1, pp 46-74, p.46

Welsh Land Settlement Association, established in 1936, was overseen by the Special Areas Commission.[161]

Roger Sales argues that pastoralism is composed of five aspects: refuge, reflection, rescue, requiem and reconstruction. Although a relatively minor study, Sales's text offers a useful framework to approach the pastoral, and it is within these terms that I wish to consider the retreats of *The World Cannot Hear You* .[162] Refuge, Sales notes, 'represents the desire for escape, pure and simple', and the Hemlock homestead offers the opportunity to fulfil this. The efforts of the brothers to transform the 'stoniest handful of acres' in Meadow Prospect into a (temporarily at least) successful small-holding is described as not only a refuge from industry and de-industrialisation, but also as a comic rebirth. Thomas describes Bodvan writing 'a list in pencil on the back of his birth certificate of the things he would need to be born again' on his return from his first visit to what is to become the Hemlock homestead (*WCHY*, 31). The descriptions of the brothers' work allow Thomas to demonstrate his reverence for physical labour, and again, he emphasises its transformative agency:

> They broke many a ploughshare on the stones of their patch and nearly broke their backs dragging them to the pile at the bottom of their enclosure. But by Spring the thin top soil, thinner than they had ever imagined the earth's flesh could be, was ready for sowing and they were within sight of at least a programme of toil which would give them bare subsistence.
>
> They did better than expected. The summer that followed their coming to the mountain top was lush, as was the crop of vegetables [...]. Bodvan and Omri began to smile for the first time in months [...] (*WCHY*, 47-48)

The efforts of the brothers are rewarded with contentment. The homestead embodies the 'pastoral calm' that Thomas reflects on in *A Welsh Eye* (145), and also the 'consciousness of aspirations and possibilities' that Raymond Williams reads in the slopes and skylines of the industrial valleys (Williams, 'Industrial', 105). In

[161] Denis Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Unruly', p.53-55

[162] Roger Sales, *English Literature in History, 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson Educational, 1983), p.15

emphasising how the brothers' homestead evolves into a model of a farming co-operative, selling produce at 'cut rates' to those their friends encourage to stroll up the hill, since 'the need for greens' unites the classes (*WCHY*, 49), Thomas can be seen to rescue the syndicalist values of cooperation.

However, this idyllic vision is soon disturbed by the return of the businessman Picton Gethin. As the brothers' patch of soil yields more produce than expected, Gethin sees an entrepreneurial opportunity which he veils in terms of his apparent social concern:

> The produce will have to find a wider market. The selling of the stuff here in Meadow Prospect and in the valleys around is the only way you can guarantee the setting up of a whole line of independent producers along the hillsides, rescued from the rusting ruins of an old industrialism.[...] And from the tortured soil of our mountains, fruit and meat for the bodies of our young whose health and happiness have been chewed to pieces by the dogs of neglect and privation. (*WCHY*, 65)

This vision of regeneration through cultivation is reminiscent of the mid-twentieth-century 'back to the land' Plaid Cymru policies that sought to reintroduce the indigenous cultural heritage of Wales to the disenfranchised and dispossessed populations of the anglicized industrial areas.[163] Saunders Lewis, the leader of the party in the thirties, also argued that agriculture should be the nation's primary industry and 'the foundation of its civilisation', and more controversially, that the south Wales coalfield should be de-industrialised 'for the moral health of Wales, and for the moral and physical benefit of its people'.[164] Lewis argued for the resettlement of former

[163] Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Remaking Wales: nation-building and the geographical imagination, 1925-50' *Political Geography* Vol. 14, 3. pp.219-239, p.224

[164] Saunders Lewis, 'Deg Pwynt Polisi', *Canlyn Arthur* (Llandysul; Gomer Press, 1985 (1938)) pp 15-17, p.16 (Pyrs Gruffudd's translation). Perhaps surprisingly, the Rhondda author Rhys Davies also expressed a similar opinion in *My Wales*, suggesting that Wales can return to its 'former pastoral unison': 'The only cheerful thought one can offer [the unemployed miners] is that they still have Wales. Surely they can forget their woes in applying their undying energy no that most of the great coal-owners and iron-masters have departed, giving their land once again to its former cleanliness. It is doubtful whether salmon ever again will consent to leap the cascade of Berw Rhondda, but surely those huge offensive heaps of colliery rubbish called the tips can be transformed in to orchards, surely time can be used in sweeping up those derelict works rusting in the Welsh rain which, as ever falls to fructify green

industrial workers in farming colonies – of which the Hemlock homestead can be seen as an emblem – and Plaid Cymru's agricultural spokesman argued that the policy was 'essential if the Welsh nation is to live. The Welsh nation is a nation with its roots in the country and the soil'.[165] Indeed, in Picton Gethin's ambition, Sylvester Strang sees an opportunity for the 'possible reconstruction of our whole way of life, the restoration of a balance for lack of which we as a community may be perishing' (*WCHY*, 66). The words 'reconstruction' and 'restoration' are of particular significance. It seems to reflect the idealistic Plaid Cymru policy of a return to the practices and values of a bygone time, but also the very idea of the pastoral.

Sales notes in his 'five Rs' analysis of the mode that the pastoral 'offers a political interpretation of both past and present' through its reconstruction of the past, and it is this aspect that is at the fore of Thomas's engagement with the pastoral.[166] Rather than echoing the sentiments of the Plaid Cymru 'back to the land' policies – which also called for Wales to disengage from the capitalist economy – Thomas is countering such arguments. Although Picton's ambitions for a 'new co-operative vegetable marketing project' initially seem to be egalitarian and socially-minded, it is the sentiments of the Hemlock brothers that the reader is encouraged to support. Bodvan wants to maintain his agency over his farm and produce and rather than sell the surplus produce as Picton intends, he plans to 'throw it over the wall [so that] the hungry can come and carry it away' (*WCHY*, 66). This spirit of the cooperative can be seen as Thomas reflecting the development of the Society of Friends' cooperative farms in south Wales.[167] Despite Picton's announcement of the 'end of all want and vitamin-deficiencies within a year' his priority is profit, and once he begins to work with the brothers, the Hemlocks find

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produce as well as to enter the decrepit shoes of the unemployed. After the ugly one hundred and fifty year's interruption from the outside world, perhaps Wales can now return to its former pastoral unison – if it can afford to' *My Wales*, (Jarrolds, London, 1937), p.81

[165] D.H. Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party 1925-1945* (Cardiff, UWP, 1983), p.92, cited in Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Remaking Wales: nation-building and the geographical imagination, 1925-50', p.224

[166] Roger Sales, p.17

[167] Denis Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Unruly', p.50

themselves exploited (*WCHY*, 96):

> Picton set about stripping and cheating the two brothers with a crookedness that had the straightforward candour of honesty itself. [...] He consistently charged prices that were slightly higher than those agreed and his returns to the brothers were ridiculously lower than those promised. He never allowed credit yet softened the too-soft hearts of the brothers by describing the great crowds of hungry children who surrounded his cart and out of pity for whom he gave unlimited credit to their parents, erecting a structure of debt unique even in Meadow Prospect. (*WCHY*, 96)

This episode can be seen as a further response to nationalist thinking of the mid-twentieth century. The 'back to the land' movement also allowed Plaid Cymru to call for the self-sufficiency of Wales, and as a consequence, economic independence. The Hemlocks try to move outside of capitalism, but are ultimately drawn into the market to sustain their homestead, thus demonstrating how it is impossible to disengage from capitalism. Furthermore, as the Hemlocks rely on Picton to sell their produce, they have no agency in the free market. The Hemlock homestead sees Thomas offer an allegory for possible Welsh economic independence.

The eventual – and perhaps inevitable – failure of the homestead allows the author to suggest that despite the nationalist back to the land policies, the traditional peasant agriculture of Wales cannot be recreated and recaptured in a simulacrum as the economy and society of the nation has developed and progressed so that it now forms a small part of a far wider network. Thomas disputes the idea that 'to leave the current of industrial capitalism was to leave English influence and to attain the conditions of nationhood', as he perceives industrial capitalism not as a mechanism of the coloniser, but rather a global system.[168] In addition, to leave industrial capitalism would be to dismantle, or erase, the industrial communities of Wales, and their potential. In short, the episode demonstrates that it is impossible to escape the forces of capitalism, and as such, Thomas argues for the empowerment of the proletarian participants of capitalism

[168] Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Renaking', p.224

and acceptance of the contemporary (industrial) Welsh situation, rather than a bucolic economic retreat.

In his anti-pastoral and complex pastoral representations, Thomas is able to expose what Terry Gifford describes as the 'cultural uses' of pastoral images (Gifford, 128). Of particular interest is the construct of the *gwerin*, or folk. Prys Morgan notes that by the turn of the twentieth century, the *gwerin* 'had become a remarkable phenomenon: [...] a classless society, progressing rapidly yet retaining a closeness to the soil, educated, religious, cultured, keen to own its own land and property, hard-working and methodical, law-abiding, temperate in drink, respecting the Sabbath, and an example to the world'.[169] Thomas uses the Hemlock brothers, Bodvan in particular, to subvert his peasant ideal. The failure of the homestead and Bodvan's death soon after he returns to north Wales to work as a farm labourer demonstrate the limits of the concept of the *gwerin*. Thomas highlights how the concept relies on exclusivity. The working classes of the industrial areas are excluded from this vision of indigenous Welsh culture, which occludes the modern Welsh experience and identity of the majority of the population. It is not the *gwerin* themselves that Thomas is writing against, rather the manipulation of their image to forward an ideology.

Thomas interrogates the concept of the *gwerin* further through the character of Sylvester Strang. Through his work at Grosbras Hall – the 'Cottage of Content' – Strang facilitates the *gwerin* ideal, promoting intellectualism, literature, and traditional craft practices, as well as the Hemlocks' return to the land. Indeed, Strang's practices can also be seen to echo the medieval Welsh laws that awarded the three principal chairs of the Court to the *bardd* (poet), the scholar and the blacksmith, representative of

[169] Prys Morgan, 'The Gwerin of Wales – Myth and Reality', in Ian Hulme and W.R.T. Pryce (eds), *The Welsh and their Country* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), pp.134-152, p.139

the craftsman.[170] The establishment offers a refuge for those seeking to escape industry. [171] The rather tongue-in-cheek narrator, Peredur, notes how at the hall the characters see

> clumps of men seated at small primeval looms in a pre-Luddite coma weaving scarves of gay tartan which already seemed to us to be yards beyond the length. [...] these boys seemed to have gone well beyond the stage of thought and did not miss the throb of wonder and protest from which they were in flight. This tartan was their barricade between themselves and the modern world. (*WCHY*, 32)

This image is one of regression, as well as retreat, as the weavers undo the Industrial Revolution in their 'pre-Luddite coma'. Thomas's scene is comic and ridiculous, and the parody is drawn from his own experience of having worked in such a settlement. As Michael Parnell notes in his biography, Thomas taught temporary classes including courses of lectures at the Maes-yr-Haf centre, a Quaker educational settlement in Trealaw, Tonypandy. Thomas reflected in his autobiography that the work undertaken by the centre, and similar institutions, was 'some of the most confusing bits of social work ever recorded'.[172] Established in 1927 by Emma Noble, Maes-yr-Haf was the first such settlement to be established in the Rhondda.[173] In their study of the social and physical effects of the inter-war economic depression in the South Wales coalfield, David Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd re-examine the work of the charitable organizations that sought to support the unemployed. Quoting from the annual report of the Maes-yr-Haf project, they observe the centre was established due to Noble's awareness of social problems, and note that she believed that 'unemployment [had become] the normal habitual state, bringing with it a lethargy and a sense of frustration that tended to dry up

[170] Iorweth Peate, *Guide to the collection of Welsh bygones* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1929), p.1
[171] The characters of the Cottage of Content are reminiscent of Thomas's bucolic character, Davy Briers, in *All Things Betray Thee*
[172] Michael Parnell, *Laughter from the Dark: A Life of Gwyn Thomas* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997 [1988]), p.63
[173] David Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd , 'Bodies and Souls: Psycho-geographical collisions in the South Wales coalfield 1926-1939', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 27, 3 (2001), pp. 377–394, p.379

the springs of energy and enterprise' and also that 'long continued idleness, hope-deferred, and unwantedness, rapidly reduced [the unemployed] to a state bordering on mental and physical dereliction'.[174] The activities provided by the 'social experiment' are summarised by Linehan and Gruffudd as follows:

> Mending shoes, weaving baskets, the routines and circulations of physical exercise, music and dance, all of these were framed as replacing the psychological benefit of work and signal the belief these charities had in the transformative capacity of orderly spaces and orderly culture. Framed as civic in nature and in ways which were explicitly gendered, these programmes also often provided opportunities for the expression of Welsh identity. The wives and daughters of unemployed men were encouraged to take up the traditional craft of quilt-making using old Welsh designs: "With the help of dried leaves and sketches of church windows the enthusiasts of Blaina were evolving their own version of the well known 'leaf' and 'church window' patterns which are found on many Welsh quilts [...]". Thus Emma Noble noted this was the kind of work which was part of a "stimulus" that could help give "this black area a general standard of taste" [...].[175]

The Welsh identity (the 'tartan barricade' of Thomas's Cottage of Content) expressed and promoted by the scheme, is one defined by an engagement with traditional, and therefore rural, culture and practices. The women are not merely taught how to quilt, they are encouraged to use traditional Welsh patterns in an effort to engender a 'general standard of taste' in the area, thus discounting the established practices of the industrial community. As Linehan and Gruffudd observe, the ideas disseminated by the settlements 'about the relationships between environment and body, and moral and psychological improvement, were conjoined with notions of a rurally defined Welsh nationhood'(Linehan and Gruffudd, 'Bodies and Souls', 389).[176] In order to be accepted into this idealised and aestheticised version of Welsh identity, the participants

[174] *Annual Report of Maes-yr-Haf, 1938–1939* , p.4, and W. Hazelton, Maes yr Haf, *Twenty Five Years of Work and Friendship in the Rhondda Valley* (Trealaw 1952), p.6. Cited by David Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd , 'Bodies and Souls', p.384

[175] by David Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd , 'Bodies and Souls', p.388

[176] The authors reflect on the construction of a paddling pool in the shape of a harp at a summer camp for unemployed families at Barry, as swimming was believed to create ' a better mental atmosphere, as well as affording physical improvement and better health'. M. Stewart, letter to *The Times*, 14 December, 1934, cited by David Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Bodies and Souls', p.389

had to turn away from their industrial experience and the culture developing in their own communities and return, literally, to the land.

Thomas emphasises this sense of the recovery of the past through exploring the historical context of Cottage of Content. Grosbras Hall was later echoed by the name of Grospoint Castle, the ostentatious property central to Thomas's 1958 short story, 'The Little Baron'. In the short story, the Norman 'fortress' Grospoint is gifted to the local authority when it becomes too costly for the family to maintain it. 'The authority', the narrator notes 'with a puzzled look on its face, took it and said it might become a folk museum when the money situation eased'.[177] Both Grosbras Hall and Grospoint Castle share parallels with St. Fagans Castle, donated to the National Museum of Wales in 1946 and now site of the National History Museum, formerly the Museum of Welsh Life. The fulfilment of Iorwerth Peate's vision of a museum of Welsh folk life, the museum seems to be alluded to directly in 'The Little Baron', but more obliquely suggested in its predecessor, *The World Cannot Hear You,* through the craftwork of those seeking refuge from the heavy industries. The museum of the *gwerin* at St. Fagans that was inspired by the National Museum's Welsh Bygones Collection, the dedicated gallery for which was opened in 1926. The gallery exhibited domestic, craft and early industrial artefacts in its displays, objects that had not been on public display since 1913.[178] In the guide accompanying the opening of the Bygone's Gallery, Iorwerth Peate reflects on the *gwerin*: 'to understand Welsh life as it used to be generally and as it still remains in the least accessible of the rural areas, one must

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[177] Gwyn Thomas, 'The Little Baron', *Meadow Prospect Revisited,* ed Michael Parnell (Bridgend: Seren, 1992) , pp.165-169, p.16. Originally published in *Vogue*, 1958. In translation to English, Grospoint also has connotations of strength, power and wealth

[178] The catalogue records 1,294 objects, including a coracle, a cheesepress, pitchers, farm implements, handlooms, miner's lamps, Welsh costumes and lovespoons. In the Preface to the *Guide to the collection of Welsh bygones,* Cyril Fox, the director of the National Museum of Wales, noted: 'Many of the objects are "Museum pieces"; others are common, in a sense trivial, and without intrinsic value. The universality of these latter, however, provides full compensation for what they otherwise lack; the commoner the object, the more faithfully it reflects the everyday life which the collection seeks to represent'(p.viii). See *Guide to the collection of Welsh bygones* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1929) for further details

picture small communities of folk, inheritors of a complex tradition, and a developed culture'.[179] But the most striking image from the description of the activity at the Cottage of content is that of the tartan barricade the weavers appear to be making, which once more suggests a defensive retreat from industrial progress.

In his reading of the novel, Stephen Knight describes Sylvester Strang's projects as a 'well-meaning manipulation', and it is through this lens that I now wish to consider Thomas's interrogation of *gwerin* culture.[180] The narrator of the novel interprets Strang's actions as 'part of a new cycle of vital affirmation which is to take up where the Normans left off', suggesting that this apparent post-colonial return to Welsh crafts and culture is actually a continuation of the colonisation efforts (*WCHY*, 43). Grosbras, a seat of Norman authority, is described by Strang as the 'last vestige of the root of a tree whose branches had overshadowed a large part of this land' (*WCHY*, 23), a description that suggests an incongruent natural element to the Norman Conquest. The residents of Meadow Prospect, however, are keen to expose the savagery of the Strang rule:

> The Strangs led the campaign that finally gutted the resistance between these two hills [...] They were great butchers, and if you have ever been struck by the cool way in which the voters of Meadow Prospect take the mixed horror of this epoch that is because the Strangs got them used to viewing this universe as harsh and abnormal long ago. (*WCHY*, 21)

The name Grosbras itself also reflects the power and violent authority of the Strang dynasty; translated from the French, the name means strong-armed man, or muscle. The 'Cottage of Content' is presented in a parodic, ambiguous and conflicted manner, as Thomas seemingly attempts to conflate the Norman colonization of Wales and aspects of the Welsh Nationalist movement, incongruously drawing together the colonial, the

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[179] Iorwerth Peate, p.4
[180] Stephen Knight, p.107

postcolonial, and the pre-colonial.[181] Strang's philanthropy recalls nativist projects that 'look back to the pre-colonial past in order to salvage what is conceived to be an essential or pure culture, which existed prior to the moment of colonization'. [182] As Kirsti Bohata notes, such constructions of cultural authenticity 'are full of dangers and must be subject to continual contestation'.[183] It is the apparent 'cultural authenticity' of the *gwerin* that Thomas challenges, having subtly exposed the political aspects and uses of the concept. Thomas proposesthe image of the Welsh *gwerin* as one compliant with the ideologies of the colonisers.

This deconstructionist investigation of the agency of pastoral motifs allows Thomas to destabilise conventional perceptions, a technique that he also deploys in his consideration of pastoral resolution. Inherent to the function of the retreat device is the instance of return; as Gifford notes, 'whatever the locations and modes of pastoral retreat may be, there must in some sense be a return from that location to a context in which the results of the journey are to be understood'.[184] Thomas uses this act of movement to again explode certainties, replacing them with ambiguity, ambivalence and liminality, to reveal the problematic nature of resolution in modern society. It is this aspect of Thomas's fiction that I shall now consider.

Resolution

> Within the lifetime of a single generation, a rustic and in large part wild landscape was transformed into the site of the world's most productive industrial machine. It would be difficult to imagine more profound

[181]Knight's analysis of the novel suggests evidence of this conflation in another character in the novel, the exploitative entrepreneur Picton Gethin, whose Welsh surname, Knight notes, 'is implicitly qualified by his sharing a first name with an imperial general from Pembrokeshire' (Knight, 107); as well as destroying the Hemlock brothers' homestead, Gethin also threatens Strang's colonial philanthropy, as he seeks to convert Strang's planned residential college, Yearn, into a holiday camp, 'Picton's Paradise Gardens' (*WCHY*, 181), which adds to Thomas's parody of the schemes for the unemployed in which he was himself involved in the late 1930s'(Knight, 107)

[182] Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.15

[183] Ibid

[184]Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.81

> contradictions of values of meaning than those made manifest by this circumstance.[185]

Leo Marx's description of the industrialisation of America also resonates with the experience of the south Wales coalfield and it is Gwyn Thomas's exploration of the 'profound contradictions', and the impossibility of resolution, that I shall next consider. Traditionally, the shepherd figures of the pastoral mode would facilitate a resolution of sorts in a text but in his complex pastoral work Thomas explodes the fantasy of simple resolution.

It is in *All Things Betray Thee* that Thomas most appreciably unsettles the concept. In *The Machine in the Garden* Marx observes how at the conclusion of the modern American fables (and similarly in the earlier texts *Walden*, *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*) 'the American hero is either dead or totally alienated from society, alone and powerless, like the evicted shepherd of Virgil's eclogue'.[186] Thomas echoes this mode as at the conclusion of his Welsh industrial fable, the hero figure John Simon Adams is dead, the violent end to the industrial dispute has failed to provide an adequate resolution for those returning to work in the foundry and the once alienated Alan Leigh resignedly assumes the responsibility of concluding, if not resolving, the narrative. In a passage that Victor Golightly observed contained 'a richness of meaning as generous as the word "promise" suggests', the harpist readies himself to leave Moonlea:[187]

> Night had fallen completely when I began the climb of Arthur's Crown, walking up the same path as I had descended on my way into Moonlea. On its summit I looked down. [...] I turned, walking away from Moonlea, yet eternally towards Moonlea, full of a strong, ripening, unanswerable bitterness, feeling in my fingers the promise of a new enormous music. (*ATBT*, 318)

[185] Leo Marx, *Machine*, p.343
[186] Leo Marx, *Machine*, p.364
[187] Victor Golightly, 'Gwyn Thomas's American "Oscar"', *New Welsh Review*, 22, pp26-31, p. 30

The conclusion sees the narrator located in a space between. As he walks 'away from [...], yet eternally towards Moonlea', Alan Leigh is representative of the cultural and social dynamic between the rural and the industrial, retreat and reality.

Alan Leigh's sense of 'a strong, ripening, unanswerable bitterness' and the feeling in his fingers of 'the promise of a new enormous music' link to an often overlooked scene in the novel. During an earlier discussion between the harpist and the revolutionary leader Jeremy Longridge, Longridge explains the connotations of music and harping to an unconvinced Alan Leigh:

> We all have a set of special pities which we work off in different ways. Harping is the simple way of doing it. But look for and find the strings of significance that to-day hang loosely between men and which must be drawn tighter before any real sweetness of melody will be heard in living, that's the job, harpist. (*ATBT*, 206)

It is these 'strings of significance' that the harpist senses as he leaves Moonlea at the end of the novel; he realises the public aspect of his role. The character's function is transformed, transcending the role of the peasant troubadour to represent the emergent sense of social solidarity in the industrial centres. This transformation of the harpist is emphasised by Katherine Briers on the harpist's return from Tudbury prison; she tells the bewildered Alan Leigh that 'the old roaming harpist you used to be is dead [...] you've been remade all over' (*ATBT*, 272 – 273). Katherine's comment recalls the harpist's confrontation with the drover, emphasising how Alan Leigh's journey to, and time spent in, Moonlea has been a transition from innocence to experience. Once more, Thomas translates the complex into the simple as the interactions and responsibilities of society are distilled into the metaphor of harp playing.

The concluding scene of *All Things Betray Thee* also invites a consideration of the concept of return. Gifford notes that '[w]hatever the locations and modes of pastoral retreat may be, there must in some sense be a return from that location to a context in

which the results of the journey are to be understood'.[188] Alan Leigh is poised to make this return, his journey away from Moonlea providing the opportunity to reflect on, and to understand, the influence of what he has witnessed the town. However, the mode of historical fiction also creates an instance of return for the reader. The conclusion of the 1830s narrative returns the reader to their present, complete with the awareness of the 'revolutionary struggles still to come' in the intervening century.[189] The reader's knowledge thus highlights Alan Leigh's Augustan tone, a tone that Leo Marx noted is characteristic of Virgilian pastoral since it is 'a way of saying that the episode belongs to a timeless, recurrent pattern of human affairs'(Marx, *Machine,* 31). Although *All Things Betray Thee* does not see the efforts of the protestors rewarded satisfactorily, and there is no evidence of reconciliation, the tone of Thomas's conclusion does echo this traditional form. Alan Leigh retains an Augustan tone, and since the work looks back to the events of 1831 from the 1940s, the intervening years prove that this cycle was, and will be, repeated; it is a 'timeless, recurrent pattern' of industrial unrest. But the utterance of Alan Leigh's closing words also signals that the events of nineteenth-century Moonlea symbolise a new order. Although the rural figure walks away from the town, he is also walking 'eternally towards Moonlea' because of the changes in society and the economy as rural Wales is increasingly defined by its interaction with the industrial centres. Furthermore, this final conflation of the harpist – the symbol of Welsh rural tradition – with the experience of the industrial re-aligns the importance of the 'working-class metropolis[es]' in the representation and self-perception of the modern Welsh nation.[190]

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[188] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.81
[189] Vic Golightly, p.30
[190] The historian Kenneth Morgan noted that 'the outstanding cradle 'of the Welsh national revival was 'not in the agrarian hinterland, so beloved of many apostles of "peasant culture", but amidst the blast furnaces and winding-shafts of the working-class metropolis of Merthyr Tydfil', an observation that Thomas's work evidently echoed. Kenneth Morgan, 'Welsh Nationalism: the historical background', *Journal of Contemporary History* , 6, pp.153-172, p.156 cited in Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Remaking Wales:

Although Thomas's complex pastoral concludes with ambivalence and irresolution there are intimations evident in his work that posit the possibility of a future resolution. Golightly's reading observes that in the harpist's 'strong, ripening, unanswerable bitterness' there 'stirs a new power of endurance, nourished by the possibility of a future triumph, however distant'.[191] This sense of anticipation is also evident in the 1953 novel *A Frost on My Frolic*. As the schoolchildren walk through Mynydd Coch at sunrise, they envisage the future of the village:

> New dawns will come, new systems of ownership will come, new and more crooked destinies for us who are young may come, new patterns of ambition, and anguish for nations in fresh and passionate resurgence, but all will crystallise and find peace around the tranquil, friendly indifference of these hills. (*AFF*, 133-4)

It is the landscape that transforms the ambiguity of society into the concrete clarity of peace. As I have already discussed, the children believe that they encounter this pastoral peace on their arrival in the nearby village of Trelom to assist in the harvest they believe the familiar 'tensions and menaces implicit in so varicose and maimed a place as Mynydd Coch' to be absent (*AFF*, 178). Indeed, their expectations are illuminated bywhat the cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan identifies as 'Worlds of fantasy'.[192] Tuan explains: 'When we wonder what lies on the other side of the mountain-range or ocean, our imagination constructs mythical geographies that may bear little or no relation to reality'.[193] The erroneous imagining of Trelom as an idyll is exposed by the end of the novel, as Thomas once more unsettles and destabilises the concepts of retreat, reconciliation and resolution:

> We walk out as silence falls on the hall. The moon is high now. Peace has come back to the valley, but it is the familiar, imperfect, precarious peace which we have always known. The glorious tranquillity we thought we glimpsed is

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nation-building and the geographical imagination, 1925-50', *Political Geography* Vol. 14, 3, pp.219-239, p.221

[191] Vic Golightly, p.30, p.31

[192] Y-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 1977), p.86

[193] Ibid

> revealed now as having been an imitation and a longing only. We glance up to the hillside on which rests the farm [...]. Across the great stretch of blue quiet air which joins mountain to mountain are drawn the streaks of patient folly. (*AFF*, 284-85)

The time spent in Trelom (Welsh for poor town) has punctured the resolute sense of 'glorious tranquillity' the children thought they had glimpsed. In their short time in the supposed rural idyll, the Trelom community has been subject to 'flood, fire, rape, [and] petards' (*AFF*,281). As such, the idyll is exposed as a 'longing', a sentiment inscribed on the pastoral environment. Read in conjunction with the earlier Mynydd Coch scene, the conclusion of the novel is relieved of its initial sense of despondency. The clarity of 'blue quiet air which joins mountain to mountain' recalls the crystallisation image of the earlier scene, and consequently returns resolution to the actual landscape and environment of south Wales, rather than its aestheticised realisation. It is also implied that the possibility and capacity for resolution is returned to the people and the communities, as the 'blue quiet air' links the mountains, thereby unifying those who live below them. Negotiating the space between the industrial upland valleys and the rural lowlands allows the characters to reflect on the dynamic between the two environments.

The act of return also exposes the inherent paradox of the pastoral device. As I have already suggested, in its '*escape* from the complexities of the city, the court, the present, "our manners"', and in this case the industrial society and environment, the pastoral – in its complex mode – can act as a means of 'exploring' what it seemingly retreats from .[194] Leo Marx's remarks on this contradiction and notes how it functions to disclose

> that our inherited symbols of order and beauty have been divested of meaning. It compels us to recognize that the aspirations once represented by the symbol of an ideal landscape have not, and probably cannot, be embodied in our

[194] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.46

> traditional institutions. It means that an inspiriting vision of a humane community has been reduced to a token of individual survival.[195]

This observation further enlightens the conclusion of 'Gazooka'. Through the incongruous example of industrial unrest facilitating an experience of pastoral calm, Thomas illustrates the deficiency of the traditional 'symbols of order and beauty' in the modern age. The mountain-top experience is unsustainable, coming as it does at the end of a day of carnivalesque activity, facilitated by the brief respite due to the strike. Once more, the text offers no resolution, only philosophical reflection 'about the night, conflict, beauty, the intricate labour of being and the dark little dish of thinking self in which they were all compounded' ('Gazooka', 128) as the striking miners and their families return to Meadow Prospect.

Thomas's overlooked engagement with the 'consciousness of alternative' that the landscape and location of the south Wales coalfield presents to its inhabitants offers new insights into his oeuvre. In approaching his fiction through the lens of the complex pastoral, his engagement with the landscape, its symbolism, and its cultural resonance is revealed. In his subtle exploration of the various uses of the pastoral, and through his strategic employment of the pastoral devices of the shepherd, retreat, return and resolution, Thomas is able to expose the persistence of the concept, and also critique the ways in which it has been used to manipulate natural imagery and to valorise the rural idyll and folk traditions. He thus exposes the myth and the myth-making potential of the pastoral. As demonstrated in my analysis of the device, the figure of the pastoral shepherd had traditionally been used to effect a 'resolution of the conflict between the opposed worlds of nature and art'.[196] But as Leo Marx points out, the resolutions attempted by modern 'pastoral fables' are 'unsatisfactory because the old symbol of reconciliation is obsolete'.[197] However, this is not a disadvantage he argues: 'the

[195] Leo Marx, *Machine*, p.364
[196] Leo Marx, *Machine*, p,22
[197] Leo Marx, *Machine,* p.364

inability of our writers to create a surrogate for the ideal of the middle landscape can hardly be accounted artistic failure. By incorporating in their work the root conflict of our culture, they have clarified our situation'.[198] It is the conflict between the rural and urban, the land and society, and the real and its ideological manipulation through myth that Thomas addresses, and clarifies, in *All Things Betray Thee*, 'Gazooka', *The World Cannot Hear You* and *A Frost on My Frolic.* In rejecting an artificial sense of resolution in his narratives, Thomas ensures that his characters continue to negotiate the physical and dialectical space between the industrial and the pastoral, exposing the slippage between the two spheres.

[198] Ibid

Uncanny Catastrophes:
Landscape, Community and Industrial Disasters

"Absolute destruction – what's the first thing that comes to your mind?"
"A coal face falling up to the bloody clouds." [199]

In this conversation featured in his first novel, *Hunters and Hunted*, Ron Berry concisely and effectively conveys the perceived dangers of the coal industry. The surreal image of a 'coal face falling up' inverts the familiar concept of falling as a downward, and natural, gravitational motion. However, this disruption of normality is achieved simply, as the account of 'absolute destruction' is from the perspective of a miner, who works underground. The effects of the 'business of coal-getting' stretch into the above ground space of the mining communities, suggesting the external, terraneous evidence of the underground workings, the coal waste tips.[200] The periodical *The Welsh Outlook* angrily reflected in 1931 how the scale of the waste tips was encroaching on the vistas of the south Wales coalfield:

> [...] having made a mess of earth, the spoilers are permitted to invade the skies. I refer to the progress made in the narrow valleys to obscure the heavens themselves by raising a rampart of coal-dust [with the help of a grotesque paraphernalia of mechanical appliances], to the tops of the highest slopes.[201]

The word 'rampart' with its connotations of battlements and fortification evokes the waste tips as a structure symbolic of conflict, an idea that the literature of the slag tips interrogates as the tips are explored as a hostile and destructive force. What the brief reflection of Berry's collier character reveals is how the practice of coal mining blurs and unsettles distinctions between the space above and below the ground, as the spaces become interdependent.

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[199] Ron Berry, *Hunters and Hunted* (London: Hutchinson, 1960) p.102
[200] Ron Berry, 'Left Behind', in Simon Baker ed. *Collected Short Stories,* (Bridgend: Seren, 2000), pp.86-92, p.88
[201] P. Mansell Jones, 'Welsh Industrial Landscapes', *The Welsh Outlook* xxviii, 6, 1931 pp.154-6, p.154

The coal waste tip is an inversion of the space excavated by the pit below, a literal overturning and transformation of the topography, geology, and the landscape. An aspect of this process that seems to have gone unnoticed in analyses of mining practices, cultures and fictions is the dynamic between the words 'pit' and 'tip' themselves. The words suggest a symmetry, and paired as 'pit/tip', the phrase becomes a full palindrome.[202] This facet is further accentuated as the sense of the words (as well as the spelling) reveals that the two topographies of the coal industry create a palindromic space, defined and delimited by the tunnels below and the waste tips above. Berry explores this in the plot and narrative structure of his 1968 novel, *Flame and Slag*. The novel is focused through the character of Rees Stevens, a collier, whose life is defined by industrial experience, particularly accidents; the son of a miner killed in a coal face fall, he, too, is injured in an accident while underground. This contemporary 1960s narrative of industrial decline is interspersed with the retrospective historic narrative of the journal of John Vaughan, Rees Steven's father-in-law. In this account, John Vaughan records the sinking of the Caib shaft in 1923, the early days of the colliery and the associated political unrest, his young family, and his experience as an exile from industry in Winchester. The narratives of establishment and the narrative of the de-commissioning of the Caib colliery mirror and invert one another. This has a particular resonance throughout the novel, especially as Rees himself is first exiled from mining through injury and then, on his recovery, by the closure of the pit. Berry further complicates this interaction of past and present through the character of Ellen Stevens, née Vaughan, the figure who binds John Vaughan and Rees Stevens as their respective daughter and wife, and furthermore both her father, and her husband's father, are both killed by the consequences of the excavation of coal in the Caib

[202] A palindrome is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a 'word or a sequence of words that reads, letter for letter, the same backwards as forwards'. The words 'pit' and 'tip' are andromic, as the word found in reverse differs from the original.

colliery, one above ground and one below ground. The two paternal characters therefore also illustrate the palindromic aspect of the coalfield environment.

An Industrial Uncanny

The palindromic nature of this industrial space and the practices of the coal industry are imbued with a sense of the uncanny, as the excavation of coal involves the revelation of what literally lies beneath the veneer of the landscape. This process of industrial archaeology rediscovers that which has been buried, and in turn, these residues of the past are transformed by their excavation into a means of progress, as the fossil fuel propels industrial and economic development.[203] Berry argues persuasively in much of his work that mining is an example of a timeless interaction with the land, and I will examine this aspect of his work in a later chapter. Mining is also an intrinsically dangerous activity which takes place out of sight, which adds to the sense of the industrial uncanny: it is an unseen, but ever present threat. Colliers work in a dark, unsettling, alien subterranean environment and the external signifiers of the industry, the pit head winding towers, coal dust and coal waste tips overshadow and, in the case of the dust even permeate, the domestic space of the home. This 'peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar' exemplifies the concept of the uncanny.[204]

Before a more sustained examination of the *unheimlich* facets of Berry's industrial fiction, an analysis of the divergence between the industrial and the domestic spheres is necessary. Katie Gramich notes in her study of landscape in twentieth-century women's writing, that spaces and places 'can be perceived in both positive and negative ways, according to the ideology and gender of the individual'.[205] Gramich develops this reading to include Henri Lefebvre's terms of spatial distinction, namely 'dominated'

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[203] See Anthony Vidler., *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 1992), for an exploration of uncanny spaces and design

[204] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.1

[205] Kate Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p.199

and 'appropriated' spaces, and considers the ways in which the different genders interact with such spaces and interpret them. Lefebvre defines dominated space as 'a space transformed – and mediated – by technology, by practice'.[206] Appropriated space, however, is a 'natural space modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group' and reflect the lived experiences of that group: 'peasant houses and villages speak: they recount, though in a mumbled and somewhat confused way, the lives of those who built and inhabited them'.[207] Gramich considers how this spatial separation functions in industrialised areas:

> Frequently, the industrial settings, such as quarries, docks and mines, are represented as male worlds, spaces into which the menfolk disappear and yet from which they return with work to be done by the women – preparing food, washing, even, at times, mourning. Thus women have an economic and emotional link with dominated space, but they dwell often in an appropriated space [...] .[208]

The 'commingling' of the dominated and the appropriated, the seepage between the industrial place of work and the domestic space of safety, is in itself an example of the uncanny. D.H. Lawrence explored this feature of coal-mining communities and environments in *Women in Love*, through the motif of the black beetles, the insects that would crawl into the clothes of miners while underground, which would be revealed once the miner undressed at home.[209]

Anthony Vidler in his study of the architectural uncanny explores the concept of 'panic space', that is, a space 'where all limits become blurred in a thick, almost palpable substance'.[210](In the context of the palindromic uncanny perceived in the industrial writing of the Rhondda valleys, it is coal that embodies the abstract 'almost palpable substance', as its actual and metaphoric seepage into the appropriated,

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[206] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p.164
[207] Henri Lefebvre, p165-166.
[208] Katie Gramich, p.200
[209] D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960 [1921])
[210] Anthony Vidler, p.225

domestic space, reveals its disruptive *unheimlich* influence. In addition to the work of Ron Berry, this chapter will also consider the early twentieth-century work of B.L. Coombes and Richard Llewewllyn. All three authors explore this sense of the uncanny through the device of the industrial accident, both above and below ground.

A rather sentimental account of mining life, *How Green Was My Valley*, sees Huw Morgan recall his childhood and early adulthood in a mining community as he leaves the valley. The area has become dominated by slagtips and industrial pollution, and Huw is the last of his family to leave. In a review soon after the novel's publication, David Jones remarked that the novel 'makes a direct and sustained appeal to our emotions,and is [...] deeply and continuously moving', reflecting the establishment press reaction but more recent critics of the novel emphasise its sentimentality, romance and inconsistencies.[211] For example,. Dai Smith has reflected that *How Green Was My Valley* offers a 'panoply of falsification' in its representation of Welsh industrial history. Indeed, it is far removed from the contemporaneous industrial fiction of Lewis Jones and Gwyn Jones, as political issues are largely avoided, and a romantic narrative of Welsh history is embraced. Stephen Knight observes that:

> recognising but avoiding the political thrust of the industrial novel, and seeing all modern industry as a destruction of a once pure land, the novel clearly appealed to a conservative, anti-modernity audience [...] but it also has a strong romance structure. [...] Llewellyn does recognize even to some extent realize, central elements of south Welsh experiences, but where other writers set out this experience in ways which are variously foreign to the tradition of the individualized and moralized English novel, Llewellyn converts the industrial experience into a homily on personal sensitivity and moralized duty.[212]

Despite its flaws, Richard Llewellyn's treatment of the blurred distinctions between the appropriated and dominated spaces in *How Green Was My Valley* is interesting and deserving of examination. In his account of a colliery rock fall, towards the conclusion

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[211] David Jones, 'Light from Wales: A Review of Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley'*, *Times Literary Supplement,* 7th October 1939. Stephen Knight's critique of the novel summarises the Welsh and American critical reception of the novel. Stephen Knight, p.115
[212] Stephen Knight, p.115

of *How Green Was My Valley,* the trapped miner, the father of Huw, the novel's narrator, is imagined as a young child in the domestic space of a bedroom, emphasising his vulnerability as he lies under tonnes of rock:

> I put my candle on a rock, and crawled to him, and he saw me, and smiled.
> He was lying down, with his head on a pillow of rock, on a bed of rock, with sheets and bedclothes of rock to cover him to the neck, and I saw that if I moved one bit the roof would fall in.
> He saw it too, and his head shook, gently, and his eyes closed.[213]

Llewellyn extends this metaphor and suggests the life on the surface of the earth: 'houses sitting in quiet under the sun, and men roaming the streets to lose voice, breath and blood, and children dancing in play, and women cleaning houses, and good smells in our kitchen, all of them adding more to my father's counterpane' (*HWGMV,* 444). This image of the domestic sphere adding to the shroud-like eiderdown of the patriarch is significant as it suggests the comfort of the domestic and the familial, but also the father's dominant role and responsibility in the Morgan household as he is supporting the household with his body and his physical labour underground. On hearing of her husband's death, the conflict between the domestic and the dominated spaces is evident once more, as the widow remarks how he was killed like 'a beetle under a foot', the dead miner further alienated from the domestic haven (*HGWV*, 446).

It is the coal waste tips the 'characteristic feature of the coalfield landscape' and a symbol of the convergence of the subterranean and the surface, the industrial, technological and the domestic, that I shall next consider.[214] Both Richard Llewellyn and Ron Berry draw attention to the tips as unfamiliar, manufactured and recent additions to the surrounding landscape; these unnatural land formations are positioned

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[213] Richard Llewellyn, *How Green Was My Valley* (London: Michael Joseph, 1939), p.444: henceforth referenced as *HGMV* in the body of the text

[214] Eric H. Brown, 'Man Shapes the Earth' *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 136 1. (March 1970), pp 74-85, p.78

within a picturesque upland vista, as formed by the above ground depositing of material excavated from beneath the surface of the earth, and are therefore doubly unfamiliar.

Llewellyn's novel traces the recollections of Huw Morgan as he returns to visit his family home, soon to be claimed by the spoil tip of the local colliery. Llewellyn describes the tips as an agent of destruction and disturbance:

> [L]ong, and black, without life or sign, lying along the bottom of the Valley on both sides of the river. The green grass, and the reeds and the flowers, all had gone, crushed beneath it. And every minute the burden grew, as cage after cage screeched along the cables from the pit, bumped to a stop at the tipping gear, and emptied dusty loads on to the ridged dirty back. (*HGMV,* 98)

Here the monstrous aspects of the tip are emphasised: its growing size, the dinosaurian ridged back, and the screeching of the cages. Indeed, the 'ridged dirty back' is reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence's motif of the black beetles. This treatment of the construction of the tips seems to echo P. Mansell Jones's observation in 'The Welsh Industrial Landscape' of the 'grotesque paraphernalia' of the bucket system.[215] Later in the novel, Llewellyn extends this description and associates the spoil tips with death and decay:

> All the way over the mountain, slag heaps were like the backs of buried animals rising from the Pit. Living trees were buried in them, and in some, gorse was growing with its lamps alight, and grass was trying to be green wherever the wind would let it rest in peace.
> "Will there be any of the Valley left free of slag?" I said to my father.
> "It was never allowed in my young days," my father said. "Laziness and bad workmanship, and cheapness my son. [...] The slag is there, and nothing to be done about it." (*HGWV,* 383)

This description is loaded with allusions to death and the funereal, from the 'backs of buried animals' that the tips resemble, to the trees buried by the spoil and slag and the grass that seeks to 'rest in peace'. The 'gorse lamps' evocatively suggest the *canwyll corff,* the corpse candle of Welsh folklore that portends death. Furthermore, a collier

[215] P. Mansell Jones, p.154

character's resigned acceptance of the spoil tips ('nothing to be done about it') is much like his acceptance of his mortality as he lies trapped under a rock fall.

Berry's descriptions of the spoil tips also focus on the unfamiliarity of the formations, and his approach is coloured by an awareness of the history of the area. In the opening pages of *Flame and Slag,* Rees Stephens looks at the Caib tip from his home and hears:

> Caib's banksman buzzing three signals again, the aerial muck-buckets floating up Waunwen like a brochure glimpse of Switzerland, trip-levered at the last pylon high up on the mountain, regular spews of muck showering down, the quadruple-humped slag-tip itself older than any man in Daren. Older than Caib pit. (*F&S*, 11)

The familiar is made doubly unfamiliar. The industrialised landscape is imagined as an alpine scene, and the iconic chairlifts that signify leisure are replaced by 'aerial muck-buckets', spewing spoil material onto the mountains. Berry returns to this imagery later in the novel, as the injured Rees Stevens imagines his psychologist at the government rehabilitation centre as a slag-slurry skier:

> His immobility teased colourless pictures inside my head, doggy-spectrummed images of him buried to the neck in the running slurry like Ellen's father, but [he] surfaced fiercely on gleaming skis, riding the tip-slide with Olympic verve, precision, his face deadpan as if it didn't belong to his body. (*F&S*, 105)

The alpine imagery however is not as incongruous as it may first seem; a nineteenth-century travel writer, Benjamin Malkin, journeyed to the pre-industrial Rhondda valleys and reflected on the way in which the view of the Rhondda Fawr valley from Porth mountain brought to mind 'the best descriptions of Alpine scenery, though on an inferior scale'.[216] He elaborated on the vista as follows:

> [T]he fields and meadows of the vale are found to be narrower and less fertile: the rocks and hills gradually close in, becoming bolder and more fantastical in their appearances while the sides of many are clothed with an apparently inexhaustible opulence of wood. The continual water-courses, down those that are naked, break the uniformity of the perspective with their undulating lines

[216] B. Heath Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales: from materials collected during two excursions in the year 1803* (London : Printed for T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1804), p.192

> and assist in communicating a characteristic interest, to what may not improperly be termed the Alps of Glamorganshire. [...] the front of [the Rhondda Fawr's] narrowing dell is filled up by a single cliff, high and broad at the top, and as if it were regularly and architecturally placed, appearing as much the result of design, as those on the sides seem to indicate the fortuitous vagaries of sportive nature.[217]

This account emphasises the Picturesque beauty of the Rhondda Fawr, an aspect that the majority of the industrial accounts of the area have overlooked. The recognition of the area as the Alps of Glamorgan makes its transformation into an industrial area, dominated by coal pit and coal tip, seem all the more remarkable. Malkin's account now seems ironic. The 'apparently inexhaustible opulence of wood' would prove to be exhaustible, as would the subterranean carbonised residue of the pre-glacial forests.

Berry's description of the action of the Caib 'aerial muck-buckets' is filled with thick vowel-sounds, punctuated like the deposits of coal-waste being showered from above. This echoes the sensory experience of living in close proximity to the spoil tips – the noise of the buckets, the noise of the waste material being dropped from a height, the dust this would cause. Berry also provides a more detailed account of the noise of the tips, the continuous upstage action which itself encroaches on the lives of those in Daren:

> Caib pit-head banksman buzzed three, the huge side-by-side wheels spinning, their fifty-eight seconds blur crowning the summer-green tump, slowing until the spokes appeared to run backwards, then the final precise joggle, cages landed, the clanging gate echoing over Daren if you listened for it.' (*F&S,* 10)

In one sentence, Berry contrasts the expected conventional peace of the pastoral 'summer-green', and the 'clanging', 'spinning' activity of the tip, whilst also suggesting that the 'tump' also clashes with the surrounding landscape.

Before turning to look at the *unheimlich* incidents of the coal waste tips encroaching on the *heimlich*, it is worth examining the tips as societal motifs. In Llewellyn's vision

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[217] Benjamin Malkin, p.190-191

of the early twentieth century south Wales coalfield, the tips are a space associated with unrule and savagery.[218] Those members of the community living nearest to the spoil tips are described as the 'dross of the collieries':

> These people did the jobs that colliers would never do, and they were allowed to live and breed because the owner would not spend money on plant when their services were to be had so much cheaper. For a pittance, they carried slag and muck, they acted as scavengers, and as they worked, so they lived. Even their children were put to work at eight and nine years of age so that more money could come into the house. They lived, most of them, only to drink. Their houses were bestial sites, where even beasts would rebel if put there to live, for beasts have clean ways with them and they will show their disgust quick enough, but these people were long past such good feeling. They were a living disgust. (*HGWMV,* 189)[219]

The people Llewellyn describes are an industrial underclass. Their 'bestial' homes and behaviour call to mind the image of the 'backs of buried animals' in the spoil tips, and they are presented as a people compliant with their exploitation, rather than as victims. The representation of this community in these terms further reveals *How Green Was My Valley* to be a sanitised, idealised, middle-class vision of the coalfield. It is striking that there is no acknowledgement of the poverty experienced in the south Wales coalfield, for example the 1926 General Strike and the 1930s Depression, contemporary with the writing, or indeed any suggestion that scores of women and pre-adolescent children were forced by circumstance to work underground until it was outlawed in 1842. Indeed, the impoverished are here outcast and dehumanised; their familial life is reduced to a concessionary allowance to 'live and breed'.

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[218] D.H. Lawrence also explores this aspect in *Women In Love*: 'They turned off the main road, past a black patch of common-garden, where sooty cabbage stumps stood shameless. No one thought to be ashamed. No one was ashamed of it all. "It is like a country in an underworld," said Gudrun. "The colliers bring it above-ground with them, shovel it up. Ursula, it's marvellous, it's really marvellous – it's really wonderful, another world. The people are all ghouls, and everything is ghostly. Everything is a ghoulish replica of the real world, a replica, a ghoul, all soiled, everything sordid. It's like being mad, Ursula"' *Women in Love*, p.12

[219] Indeed, so dominant is the imagery of the slagtips in the novel, that Llewellyn had originally intended the novel to be titled 'Slag'. Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004) p.114

Gwyn Thomas's 'Oscar' offers a useful counter-representation of those who work on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century coal tips. In the novella, it is the tip owner who is described in animalistic terms. As the narrator, Lewis, remarks:

> [F]or a hog, Oscar did very well out of being a man. Nobody liked him in the valley. The elements who went to chapel thought he was on a par with the god Pan, who was half goat. The elements who did not go to chapel thought he was all Pan or all goat [...] [220]

He is presented as a savage and immoral character, exploiting those he employs to pick coal on the slag tip and, it is implied, displaying a Pan-like virility as he attempts to seduce, or overpower, the women he encounters. This, as I shall explore shortly, is one of three episodes I have identified that ally those associated with coal-waste tips with sexual assault.[221] The examples in the works of Gwyn Thomas, Richard Llewellyn and Ron Berry uphold the perception of landscape and nature as feminine, and industry as masculine. As has been noted in a study of gender and landscape in American fiction, 'nature [as] feminine [is] a cultural given'.[222] Leo Marx similarly observes in his overview of the American pastoral that descriptions and portrayals of the encroachment of industry (the 'machine') into the perceived, or imagined, rural idyll (the 'garden') relies on an opposition of masculinity and femininity: [223]

> certain general features of the pattern recur too often to be fortuitous. Most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine and submissive attitude traditionally attached to the landscape.[224]

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[220] Gwyn Thomas, 'Oscar' in *The Sky of Our Lives* (London: Quartet, 1973 [Hutchinson, 1972]) pp1-74, p.5 henceforth referenced in the text as 'Oscar'

[221] It is a motif of industrialisation that was central to Alexander Cordell's novel, *Rape of the Fair Country* (1959)

[222] Louise H. Westling, *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender and American Fiction* (Athens, Georgia & London: University of Athens Press, 1996), p.41

[223] The first chapter of Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* considers the notion of an American pastoral, as portrayed in the work of Emerson, Melville, Twain, Thoreau

[224] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.29

Early in Thomas's short story, a female character asks Lewis, who has come to collect a drunken Oscar from the Harp Inn, about Oscar's behaviour:

> "What gives him the right to think that he can go around expecting girls to lie at his feet like mats to be jumped on?"
> "Did he jump on you?" [...] I was interested in Oscar's antics.
> "Near as hell to jumping. First he got me a bit drunk. Then he got me in here. Next thing I know I think the whole bloody roof has come down on me. What gives him the right? That's what I'd like to know." ('Oscar', 13)

In 'Oscar', as was demonstrated in a previous chapter, the protagonist's behaviour is bound to the authority he believes he exerts as a landowner and employer. Thomas in this instance does not directly associate femininity with the landscape as he has done before, but the coal waste tip is undoubtedly a symbol of a brutal masculine agency and Oscar's authority is also expressed through his threatening lasciviousness.[225] It is this sexual agency that Hannah, the widow of Danny, Oscar's victim, seeks to exploit in order to 'kill that bastard of an Oscar' ('Oscar', 61). Hannah and Lewis, the narrator, conspire to arrange for Oscar to visit Hannah's home. But as Lewis observes the incident from outside the window, he realises that Hannah is submitting to Oscar:

> Hannah's head dropped back. I could see the muscles around her eyes contract as she closed her eyes tighter, as if to lose the sight of herself and the conscience of her from sight. Her mouth hung open. And then, with the unhurried silence of falling snow, she gave herself to Oscar. There was nothing I could not see now [*sic*]. She gave herself, and Oscar, with his huge body flattened in skilled and solemn ecstasy took her with a rapture and a joy that could almost be seen rising from him like a mist. ('Oscar', 69)

The female figure is here complicit in her exploitation, perhaps allegorising the way in which the Welsh people were also keen to gain economic advantage from the exploitation of the landscape and its natural resources.

In *How Green Was My Valley*, the incident of the 'savaged' young girl – a more polite or acceptable manner of describing a sexual assault and murder – explores the

[225] See Stephen Knight's observation that Katherine Briers, in *All Things Betray Thee* is a 'a sort of blond earth-mother', *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, p.105

clash of industry and innocence, masculinity and femininity in more typical terms:

> [A] little girl had been savaged on the mountain, and when I came from school the people were on the street on the Hill, and down in the village the shops were shut and the Chapel bell was ringing. While I was having my tea, my father came in, for the colliery had closed early for the men to be home and start the search for the swine in the form of a man. (*HGWMV,* 187)

This act against the innocent femininity of the young girl by someone associated with the slag tip can be seen to contribute to Llewellyn's sustained feminisation of the land. The young girl is attacked on the hillside, a space increasingly overshadowed, or violated, by the spoil tips. It is one of the men of the industrial underclass, described once again in bestial terms as a 'swine in the form of a man', who is accused of having committed the crime. By symbolically aligning the people the narrator perceives as 'a living disgust' with the spoil heaps, the tips are envisioned as a sinister, uncanny Other. This chimes with Llewellyn's representation of mining as an unnatural practice and a violation of nature, as will be demonstrated later.

A scene of sexual assault also features in Berry's short story 'Comrades in Arms', first published in 1995.[226] The incident is portrayed in more ambiguous terms than Llewellyn's scene. The teenager Jilly Hughes is described as a young woman, 'blameless as Eve by England's Glory matchlight, curious to see what they had, touch, feel for her own sake without cheat or swoony palaver' ('Comrades', 60). However, the incident is undoubtedly an act of sexual assault. The former servicemen, now 'night shift labourers, lowest of the low', Redvers Gillard and Lemuel Nelson, arrange to meet the fifteen year old Jilly on Pen Arglwydd mountain (Ibid, 58) The men each take their turn, with Redvers urging '"You'll be al'right [...] Ssh, girl, please don't make a fuss"'as he places his hand over her mouth to silence Jilly's whimpered protests, and Lemmy pleading '"Don't worry, love, let yourself go, c'mon, enjoy you'self"' as he

[226] Ron Berry, 'Comrades in Arms', in Simon Baker ed., *Collected Short Stories* (Bridgend: Seren, 2000) pp.57-6. Henceforth referenced in the text as 'Comrades'

assaults her (Ibid, 60). As the male characters walk back into the village, they attempt to justify their actions, despicably agreeing that '[s]he wanted it' (Ibid). 'Comrades in Arms' can be read as a development of a loaded phrase from a short story first published in 1982. In 'Natives', the redundant and retired colliers, or 'left-overs from the regime of King Steam Coal', describe mining as 'subterranean rape'.[227] Read in these terms of the violation of the feminine, the coal waste tips become obscene palindromic protrusions, representative of the 'crude, masculine aggressiveness' of industry (Lefebvre, 92). The spoil-tips share 'the arrogant verticality of sky-scrapers' that Henri Lefebvre observes, and they too introduce a 'phallocentric element into the visual realm', as the structures contrast strikingly with the femininity of the surrounding natural Picturesque landscape.[228] As Lefebvre adds, '[v]erticality and great height have ever been the spatial expression of potentially violent power', and this is evident in Berry, Llewellyn and Thomas's portrayals of the industrial environment.[229]

Once more, there is retribution for the actions of the 'Comrades in Arms', as, when their assault is exposed in Jilly's father's pub, Redvers and Lemmy become manic. As Mrs Hughes shrieks ' "Chuck 'em out! They forced our daughter up there on Pen Arglwydd, took advantage of her they have!" ', the accused huddle together, 'grinning like masks, feral' ('Comrades', 61). Their behaviour rapidly becomes more disturbing:

> Suddenly Redvers softly howled, winding up then down to crouched shudderings as if small explosions were firing inside his body. Lemmy howled, desolate, rabid, nerve tingling. Clutching each other's wrists, they howled, twitched, hopped in slow, baroque two step. [...]
> Then erupted bedlam, frenzied legerdemain, Lemmy and Redvers pelting glasses, bottles, ashtrays, bar stools, chairs, tables. (Ibid, 61-62)

The characters are described as if possessed, lending a sense of the uncanny, especially as Redvers' involuntary movements evoke an epileptic seizure. As Freud's essay 'The

227 Ron Berry, 'Natives' in Simon Baker ed., *Collected Short Stories*, pp.77-85, p.77, 78
228 Leo Marx, *Machine*, p.29
229 Henri Lefebvre, p.92

Uncanny' notes, seizures and manifestations of insanity prompt an uncanny effect as they 'arouse in the onlooker vague notions of automatic –mechanical – processes that may lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person'.[230] Such processes, 'hidden behind [a] familiar image', call to mind the topography of the coal waste tips. Their manufactured, conical shape is a simplified motif of the mountains that surround them (similar to a child's depiction of a mountain), and their often greened surface conceals their instability. The essay continues, '[h]ere the layman sees a manifestation of forces that he did not suspect in a fellow human being, but whose stirrings he can dimly perceive in remote corners of his own personality'.[231] Redvers and Lemuel's frenzy clears the bar of patrons, but their manic behaviour continues as they rip off their clothes and regress into 'primal' behaviour. It seems that the disturbance of a form of femininity prompts destructive and unsettling behaviour, much in the same manner as the excavation of coal from the earth, and the depositing of the coal waste in tips, and it is this overturning and disruption of the landscape that I next wish to consider.

Tip-slides and Burial Alive

Although their evocations of the industrial landscape of the waste tips touch on the sense of the uncanny, it is the tip-slide scenes in the fiction of Llewellyn and Berry that most vividly engage with the concept of the intrusion of the *unheimlich* into the sphere of the *heimlich* – the homely – as the tip-slides threaten and engulf homes. In both instances, the dominated, masculine space of the collieries invades, engulfs and erases the appropriated, feminine space of the home. The approaches of both authors to the uncanny aspect of the action of tip-slides are distinct: Llewellyn can be seen to engage

[230] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp.123-62, p.135
[231] Ibid

with the aspect of the uncanny that Royle describes as 'crisis of the proper', but Berry evidently explores what Royle terms the 'crisis of the natural'.[232]

Llewellyn's focus is preoccupied with the material destruction caused by the invasion of an *unheimlich* force, and considers how it destroys his family home and threatens the physical manifestations of memories. In this sense, it corresponds with Royle's description of the uncanny as 'a critical disturbance of what is proper [...] a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property' (Ibid). Throughout the novel, the account of the gradually encroaching tip is primarily concerned with the damage caused to the family home and also of the effort expended and the craft demonstrated in the process of creating the house: 'in my father's day men built well for they were craftsmen. Stout beams, honest blocks, good work, and love for the job, all that is in this house' (*HGWMV*, 97). As David Punter notes in his consideration of Poe's 'The House of Usher' in *The Literature of Terror*, there is a traditional ambiguity 'of the "house" as building and as family', and there are traces of this aspect of the house and home in Llewellyn's portrayal.[233] Throughout the narrative of the destruction of the house the concept of ownership and inheritance recurs: 'the slag heap moves, pressing on, down and down, over and all round this house which was my father's and my mother's, and now is mine' (*HGWMV*, 97), and this is later developed into the consideration of the home as a retainer of memory:

> Dear little house that I have lived in, there is happiness you have seen, even before I was born. In you is my life, and all the people I have loved are a part of you, so to go out of you, and leave you, is to leave myself. (*HGWMV*, 145)

The slag tip threatens Huw's personal property of the inherited home, and the 'properness' and security that the institution of the family home represents. In addition to functioning as a symbol of the community's racial or class Other, the slag tip is also

[232] Nicholas Royle, p.1

[233] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Gothic Tradition* [2nd edn] (London & New York: Longman, 1996), p.180

described in the text as a malevolent force. The moving tip is described in anthropomorphic terms:

> I can hear it whispering to itself, and as it whispers, the walls of this brave little house are girding themselves to withstand the assault. For months, more than I ever thought it would have the courage to withstand, that great mound has borne down upon these walls, this roof. And for those months the great bully has been beaten. (*HGWMV,*96-97)

This almost childish description of the tip-slide makes no attempt to convey the force of the movement of the tip. Instead, the 'brave little house' and the 'great bully' almost conjure a whimsical fairy tale, lending a faintly fantastical tone to the description. The tip also functions to represent the perceived tyranny of industry and the seeming immorality of industrial society and the threat that both pose to the 'properness' of the institutions of the family and the domestic space. It is a malevolent Other that the sense and tradition of the *heimlich* attempts but fails to restrain. The slag tip and tip-slide for Llewellyn are more a literary metaphor than an actual potential catastrophe.

The imagined tip-slide of Ron Berry's novel *Flame and Slag* however conveys the unrestrained, and unrestrainable force of nature and the comparative fragility of humanity. It is, within Royle's analysis of the Uncanny , 'a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature': one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world'.[234] It reaches beyond the crisis of the proper to disrupt the natural, the human, and through Berry's arresting description, language. The 'crisis of the natural' is evident from the initial description of the action, as Berry exposes the myth of society and industry's perceived masterful control of the landscape: 'Nature undid a century's work, Caib tip breaking away, erupting from the steep breast of Waunwen, hitting Thelma Street like a tidal wave' (*F&S*, 27). The moving tip is at once suggested as an avalanche ('breaking away[...] from the steep breast'), evoking Berry's earlier image of the dichotomous

[234] Nicholas Royle, p.1

industrial/Alpine landscape as an 'erupting' volcano, a natural disaster which the title of the novel also suggests and as a destructive 'tidal wave'. All three natural catastrophes reveal the innate force of the earth, and its power to smash someone 'beyond humanity', as Berry reflects in the short story 'Left Behind.[235]

The following is a long excerpt, however it is necessary to quote it at length given the action, detail and linguistic play that Berry succeeds in including his account of the fictional Caib tipslide. The description encompasses the physical movement of the land, the corporeal reaction of the witnesses, and the violent convergence of the force of industrial (or dominant) and the passivity of the domestic (or appropriated):

> One inch of our annual eighty-one average rainfall poured overnight; first to cop on that drenching Saturday morning, the silent shunting yard jigsawed around Caib washery and screens. Niched into the base of Waunwen, three small culverts trapped half a dozen separate stream feeders to Daren river. These culverts were blocked simultaneously, greasing the tip already fallen a hundred yards, the black eagre bearing trucks across the siding, deep-riding and rolling dinosaurian in the softly roaring crushed shale, the undertow bulking heaviest, faster than the surface prow of the tip, carrying it clunking and clittering, unbroken almost like scum, a joggling froth of fresh-tipped muck, stones, bass coal, ancient tram ribs, derelict timbers. The over-all effect was of gargantuan stripping: green Waunwen flayed down to the clay and all the granite ballast chippings gulped off the railway sidings.
> [...] Ellen and I were racing across Daren in Percy Cynon's car, Caib pit hooter blowing SOS non-stop, Percy savaging the car up a dirt lane, rounding the lefthand corner towards the intersection, then crashing fast into reverse as the outer spreading muck came at us, inches deep, gently swilling like summer sea-water [...] twenty feet of tip muck shifting seething-topped down between the corner houses, leaving dripping tide marks on each gable end, three houses on the upper right-hand side of Thelma Street overwhelmed to their eaves, huge soft black curds dolloping from front windows, screams, madmen shouts, squealing, grinding timbers, moans, Ellen moaning, incoherently in shock, Percy floundering on his one knee, unable to stand in the thickening slurry. (*F&S*, 27-29)

The scene is loaded with terror as Berry forces language to express an almost

[235] Ron Berry, 'Left Behind', in Simon Baker ed., *Collected Short Stories* (Bridgend: Seren, 2000) pp.86-91, p.87

unimaginable event. The elongated sentences, punctuated with frequent commas, express the pace of the movement of the tip, building to the crescendo of the description of the 'gargantuan stripping' effect of the tip slide. The onomatopoeic phrases, 'softly roaring crushed', 'carrying it clunking and clittering', 'joggling froth of fresh-tipped muck', and 'tip muck shifting seething-topped down' sees the narrative convey the force and overwhelming nature of the tip slide in both the sense and the sound of the language used. Furthermore, the energy that the narrative attempts to express (as well as contain) sees nouns transformed by Berry into verbs; the energy of the event liquefies the landscape, *terra firma* become *terra mobilis*, and language itself also becomes fluid. Nouns can no longer be stationary and the description becomes a chain of signifiers of movement. Berry also uses language more typically associated with water in his attempt to capture and describe the force and surreal flow of the movement of the normally static earth.[236] The tip becomes a 'black eagre', an estuary tidal wave which once more reaffirms the power of the environment and the landscape. The tip becomes a wave, 'deep-riding', 'rolling' and 'roaring' against the sand-like crushed shale, forming a prow as it moves down the hillside. The earth is imagined as an encroaching tide, facilitating the suggestion of its destructive agency. Although theories of trauma literature suggest that the 'symbolic depiction of [collective] trauma' in terms of the elemental fire, earth, air, and water can provide an imagined 'means of orientation in a world of myriad sensations', here the elemental language is deployed to disturb, disrupt and disorient the characters' and the reader's perception of the landscape and to emphasise the magnitude of the mass movement.[237] The water imagery also signals that it is water that saturates, liquifies and destabilises the spoil tip,

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[236] The water imagery again calls to mind *Women in Love* in which Lawrence describes industrial progress, and its encroachment into the domestic: 'the industrial sea which surged in coal-blackened tides against the grounds of the house. The world was really a wilderness where one hunted and swam and rode' (249)

[237] Ronald Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster* (Peter Lang: New York, 1995), p. 65

prompting the geomorphic catastrophe.

Berry's description of the fictional Caib tipslide echoes descriptions of the mass movement of tip four of the Merthyr Vale colliery, above the village of Aberfan in October 1966. A coal waste tip destabilised by an underground spring moved down the hillside and into the village below, engulfing farms, houses and the Pantglas Primary School, killing 144 people, 116 of them children. The disaster was found to be caused by the negligence of the National Coal Board, which twenty years before had been hailed as the saviour of the mining industry, nationalising the coal pits of Britain and supporting the coal mining communities. The event recalled memories of the underground pit disasters of privately owned mines, bringing recognition and confirmation of the growing disenchantment with the National Coal Board and its practices.[238] The defining aspects of the Aberfan disaster was its visibility and its victims, marking its difference from the conventional colliery accidents that mining communities had sadly become conditioned to expect. As the Rhondda writer Gwyn Thomas noted in a BBC broadcast at the time, Aberfan was different:

> [...] When men perished in their hundreds in some eruption of blazing methane, it was possible to view with a kind of blind ferocity; the sort of ferocity we have always used in the face of war. Men were below the earth doing a grim, unnatural job, and sometimes the job would blow up in their faces. And most of the doom was underground, out of sight, tucked tactfully away from the public view. But Aberfan is different.[239]

Furthermore, the disaster resonated with the coalfield communities of South Wales, as each coal waste tip in the landscape now uncannily presented the potential of a similar catastrophe. Indeed, as one study of the disaster noted, the remaining coal waste tips in the area served to continue the population's exposure to the disaster (Johnes, 9). Berry's text undoubtedly responds to the sense of uncanny fear in the post-Aberfan

[238] Martin Johnes, 'Aberfan and the Management of Trauma', *Disasters* 24 1, pp 1-17, p.13
[239] Gwyn Thomas, Transcribed from an excerpt of a broadcast, Wales on Air: BBC Wales website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/walesonair/database/gwynthomas.shtml, accessed 14th April, 2008

palindromic environment. Manuscripts of the novel reveal that Berry completed the final draft of the text on 19th June 1967, which, given it includes a fictional rendering of a tipslide, positions the novel as a reaction to the Aberfan tragedy.[240] Oral accounts of the disaster presented to the Aberfan Tribunal by the Tip workers note what tip workers witnessed on the morning of the 21st October 1966:

> I was standing on the edge of the depression, sir, I was looking down into it, and what I saw I couldn't believe my eyes. It was starting to come back up. It started to rise slowly at first, sir. I still did not believe it, I thought I was seeing things. Then it rose up after pretty fast, sir, at a tremendous speed. Then it sort of came up out of the depression and turned itself into a wave, that is the only way I can describe it, down towards the mountain … towards Aberfan village, sir. … And as it turned over, I shouted: "Good God, boys, come and look at this lot…" [Witness, identified as Tip worker]
>
> [A]ll I can tell you is it was going down at a hell of a speed in waves. I myself ran down the side of No. 3 tip, all the way down towards No. 2 and No.1 tip on the side. As I was running down I heard another roar behind me and trees cracking and a tram passing me. I stopped – I fell down in fact. All I could see was waves of muck, slush and water. I still kept running. [Witness, Leslie Davies, Tipping gang chargehand] [241]

As in Berry's fictional account, the witnesses can only express the movement of the tip-slide in aqueous imagery as they attempt to describe its action.

But perhaps the most interesting parallel between the actual and the fictional disasters is the similar clash between the orders of the pit managers and owners, and the environmental awareness (by which I mean the knowledge of the landscape and its natural and geological characteristics) of the local inhabitants, a divergence that the Aberfan Tribunal would reflect on:

> We found that many witnesses, not excluding those who were intelligent and anxious to assist us, had been oblivious of what lay before their eyes. It did not

[240]See first page of typed *Flame and Slag* Manuscript, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE1/1/1

[241] http://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/politics/aberfan/chap1.htm, authors Iain McLean and Martin Johnes (excerpts from *Transcripts of Oral* Evidence, from *Report of the Tribunal appointed to inquire into the Disaster at Aberfan on October 21st, 1966*, Chairman Lord Justice Edmund Davies, HMSO, 1967, HL 316 & HC 553) accessed 14/8/2008

> enter their consciousness. They were like moles being asked about the habits of birds.[242]

This statement reveals the perceptual chasm at the centre of the mining industry: the conceptual – and procedural – distinction between the coal pit and the coal tip despite the implicit interconnectivity. The failure to register the process of mining as a dynamic one, involving the terrains both above and below the earth's surface, caused an industrial environmental catastrophe. Industrial practices were perceived to be removed from the environment, despite the coal industry's dependence on natural resources, and as a consequence mining was constructed as a solely underground activity, with little consideration given to the simultaneous and related action in the landscape above. As such, despite their very visible presence in the coalfield environment, the coal waste tips, and the palindromic nature of the coal industry, were overlooked. Once removed from the collieries, the industrial waste was no longer part of the coal industry, a perception which facilitated environmental irresponsibility.[243] It has been observed that the perceptual split functioning in the coal industry of south Wales – and the case of Aberfan in particular – 'offers a powerful and tragic instance of the manner in which this failure of perception may not merely be an individual failure, but may be created, structured and reinforced by the set of institutional, cultural or sub-cultural beliefs and their associated practices'.[244] The study continues:

> The Aberfan Inquiry makes it quite clear that the pervasive set of beliefs and perceptions within the coal industry was, for very good reasons, oriented wholly towards the problems, difficulties and activities of underground mining for coal, and away from tips as being in any sense important for those involved with mining. A whole cluster of factors contributed to, and reinforced, this set of beliefs and perceptions. Historical and institutional precedent contributed. Tips

[242] *Report of the Tribunal appointed to inquire into the Disaster at Aberfan on October 21st, 1966*, Chairman Lord Justice Edmund Davies, HMSO, 1967, HL 316 & HC 553, p.11 cited in Iain McLean and Martin Johnes

[243] Berry was to return to consider environmental neglect and irresponsibility in his later work, as I consider in the following chapter.

[244] Barry A Turner & Nick F. Pidgeon. *Man Made Disasters* (2nd ed) (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1978, 1997), p.47

> had been neglected by the 1938 Commission in Safety in Mines and Her Majesty's Inspection of Mines and Quarries had similarly paid no attention to tips. It had never been the practice in the twenty five years of the NCB's existence to survey tip.[245]

Berry draws on this fractured perception in his description of the Caib tip disaster in *Flame and Slag*.

In the initial account of the Caib tip-slide, Berry suggests that heavy rainfall was the primary cause of the disaster. However, later in the novel, a former collier and amateur archaeologist, who excavates and understands the geology and geography of the tips, remarks how industrial negligence also influenced the incident:

> "Bit of foresight and they could'a saved Thelma Street," he said. "That water comin' out from the old Waun, see, Rees?"
> "It was trenched to run into Nant Melyn," I said.
> "When? I'll tell you when, The time Gibby built Thelma Street. That's when. Only they filled the ditch with muck when they extended the aerials." (*F&S*, 121)

This conversation alludes to the Aberfan disaster and the assertion of the Rt. Hon. Lord Robens, Chairman of the National Coal Board, that 'it was impossible to know that there was a spring in the heart of this tip which was turning the centre of the mountain into sludge',[246] an observation that the 1967 Tribunal later proved to be incorrect as 'it was well known to everybody in the village that the tip had covered springs on the mountain'.[247] The misguided construction of the spoil tip across a line of springs increased the underground water pressure and reduced the stability of the ground and the tip material, culminating in a mass movement. [248] The tip-slide therefore sees a combining of the two distinct forms of geomorphic processes: the endogenetic forces from within the earth, and the external exogenetic forces, again re-affirming the

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[245] Ibid.

[246] http://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/politics/aberfan/chap1.htm, (authors Iain McLean and Martin Johnes) accessed 14/8/2008

[247] Iain McLean, 'On Moles and the Habits of Birds: The Unpolitics of Aberfan' *Twentieth Century British History* Vol. 8, 3, pp285-309, p.287

[248] Eric Brown, p.79

palindromic experience of the mining landscape. The material, uncannily excavated from within the earth by human-exogenetic activity and deposited on its surface, is further transformed by water, a natural exogenetic process, to horrifying effect. Berry reflects this in his portrayal of the tip-slide in images of a ruined, or doubly spoiled, pastoral. The natural landscape altered by industry is destablised and destroyed; 'screams, madmen shouts, squealing, grinding timbers, moans' replace idyllic peace, and the slag forms bucolic 'huge soft black curds' which 'dollop', an image which evokes a sense of revulsion as the wholesome sense of natural produce is tainted. This image is repeated when John Vaughan's body is discovered, as Rees Stevens witnesses 'the final wet roll of top slurry creamed remorselessly over his white head' (*F&S*, 30).

The sense of the tip-slide being at once a natural and unnatural occurrence is also emphasised by the brief description of John Vaughan's death and later, by the positioning of his dead body. As Rees and Ellen race across Daren, her parents' home is subsumed: 'Kate Vaughan's scream: "Get up, run!" as daylight cut out of the window behind his bent shoulders, easily racing him to the back of the house as the room filled' (*F&S*, 28). Berry's abstract description of the tip-slide through its effects ('daylight cut out', 'easily racing him', 'room filled') and the peculiar syntax further unsettle the sense of domestic normality, and once again conveys the unstoppable movement of the earth. Any sense of the *heimlich* is soon obliterated as John Vaughan's body is swept out of his home by the force of the moving slurry: 'number 9 back door suddenly bursting outwards and John Vaughan floated free buried neck-deep, his grey corrugated face aghast, dead, the white hair trailing smudged, matting weedily in the coiling surface muck' (*F&S*, 30). A clash of natural and unnatural language and imagery is once again invoked by Berry, as the dead John Vaughan's face is 'corrugated' like the tin sheets of the coal washery and his hair mats 'weedily' in the settling slag. The surreal uncanninness of the scene is also highlighted in the

paradoxical image of John Vaughan 'float[ing] free buried neck deep' in the slag: in death he is freed from his position as a 'semi invalid' retired and ill miner (*F&S*, 28), but he remains literally and metaphorically buried and dominated by the coal industry and its effects.

The Caib tip-slide scene enacts 'burial alive,' an experience – or fear – that Freud suggests is seen by many as the ultimate instance of the uncanny (Freud, 'the Uncanny', 150). In the essay, Freud's admittedly brief analysis of the experience is associated with two other states, firstly the horror of 'ostensibly, or being seemingly dead [*scheintot*], as if in suspended animation' and secondly, the claustrophobic 'intra-uterine experience':[249]

> Some would award the crown of the uncanny to the idea of being buried alive, only apparently dead. However, psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying fantasy is merely a variant of another, which was not at all frightening but relied on a certain lasciviousness; this was the fantasy of living in the womb.[250]

Nicholas Royle observes that Freud's essay features:

> a sort of micro-analysis of psychoanalysis in two sentences, the story of life from A to Z, or from Z to A, from death to birth, from imminence of death to the timeless pleasure of womb-life, from terror to lasciviousness, from death to the mother.[251]

The very iconography of collieries also symbolises this micro-analysis of life. An analysis of North American mining landscapes considers the icon of the colliery headframe. The author notes the symbolic dichotomy of the structures, 'gallowslike' in appearance but representative of the 'umbilical connection' between the surface and the underground world of a miner' as it hoists men and material from beneath the earth's surface.[252] The author overlooks the obvious phallic imagery of the headframe structure, but does elsewhere in the study reflect on the mining landscape as a

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[249] Nicholas Royle, p.143, p.142
[250] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p.150
[251] Nicholas Royle, p.142
[252] Richard V. Francaviglia, *Hard Place: Reading the Landscape of America's Historic Mining Districts* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), p.50

'manifestation of male identity'(Francaviglia, xxi).[253] The pit head therefore is a space between above and below, an uncanny commingling of the masculine and feminine, life and death, destruction and creation.

Berry's depiction of the character of John Vaughan, and his death, engages with and explores this 'story of life'. The most obvious instance of this is that as John Vaughan is suffocated and crushed by the coal waste tip-slide, his daughter Ellen gives birth to a daughter in the Caib Miner's Institute. Later in the novel, Rees Stevens refers to a 'home sweet womb', which once more allies the home with the feminine, and in the context of the Caib tip slide, it also confirms the sense of the uncanny (*F&S*, 168). However, Berry too is able to condense the 'story of life', from 'death to mother' in one sentence: 'While we dug out his body, Ellen gave birth to Lydia on the oak table in Caib Institute' (*F&S*, 30), and later Ellen echoes this, reflecting: ' "My father was dead! Lydia was alive! He was spying down at us from that old photograph, my daughter squealing like a rabbit, alive" ' (*F&S*, 37). This incident seems to illustrate the comment in Berry's first novel, *Hunters and Hunted*, in which a group of young colliers discuss their perceptions of the concepts of 'absolute destruction' and 'absolute creation'. As already examined, the image of 'absolute destruction' is one of industrial disasters, but the characters' understanding of 'absolute creation' is 'making a baby' (*H&H*, 102). This incident mirrors Ellen Stevens' own birth at a time of industrial disaster. John Vaughan's journal informs the reader how his daughter was born on the 6th June 1938, the day after an underground explosion killed sixteen miners and boys in the pit. In a further act of mirroring and palindromic playfulness in the plot, the death of Rees Stevens' father, Dai, also offers a similar pairing of opposites as he was literally smashed by mining, and killed in a pit collapse the day before Vesting Day, January 1st 1947, a time of national celebration as Clement Attlee's Labour government

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[253] Richard V. Francaviglia, p.xxi

nationalised the coal industry. The circumstances of these deaths further define the interactive space between above and below.

Berry also engages with Freud's analysis in a more subtle manner. Early in the novel, soon after Vaughan returns to Daren from his exile in Winchester, Rees Stevens visits him and his daughter, Ellen, and observes:

> Riven as a burnt-out aesthete, vitality siphoned up, drained away from inside his skull, John Vaughan lay baby-limp on a small, brand-new settee in Number 9 Thelma Street. You wouldn't recognize him from the stark owl-faced photograph in Caib Institute committee room. He looked petrified, petrifying, his tint dog-fretful eyes ambushed below white, furry eyebrows. His lamby curled haircut belonged to Arcadia, bulked milkily white behind his ears and on his neckline. (*F&S*, 12)

With his Arcadian hair John Vaughan seems to belong to another age, something that his 'petrified, petrifying' appearance also highlights. The 'milkily white' image is imbued with a greater resonance once Berry's later vision of the ruined pastoral is taken into account. John Vaughan is reduced to a mummified husk while he still lives, and a page later, Rees the narrator confides to the reader that he knew that the bronchitic, weak John Vaughan would 'break, die, never survive the wet, the snow, the fog of Daren winters' (*F&S*, 13). This scene also features a sentence that obliquely forebodes the uncanny nature of John Vaughan's death: '[r]ivose creases dug into the putty-grey flesh of his jowls and brow, like the drying-out carcass of a hairless, foetal mammal' (*F&S*, 12). The 'rivose creases' evoke the centuries-old plough furrow marks on the Daren hillsides, and the 'putty-grey flesh' conjures a deathly pallor. But the most significant phrase here is 'carcass of a hairless, foetal mammal', which hints at Freud's depiction of the act of being buried alive as 'a variant' of the experience of 'living in the womb'. In his imagining of John Vaughan as a foetal carcass, Berry presents a character seemingly positioned simultaneously intra-uterine and post-mortem, a state which is also explored to great effect in one of Berry's short stories. 'The Old Black

Pasture',[254] published in 1996, imagines a pair of miners trapped underground by a pit-fall, one dead and one alive. Berry deftly and movingly conveys the action of the 'earth roiling original chaos' and the experience of isolation underground and seemingly immanent death ('Old Black Pasture', 242). A striking aspect of the portrayal of the space the trapped miners occupy is its perceived femininity, for in Berry's visualization, the space is an alternate womb:

> He drowsed, hungering, cuddling his privates for warmth, the only wistful reach of life in his humanity. Subsequently through his drowse, emerged a large amorphous female, soft concubine of dream to give succour, dissolving benevolence throughout his bones and flesh. Instantly losing her. Afterwards deep sleep, peaceful, and all lost forever in the spastic rigor of his awakening (Ibid, 251).

The character evokes the feminine and the foetal while trapped, both offering the miner a glimpse of comfort and security while trapped underground. The female figure he sees in his delirium is at once a maternal figure and a sexualised one. As well as offering benevolence and succour, she is also a 'soft concubine of dream', conjured while he lies 'cuddling his privates for warmth'. This dual (and indeed duelling) representation of the feminine also reflects the terms within which the womb is understood as source of female agency. This reflects Freud's reading of the male anxiety concerning female genitalia in his study of neuroses:

> It often happens that neurotic men state that to them there is something uncanny about the female genitals. But what they find uncanny is actually the entrance to man's old 'home', the place where everyone once lived. [...] Here too then, the uncanny is what was once familiar. (Freud, 'The Uncanny', 152)

Gabe is trapped in a space that signifies 'man's old "home"' as his position brings an awareness not only of mortality, but of the long history of the area. He is described 'listening to the roof sounding off' as 'high up air pockets imploded on rock molten and

[254] Ron Berry, 'The Old Black Pasture' in Simon Baker ed., *Collected Stories*, pp 216-257: henceforth referenced in the body of the text as 'Old Black Pasture'

sealed for three hundred million years' as he is contained in a space that recalls the uterine experience ('Old Black Pasture', 243).

The intra-uterine imagery is continued in the next scene:

> He lay there to the eighth day, curled in darkness, small pieces of leather bootlace inside his mouth. Total blackness no longer disturbed him. There weren't any terrors. Billy's broken hacksaw blade hung from his wrist. Short lengths of bootlace clustered meaninglessly in his stomach. Like an infant he licked the dried, coal-grained cuts on his hand, puckered skin cold against scant warmth of his tongue. He moaned to sighing, very, very slowly creeping his thighs to his belly, sighing, sighed into the coma which sustained him on ebb until Monday evening, when the first rescue miner found him. (Ibid, 252)

Gabe, 'curled in darkness', slowly moves into the instinctive foetal position as he seraches for solace. Furthermore, in his reading of the short story, John Pikoulis suggests that the foetal imagery continues on the surface as on his rescue, Gabe is re-born 'like a new-born baby, he stirs beguiling simplicity in his new found vulnerability'.[255] Through his presentation of the near-uterine uncanny experience of 'burial alive', Berry also explores the sense of affinity between the power of the land and nature and the mysterious agency of femininity.

Trauma and Testimony

In his study of the trauma novel, Ronald Granofsky proposes that the term 'trauma writing' should be re-aligned and reserved 'for those contemporary novels which deal symbolically with a collective disaster'.[256] Although controversial, Granofsky's proposal provides an enquiring interpretative model for considering aspects of Berry's fiction. Returning to look at 'The Old Black Pasture', I will explore the depiction of the consequences of the 'trauma' of underground industrial accidents, and also place the story in dialogue with a similar text by the collier-author B.L. Coombes. Both authors were keen to assert the verisimilitude of their writing. Coombes published a text in

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[255] John Pikoulis, 'Heroes of zero ambition', *New Welsh Review* 50 Autumn 2000, pp26-33, p.33
[256] Ronald Granofsky, p.5

1939 with the National Labour Press entitled *I Am A Miner, Fact*, and the majority of his writing was framed as autobiography, although it has been argued that *These Poor Hands* is an autobiographical novel featuring fictional elaboration and invention, rather than a strictly autobiographical text.[257] Berry, too, was keen to assert the authenticity of his subterranean narratives (both fictional and autobiographical) and stated that the lauded industrial writers D.H. Lawrence and Gwyn Thomas 'existed *outside*' of the industry and 'never sampled the muck and the mire'.[258] He argues that to be understood, 'coal mining had to be experienced day by day, year in and year out, the whole ingested for as long as oxygen fans the skull-mix' in order for the experience of the industry to be adequately expressed (*HWYL*, 54). Like Coombes, Berry does not adopt the persona of a miner. He is not a 'mining expert with clean lungs, nostrils, toe-nails and finger-nails' (*F&S*, 178); he is a miner, fact. The emphasis on the truth of the narrative frames testimony as a theme in both authors' accounts of mining activities and accidents. Both Berry and Coombes fuse testimony, persistence and responsibility; *Flame and Slag*, 'The Old Black Pastures' and 'Twenty Tons of Coal' are all concerned with disseminating the experience of working underground, and in particular, with honouring the memories of those who have been killed through their participation in the coal industry. In Berry's work in particular, there is a suggestion of guilt as he did not work long enough to succumb to the dangers of dust – or fatal mining accidents – unlike many of his collier friends. It seems that his unease with his short career as a collier compels him to recount life underground with such accuracy, capturing the language and the activities of the collier.

It is through the accounts of industrial accidents that the testimony and burden of the survivor come to the fore. In 'The Old Black Pastures', Berry describes how Billy

[257] B.L. Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, in Bill Jones and Chris Williams eds., (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2004) Barbara Prys Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000) pp.64 -79

[258] John Pikoulis, 'Word of mouth cultures cease in cemeteries' *NWR* 34, pp9-15, p.12

Holly is killed in a pit fall:

> But there were more falls. Every few yards the walls burst open. Softly roaring slides of crushed shale spilled out. Overhead rock cramming down on the rings, broke the lagging, jagged stones smashing through, pelting like volcanic hail in the roadway. [...] They were isolated, the earth roiling original chaos. [...] Floods of rubble continued, burying Billy's head and shoulders. Grazed hands shielded between his thighs, without realising Gabe had heard the sickening knock of stone against bone. The bones of his butty's skull. ('Old Black Pasture', 242)

Berry uses the discourse of natural disaster to express the industrially-caused incident – 'volcanic', 'floods' – a device which, as already noted, is also used in his descriptions of tip-slides. The action is a disruption of the natural. The earth, and the language Berry uses, is once again destabilised. The catachretic metaphor of the 'earth roiling original chaos' sees the author manipulate language in his attempt to capture and express the uncanny turmoil of the shifting of the earth in both the sense and the grammar of the phrase. The inflexion of the noun 'roil' to form the verb 'roiling' highlights the sense of movement as the description of the earth's agitation is itself made active. Furthermore, the pairing of 'chaos' with 'original' returns the word chaos to its Greek root: 'the nether abyss, infinite darkness': not only is there a primitive confusion, but time is reversed as the earth seems to erase itself and return to the 'formless void' from which it was created.[259] Coombes' short story also draws on natural imagery to convey the action of a similar industrial accident. As the narrator and his colleague Griff begin to clear the fallen rocks that have blocked the new Deep heading, the support timbers are envisioned as a subterranean forest, a trope which plays on the origins of the fossil fuel and refers to the palindromic environment of the coalfield: 'The posts seem no better than matchsticks under the pressure and we feel as if we were standing in a forest – so close together are the posts – and that a solid sky was dropping slowly to crush

[259] *OED*, second edition, 1989. http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50036694?single=1&query_type=Word&queryword=chaos&first=1&max_to_show=10 Accessed 9th February 2010

everything under it'.[260] The forest is malevolent, and the vision of the falling solid sky apocalyptic as Coombes seeks to use a language and an imagery to facilitate the readers' understanding of the unseen underground environment, something Ron Berry would also later attempt. This natural imagery also extends to Coombes' description of the falling rocks, which are rendered as a form of rainfall: 'the early drops of a shower of solid rain' ('Twenty Tons', 179). The images provide a familiar perceptual framework for the reader to visualise the catastrophe, but also express the inherently alien and uncanny subterranean setting.

It is this sense of a disturbed space that Berry's story reflects upon. As Gabe Lloyd realises that he is trapped, he attempts to hack at the stones to find a way out, but his limbs weaken, 'creeping to slumped rest. Rest, peace', shadowing the dead friend he has laid out on the ground ('Old Black Pasture', 247). In addition to the horror of being interred alive, Gabe Lloyd is also surrounded by death as he sees and smells his friend's decaying body: 'The fragile corpse stank stained teeth bared inside tightened, spread-away lips' (Ibid, 252), a spectre that provides an additional *memento mori.* The presence of the dead Billy Holly also signals the unusual nature of the subject of the short story, as the testimony of the trapped miner is often a silent one, given the high mortality rates of such incidents. Berry also explores the concept of 'out of sight' incidents in *Flame and Slag*, once more through the portrayal of pit collapses. The protagonist, Rees Stevens and his father are injured in pit falls twenty years apart. Rees describes how 'when the stone came down off the inner lip of broken ground, I was flat on my back' (*F&S*, 92-93). As a consequence, he suffers a doubly fractured pelvis and is unable to return to work at the coal face. However, in the 1947 accident, his father is killed. Rees tells his wife how his father, after crossing the tramway into the old workings in order to relieve himself, was '"smashed to bloody pieces [...] buried,

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[260] B. L . Coombes, 'Twenty Tons of Coal', *The Penguin Book of Welsh Short Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 165-185, p.170 .: henceforth referenced in the text.

crushed into his own mess. They brought out his remains in a feed sack. There wasn't a man's body left to plant up in Daren cemetery"' (*F&S*, 38). The similarities between this accident and his own emphasises Rees as a witness, not only to his own accident, but also to the experience of his father.

Indeed, the themes of testimony and voice are evident in the account of Rees's accident, as a minor soft-coal fall moments before anticipates the incident. The narrator notes how an electrician is briefly buried, and how the rescued man's 'jaw shivered and he couldn't talk much' (*F&S*, 92). This once more emphasises the mute and absent documenting of the experience; the number of injured or dead may be reported in papers, but the experience remains untold and untellable, imbuing this fictional recording of the event and the more serious accident that follows it with a sense of authority and authenticity. Testimony is an important aspect of the trope of the fiction of collective trauma, which relies on the self-conscious sense of bearing witness to a catastrophe. Granofsky suggests that this is often manifested by the 'guise of pervasive literal and metaphorical emphasis on vision, looking, or eyes'.[261] Evidently vision underground is limited, and as such 'literal' vision is problematic. Firstly, sight is restricted by the light emitted by helmet-mounted lamp, which illuminates only a narrow area. Secondly, for the trapped miner, the batteries operating the lamp must be conserved so illumination is consciously restricted. As such, both Coombes' and Berry's accounts foreground the other sensory faculties, in particular touch, hearing, and smell. In 'Twenty Tons of Coal', the roof fall is conveyed through what the narrator felt: 'air rushing past my face; something hit me a terrible blow on the back' ('Twenty Tons', 177). Immediately after the accident, the narrator listens: 'in the darkness I hear a sound that resembles the ripping of cloth. It is this noise that stones make when they are being crushed and broken by the weight that is moving above

[261] Ronald Granofsky, p.13

them' ('Twenty Tons', 177). John Pikoulis notes in his extended review of Berry's *Collected Stories* that the author takes care 'in describing his men's breath – they wheeze, hiss, gust, huft, puhh, wet shhhh and dry spit, sush, tish, gush. These reflect on ex-miner's sensitivity to sound which could be full of such different potential meanings, some of them lethal'.[262] Berry therefore forces language to become an extension of the body and the senses. Gabe Lloyd hears his friend's skull shatter, but he also immediately smells for gas in the aftermath of the fall to check for any additional dangers he may encounter.

Although Berry's story concludes with an account of Gabe's preparations for his return to work, once the miner re-emerges from the 'bowels of the earth' there is no explicit reflection on his experience of the accident ('Old Black Pastures', 256). Indeed, Gabe's former lover's articulation of the anxiety felt by those above ground prompts a fierce reaction:

> "Everyone kept saying you were dead. Morning, noon and night in the canteen. Gabe Lloyd is gone, he's bound to be dead. Even Mr Leyshon, he believed you were dead". He jammed his fists into his pockets.
> "Okay, I don't want to hear anymore." (Ibid, 254)

Gabe's refusal to engage with his uncanny experience when restored to the regular activity of life above ground differs from the reaction of the (unnamed) first person narrator of Coombes' 'Twenty Tons of Coal'. Berry's story concentrates on the underground experience, but Coombes' narrative considers how the witness to an industrial accident attempts to understand what he has experienced and seen. One of the first scenes of the story examines the narrator's attempt to express the horror that he has witnessed. His friend, a shop keeper, asks the narrator why he is quiet and 'looking rough'('Twenty Tons', 165). He speculates that perhaps the collier has a 'touch of flu', an assertion which is angrily corrected: ' "No! I wish it was the flu," I answered, "I

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[262] John Pikoulis, 'Heroes', p.27

could get over that, I've had my mate smashed – right by my elbow" ' ('Twenty Tons', 165). The shopkeeper does not possess the same experiential references as the collier and cannot comprehend the uncanny terror of the accident, as the exchange between the two characters illustrates:

> "Good Lord!" He is astounded for an instant, then remembers. "Oh yes. I heard about something about it, up at that Restcwm colliery, wasn't it? That's the way it is, you know. Things are getting pretty bad everywhere. The toll of the roads f'rinstance [*sic*] – makes you think, don't it?"
> "The roads," I answer slowly, "yes, we all use the roads. Can't you realize that this is something different? He was under tons of rock, and everything was pitch dark. No chance to get away; no way of seeing what was coming; no – oh, what's the use? If you've never been there you'll never understand." ('Twenty Tons', 165-166)

It is this perceptual gulf existing between above and below which permeates Coombes' story, once again revealing the problematic nature of the palindromic environment of the coalfield. Although, as considered earlier, the text features imagery that negotiates this perceptual fracture, it is evident that this is a literary device as it is not something that the narrator can articulate in his conversations. The narrator's role as a witness at the inquest of his dead colleague also explores this difficulty as he confides that he dreads negotiating the impossibility of articulating what happened in the accident: 'I shall have to tell what happened in pitch darkness about two miles inside the mountain. They will listen to me in the brightness of the daylight and in the safety of ordinary life; and they will think that they understand'('Twenty Tons', 168). The narrator's appearance at the inquest also allows Coombes to problematise the concept of testimony further. In addition to the difficulty of conveying what he experienced, the narrator is constrained by the use of the procedural regulations of the mining industry. He dejectedly reflects that due to the negligent and irresponsible orders of the colliery's fireman, ' "If I speak what is true, the insurance company will claim that they are absolved from liability because we should not have worked there. Had we refused to

work we should probably have lost our jobs" ' ('Twenty Tons', 165-166). Furthermore he observes that should the inquest return a verdict other than accidental death, his colleague's widow will receive only her dead husband's final wage payment, and no further support. His compulsion to give a truthful account of the incident is therefore compromised by his sense of responsibility to the family of the dead collier.

Berry also explores the nature of testimony, but within the mode of the novel rather than the short story. As I have already noted, *Flame and Slag* is a novel of two narratives, the contemporary account of Rees Stevens and the historic journal of his father in law. Even before the accident, Ellen suggests that Rees should start to write down the 'silly bloody memories' that distract him (*F&S*, 67). Rees begins to write, seemingly inspired by the journals of John Vaughan, recovered from the wrecked Thelma Street house. Indeed, the structure of the novel, with the interspersing of the contemporary narrative with John Vaughan's historic journal, suggests that perhaps Rees Stevens' narrative is his own emulation of his father-in-law's recording of events. The first person narrative of the novel underlines this, suggesting that the 1960s narrative is Rees Stevens's own lens on his experience. However, there is also evidence that his narrative is a frequent inter-narrative device, and that Berry remains the authorial presence. For example, early in the novel the narrator shifts:

> Rees Stevens doesn't have to blurb this piece either. Naked facts and figures are published every year in *Whitaker's.* Histories embalmed, egos preserved without a creak, flawless, bang-on as yesterday's weather. Anyone can use *Whitaker's* for anything, any year book, any chart, statistical record, any statement of accounts. (*F&S*, 44)

The effect is two-fold. It positions the novel as a form of documentary, as Berry seeks to 'crystallise', or 'carbonise' as one critic has noted, the lived experience of the mid-twentieth century south Wales coalfield (Pikoulis, 'Word of mouth', 34). But the shift also prompts the reader to interrogate Rees Stevens' varying styles, given the inter-textuality within the narrative. Writing becomes an obsession during Rees's

recuperation, as his visit to the government rehabilitation centre illustrates. Describing himself as existing in suspended animation, Rees states:

> "I'm living with a kind of dying, When I win, I'll be reborn."
> "Ha, death, rebirth! Most of us cannot afford to worry about dying and rebirth. Perhaps it's easier for you to mystify the circumstances of your injury instead of facing up to reality. Are you Mr Stevens?" (*F&S*, 109)

This is recalled later in the novel as Rees states that he has found a '*cwtch* of rebirth' in the act of writing. However, it is the denigration of his perceived 'mystifying of [his] injury' that deserves further attention.

In creating a fictional tip-slide, featuring subtle similarity to the Aberfan disaster, Berry can be seen to attempt to recover the experience of this very public and 'seen' disaster from the legal discourse that dominated the many accounts. Through a restrained use of literary symbolism, the mystifying of the injury as it were, Berry 'facilitates a removal from unpleasant actuality by use of distance and selection. While human memory achieves distance temporarily, the symbolic fiction achieves it spatially by imposing itself between the reader and the thing symbolised'(Granofsky, 6). The uncanny abstraction of the tip-slide incident is a literary symbol that facilitates the fictional account of a persistent and visceral disaster, and also allows a space for considering industrial disasters outside of the community and industry's conditioned 'routinization [of] the handling of the after effects of major accidents'(Turner and Pidgeon, 83).

Berry's creation of a perceptual space in which to consider industrial accidents reveals his concern for the communities of the south Wales coalfield. But it also reveals his conviction of the centrality of landscape and sense of place in the narratives of community, society and history. In his examination and description of the landscape Berry attempts to express the peculiarities of the south Wales coalfield landscape, and its influence on the communities that inhabit it. Having experienced the landscape from both above and below he imbues his work with an awareness of the palindromic, and

often uncanny, dynamic at work in the dichotomous industrial/natural/domestic space. Berry reads the landscape he inhabits. He draws on its early nineteenth-century depiction as the Glamorganshire Alps by a visiting travel writer and contrasts this with the ingrained and iconic twentieth-century imagery of the coalfield: the pit head winding towers and coal waste tips, signifiers of both industry and danger. But Berry consciously extends his gaze beyond the industrial iconography to consider the lived experience of those in the Rhondda communities. His attempts to capture this experience and the *genius loci*, or *cynefin*, of the south Wales coalfield also leads to literary experimentation as he seeks to find a suitable form to express the palindromic and uncanny atmosphere. Illustrative of this is his sensitive engagement with the terror of industrial catastrophes, both above and below the ground. Berry negotiates not only the perceptual gulf between those who have experienced working underground and those who have not, but also the gap between those who are familiar and unfamiliar with the landscape he describes. His visceral descriptions of the uncannily catastrophic potential of the landscape features – the unseen tunnels and the exaggeratedly visible slag tips – bridge this space. Furthermore, to reveal the impossibility of what he is attempting to describe, Berry forces and fractures language in an attempt to capture the overwhelming chaos of the glimpses of 'absolute destruction' that such catastrophes present, and to reflect the forces inflicted on, and by, the landscape.

As the first author to engage with the palindromic nature of the south Wales coalfield environment, Berry positions landscape at the centre of any consideration of the area. Indeed, his exposure of the history contained in the land reveals that its re-shaping – its remodelling by human activity, whether directly or indirectly – is a fundamental, but overlooked, aspect of social history. His examination of the role and influence of the physical environment was not however limited to considerations of the industrial experience. As argued in this chapter, Berry is acutely aware of the long

history of the geography he inhabits, and of the concept of landscape as a process. His writing considers the de-industrialised and post-industrial phases of the Rhondda, but also, perhaps rather surprisingly for an author long defined by industrial experience, includes natural histories and environmental writing. It is these last genres that I will next consider, investigating Berry's deep engagement with the environment of his habitat. As Rees and Ellen note at the conclusion of *Flame and Slag*: ' "Away to the woods," I said. "That's right, away from the coal and muck on your mind. No more *ach y fi*." ' (*F&S*, 183).

The Black Pastures: Ron Berry's Ecocentric Writing

The pastoral, in addition to offering a literary framework in which to see the social and cultural construction and consumption of the landscape and its associated symbolism, can also provide a model for the consideration of the natural environment. This later development of the genre, which Terry Gifford terms the 'post-pastoral', results in a style of literature (and art) that 'demands our re-examination of our real daily relationship' with the natural environment.[263] For Leo Marx, however, it is the realisation of 'the precariousness of our relations with nature' that brings forth 'new versions of the pastoral'.[264] Although opinions on the process of the evolution of the post-pastoral are varied, it is evident that contemporary ecological consciousness – both in literature and in wider society – entails an 'eco-centric repossession of pastoral', a shift to a consideration of the dynamics between people and the environment.[265] Gifford argues that post-pastoral 'seeks to define a pastoral that has avoided the traps of idealisation in seeking to find a new discourse that can both celebrate and take some responsibility for nature without false consciousness'.[266] Informed by the enquiry of the complex pastoral and prompted by the persistence of the myth of the unspoilt rural idyll, the post-pastoral has, as Lawrence Buell observes in *The Environmental Imagination*, 'begun to shift from representation of nature as a theatre for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake'.[267] Buell notes that the defining theoretical text of the complex pastoral, Leo Marx's

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[263] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (Routledge, London, 1999), p.150
[264] Leo Marx, 'Does Pastoralism have a future?' in . John Dixon Hunt ed , *The Pastoral Landscape proceedings of the symposium "The Pastoral Landscape", sponsored by the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts,*. Vol. 20 (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), p.222
[265] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), p.52
[266] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.148
[267] Lawrence Buell, *Environmental*, p.52

Machine in the Garden, displays a 'relative disinterest in the literal environment as opposed to the environment as cultural symbol'.[268] The post-pastoral mode, however, positions the 'literal environment' as its primary focus whilst also revealing an awareness of the cultural, historical and social significance of landscape and the natural environment. It (re-)examines 'what pastoral has achieved and what pastoral can yet achieve in mediating and negotiating our relationships with nature and each other', and dissolves the distinction between the realms of the human and non-human in its consideration of the environment and society.[269]

It is the post-pastoral and eco-centric aspects of Ron Berry's writing that will form the focus of this chapter. Much of Berry's writing is rooted in the locale of the upper Rhondda Fawr valley. It traces the impact of heavy industry on the area, both looking back to its industrialisation and examining the contemporaneous late twentieth-century process of de-industrialisation. The texts also revel in the local environment; the mountains, moorland and watercourses as well as the natural life they sustain. Although he did not define himself as an environmentally conscious writer, Berry's short and novel-length fiction (including the unpublished novel 'Below Lord's Head Mountain'), his autobiography *History Is What You Live*, and his natural history text, *Peregrine Watching,* all feature an underlying environmental awareness. This aspect of Berry's work has been overlooked to date but examination of private papers reveal his active engagement with environmental concerns. In addition to an archive of his protests against a Forestry Commission and Rhondda Borough Council recreation scheme, the collection also contains a letter outlining how the author viewed himself as a 'long-

[268] Lawrence Buell, *Environmental*, p.440
[269] Terry Gifford, 'Post-pastoral as a Tool for Ecocriticism', *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed* ed. Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006) pp.14-24, p.18

time, rather disillusioned [environmental] campaigner'.[270] Through this optic, allusions to ecological issues and wider environmental concerns in Berry's work are revealed. But before examining Berry's work in these terms, it is necessary to clarify the features of post-pastoral or environmental writing.

Lawrence Buell and Terry Gifford both provide definitions of eco-centric literature. Published in 1995, Buell's definition of environmental writing outlines four elements:

- The non human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history
- The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest
- Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation
- Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. [271]

Gifford's assessment of six characteristics of post-pastoral writing was originally published in the same year.[272] This was later extended and it is the revised definition that I shall consider.[273] In *Pastoral*, Gifford proposes six features of post-pastoralism. The first is defined as 'awe in attention to the natural world';[274] post-pastoral literature secondly recognises the creative-destructive dynamic of the environment, and also thirdly, perceives that 'inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature'.[275] Fourthly, an awareness of 'both nature as culture and of culture as nature' is expressed in post-pastoral texts as aspects of the complex pastoral are inverted

[270] Ron Berry, letter of 20th September 1977 to *Western Mail*, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives WWE/1/10/14

[271] Lawrence Buell, *Environmental*, p.7

[272] See Terry Gifford, *Green voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.121

[273] Dominic Head argues that Gifford's 'extended definition of post-pastoral was originally conceived in a discussion of contemporary poetry, [and] its applicability to fiction remains to be tested', *Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction 1950-2000,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.194.However, in Gifford's chapter on the post-pastoral writing in *Pastoral,* each of the six proposed qualities of environmental writing is explored in both poetry and prose. See Terry Gifford, *Pastoral,* pp.146-174

[274] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.152

[275] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.155, p.156

.[276]Consciousness as conscience is Gifford's fifth suggested quality; he explains that consciousness, from a bio-centric perspective, could be humanity's 'opportunity to take responsibility for its ecological relationships', shifting the georgic from 'the elaboration of good work practices [to] a plea for environmentally sensitive local and global management'. [277] The final feature of Gifford's definition is that environmental exploitation is a parallel of social exploitation and that the same ideologies inform both these forms of abuse.[278]It is apparent that there is some overlap between Buell and Gifford's definitions and they can arguably be combined and condensed into three aspects:

- The long interaction of human and natural histories
- Profound 'inner' responses to the natural world
- Environmental conscience, responsibility and accountability: inhabiting, re-inhabiting and appropriating the environment

Each of these facets is informed by the understanding of landscape and environment as ever-changing processes and considers human and societal interaction and engagement with the natural environment as actions that shape the space and our understanding of it. It is these approaches that will frame my analysis of the eco-centric features of Berry's writing.

Habitat and Histories

In *A Phenomology of Landscape*, Christopher Tilley argues that space and place are 'intimately related to the formation of biographies' and personal and group identities.[279] *This Bygone*, the last novel Berry was to publish, expresses a similar sentiment; the closing lines conclude that the protagonist is '[b]oy inseparable from man in his time, in his place', reflecting the author's own predicament.[280] By fixing his various

[276] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.162
[277] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.163
[278] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.165
[279] Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p.11, p18
[280] Ron Berry, *This Bygone* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1996), p.202

narratives to the Blaenycwm locale, Berry is able to reinforce his identity and locate his biography. As Barbara Prys Williams has observed of his writing, 'there is a feeling that, whatever he knows himself to be [...] it is because, with his genetic endowment, in his particular historic time and environment, he can be no other'.[281] This grounding of his self and his imagination also allows Berry to investigate the histories of the area he best knows, and to trace the processes that have acted upon the area to form its *cynefin.* For him, the space that landscape and the environment creates is not the 'abstract dimension or container in which human activities and events [take] place' of the new geography movement.[282] In Berry's work space is a medium, 'something involved in action and [that] cannot be divorced from it', and as such it is a social product.[283] Tilley explains that social space is 'contextually constituted, providing particular settings for involvement and the creation of meanings. The specificity of place is an essential element of understanding its significance'.[284] Furthermore, he notes that the 'meaning of place is grounded in existential or lived consciousness of it' [285]It is this 'lived consciousness' of place, landscape and environment that Berry attempts to capture and commemorate in his work.

Before examining how Berry reads his locale it is necessary to outline how he transfers his sense of the importance of his own location to his fiction. In his novels and short stories, he conjures a fictive geography evidently influenced by the upper Rhondda Fawr. Versions of the settlements of Blaenddu and Tosteg in particular recur in Berry's novels, and on reading his autobiography the reader is able to deduce that they are versions of Blaenycwm and the nearby Treorchy.[286] Berry worked in

[281] Barbara Prys Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p.80-81
[282] Christopher Tilley, p.9
[283] Christopher Tilley, p.10
[284] Ibid.
[285] Christopher Tilley, p.15
[286] Like Blaenddu, Blaencwm is a mining village comprising one pit and a drift mine as Berry outlines in the introduction to *History Is What You Live* (13). Blaenddu is the setting of *Hunters and Hunted* (1960)

Blaenycwm's Graig level drift mine, a version of which appears in *Hunters and Hunted* as the Gwynt level, that 'ran directly into the Graig mountain' (*HH*, 21) and as the Druid level, which 'runs into Graig Ddu mountain' (*FTA*, 24). Blaenycwm's pit, the Tydraw colliery appears variously as Blaenddu's Bobbin pit (*HH*, 21) and as the Vivian (*FTA*, 128).[287] As already noted, Berry's personal papers reveal the influence of Pen Pych mountain on his identity, and a version of the mountain appears in his fictional work. Pen Arglwydd mountain, a fictional rendering of Pen Pych, features in both Berry's novel-length and short fiction and a literal translation of name was to provide the title of the unpublished novel-length manuscript, 'Below Lord's Head Mountain'.[288] The title illustrates the significance of the mountain, the majesty of its appearance and the way in which it overshadows the village of Blaenddu. Indeed, this aspect of it is suggested in the other fictional depictions as the mountain is rarely the setting of a scene, rather a landmark observed from a distance. In *The Full Time Amateur* it appears 'far off under moon glow', through the paneless windows of a new house on a building site (135), and as a 'green and granite temple to Rameses II' (130). In the short story , 'Time Spent', the mountain is a signifier of freedom as the pneumoconiotic miner watches carrion crows 'winging down below [its] high level rim'. [289] He realises it is twenty years since he last climbed the mountain and that he is now too ill to do so: 'can't manage it now. Finished. Christ, aye, I'm finished' ('Time Spent', 99).

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and Berry's unpublished novel 'Below Lord's Head Mountain'; Tosteg is a nearby village further down the valley. The villages are also referred to in *So Long Hector Bebb* (1970). Tosteg is mentioned in *Flame and Slag* (1968) and Blaen-du features in the short story 'Comrades in Arms' (*CS*, 57-63). The novel *The Full-Time Amateur* (1966) seems to be set in Tŷ Mawr (there is no explicit location, but the club the principal character frequents is the Tŷ Mawr Con Club). The novel however does trace the actual geography of the south Wales coalfield, making reference to the area 'from Blaenrhondda to Pontypridd'(*FTA*, 39) and frequently locates the narrative in the Rhondda

[287] *The Full Time Amateur* also features a second deep pit, the Black Rand, which appears to be a version of the Glenrhondda colliery (*FTA*, 176)

[288] 'Below Lord's Head Mountain' Manuscript , Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/2/1/3 . Drafts indicate that the text was originally titled 'Under Pen Arglwydd' or 'Colours of Saying', Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/2/1/2 . The text will henceforth be referenced as BLHM in the text

[289] Ron Berry, 'Time Spent', in Simon Baker ed., *Collected Stories* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2000), pp.92-103, p.99

In his autobiography, *History Is What You Live*, Berry reflects on the significance of *cynefin,*, that is the place, its environment and its history to its inhabitants. From the summit of Pen Pych mountain at the head of the Rhondda Fawr valley, Berry observes 'Blaenycwm village [lying] outstretched, panoramically sideways, matchboxed by distance, locale interregnum between first squall and last gasp' (*HWYL*, 29). The scene meditates on the inherent in the interrelation of time, space and place. Berry's village is 'matchboxed' by the perspective offered by the surrounding mountains; the manscape is contracted by the landscape, prompting a shift away from the anthropocentric. But the phrase 'locale interregnum' is ambiguous. It suggests the significance of location during one's life, but also the apparent brevity of this authority, limited as it is to between the 'first squall and last gasp' of life. A period of 'interregnum' is dependent on what lies either side of the interval, and it follows therefore that locale possesses more potential than is typically acknowledged. It is at once a repository of the past and an inheritance of the future, inscribed with the evidence of each passing generation. Furthermore, that which constitutes a locale – landscape and nature – predates humanity and society and will continue to exist beyond human history.[290] Berry's autobiography is an exercise in investigating the interregnal influence of place but also the permanence – including both the history and future – of the landscape; it is an expression of Berry's understanding of the 'deepening of time' that landscape represents (Macfarlane, 14). As Robert Macfarlane observes, such a perspective 'gives you special spectacles through which to see a landscape. They allow you to see back in time to worlds where rocks liquify and seas petrify, where granite slops like porridge,

[290] In *Mountains of the Mind,* Robert Macfarlane reflects that the understanding of deep time is profoundly linked to wonder: 'Contemplating the immensities of deep time, you face, in a way that is both exquisite and horrifying, the total collapse of your present, compacted to nothingness by the pressures of pasts and futures too extensive to envisage [...] you learn yourself to be a blip in the larger projects of the universe [...] you are also rewarded with the realization that you do exist – as unlikely as it may seem, you do exist'. Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind* (London: Granta, 2003), p.43-44

basalt bubbles like stew, and layers of limestone are folded as easily as blankets'.[291]

The autobiography opens with Berry's earliest recollection, an upland picnic, which grounds his sense of self in the Blaenycwm locale:

> Maiden memory, summer of 1921, striking miners and their families gathered on a green field. Still frocked and napkined on Mary Ann's lap, lost and found next to my unborn sister Marian. [...] Before the next long strike of 1926, the field lay beneath acres of slag. Now (1996) it's green again, two pitshafts filled in, my Uncle Glyn's life's blood (1927) buried two hundred years [*sic*] deep for all time this side of eternity, that packaged mystique of religions. (*HWYL*, 13)[292]

The 'maiden memory' reveals Berry's rootedness in the context of both the Blaenycwm landscape and its history. As a character reflects in *The Full Time Amateur*, Berry has lived 'to see the wheel turn full circle' (*FTA*, 193). His lifetime spanned the expansion of the first pit in Blaenycwm to the closure of the last colliery in the Rhondda and his was personal history embedded in the land. The tracing of the changes to the landscape from green field to slag tip, to 'landscaped' greenery, signifies the shift from industrialisation to deindustrialisation. In his introduction to *History Is What You Live*, Dai Smith observes of Berry's work that 'no writer has so dissected a world living [...] inside the husk of its own history' (*HWYL*, 9). This sense of a deep locatedness in both place and history is borne out by the title of the autobiography which underscores the significance of the lived – and historical – consciousness of the area to Berry. Private papers reveal how he viewed the landscape of the Rhondda as his (and his family's) 'inheritance' and his autobiography inscribes this perspective: indeed, the writing of his experience of his habitat transmits and continues the legacy.[293] Berry's writing enacts and expresses Simon Schama's observation in *Landscape and Memory* that 'before it

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[291] Robert Macfarlane, p.43

[292] The word 'years' is a misprint in *History Is What You Live*. In the BBC Wales documentary *Read All About Us,* Berry reads from the draft of his autobiography confirming that the correct text read 'two hundred yards deep' . *Read All About Us: Ron Berry* (BBC Wales, 1996. Exec Prod: Dai Smith)

[293] The notion of landscape as personal inheritance features in the draft document 'Objections to Rhondda Forest Recreation Project' (1st July 1975), a letter to the *Sunday Times* 4th October 1976, and a letter to the *Western Mail* 20th September 1977 : Ron Berry Papers, (Rhondda Forest Recreation Project Papers), Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

can ever be a repose for the senses landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock'.[294] Schama's remark illuminates the schism in the common approach to the natural world. We are accustomed, he notes, 'to separate nature and human perception into two realms, [although] they are, in fact, indivisible'. [295]The 'maiden memory' evokes this sense of the indivisible connection between the human and the natural, or non-human, world. The memory is recalled from his early infancy, a time, as Yi-Fu Tuan argues, before a child can 'distinguish between self and an external environment'.[296] During this brief time, Tuan reflects 'human beings have known how it feels to live in a nondualistic world'. [297]

Barbara Prys Williams recognized that conceptually, the village and the mountains of Blaenycwm provide the 'organizing framework' of *History Is What You Live* .[298] Much of the text, the reader comes to notice, is a guided walk through the upper Rhondda environment ('we're up here on Cefn Nant y Gwair' (*HWYL,* 41). In the text, Berry recreates his personal experience of his immediate surroundings; he 'wanders in memory the mountain tops of Blaen-y-cwm [*sic*]' vacillating between the past and the present (Ibid, 81). The narrative is punctuated with dense descriptions of the landscape that excavate the history of the geographical features of the area and, as Barbara Prys Williams observes, Berry 'interprets his habitat [...] so that we can see its value through his eyes' (Ibid). His gaze extends beyond the surface of the landscape to consider the narratives embedded in it. His accounts of the landscape negotiate the pre-historic, the pre-industrial (or *gloran*), the industrial and the post-industrial phases and aspects of this mountainous terrain, in addition to his personal sensory experiences and

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[294] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), p.6-7
[295] Ibid
[296] Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 1977), p.20
[297] Ibid.
[298] Barbara Prys Williams, p.80. As already alluded to, Pen Arglwydd mountain functions in a similar manner in Berry's fiction.

awareness of the natural history of the landscape.[299] The following passage reveals how Berry uncovers the 'strata of memory' of Pen Pych mountain:

> Two streams, Selsig and Blaenrhondda, converge at the foot of Pen Pych, becoming Rhondda River for 12 miles down to Pontypridd. On Blaenrhondda's flank of Pen Pych, scattered hardwoods older than Cardiff city. Above the trees, whinberry ledges, ivied buttresses, shale slips, raven territory up and over the flat summit. Around towards Blaenycwm, descending belts of bracken, patches of scree, gale-shaped hawthorns, and a lateral row of holes entering Pen Pych's breast, scars left by Depression miners who burrowed for coal and shoulderedhundredweight bags down sheep tracks like vassals of the Dark Ages. (*HWYL*, 29)

The scene is located: the streams and river are named, reminding the reader of the origin of the name Rhondda and of the geological processes in the formation of the valley. Secondly, the hardwood trees are described and their growth rings are metaphorically counted ('older than Cardiff city'), and the other features of the mountainside are also recorded (shale, whinberry ledges, windblown hawthorn bushes), including the wildlife. Finally, Berry draws the reader's attention to the 'lateral row of holes entering Pen Pych's breast', a feature that a more casual observer would overlook. We learn that the holes are evidence of the hardships endured by miners during the Depression, who improvised and adapted their typical industrial activity by burrowing into the hillside to find coal.

It is the processes of coal mining that reveal to Berry the 'strata of memory' of the Rhondda, or as Gwyn Thomas had earlier remarked, its 'geology of remembrance' (*AWE*, 18). The exposure of the geological strata through mining literally reveals the long history of the area. The mines expose and exploit pre-historic residues, obscure the *gloran* history of the landscape, and embody industrial history. Furthermore, their absence constitutes the post-industrial context of the upper Rhondda Fawr valley. The experience of working underground seems to imbue Berry with the ability to perceive

[299] *Gloran* is a term used by Berry to describe the 'original Rhondda bloodstock' and as such provides a useful term to succinctly describe the pre-industrial agricultural history of the area (*HWYL*, 23)

the depth of history of his habitat, or *cynefin*, and as well as exploring this in his autobiography, he too considers it in his fictional work. The conclusion of *Flame and Slag* sees Berry consider the 'earthbound past' of Daren:

> Always the past, the mortifying past. John Vaughan's past, past time out of mind, all Daren's earthbound past putrefying from uncountable sweats, worshipful feasts, January-nights, dried lungs, broken backs, burnt blood, lucifered Christs, ghetto dreams, shanty chapels, tombstone chapels, the first shovelful of muck multiplying into Caib tip-slide, and farther away still those Hunter and Fisher Folk (our first ever) chipping flint arrowheads with the surety, precision of monocled watch repairers. The Folk curled like badgers in mountainside holes, sniffing dawns millions of years after the last pterodactyls sparred fanged mating bouts in humid glades beside hydrolytic swamps, the Coal Board's property virginally seamed down beneath Waunwen, awaiting, awaiting royal protocol, £164,000,000 to the coal-owners and His Majesty's sanction on 12th July 1946. (*F&S*, 166-67)

Berry undertakes a textual excavation to expose the processual features of landscape. The resultant perspective extends beyond the industrial community, past the *gloran*, or native, pre-industrial inhabitants of what was then the Ystradfadwg parish to a Neolithic people; it is a deepening of time. One of the most striking aspects of this extract is the image of the 'folk curled like badgers in mountainside holes, sniffing dawns millions of years after the last pterodactyls'.[300] This image functions in three ways. It first conjures the flint-using 'Hunter and Fisher Folk' living in their subterranean homes; furthermore, it also alludes to their entombed bodies deep in the mountainside.[301] The act of 'sniffing dawns millions of years after' can also be seen to suggest the miners extracting the carbonised residue of the hydrolytic swamps in the

[300] Berry was to revisit this image in the unpublished novel-length manuscript 'Below Lord's Head Mountain'. The narrator reflects on a former miner's 'subterranean ethos' and sees how he is a 'cameo of a Celtic mole, a troglodyte under Pen Arglwydd.' (BLHM, 77)

[301] Many Mesolithic artefacts have been discovered in the Rhondda valleys, predominantly in the upper areas around Blaenrhondda, Blaencwm and Maerdy. The mainly stone age items relate to hunting, fishing and foraging, which suggests seasonal nomadic activity. http://wales-link.co.uk/Mid-Glamorgan/rhondda-valley/Page-2.html accessed 23/06/2009 Berry's papers reveal that it was Shôn Price, 'Upper Rhondda's forerunner in archaeological field work', who first proved 'how far inland in Glamorgan came the Hunter and Fisher Folk of pre-history. All previous evidence locates them around the coastal belt' (Ron Berry, 'Objections to Rhondda Forest Recreation Project', p.4, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14)

drift mines that pock-mark the hillside, and later in the coal pits. Berry also explores the long history of the area through the character of Charlie Page. On his enforced retirement due to ill health – specifically a dust level of fifty per cent in his lungs – Charlie, who worked underground for thirty four years, takes up archaeology and becomes 'the doppelgänger of a Hunter and Fisher Folk shaman' (*F&S*, 72). He spends his days excavating the tip, collecting the flint-scrapers and arrowheads of the Neolithic communities, and also fossils from the pre-human era. Berry's autobiography suggests that this character is grounded in reality. On walking up Pen Pych he recalls the slag tips that once littered the mountains opposite:

> Bigger than Cadbury mounds once bulged along the silhouette of Graig y Ddelw and Mynydd Ty Isaf, slag heaps from defunct Tydraw colliery, landscaped now, contoured and conifered. Attractively quaint, petrified mussels from 250,000,000 BC are sprinkled within like Absolute currants. Some of these are in Cardiff Museum, collected by Shôn Price [. ..]
> (*HWYL*, 30)

For Berry, the slag tips form part of the 'grammar of the landscape'.[302] Signifying the industrial and post-industrial narratives of the south Wales coalfield in their creation and remodelling and the deposited industrial waste, the slag tips also unearth and thus literally lays bare the buried history of the area. The incongruity of the 'petrified mussels' in the uplands echoes a similar discovery in the novel *Flame and Slag*. Charlie Page's 'clutch of small fossilized mussels' reveal to the characters how once there was 'salt water everywhere over Daren. No mountains, no woods, no coal' (*F&S*, 73). A similar perspective is also presented in Berry's fictional accounts of industrial accidents. In *The Full Time Amateur* the injured narrator reflects how the rock that injured him 'waited about two hundred and fifty million years' to fall (*FTA*, 47), and in the short story 'Left Behind', a rock that kills a miner is described as 'slamming down out of millions of lightless years', exposing the pre-historic context of the product of

[302] Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (Yale, 1998), cited in Jim Perrin, 'Land and Freedom', *New Welsh Review* 74, pp8-18, p.12

the earth and also underlining the fact that the industrial disturbance of the subterranean environment is a comparatively recent phenomenon (*CS*,88). It is as if the glimpse of human mortality offered by the chance industrial accidents prompts a profound realisation of the seemingly eternal qualities of the earth.

The Significance of Inscape: Inner responses to the natural world

> A huge brazen mountain [Pen Pych] filled with dreams from pre-history, where I too dreamed for more than forty years, linking self to near as damn it eternity.[303]

The shift from the anthropocentric perspective of the natural world to a more holistic view of the environment cannot ignore the human response to its surroundings. Indeed, it is the profound reactions that landscape and nature can engender that define two of Terry Gifford's 'six qualities' of environmental writing. The first definition emphasises that 'fundamental' to eco-centric literature is 'an awe in attention to the natural world'.[304] Head has observed that the expression of such awe 'would seem to represent an embarrassment to the procedure of fiction'.[305] Indeed, it is primarily in his non-fictional writing that Berry explores his experience of awe in response to the natural world; there are only brief instances of the veneration of nature in his fictional writing. The second quality concerned with the human response to nature is the consideration of the connection between the inner nature of emotion and self and the outer natural world. Before considering how Berry connects with the Blaenycwm environment, it is appropriate first to consider his expressions of wonder.

As already indicated, Berry's descriptions of industrial disasters both above ground and below in the novel *Flame and Slag* are loaded with a sense of awe, but the narrator also more subtly exposes his wonder at the 'chlorophyll alchemy' of 'ancient trees' that form 'vast pulsing islands breeding and feeding and bleeding a criss-crossed

[303] Ron Berry, typed draft document undated, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE//1/10/14
[304] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral,* p.152
[305] Dominic Head, p.194

married myriad', and the 'uprearing of the landscape' (47, 99). The second phrase is particularly dense, and sees Berry both describe the height of the mountainside and allude to the process of their geological formation, whilst also exalting its appearance. Berry's descriptions of more profound engagements with the natural world are reserved for his autobiographical writing, and his nature journal *Peregrine Watching.*[306] Indeed, it is the experience of bird watching that informs the majority of Berry's recollections. As he walks on Pen Pych mountain, the swifts flying above prompt a childhood memory:

> Dog days on Pen Pych, grasshoppers churring in the dry grass, swifts scything on high, harvesting gnats as the sun goes down, screamers orchestrating evolution's delirium. Once as a small boy, enraptured by swarming swifts in Wion gully, I felt universal, holier than ages, mightied by wonder. (*HWYL*, 31)

Expressed awe in environmental writing, Gifford argues, shows that reverence 'derives not just from a naturalist's intimate knowledge or a modern ecologist's observation of the dynamics of relationships, but from a deep sense of the immanence in all natural things', and Berry appears to enact that understanding here.[307] The 'small boy' Berry

[306] Berry's *Peregrine Watching* bears many similarities to J.A. Baker's *The Peregrine* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2005 [Harper Collins, 1967]). Baker's text is a more developed account of bird watching (it consists of very nearly daily records of the birds he observes and follows), but both texts share a common reverence and respect for peregrines and the wider natural world. Baker also seeks to blur the distinction between the human and nonhuman realms in his nondualistic perspective, but in a more extreme manner than Berry. Early in *Peregrine Watching*, Baker outlines how he 'will follow [the tiercel] till my predatory human shape no longer darkens in terror the shaken kaleidoscope of colour that stains the deep fovea of his brilliant eye. My pagan head shall sink into the winter land, and there be purified' (41). As Robert Macfarlane remarks in his introduction to the text, Baker writes of 'becoming a bird' (viii). Berry's account too reflects how 'watching peregrines becomes obsessional', and notes how he and his two fellow peregrine watchers log 300 hours of observations over two breeding seasons. Although Berry does not (overtly at least) seek to become the bird, his accounts do reveal that his engagement with the peregrine transports him to a state that steps out of conventional human perception: he notices that he 'sniffs like a troglodyte' (*PW*, 53), and reflects that 'ravens know more about peregrines than we do' (*PW*, 48). He also reflects on his interaction with the birds, reflecting how he hopes that in consistently observing the pair of peregrines at Cerrig Fawr he becomes ' a fragmentary part of their lives' (*PW*, 64). Berry too is aware of the position of human as a predator within the natural world, and as Baker's text records a mid 1960s winter and the declining peregrine population due to DDT and indiscriminate shooting, Berry's account, written almost 15 years later, observes the re-introduction of peregrines to South Wales. But is haunted by the lack of 'experience of watching peregrines during the late Fifties and throughout the Sixties, when the moloch genius of applied science seemed destined to eliminate hawks in the civilised world' (*PW*, 19). Berry's *Peregrine Watching* is deserving of a more developed comparison with Baker's *The Peregrine*, and I plan to do so in a future article

[307] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.152

feels 'universal' as he watches the swifts, realising that he too is part of the (nondualistic) natural world, that 'natural space of ecology'.[308] His older self too suggests a similar sensation as he observes the screaming swifts 'orchestrating evolution's delirium'. This phrase conveys the majestic beauty of the scene but also highlights Berry's wonder at evolution, and its surreptitious control over nature. In *Peregrine Watching* he had earlier begun to reveal his awe at long evolutionary process, reflecting that the tiercel he observes is 'a hundred yards and time-out-of-measure apart' (*PW*, 58). But Berry is remarking not on the evolution of homo sapiens, but on the essential glory of the bird; he continues, 'she glared innate genius, the ultimate of her kind' (*PW*, 58). Berry revisited this wonder in his autobiography, recalling how, for him, as a teenager 'birds especially were miraculous in those days, glory creatures divorced from reptiles, from molluscs squirting in slime' (*HWYL*, 59). In each of these instances he is 'enraptured' by the immanence of the natural world.[309]

Berry's reverence for the natural world shares similarities with the admiration of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Terry Gifford proposes that Hopkins's poetry offers a 'good example of awe', and Berry both indirectly and directly alludes to Hopkins's work .[310] However, Berry does not share the incarnational aspect of Hopkins's work; he instead offers secular form of immanence. The most obvious Hopkins reference is included in *History Is What You Live*:

> Nant y Gwair ripples free from quaking peat, half a mile north from its white pour down a rock face. Kestrels nest on a ledge behind whinberry bushes, divine falcons in the heavenish static of Gerard Manley Hopkins. A stone bigger than a single decker bus hulks below the falls. Two grey wagtails fly downstream in long curvations, like unzipped spirits. Behind the falls a steep gutter in the rock face, climbable in drought conditions, then, from here, track over rough scree to the old quarry, where generations of peregrines have been

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[308] Ron Berry, letter to *The Sunday Times*, 4th October 1976, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Archive WWE/1/10/14

[309] Berry also reflects that 'the peregrine-watcher lacking a sense of awe might as well spend his days selling sink units' (*PW*, 64), confirming the significance of a humbling sensation of awe at the natural world

[310] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.152

shot when copping in at dusk. (*HWYL*, 43)

The scene is imbued with a sense of the sublime. The instances of beauty are undercut by the threat of the 'stone bigger than a single decker bus' which 'hulks', and the 'steep gutter'. At the centre of the vista, however, are the 'divine falcons in the heavenish static of Gerard Manley Hopkins'. This precise evocation of Hopkins' 'The Windhover' ('[...] dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon in his riding / Of the rolling level underneath him steady air [...]') invokes the poet's concept of inscape. Inscape was defined by Hopkins as 'the essential and only lasting thing [...] species or individually-distinctive beauty of style'.[311] Berry expresses a similar perception of this essential quality in both his fictional and non-fictional writing. In *Peregrine Watching*, he describes the peregrine as the 'most absolute bird in the sky' (*PW*, 37), but it is the aptly named Hopkin in the short story 'End of Season' who most explicitly summarises inscape: '[He] appreciated wild creatures. They signified what they appeared to be in themselves'.[312] The character precisely echoes G.M. Hopkins's conviction that complex dynamics inform the characteristics and individuality of a thing, thus manifesting 'the outward reflection of the inner nature of the thing'. [313](Embracing a secular interpretation of Hopkins's concept in his natural history text, Berry demonstrates how the peregrines reflect their inner nature, but also the environment they inhabit: 'Peregrines have, or seem to have in our terms, a saurian endowment for stillness, yet even in repose they embody wilderness made flesh' (*PW*, 78).

Fundamental to inscape is awareness and the resulting reverence that this promotes. G.M. Hopkins reflected on 'how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and

[311] Gerard Manley Hopkin, Journal, quoted by William H. Gardner, 'Introduction', *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985),pp.xiii-xxvi, p.xxii
[312] Ron Berry, 'End of Season', in Simon Baker ed., *Collected Stories*, pp.1-5, p.2
[313] Williamm H. Gardner,, p.xx

it could be called out everywhere again'.[314]Berry reports a similar concern. While watching the peregrines in the south Wales coalfield, he suggests that the 'talkative strollers [...] enjoying the scenery' from the Forestry Commission's footpaths are ignorant of the presence of the birds (*PW,* 40). This implies that these 'trustless hominids' lack the awareness – and receptivity – to appreciate the inscape (*PW,* 40). Berry's criticism is subtle, but its sentiment is reinforced as it is prefaced by a conversation with his friend, the artist Jim Lewis, in which they express their wonder and humility in the face of the natural world. As they observe a young eyas being fed by a tiercel, the bird-watchers reflect:

> The eyas slumped, its shoulders and folded wings the colour of a dryish purple grape. Jim gabbled amazement. We saw the tiercel landing on a high spur at the corner of the cirque. The falcon flew towards the saddleback mountain until she disappeared.
> "I feel humble." Jim said.
> "Privileged too?" I said – perhaps I wanted an excuse for my own peregrine-watching mania.
> "Sure," said Jim.
> I said "It's taken a long, long time for peregrines to become peregrines."
> (*PW*, 35)

William Cronon observes that the 'striking power of the wild is that wonder in the face of it requires no act of will, but forces itself upon us – as an expression of the nonhuman world experienced through the lens of cultural history – as proof that ours is not the only presence in the universe'.[315] Jim's 'gabbled' response to the tiercel's actions is an involuntary attempt to articulate the experience in language. The incident also prompts a deep sense of humility and privilege as it is a scene rarely observed, but for Berry it additionally offers an opportunity to reflect on, and appreciate, the wonder of the birds, and their evolution. It is the 'long, long time' it has taken for 'peregrines to become peregrines' that fascinates him as much as the creatures themselves, a perspective that exposes the wider function of evolution and other processes in the

[314] Gerard Manley Hopkins,, p.126
[315] William Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness', in William Cronon ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, (London: Norton & Norton, 1996) pp.69-91, p.88

natural world, both human and nonhuman.

Berry also explores the way in which 'inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature'.[316] In his autobiography, he describes the Blaenycwm landscape as his 'familiar reclusive, trusty inscape' (*HWYL*, 136). Although informed by Gerard Manley Hopkins's concept, Berry's version is significantly different from it. The appreciation of the essential, eternal quality of nature persists, but for Berry, his inscape is an escape into the environment as a space of solace and a space for his awareness of self. In one of the most evocative descriptions of place, he recalls the childhood experience of running home one moonlit night:

> And nameless again, alone beneath my brains in Blaenycwm's frozen wood. Glacial moonlight, ice-weight cracking off twigs high and low, waltzy music floating from Glenrhondda Institute, sheepdogs barking, Wion gargling under glassy layers, beaky clickings threatening from the monkey puzzle tree. Suddenly I ran, the beaded grass tinkling until I stopped, shivering by the line of hawthorns, annihilation crawling my blood. Then I pelted home [...] (*HWYL*, 32) [317]

Berry shares with his reader the moonlit, aural experience. The scene is conveyed through a conveying of the sounds, rather than the sights of the hills above the Glenrhondda Institute as the darkness transforms Berry's known habitat into something unfamiliar and threatening; even birdsong is distorted into 'beaky clickings'. It is as if the 'ice-weight' and the 'glacial moonlight' return the landscape to its pre-historic past,

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[316] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.153, p.155. It is necessary to note that in an undated published letter arguing for a more compassionate and better informed planning policy, Berry states: 'I plead for those who cherish what they inherit, not as so-called amenities, but as essential to one's inner reality'. Ron Berry archive, WWE/1/10/14 Swansea University Library Archive

[317] The moonlit, frosty prospect recalls the ice skating scene of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*: 'And in the frosty season, when the sun /Was set, and visible for many a mile / The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom, / I heeded not their summons: happy time /It was indeed for all of us--for me / It was a time of rapture!' (ll.425-430) Berry's experience is analogous to that of Wordsworth, the moonlit winter activity prompting a realisation of the power of the natural world. Furthermore, Berry's realisation of 'annihilation crawling' in his blood, and the destructive capability of humanity calls to mind Wordsworth's 'Nutting': '[..]then up I rose,/ And dragg'd to earth both branch and bough, with crash / And merciless ravages, and the shady nook / Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower, Deform'd and sullied, patiently gave up / Their quiet being; and unless I now / confound my present feelings with the past , / Even then, when from the bower I turn'd away, / Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings -/ I felt a sense of pain when I beheld / The silent trees and intruding sky. —'(ll. 41-51) William Wordsworth, *The Prelude :the four texts 1798, 1799, 1805, 1850* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1995)

to the time of its creation in the last ice age, prompting the child to realise the awesome and eternal aspect of the natural environment. The description of this visceral moment is loaded with a sense of clarity: the 'glacial moonlight', 'glassy layers of ice' on the stream, and the 'beaded grass' reflect and reinforce the lucidity of Berry's memory. But the most arresting aspect of the scene is his rendering of his young self as 'nameless again, alone beneath my brains' in the landscape. The darkness and the isolation sees the child absorbed into the natural world, the momentary detachment from his 'brains' – his anxieties, his difficulties, his ego-ideal – restores him to a nondualistic environment, and positions him in what Berry understands as his inscape. With no boundary between child and environment, the subconscious, primal aspect of the experience is heightened by the realisation of 'annihilation crawling' in his blood. This phrase is loaded with ambiguity, suggesting Berry's awareness that his running has disturbed the 'beaded grass' and therefore has altered nature, but more significantly that the experience has also revealed the (normally concealed) destructive capabilities of the natural – and therefore also human – world. The word 'crawling' implies the capability is active, external and incursive, but the word 'blood' signifies its natural, innate and internal qualities. In addition, 'annihilation' also articulates the child's experience of 'blotting out existence' as he retreats from village and family life into the moonlit forest.[318] This scene conjures a wilderness, and as the eco-centric poet Gary Snyder has observed, this space exists both externally and internally: 'A person with a clear heart and open mind can experience the wilderness anywhere on earth. It is a quality of one's own consciousness. The planet is a wild place and always will be'.[319] Indeed, Berry's writing is here closely aligned with that of Snyder. Similar to the speaker of the Piute Creek passage of *Riprap*, Berry records 'his experience of a tremendous awe-filled

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[318] *OED* 2nd edition 1989 http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50008844?single=1 &query_type=word&queryword=annihilation&first=1&max_to_show=10 . Accessed 15th November 2009

[319] Gary Snyder, quoted in *New York Times,* 'Week in Review', Sept 18, 1994: p.6 cited in William Cronon, p.89

moment as he is overwhelmed by the natural world in which he is immersed'.[320]

The autobiography also traces other instances where Berry flees to the constant landscape, but before examining those scenes I wish to consider cultural geographer, Yi Fu Tuan's, analysis of intimate experiences of place to illuminate further Berry's interaction with the natural world. Tuan notes that 'intimate experiences lie buried in our innermost being so that not only do we lack the words to give them form but often we are not even aware of them'.[321] Through this lens, therefore, Berry's sightless description of his childhood moonlit experience can be read as an attempt to fix its profundity in language. The descriptions of his sensory perceptions prompt the reader's imagination to shift to a non-visual rendering of the scene, destabilising the conventional interpretation, reflecting the experience of the child. Furthermore, the memory recalled by Berry is not described in a manner which overtly outlines his response at the time, thus the reactions it prompts in the reader are not prescribed, once again allowing the reader's process of understanding to echo that of the narrator. Intimate occasions, Tuan remarks in his definition, rely on the passivity and receptivity of the subject.[322] The child's openness is in evidence twofold in the scene: firstly the child is poised 'beneath [his] brains' and is therefore standing outside of his self; secondly, the darkness has unsettled what is benign in daylight, thus revealing new facets of the seemingly familiar. The double unfamiliarity heightens the child's exposure 'to the caress and sting of new experience'(ibid). Tuan also observes that when intimate experiences 'flash to the surface of our consciousness they evince a poignancy that the more deliberative acts – the actively sought experiences – cannot match'.[323] It is this sense that the moonlit scene, and the scene which immediately

[320] Patrick D. Murphy, *Understanding Gary Snyder* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1992), p.49
[321] Yi Fu Tuan, p.136
[322] Yi Fu Tuan, p.137
[323] Yi Fu Tuan, p.136

follows it, capture, for it is this experience that forms Berry's initiation into his inscape. On his return from the frosty hillside the he re-enters a world of safe domesticity; as his mother sits crocheting, his father works in the pit, and his siblings sleep in an upstairs bed, Berry is aware that he does not fit. Of his newly-confirmed alienation he reflects: 'maybe it's suchness to be fated. We find out what we are from hungering enough, grappling with haphazards along the way' (*HWYL*, 32). It is his chance experience in the moonlight landscape that has validated his realisation.[324]

As I have explained, Berry also recalls similar experiences from his adult years. In *Peregrine Watching* he describes his experience of the 'elemental tranquillity peculiar to high places' as he observes the nesting falcons on Cerrig Fawr. On losing his job on the Graig level after an altercation with the mine manager, he 'roamed the mountains' with his friend Cliff Williams, who had recently been diagnosed as 'tubercular' (*HWYL*, 89, 87). But this experience is again framed as an unintentional, but significant activity: 'no more than circumstantial, acutely aware of small mercies'(*HWYL*, 89). The landscape, as well as the roaming, is seemingly incidental. But the second part of the phrase underlines the significance of the act of retreat; 'circumstantial' is placed in the more archaic context of particulars, minutiae and detail. It is these aspects of the environment and the inscape that provide the 'small mercies'. Later, while recovering after an operation, the 25 year old Berry again finds comfort walking in the surrounding landscape:

> Slow motion at first, I strolled Blaenycwm mountains. Green space eases complacency tainted with hubris, it offers a Simple Simon way out of problems. Family rows sent me rambling. Wrangles with Mary Anne (who suffered her own temperament) appeared trifling in the mindless ambience of waterfalls, rocks, trees, grass and sky. (*HWYL*, 123)

[324] Again, this experience recalls Snyder's early writing, which explored the implications of coming to know that 'nature includes and surrounds the individual, and in the process of realizing that participatory inclusion, [one] moves beyond the limitations of being human. Human here does not mean homo sapiens so much as it means civilised people, those who have separated themselves from wild nature through culture, technology and behaviour.' (Murphy, 50)

Once more, the natural environment allows Berry to escape from himself as the 'green space eases complacency tainted with hubris', and the 'mindless ambience' of the features of the landscape recall his earlier experience of being 'beneath [his] brains'. The environment enlightens his self, reinforcing his humility. In his fiction, Berry contemplates the capacity of the landscape to function as what Tuan terms 'a place of nurture', where 'fundamental needs are heeded and cared for without fuss' .[325] In *Flame and Slag*, Rees, the injured narrator, and other ill miners walk the hills as they recuperate:

> Charlie had fifty per cent [dust on his lungs], the knowledge ageing him, lining animal despair in his leathery face. He stopped smoking, drank less and took to rambling the hillsides. Regular pathways through and around Daren woods, where other pneumo and silicotic cases eked out their careful days. Favourite open-air route, the old parish road over Waunwen. You'd see them on sunny afternoons (mornings were spent coughing, warming up blood and tissues, preparing heart and lungs), dotted groups and singles up to the Forestry Commission fence and no farther, slow moving as Klondike survivors against the broad green track. (*F&S*, 72)

Berry draws parallels between the Daren miners and those of the Klondike gold rush, implying the similarities between the two 'frontier' areas and the hardships suffered by the respective populations. Although rambling the above ground environment offers the miners some relief as they eke out their 'careful days', it is an activity for which they must prepare, such is their ill health.[326]

The reference to the 'Simple Simon' nursery rhyme in Berry's description of his rambling frames the search for a 'place of nurture' in nature as an innocent, childlike pursuit. Berry's 'wrangles' with his mother Mary-Anne recalls an earlier passage of the text where Berry reflects on how 'loving kindness shone from externals', and lists cherished items and experiences from his childhood:

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[325] Yi Fu Tuan, p.137

[326] Berry was to revisit the apparent healing power of the natural environment in the short story 'Time Spent', in which Doctor Gammon advises the protagonist to 'live outdoors as much as possible, cultivate an allotment, grow vegetables, flowers, then you'll increase your chances of lasting to a good age.' ('Time Spent', 92)

> Buttercup chains, Selsig minnows and loaches, jack-frosted windowpanes, woollen vests, hawthorn berries, paper and pencil. Lucky Bag magnets, March frog ponds, Mari Lwyd nights, New Years' Eves, cuckoos calling on the hillsides, sweet cocoa, snowfalls, rainbows, tinned pineapple, our mongrel bitch howling, singing while George played his 12/11d melodeon. (*HWYL*, 16)

Barbara Prys Williams describes this list as the memory of 'a time when the external world itself seemed a secure and tender nurturing place, reflecting a promise of sure sustenance'.[327] The comfort offered by the signifiers of the domestic space of the home (frosted windowpanes, warm vests, cocoa and tinned pineapple) and the outside, natural space (frog ponds, snowfalls and cuckoos) are recalled as an indistinct amalgam, with little division between the inside and outside. This once again suggests a nondualistic interpretation of the environment and reveals a liminal aspect of Berry's character. As remarked earlier, he occupies the position of a post-pastoral shepherd, the 'mediator between the realm of organized society and the realm of nature'.[328] But as noted of Alan Leigh, the focalising character of Gwyn Thomas's *All Things Betray Thee*, the shepherd is often an alienated figure. In 'Pastoralism in America', Leo Marx reflects that 'against the background of the wilderness' the shepherd appears to 'be a representative of a complex, hierarchical, urban society'.[329] However, when viewed from the very society he represents, the figure epitomizes 'the virtues of a simple unworldly life disengaged from civilization and [living instead] "close to nature"'.[330] Berry's autobiography notes that 'villagers saw [him] as unsound, a young man of little account, lobo, not to be taken seriously' due to his unconventional behaviour (*HWYL*,102). As Berry strives to recapture the nondualistic world of his youth, he comes to occupy a space between.

The symbol that best expresses this is the *cwtch*, or hide, that features in both the

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[327] Barbara Prys Williams, p.82
[328] Leo Marx, 'Pastoralism', p.43
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid.

fictional *Flame and Slag* and Berry's later autobiographical work. The *Flame and Slag* cwtch was based on a hide that Berry himself built, or so a recent doctoral thesis has claimed.[331]

> His *cwtch* was a patchwork of slag-stone walling, old tram-planks and mildewed timbers once carefully notched, hatcheted by men who were probably dead. Discarded pieces of corrugated sheeting made up the forward-sloping roof, the sheets camouflaged with turf and rubble. Housed into the hillside, Charlie's *cwtch* looked like a mountain fighter's derelict observation post. (*F&S*, 74)

The *cwtch* is constructed from materials reclaimed from the Caib tip; debris and waste from mining is recycled and re-used to create a retreat from industry. Although industrial in origin, the construction is unobtrusive and seemingly a natural part of the landscape as it is 'housed into the hillside'. The non-fictional 'dugout' of *History Is What You Live* is similarly camouflaged. Described as Berry's 'secret, desperate hideaway in the hills', built during his 'squeezed escape' from the Merchant Navy, and long since abandoned, the turfed roof of the dugout has collapsed, and lichen and mosses 'naturalised' the walls beneath (*HWYL*, 124). As nature reclaims Berry's hide, it is evident that the structure is part of a space between; originating from the human realm, but of nature. The *cwtch* signifies his liminality. He 'combines traits that result from his having lived as both part of, and apart from, nature; from his having lived as both part of, and apart from, society' in his practices .[332]When watching the peregrines, Berry, despite his absorption in the activity, remains conspicuously human in a non-human environment. While admiring and recording the freedom of the falcons, he sits on a ' piece of Dunlopillo', the 'hoary peregrine-watcher's accessory' (*PW*, 54). In addition to introducing objects of domesticity into the wilderness, Berry also perceives a disturbed domesticity in the animals he observes. He reflects how, when a tiercel fails

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[331] David Ingli Gidwell, 'Life writing, the Rhondda and Ron Berry', PhD thesis (Cardiff University 2007)
[332] Leo Marx, 'Pastoralism', p.43

to catch the ring ouzel she hunts, she returns with a face that bore 'the bruised downcast look of a victim, sad spouse of a wife-beater' (*PW*, 13). The observation is, however, qualified by the realisation that such an interpretation is 'anthropocentric fancy' (ibid).

It is the wild, unrestrained quality of the natural world that enchants Berry. As evidenced by his description of peregrine falcons ('wilderness made flesh' [*PW*, 78]), He is fascinated by the potential freedom that nature represents. His conception of inscape is bound to this and in his first novel, *Hunter and Hunted*, Berry touches on the experience of inscape as his principal character ponders as the sun sets behind Pen Arglwydd mountain:

> Down travelled the shade, chilling lichened scree, tough grass, slowly darkening the whole vale. [Walking] they recrossed the mountain, veeing [*sic*] off half a mile up to the bog source of the Second Waterfall river. Above the bog, dozens of low, intersecting peat banks and sterile pools. A vast barren area [surrounding the village of Blaenddu] gave significance to the senseless sky and offered Beynon a lavish sense of personal freedom' (*H&H*, 15).

Immersion in the apparent emptiness of the 'vast barren area' conjures a profound, and indulgent, sense of self for the young miner. But the opportunities offered by this inscape are accompanied by a warning: Beynon admits that too much freedom 'hurts him' (*H&H*, 15). Much like Berry, Beynon occupies a liminal position between society and rurality. It is implied that his retreat into his personal inscape complicates and unsettles his social role, and it is suggested that the 'lavish sense of personal freedom' is as transgressive as it is transcendent. This renders the associated 'vast barren area', or the near-wilderness, as a space beyond the constraints of conventional social behaviour. Berry's autobiography, too, draws on this aspect of wilderness. Of his *cwtch* he ponders that had he chosen to live in the dugout 'God knows what brute stuff would have surfaced': he is acutely aware of the primal possibilities that wilderness presents (*HWYL*, 124).

As I have earlier considered, the coal waste tips on the hillsides are a space that

signify unrule, but the hills themselves are also deployed by Berry as a primitive space. The post-industrial wilderness of the coalfield uplands is explored in his 1970 novel *So Long Hector Bebb*. The novel sees Hector, a successful boxer, transgress the socially accepted boundaries of violence. His victory over Jesse Markham to become British Middleweight Champion is lauded, but on the same night, on his return to Cymmer, Hector accidentally kills his wife's lover. Hector first flees to the farm of Prince Saddler, where he adopts the persona of Joe Williams and works as a labourer for five years. When his real identity is revealed by a former boxing partner, he is forced to take refuge in the hills in order to elude his arrest.

Hector's abscondment reinforces the frontier-like nature of the coalfield environment, an aspect underscored by Berry's description of the derelict colliery in which the protagonist finds shelter:

> Stone built winding house gone ramshackle, bushes growing out from the walls. Bow and arrow country, I thought, as pictured in Western stories, except here it's Welsh hills sprinkled with odd trees rising to nothing but Christmas trees bunched thick as ferns up there on the sky-line. The stream made a long SWISH-SH-SH you had to listen for, clear water twisting and bubbling. (*SLHB*, 197)

The landscape is imagined as a Welsh wild west, complete with outlaw. Hector's retreat also plays with elements of the American trope of the 'male wilderness romance'.[333]. It has been observed that in this tradition 'authors withdraw from the cares and corruption of civilization into places they represent as wild [...] they are individuals immersing themselves in the nonhuman wilderness'.[334] Typically, as William Cronon remarks, the wilderness is a paradox. It is revered by culture as a 'model for human life in nature', but this concept excludes those people who work the

[333] Lawrence Buell, *Environmentalism,* p.25

[334] Karla Armbruster, ' Bringing Nature Writing Home: Josephine Johnson's *The Inland Island* as Bioregional Narrative', *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New essays in Ecocriticism* eds. John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), pp.3-23, p.8

land to make their living.[335] The wilderness therefore 'embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural'.[336] But Berry's description of the post-industrial wilderness outlines the human presence in this landscape, and the scene illustrates the dynamics of the post-industrial upland environment: the abandoned mine workings, the presence of the Forestry Commission, and the natural environment. This wilderness is not a pristine natural environment, and neither is Hector's retreat a withdrawal by the author from the 'cares and corruption of civilization'. Indeed, Berry uses the trope of wilderness as a lens through which the reader can consider the community of Cymmer village. Cronon reminds us that as recently as the eighteenth century, the word 'wilderness' signified a region that was deserted, savage, desolate, and it is this environment which Berry captures, suggesting the social consequences of deindustrialisation.[337] Hector is imagined as a character of his habitat. Described as possessing an 'aboriginal certitude' and as a primitive 'geared to survival', he is a figure who seems to belong in the environment of an earlier time (*SLHB*, 159). The indigenous quality of Hector is emphasised as he is seen to enact the 'meaningless, familiar passion of a man matched to his environment', working the land, tending to the livestock and hunting with Prince (*SLHB*, 157). Hector's affinity with the natural environment is further reinforced by his behaviour when removed from it, as much as his behaviour when part of it. His narrative recalls the physical and psychological disturbance he experienced when incarcerated in a police cell. At first he paces the cell, walking 'up and down, circles, cross-ways, zig-zag', but panic and claustrophobia soon strike him (*SLHB*, 176):

> The sweats came. [...] soon afterwards I felt sick, losing control, sicking on the floor near the wooden bed. Couldn't prevent myself. It gushed out like a tap turned upside down. Behind the spew my whole voice came full pelt sending screams into the shit bucket to crowd out the silence. Just bawling to make

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[335] William Cronon, p.80
[336] Ibid
[337] William Cronon, p.70

noise. Any, any kind of noise. (*SLHB*, 176-77)

His visceral corporeal reactions reveal the trauma he experiences when restrained.

The most violent scene in the novel is facilitated by Hector's retreat to the post-industrial wilderness. As he attempts to survive on the hills, he must hunt for food. As a ewe and her lamb graze near the abandoned colliery, he realises the prospect of a hot meal: 'I could sleep on a bellyful of mutton chops, bounce back to normal strength double-quick' (*SLHB*, 200). The killing of the sheep is presented as a primal act of opportunity:

> I hear her hooves on the fallen stones. As her black nose came level I hit her one CLUNK, like wood on wood. Flinging out to full length I grabbed her hind legs. She was trapped. But I lost true sight, everything fuzzy and roman candles firing inside my chest. Strength came in spasms, although I robbed myself, the lamb bleating, bleating, tormenting my mind. Blood splashed over my trousers. Heavy drops of rain began to fall. By and by, dead lamb, unconscious ewe, me straddled over, both of us quite still. (*SLHB*, 201)

The violence is enacted in an unwilled wild frenzy: Hector loses 'true sight', and seems to only become aware of his actions as the blood stains his trousers. The phrase 'I robbed myself' again suggests that he undoes aspects of himself as he bludgeons the ewe; indeed, the primal violence contrasts the controlled aggression he exhibits in the boxing ring. Soon after the incident he reflects that he buried the lamb, 'bits left of him, poor mite' as he again distances himself from his violent actions (*SLHB*, 203). The savage behaviour reveals the wildness that society thinly veils. Berry transgresses the 'bipolar moral scales in which the human and the nonhuman, the unnatural and the natural [which] serve as our conceptual map for understanding and valuing the world'.[338] Considered through the lens of Hector's actions, the concealed animalistic behaviour of other characters in *So Long, Hector Bebb* is revealed; the reader comes to realise that Hector is far from the only character who is 'no better than an animal' in the text (*SLHB*, 250). Berry's non-dualistic perspective reflects the landscape of the Upper

[338] William Cronon, p.89

Rhondda Fawr valley that both he and his writing occupy: it is a liminal space, positioned between heavy industry and natural near-wilderness, between the civilised and the wild. The liminality allows the author to negotiate the relationship and interaction between his community, wider society, and the natural world.[339]

Reinhabitation and Reclamation: Recovering the natural and narratives of place

Berry's excavation and dissemination of the historical narratives embedded in the 'geology of remembrance' of the landscape appears to emulate the process of reinhabitation. But before considering reinhabitation, it is necessary to interrogate the concept of habitat. The word is suggestive of more than a place; it represents a coalescence of landscape, nature, environment and sustenance. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines habitat as:

> The locality in which a plant or animal naturally grows or lives; habitation. Sometimes applied to the *geographical area* over which it extends, or the special locality to which it is confined; sometimes restricted to the particular *station* or spot in which a specimen is found; but chiefly used to indicate the kind of locality, as the sea-shore, rocky cliffs, chalk hills, or the like.[340]

From the definition it is clear that the word is more typically associated with the non-human than the human. But Berry's affinity with his local environment and his expression of this connection, gives rise to the sense that he is a 'specimen' of a particular locality. As he notes in *History Is What You Live,* he is 'native born slot fit' (*HWYL*, 67). Reinhabitation, then, involves a reconciliation with a habitat, as the prefix suggests. Originally conceived by Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann as the process of 'applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its exploiter',[341] it is a 'specific method of committing oneself to a place'.[342] Lawrence Buell provides a valuable definition of the concept:

[339] Terry Gifford,'Post-pastoralism', p.18
[340] *OED* 2nd edition 1989 http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50101059?single=1&query_type=word &queryword=habitat&first=1&max_to_show=10 . Accessed 17th September 2009
[341] Peter Berg and R. Dasmann, 'Reinhabiting California', *The Ecologist* 7 (10), pp399-401, p.399
[342] Matthew Jarvis, *Environments in Contemporary Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008) , p.71

> Advocates and practitioners of reinhabitation, whether or not they use the term, start from the premise that not only has the environment been abused, aspiring reinhabitors have themselves been wounded by displacement and ecological illiteracy so they must (re)learn what it means to be "native" to a place. Moreover, the reorientation process cannot simply be a solitary quest but must also involve participation in community both with fellow inhabitants in the present and with past generations through absorption of history and legend. In short, reinhabitation presupposes long-term reciprocal engagement with a place's human and nonhuman environments and welcomes the prospect of one's identity being molded [*sic*] by this encounter.[343]

Berry's writing aspires to reconnect with the Blaenycwm habitat in numerous ways. It offers a return to the land, engaging with the social, historical and natural surfaces of the landscape, as well as the subterranean plane. He remains a very conscious inhabitant of his area, but is aware of the metaphoric displacement experienced by others in his community. His papers indicate that, despite the sense of dislocation in the community, the population of the Upper Rhondda area remain the 'inheritors of natural and industrial history', although they may not be conscious of this inheritance.[344] This sense of rupture has been caused by the economic shifts in the area, primarily the decline, and continuing legacy, of heavy industry, the wide-ranging social effects of which have been outlined elsewhere.[345] At the forefront of Berry's concern, however, is the disturbed interaction with the landscape, the narratives it contains and the natural environment it sustains. His act of reinhabitation emphasises a concurrent rehabilitation: the recovery of the narratives of industry, the re-establishment of what he terms 'the dialectic of man and his environment', and a restoration of the community and landscape he inhabits.

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[343] Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World* (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press, Harvard, 1995), p.84

[344] Ron Berry, 'Objections to Rhondda Forest Recreation Project', p.1. WWE/1/10/14, Swansea University Library Archives. Henceforth referenced in the text as 'Objections'. The collection relating to the Rhondda Forest Recreation Project dates from 1973-1977

[345] See K. Bennett, H. Beynon, R. Hudson, *Coalfields Regeneration: Dealing with the Consequences of Industrial Decline* (Abingdon: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Policy Press, 2000); Michael Thomas, *Death of an Industry: South Wales Mining and its Decline – the Local Story in a Global Context* (Singapore: Colben system Pte. Ltd, 2004); and John Sewel, *Colliery Closure and Social Change: A Study of a South Wales Mining Valley* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975)

Berry's excavation of the 'geology of remembrance' of Upper Rhondda unearths the processes the landscape and the environment have undergone. In *Flame and Slag* he offers an almost celebratory meditation on 'the principles of Change' (*F&S*, 44). His narrator defines the principles as: 'evolutionary, devolutionary, involutionary, revolutionary, of progress and regress, of ingression, eggression [*sic*] and digression' (Ibid). The definition encompasses the many (and contradictory) aspects of change. The very structure of the sentence encourages the reader to consider the interplay between the words and the concepts, and also the etymology of the words. The repetition underscores the cyclical movement of 'volution' (from the Latin *volūt-* from *volvĕre*, to turn), implying that change, too, is a cyclical practice. In addition to the familiar long process of evolution, the sense of movement, or upheaval of revolution, and the sense of descent or succession of devolution, the word 'involutionary' is included. As well as being the opposite of evolution, involution is the action of an implicit comprehension and also a sense of intricacy and entanglement, a sense indeed that the narrator's definition of change enacts. Furthermore, the definition complicates the familiar dynamic of 'progress and regress', introducing 'ingression', 'egression' and 'digression', three words that breach boundaries: entering or invasion; moving outside of specified limits; and deviation. As the author states in an unpublished essay, he is in favour of the processes of change, but the imposed changes in his habitat (development, destruction, and remodelling) concern him, as they obliterate any evidence of the threads of the histories of the area, the 'strata of memory' that are so familiar to him.

Berry outlines in *History Is What You Live* how the process of deindustrialisation has changed the Blaenycwm landscape:

> See where the NCB has demolished (1966) Glenrhondda colliery, leaving blackened wasteland. Two collieries razed, Glenrhondda and Gorllwyn, the same old Hook and Eye pit where Bill Brunker and Pricey Jones were killed,

> where Tom Walters lost his leg and Will Deane his arm and part of his face. Across the valley, climbing from Selsig river, see Hendrewen inclines ballasted for dumper traffic, the adjoining mountainside herring-boned with huge drainage ditches since Aberfan's tragedy shook the bowels of absent experts. Bigger than Cadbury mounds once bulged along the silhouette of Graig y Ddelw and Mynydd Ty Isaf, slag heaps from defunct Tydraw colliery, landscaped now, contoured and conifered. (*HWYL*, 29-30) [346]

He reads the scars of the land explaining the 'blackened wasteland' left by the demolition of a colliery in the 1960s, the significance of the drainage ditches and the 'conifered' contours of the hillsides. Indeed, it is a landscape defined by an absence, as much of the industrial history has been erased, the rest obscured. As a result, Berry restores aspects of the lost narrative. The Hook and Eye pit (the local name for the Glenrhondda colliery) is remembered as a place where men were injured, maimed and killed, emphasising that it signified more than a mere place of work. Berry recovers the narrative of the specific industrial history and experience of Blaenycwm from the 'naked facts and figures' published in *Whitaker's* mining records (*F&S*, 44). Deaths and pit-related injuries are recorded, but the long-term effects of the industry are overlooked. Indeed, as he notes in *Flame and Slag* when his voice briefly emerges in the narrative, stating that the first-person narrator 'Rees Stevens doesn't have to blurb this piece', records of men incapacitated by mining are concealed (*F&S*, 44). He remarks that 'There are no publicized records of men (numbers, when and where) suffering from dust, no how, when and where record of the disabled, but the NCB statement of accounts does publish the *total* amount of money paid to disabled miners and ex-miners' (*F&S*, 45). Personal experiences are made indistinct by the national authority and Berry later challenges this in his autobiography, reinscribing the names of

[346] The 'Rhondda Forest Recreation Project Working Party Report' states: 'The site of Glenrhondda colliery has been graded and seeded but evidence of past use in the form of steel cables and metal can be seen at close quarters. Scouring by rainwash has also taken place and there is evidence of tipping by builders'. (Rhondda Borough Council, 'Rhondda Forest Recreation Project Working Party Report' WWE/1/10/14, 5), Berry's notes on the document 'Who blames whom for the failure to properly clear the sites of Glenrhondda and Gorllwyn collieries?', reveal his anger at the failure by the various authorities to suitably redevelop the site ('Objections', 4)

those whose suffering is overlooked.

Part of Berry's rehabilitation of the area's industrial history is the revelation of the continuing 'dialectic of man and his environment', a relationship which he believes has been damaged in the Upper Rhondda by institutionalised interpretations of industry. His descriptions of working underground challenge this perception, re-emphasising that coal mining can be an intimate interaction with the earth. Of his first working day in the Graig level, Berry recalls filling his water bottle from a mountain stream, and noticing the 'fungus on double timbers' just inside the entrance of the mine (*HWYL*, 55). Such observations reveal the proximity of the industry to the natural world. He presents himself 'as natural man, man in Nature *working.* (Not man in Nature meditating on himself as a transparent eyeball or as the centre of natural relations)'.[347] Berry had earlier described coal as the 'insanest natural phenomenon' (*FTA*, 132), and in the later short story 'Left Behind' he revisited this sentiment: 'if there is some time out of mind Lord God, he undoubtedly said *Let there be carbonised vegetable matter* – to prove how poxy Nature is'.[348] The narrator continues:

> Peace on earthers spout delusions, drool about rapport with the birds and the bees, but Nature herself has to be manhandled, forced, controlled, exploited, and coal-getting's the essence of it, less than a short spit away from deep sea trawling. Human nature takes some forcing too, else we'd still be scratching fleas off each other's backs. ('Left Behind, 88). [349]

Berry repositions mining as an engagement with natural resources, similar to deep sea trawling, and by implication, agriculture.[350] The need to manhandle, control and exploit

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[347] Tim Dean, *Gary Snyder and the American Unconscious* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p.87
[348] Ron Berry, 'Left Behind' in Simon Baker ed., *Collected Stories,* pp.86-91, p.88
[349] Berry also alludes to this in his fiction. The greened-over plough furrows of the Daren hills remind the reader of man's long interaction – and use – of the land. Furthermore, it suggests a long history of the exploitation of the land. As Simon Schama reflects in *Landscape and Memory*, the invention of the plough transformed humanity's engagement with the earth: 'the 'knife' of the [plough] "attacked" the land: farming became ecological war. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature.' Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), p.13
[350] Berry also reflects how in rural areas 'life and earth [are] very near to each other but thinned out, monotonised, the natural order of Creation where human beings stand no chance of escape. Only miners and sewer-men work lower than sons of the soil' (*HWYL*, 82). In positioning the miners beneath the

nature is here ventriloquised by Berry. The narrator's attitude towards the natural world is removed from that of the author, who maintained a 'rapport with the birds and bees' as I have already suggested. The narrator, as well as Cadwgan, the fellow collier whose violent death is the subject of the story, seems to enact Terry Gifford's theory that environmental exploitation parallels social exploitation: their lives are endangered as their labour is used to extract coal. The scene is located in the nondualistic natural sphere as human nature too is seen as in need of 'some forcing'; innate human nature is rendered indivisible from the wildness of the natural world in another expression of Berry's awareness of the dialectic of man and environment.

It is the problem of human nature that underpins many of Berry's environmental concerns. In particular, he is aware of the (persistent) impact of the pollution of the natural world on industrial societies: 'Old mining, steel, railway and dock communities accepted environmental pollution as integral to themselves, just as generations of city folk persist without horizons of grass or trees' (*HWYL*, 54). In the draft of his 'Objections to Rhondda Forest Recreation Project', Berry argues:

> Our rivers should be clean, but they aren't. Citizens should respect their environment [...] but they seldom consider the matter as a moral issue. More middle aged and pensioner natives of Rhondda, than children and youths, throw domestic rubbish into our rivers, understandably too, pollution being intrinsic to their birthright, their habitual dumping a fly-speck compared to the endless, massive pollutions of industry. Walk up the brooks in Blaenrhondda, Blaenycwm and Cwmparc; from each brook one sees slag tips, NCB and British Railways dereliction, and shanty backyards. ('Objections', 2)

Berry believes that the continuing exposure to (seemingly authorised) neglect and exploitation of the environment has conditioned the Rhondda inhabitants to also despoil their habitat. He outlines how generations of them have been conditioned to accept without question the 'massive pollutions of industry' that surround their homes, and

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'surface of the soil', Berry highlights the peculiar perspective offered by mining practices: life and earth become inseparable, and the dialectic is not 'monotonised'

they also enact similar actions on a micro-scale: pollution is a given, 'intrinsic to their birthright'.[351] Terry Gifford asserted that environmental exploitation paralleled social exploitation, and a similar concept is in evidence here as Berry suggests that environmental neglect is symptomatic of social neglect .[352] He reflected in the novel *The Full Time Amateur* on the socio-environmental projects that seem to offer a means of a community reinhabitation of the landscape, suggesting that they 'merely niggle' at the social problems of the area ('Objections', 4): 'Currently, they're publicly discussing ways and means of clearing up, beautifying the valley and edifying the citizens. Aeonian prospect' (*FTA,* 193). The phrase 'Aeonion prospect' is employed to both critique the plans to beautify the valley, and to highlight also the length of time needed to regenerate and support the area. Berry's papers recount a 1975 effort to 'rehabilitat[e] Graig Fawr corrie'. He describes how:

> It was agreed on professional and local advice to landscape the waste spoil, obliterate access roads, plant native grasses and some trees i.e. hawthorns, alder, willow, birch. Lower slopes of the corrie are already landscape and seeded. Approximately 380 trees were planted; approximately 140 remain alive. The others were destroyed by ponies, sheep and vandals. (Ibid)

He argues that villagers should have been given 'an intensive continuing programme of education' to inform them of the importance of the preservation of the natural world in order to maintain the well-intentioned project. But most significantly, Berry exposes the scheme as a superficial effort to rehabilitate the deprived and socially fragmented community that in reality requires a far more sustained programme of social and economic rehabilitation.[353] Indeed, his protest once again returns to the sense of a nondualistic natural sphere and the dialectic between people and the environment, a

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[351] See previous chapter for a consideration of the specific significance of coal waste slag tips
[352] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p.165
[353] See K. Bennett, H. Beynon, R. Hudson, *Coalfields Regeneration: Dealing with the Consequences of Industrial Decline* (Abingdon: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Policy Press, 2000). David Linehan and Pyrs Gruffudd also offer an overview of the social regeneration programmes of the 1930s in the article 'Bodies and Souls: Psycho-geographical collisions in the South Wales coalfield 1926-1939', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 27, 3 (2001) pp.377–394

dialectic which David Pepper has succinctly defined:

> There is no separation between humans and nature. They are part of each other: contradictory opposites, which means that it is impossible to define one except in relation to the other [...]. Indeed, they *are* each other: what humans do is natural, while nature is socially produced. Second, they constantly interpenetrate and interact, in a circular mutually affecting relationship. Nature, and perceptions of it, affects and changes human society, the latter changes nature: nature changes, affects society to further change it, and so on.[354]

As outlined above, Berry is also concerned with the reinhabitation of his habitat, both the communal social history and the environment. Indeed, *History Is What You Live* is a manual for the practice of reinscribing the social, industrial and natural histories of the Blaenycwm locality. Barbara Prys Williams observes that by the end of Berry's autobiography, the reader 'has a sense of a memory bank overflowing with intense recall, a human personality unusually endowed in recording, being nurtured by and finding meaning in, what he sees'.[355] The interpretation continues to note that the text, and the visual and sensual memories inscribed in it, are the author's 'own personal stay against evanescence' (ibid). Whilst it is undeniable that Berry's autobiography is an attempt to record his self and his personal history, I would propose that the text is also an expression of a shared history which he feels compelled to disseminate in order to maintain. The text appears to form a guided walk of the area, as Berry's narrative signals his – and his reader's – position in the landscape:

> now we're up here on Cefn Nant y Gwair. Robens and Beeching are elsewhere, honing themselves for hatchet-work. The pits are producing coal and its steam engines blowing up valley, through the tunnel to Swansea. Blaenycwm football field hasn't yet been levelled at the base of Pen Pych mountain. Gorllwyn tip behind Hendrewen Road is black. About 70 years will moss, lichen and grass it green. Over on the left, across the ravine, another slag tip had grown since 1859. (*HWYL*, 41)

This passage negotiates a time span of over one hundred years as Berry returns to the

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[354]David Pepper, *Eco-socialism: from Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp.107-108; emphasis in original

[355] Barbara Prys Williams, p.82

interregnal aspect of the landscape in time. The scene is originally located before 1961, as the National Coal Board Chairman, Alfred Robens, and the British Railways Board Chairman Dr. Richard Beeching are 'elsewhere', yet to be appointed, and the Rhondda railway tunnel remains open.[356] After a description of the thriving coal industry of the mid-twentieth century, Berry shifts to the future, considering how in 70 years, 'moss, lichen and grass' will green the Gorllwyn tip; a perspective which extends beyond his own life time. The final remark of the passage once more vacillates between his present and the past, precisely dating the development of the other slag tip. In unearthing and recounting this history, Berry traces and disseminates the narratives of place, facilitating a reconnection, and reinhabitation, of the locality. The unpublished novel, 'Below Lord's Head Mountain', also records a similar process of reinhabitation, as Shad Beynon returns to the environment of his youth and finds it changed. He has to re-learn his once familiar environment, changed both by the dismantling of the coal industry and the Forestry Commission plantations. He is aided in his efforts by his partner, Lottie, who is also keen to connect Blaenddu and its environment:

> We left the car at the edge of Spiller's wood. Markie Spiller shared a grave with his wife in Golau Nos cemetery. The farmhouse was a shop selling craft-work and health foods, having failed as a pony trekking centre. There weren't any sheep among the sitkas on Pen Arglwydd. We climbed the mountain of my boyhood, Lottie questioning what I had never seen before, the green shallow mound above the village, where once four pits sent coal to Cardiff and Swansea docks. Endlessly pouring out steam coal. (BLHM, 15)

For Lottie, Blaenddu is an alien landscape. She questions 'what [Shad] had never seen before', signifying the new landscape formations created by de-industrialisation, but also the older features of the habitat that Shad once took for granted. As Shad comes to reinhabit the area, he shares his knowledge with Lottie. She begins to appreciate the

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[356] Beeching and Roben also appear in Berry's fiction: 'If Doctor Beeching read out the writing on the walls for railways, Lord Robens had better do something about these decrepit coal screens, or the valleys will wind up as botch-gelded zones of mongrelised production. He'll be faithfully rewarded, Lord Robens will.' (*FTA*, 24)

'wild grandeur' of Blaenddu's mountains, although she finds the village dull (BLHM,55). Indeed, soon we see that Shad's shared experience of his reconciliation of his memory of Blaenddu and the contemporary actuality has enabled Lottie to identify and name the surrounding mountains (BLHM, 135). Her coming to inhabit Blaenddu shadows his reinhabitation. Towards the conclusion of the narrative Lottie recounts how embedded in the habitat she has become:

> Every evening driving up from Tosteg, I see Pen Arglwydd mountain looming. It's so huge, dominating, rising steeply from the verge as you approach Blaenddu, then veering away to the north, to Wion waterfall, and curving back towards the village, the white foam of Ychain glaring, and then the nakedness of Theo's quarry, I prefer Blaenddu to Tosteg. I like the timeless atmosphere. It's our home. (BLHM, 261)

Echoing her partner's account of the hills and waterfalls at the beginning of the test Lottie maps the natural landmarks of Blaenddu: Pen Arglwydd, and Wion and Ychain waterfalls. Shad has exposed the 'strata of memory' of the habitat and its community to her, and she perceives the 'timeless atmosphere' of their home, their habitat.[357]

It is the same 'timeless atmosphere' that defines the Blaenycwm landscape for Berry: 'hills, brooks, natural phenomena and wildlife are [...] here, have been in varying degrees since time immemorial' ('Objections', 6). Identifying himself as a 'naturalist by instinct', he outlines in his private papers his own efforts to maintain his local ecosystems:

> I introduced the first trout to Llyn Fach, 220, caught in Rhondda brooks and transported illegally, strictly speaking, on Forestry Commission roads, myself riding pillion with large containers hanging from the ends of my arms. Two years ago, I placed 20 minnows in Llyn Fach. [...] Originally barren water,

[357] The self-motivated process outlined in the fictional 'Below Lord's Head Mountain' invites comparison to the 1970s Rhondda Forest Recreation Project. The working party report outlines that the project's primary objective was to 'create opportunities for informal recreation and facilities for the interpretation of the forces that have helped create the physical and social fabric of the area', (Rhondda Borough Council, 'Rhondda Forest Recreation Project Working Party Report' May 1975, Rhondda Forest Recreation Project , Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14. Henceforth referenced as 'Working Party Report' in the body of the text). It is the issue of interpretation that most concerns Berry: 'Whoever "interprets" will categorically bend the truth, attempt to brainwash a largely disinterested [*sic*] local population' ('Objections', 6)

> deficient by my own pH readings, but not *totally* barren. In season, the water teems with frogs and newts, and there is a fertile population of water beetles. I have counted carapaces in heron droppings. While on this subject, many years ago when Rhondda river ran black as ink to join the equally black Taff at Pontypridd, I introduced small native trout to the headwaters of Nant Selsig, Blaenrhondda river, Nant Orchwy and Cwmsaerbren dam. ('Objections', 2-3)

He describes the way in which he assumed responsibility for populating a once barren lake on the Rhigos with native trout. In *Peregrine Watching*, Berry later meditated on the distinction between the conservation and the management of the natural environment. He opined that conservation 'does not mean "management". It means leaving be, stepping out of the skin of monomania, shedding nationhood and dogmas from on high, the huffs and puffs of consciousness buggered by realities' (*PW*, 87). For Berry, therefore, conservation is an act which transcends the self and the anthropocentric instinct; it returns to the more beneficial 'dialectic of man and his environment'. His conservational concerns are also expressed in his fictional writing. In his first novel, *Hunters and Hunted*, the narrative draws attention to the precarious situation of the peregrine falcon, a theme he would later return to in his natural history writing. As Miskin and Beynon sit on a mountainside, Beynon admires the birds as they 'roved haphazardly' above Blaenddu:

> Beynon held up his glasses. "Cock bird. The tiercel will be around somewhere. I hope they nest in the old quarry again."
> "She's a goner", Miskin said quietly.
> "What?"
> "Aye, I shot her".
> "You stupid bastard. Why go and do a thing like that? [...] "Tommy Wills paid you, ah, I suppose he paid you?" Williams said anxiously.
> "True enough. Licence and cartridge money."
> {...] "right Miskin, I'll tell you what I think. I think you're triggerhappy. There's no bloody hope for you.
> 'Because I shot a falcon? Tommy Wills gave me five quid for that bird. Sounds more like simple arithmetic to me." (*H&H*, 85)

In addition to being angered by the shooting of the tiercel, Beynon is upset by his friend's apparent indifference to the act. Although familiar with hunting (he and Miskin

hunt rabbits and rats with their dogs), he cannot comprehend how his friend was able to extinguish the wonder of the falcon in return for a relatively small amount of money. The thoughtlessness of the act prompts Beynon to ask, rather philosophically: '"What happens when there aren't any more falcons to shoot?"'(*H&H*, 85). Miskin, unaware of, or unwilling to acknowledge, the depth of the question, replies: '"I'll be out of pocket, that's all it amounts to. I could have shot both of 'em see, boy. Only a question of sitting on my backside and waiting"' (*H&H*, 85).

Berry's conservational concerns are motivated by his wonder at the endurance of the natural environment of Blaenycwm that despite the exploitation and abuses of industry. He explains how 'since time out of mind, stocks of fish in our two main rivers have been sustained, despite pollution from heavy industry, by the natural hatchery waters above colliery pit-heads'('Objections', 2, 3) and describes how areas of the landscape have 'survived exploitation' despite industrial activity.[358] Indeed, he appears to share the conviction of the character of Ellen in *Flame and Slag* that 'green always comes back', and it is Berry's investigation of the 'greening' and 'beautifying' processes of environmental reclamation and regeneration that I next wish to consider (*F&S*¸47).

The Industrial Forest: Denaturing the Natural

> We have been robbed of our natural ecology of space, simple geography, vistas, landmarks, besides ground nesting birds: pipits, lark, wheatears, whinchats. Crows, magpies, pigeons, jays and foxes are thriving.[359]

Berry's fictional and autobiographical writing suggests his disapproval of the policies, actions and authority of the Forestry Commission in Wales, but it is his private archive

[358] Ron Berry, draft of letter of 24th June 1975, to John W L Zehetmayr, Forestry Commission Conservator in South Wales, Swansea University Library Archive ,WWE/1/10/14
[359] Ron Berry, letter to *The Sunday Times*, 4th October 1976, Swansea University Library Archive WWE/1/10/14

which reveals his long protest against the activities of the public body.[360] The archive includes numerous letters of objection to the environmental regeneration work of the Forestry Commission, and in particular, a series of letters arguing against the plans of Rhondda Borough Council to develop (in conjunction with the local authority and the Forestry Commission) an 'area of informal countryside recreation', the Rhondda Forest Recreation Project ('Working Party Report, 1). Before examining Berry's writing on the issues surrounding the Forestry Commission plantations and activities, it is useful to summarise the history of the south Wales coniferous forests. The Forestry Commission's forested area in the former south Wales coalfield, known as the 'Valleys forest', constitutes 23% of their estate in Wales, and covers an area of 27,261 hectares.[361] Although planting began in the area in the 1920s, only half of the trees in the plantation are over thirty years old; as such, the process of plantation remains a recent experience and memory for much of the local population. One study of the coniferous forest outlines its characteristics as follows:

> The forest is not a single discrete area of trees. Rather it consists of blocks of trees interspersed with communities, open country, farm land, derelict mine workings and mountain areas. Forest blocks are largest around the Neath, Afan and Rhondda valleys. The Valleys forest is unique in its proximity to populations and is the largest urban forest in Western Europe, with approximately 1.7 million people living in the forest area.[362]

The scale of the woodland reveals that it is an industrialised forest; indeed, as some have described it, a 'wood factory'.[363]. As such, although the heavy industries have declined and been dismantled the area remains industrialised. To Berry and others who protested against the policies and activities of the Forestry Commission, the afforestation of the south Wales coalfield is the persisting (and persistent) invasion of

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[360] In one letter he describes himself as a 'long-time, rather disillusioned campaigner', in a letter of 20th September 1977 to *Western Mail*, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archive WWE/1/10/14
[361] L Kitchen et al., 'Forestry and Environmental Democracy: The Problematic Case of the South Wales Valleys', *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 4: pp139 – 155, p.145
[362] Ibid.
[363] Ibid.

the garden by the machine. As Leo Marx remarked, increased ecological and environmental awareness imbued the 'archetypal nineteenth-century image of the machine invading the landscape [...] with a new, more literal meaning and credibility'.[364] As Berry described the situation, 'King coal is dying, along with free range Welsh mutton and wool. Long live King conifer marching the crammed landscape, reaching for sunlight above ground where no grass will grow'.[365]

Various studies have outlined and analysed the processes of land acquisition employed by the Commission.[366] In particular, Kirsti Bohata's framing of the afforestation debate in a post-colonial theoretical context provides new insights, considering the construction of the Commission and the plantations as 'an alien, colonizing force' by writers in Wales.[367] Bohata's study considers the way in which Welsh writers record the process of the 'erasure of place' that the afforested communities of west Wales experience, a process which, as suggested above, Berry also witnesses in Blaenycwm (ibid). His papers emphasise that fences and forest surround 'Cwmsaerbren Basin, Graig y Ddelw, Mynydd Tŷ Isaf, and all around to the villages of Nantymoel, Blaengwynfi and Glyncorrwg, over to Pen Pych mountain [...] and above Blaenrhondda, Tŷneweydd and Treherbert, extending over to Maerdy and down almost to the entire length of Rhondda Fach'.[368] The 'toponymic memory' which Berry has inscribed in his habitat is obscured by a tide of conifers.[369] The unpublished manuscript narrative of 'Below Lord's Head Mountain' is also inflected by the

364 Leo Marx, 'Post-pastoralism', p.66

365 Ron Berry, undated typed draft document, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archive WWE/1/10/14. This echoes a remark made in the *Forestry Commission Annual Report 1919/20* which stated: 'The afforestation of land [...] is bound to cause inconvenience and even hardship to existing owners and occupiers: the cry of mutton versus trees will be raised'. [William Linnard, *Welsh Woods and Forests: A History* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2000] p. 191)

366 See L. Kitchen et al.; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: A History of Modern Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1982]); and Michael Winter, *Rural Politics: Policies for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment* (London: Routledge, 1996)

367 Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.81

368 Ron Berry, letter of 14th/16th June 1975 to Mr J. M. Evans, Planning Officer, Rhondda Borough Council, WWE1/10/14

369 Wendy Joy Darby, *Landscape and Identity: Geographies of Nation and Class in England* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2000), p.83

alienation and sense of exile felt by the community as their surrounding landscape is remodelled:

> The old incline had greened over, a sunken track between thousands of larches. Smaller pines blobbed every square yard of turf among acres of scree below Theo's quarry.
> I felt destructive.
> Lottie warned, "Stop it, you sound like a degenerate."
> "Coal face language," I said. "They've ruined everything. You wouldn't understand." (BLHM, 17)

The returning Shad Beynon feels a visceral sense of loss when he is faced with the afforested landscape. It echoes Berry's own reaction to the development: 'the operation of the Forestry Commission sickens my heart'.[370] His papers emphasise that what little evidence of the pre-industrial *gloran* communities remained was erased when historic dry-stone wall boundaries were bulldozed in order to erect Forestry Commission fences.[371] In addition to the erasure of the inscribed history of the landscape, Berry also stresses how the local population is prevented from accessing the hillsides, a practice which, as the introduction to Berry's autobiography describes, has been a part of Upper Rhondda landscape interaction for generations. He disputes the Commission's claim that there is 'unrestricted public access *on foot* throughout land in its ownership' arguing that 'walkers are compelled to walk on FC roads ('Working Party Report', 6), and that 'the land is ploughed deep, [making it] ankle-wrenching to traverse on foot, and when trees are up to canopy, only a dwarf with a torch can move at ground level' ('Objections', 5). Berry later explored this often overlooked impact of the forestry plantations in the short story 'Natives'. The story follows the experience of a group of retired miners, 'well past middle age, [...] on compo and hardship allowance [...] sacrificial victims to the old black diamonds'.[372] Sitting in a pub they discuss the

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[370] Ron Berry, handwritten, undated draft document, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

[371] Ron Berry, undated typed draft, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

[372] Ron Berry, 'Natives', in Simon Baker ed., *Collected Stories,* pp.77-85, p.78

influence of afforestation:

> "Aye, Upper Coed-coch has been renamed Isolated Area by our county planning experts. Consequently the Forestry commission has taken over. Surface pillage succeeding subterranean rape".[373]
> "Mountains around here," said Martin, "they'll be like the Western Front when these trees are cropped." [...]
> "We shan't witness the millennium," promised Levi.
> Martin looked angry. "Nor roam the mountains on Sunday mornings. You need a can-lamp and knee-pads to crawl under the bloody Christmas trees."
> Levi dipped a finger in his beer, swam it humming around the rim of the glass. "Economics, the name of the game." ('Natives', 78)

The description of crawling under the trees, using a lamp and knee pads to negotiate the dark forest floor is inflected with the miners' experience; the image recalls the subterranean activities of mining. In this subtle analogy, Berry once more highlights the origins of the fossil fuel and the dialectic between the coal industry and nature. In doing so, Berry also reveals the irony of the re-afforestation of the Rhondda; as the British Coal Authority publication, *The Environment,* remarked: 'It is paradoxical that coal is derived from trees and that the finest cover for reshaped coal spoil tips is that self-same source'.[374]

Timber has long been associated with the industrial activity of south Wales. Before the extraction of coal in the area, the woodlands of the valley hillsides were harvested for fuel, as Gwyn Thomas illustrated in *All Things Betray Thee.* Forest

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[373] The origins of this phrase are in evidence in Berry's letter to *The Western Mail*, (22nd September 1977) : 'I believe the subterranean rape of our South Wales valleys having been virtually accomplished, we are now witnessing the surface rape'. Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

[374] The Coal Authority Environment Group, *The Environment,* 5th July 1999, p. 1. Berry reflects on a further aspect of the irony of the natural material above and below the surface of the earth in *Peregrine Watching*, as he recalls witnessing the effects of a forest fire: 'Tramping conscientiously to Cerrig Fawr, I smelled peat smoke. Far away across the tops, a lop-sided square mile of young conifers was destroyed. Here and there in the black welter, whiffs of smoke rose from peat smouldering six feet below the surface, peat laid down long ago, over a span of 65 million years – figures learned from a blackboard. Extra Mural classes, the Professor of Geology stepping aside, rubbing chalk off his fingers, cocksure of his exposition. [...] Flat on my back under pouring skylarks, I chewed on his indigestible aeons. [...] Turning on my elbows, I watched two crows prodding near a recurring pencil of peat smoke. Millions of insects had beaked in the forest fire' (*PW*, 53). It is unclear whether the fire is accidental or arson, but elsewhere Berry does outline the direct-action protests that attempted to stall the work of the Commission: Berry went on to consider arson as protest in the unpublished 'Below Lord's Head Mountain': 'There's nobody'll beat the Forestry Commission. Alright, Shad Beynon. Beynon? Me and him in our time, we'd be slashing fences and striking matches up in old Blaenddu, trying to stop the take-over.' (BLHM, 5)

plantations were necessitated by the expansion of the coal industry as pitwood was needed to reinforce and support the tunnels of mines.[375] As the industry declined, it was argued that forestry offered a convenient and suitable means to ameliorate the scars of industrial activity in the coalfield.[376] The apparent ideological shift to a concern for environmental aesthetics was reflected in the 1956 text *Tomorrow's Landscape*, where it was argued that a 'landscape cluttered by industry' can be improved by the introduction of woodland. Giving the example of the view from Tonpantrau, north of Merthyr Tydfil and the Taf and Rhymney valleys, it is noted:

> In the valley are a station, a railway, its attendant posts, wires and buildings, a string of reservoirs, some pleasant, some appalling, but all having the taint of artificiality. All these elements between them destroy the magic of the hills and worry the eye with a restless disorganized litter. A great sweep of forestry here would absorb the jarring elements and restore a feeling of peace.[377]

But the Forestry Commission afforestation of the coalfield landscape has done little to 'restore a feeling of peace'; instead, the 'geometrized landscape' of the plantations covertly continue the industrialisation of the area (*F&S,* 173). A letter to *The Sunday Times* outlines Berry's despair at the remodelled landscape of Blaenycwm. The Forestry Commission, he states, has

> compounded a real and aesthetic blasphemy upon myself, my children and my grandchildren [...] We have been robbed of our natural ecology of space, simple geography, vistas, landmarks, besides ground nesting birds [...]. I *live* here. [the Forestry Commission] has contributed to the ruination of my inheritance. Midway into the next century, the village where I was born will be drowned in conifers.[378]

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[375] See William Linnard, *Welsh Woods and Forests*, for a detailed account of pitwood production (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2000). Although the text is very much a sympathetic record of the Forestry Commission in Wales, the data presented regarding timber use in heavy industry contextualises the perceived need for a nationalised woodland management / timber production scheme

[376] R.A. Farmer, 'Forestry in South Wales', *Forestry*, Vol. 66, No. 2, 1993, p.124

[377] Sylvia Crowe, *Tomorrow's Landscape* (London: The Architectural Press: London, 1956), p.47

[378] Ron Berry, 4th October 1976, letter to *The Sunday Times*, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14. A report which considered the Commission's operations in the area noted that 'it is clear that the Forestry Commission was not, at the time of planting, particularly sensitive to local communities. In many situations, the forest is planted to the limits of the Forestry Commission land. The patterns of high-density, linear-edged planting reflect the productivist foundations of the Forestry Commission. Consequently dark block of conifers overshadow many houses and communities.'(Kitchen et al, 146)

The word drown is particularly significant here, as Berry aligns the forest plantation with the appropriation of land for the construction of reservoirs, another instance of the 'perceived disregard, or undervaluation, by the London government of the rural Welsh and their culture'(Bohata, 81). The plantations have defamiliarised and alienated the known 'natural ecology of space', and the narratives inscribed in the land. Berry's writing on the subject reveals that he is motivated to expose the industrialised ideology of the Forestry Commission operations in reaction to the public body's 'annual PR stunts', the attempts to reposition the conifer plantations as a natural feature of the landscape (*PW,* 53). He asserts in his nonfictional writing that the Commission's activities are primarily concerned with profit, rather than the environment and local community (he scathingly describes Forestry Commission staff as 'wage people connected to the economics of planting and cropping trees for the sterling good of the nation'), a sentiment also expressed in his fictional writing: 'The Forestry Commission just fenced and planted. It's still going on. Nobody can stop them. They're worse bastards than private coal owners but it's less obvious. They press on quietly like a dose of pox.' (BLHM, 5) In *Peregrine Watching* he suggests that the Authority is analogous with 'righteous gangsters', making 'enemies in the gospel name of Economics' (*PW*, 53). Berry was to return to this theme in his autobiography, asserting that the afforestation of the Rhondda signifies 'pre-history sacrificed to Mammon masked as a quango' (*HWYL*, 31).

The continuing exploitation of the Rhondda environment also causes Berry to reflect on the impact of the forests on the natural ecology of Blaenycwm. His papers draw attention to the 'planned vandalism', or environmental disregard, exhibited by the Forestry Commission. He reflects:

> More and more, planned vandalism becomes apparent to us all. The Forestry Commission has left fencing materials, mechanical and human litter all over our hills. Across the skyline where water pours from two of the loveliest waterfalls

> in the County, [...] the Commission has strung fences. Men with the aesthetic nous of Neanderthals [... .] The NCB, British Railways, local authority departments and manufacturing industries supply examples of vandalism / dereliction too common-place to itemise. ('Objections', 4-5)

He suggests that society's increased environmental conscience prompts an awareness of the 'planned vandalism' enacted in the landscape. This narrative of environmental vandalism is analogous to Lawrence Buell's concept of 'toxic discourse', the 'expressed anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency'(Buell, *Endangered*, 31). Berry's concern is not the threat of toxic pollution in the natural world (though his archives reveal an awareness of the dangers of the development of new chemical pesticides) but the apparent reckless remodelling of the deindustrialised landscape.[379] Berry argues that the Forestry Commission, although positioned as conservators of the landscape, are contaminating the new coniferous forests with industrial debris ('mechanical and human litter'), and fences which recall the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enclosure acts. The authoritative aspect of the Commission also extends to influence people's interaction with the environment: it reinforces the perceived distinction between humanity and the environment, a distinction which Berry transcends in his nondualistic approach. He asks:

> Why not become a bona fide naturalist under the aegis of the Forestry Commission? Stride eyes front (what else?) along its drives; better still, count birds (not species) on a Forestry Commission bursary. Do not cavil with district officers; they are merely doing a job of work, acquiring Public Record Office awareness during these times of emergency. Do not question the book-keeping of the commission. Walk patiently outside a fence until you come to a stile which is guaranteed to lead you to a drive surfaced with stone chippings. Condition your grandchildren to loss of song-birds, bare skylines, profiled, accessible mountain streams, the footloose ways of your own childhood.[380]

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[379] Undated newspaper cutting from *The Times*, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

[380] Ron Berry, undated typed draft document, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

Fences restrict access and cross timeworn paths, leading those who walk in the forest to 'walk patiently outside a fence' until they find a stile. The very action of investigating the (once) wild landscape is now controlled and there is little opportunity for exploration. The appreciation of the area's wildlife is reduced from a qualitative to a quantative mode, as numbers of birds, rather than the variety, is recorded. The wild landscape is reduced to the sum of its parts, to the mechanics of a land-based ecosystem. The conifer forests, as Berry reflected elsewhere, have 'de-nature[d] [the] physical environment'.[381] The natural has been rendered unnatural and uniform, and furthermore, the concept of a natural forest itself is distorted as it is used to define and describe an industrialised wood factory. Berry's description of the forest emphasises the manmade aspect of the plantations, paralleling conventional descriptions of cityscapes as the restricted horizons of the gravel roads evoke anonymous streets: 'Stride eyes front [...] along its drives'. Berry goes on to reflect further on the behaviour the Forestry Commission encourages through the planning and development of the area's conifer plantations:

> In the Year of the Tree, litter bins and rustic seats accompany every lay-by carved by the Commission. Sit and look, munch and drink etc, and throw wrappings, bottles and condoms into the bins. Mother Nature, that great mindless Mom of life and death, now delivered to us all by courtesy of the Forestry Commission. [382]

The features added to make the natural environment more comfortable for its consumption by the visitors (faux 'rustic seats' and litter bins) domesticate, and therefore de-nature, the forest landscape.

The post-industrial forest project enacts Jean Baudrillard's postmodern concept of the simulacrum, the simulation of the real. The 'geometrized landscape' of conifers

[381] Ron Berry, undated published letter, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

[382] Ron Berry, undated typed draft document, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

reconstitute the wooded hillsides of the pre-industrial Rhondda valleys, but in a form that is planned, regimented, and unnatural. Furthermore, as I have already considered, the coniferous forests manifest a pared-down ecosystem, alien to the area – it is therefore not real woodland. It is a 'reproduction in which the very idea of the real is no longer the concrete signified of which the simulacrum is the signifier'.[383] The coniferous manmade forest cannot replace the indigenous deciduous woodland of the area that was harvested during the nineteenth century to provide fuel for the furnaces of the ironworks, and pitwood for the collieries.

Although this broadleaf forest is not a landscape feature that twentieth-century inhabitants of the Rhondda valleys were ever familiar with, it exists in a collective myth: the frequently retold (and idealised) story of how before the industrialisation of the south Wales steam coalfield, a red squirrel could journey from Cardiff to the upper Rhondda through the tree-tops. Furthermore, the alien ecology imposed by the coniferous forest masks the landscape and ecosystem established in the area since the clearing of the first forests, thus concealing the upland environment familiar to the twentieth-century inhabitants of the upper Rhondda.

As considered above, this imposed (un)natural environment has also been landscaped and modelled for the benefit of leisure participants, a process which further removes the forestry from the natural and the wild. It offers a sanitised, safe, representation of the natural and wild. The fantasy offered by the manmade forest also conceals the long-term cycle of the forestry plantation: planting, maturation, harvesting, fallow land, re-planting, a process that Berry is keen to expose. In *Peregrine Watching* Berry reflects that when 'the conifers are harvested in the next century, areas of ancient Gwalia will look like the Western Front, reeking of diesel and cordite' (*PW*, 7): it will be a spoiled, post-industrial landscape once again. In his papers, he outlines the plans

[383] Julian Wolfreys, *Critical Keywords* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.226

for the leisure development of the upper Rhondda, noting that they fail to mention 'harvesting those vast plantations surrounding the historically industrialised populations of Glamorgan. Imagine this ravaged ecology, our grandchildren's inheritance. Derelict hills comparable to slag heaps, until the next crops are planted'.[384] In the marginalia Berry added to the working party papers of the project, he remarked that the public consultation material should include 'illustrations of felled forests, showing over-all dereliction, cite ruined ecology, relate Rhondda Forest Recreation Project to this inevitable end. Be honest'.[385] This was later re-drafted as part of his response to the project, when he reminded the borough council that harvesting will cause 'visible desolation on a greater scale than that created by the coal industry'('Objections', 1-2).[386] Berry's concern is that the Rhondda Forest Recreation Project can be neither a long-term nor sustainable scheme given that the forest it inhabits will be harvested – it will repeat the pattern of the original deciduous woodland of the Upper Rhondda.

Berry's papers also suggest his awareness of the simulation at play in the establishment of country parks. Reflecting on the probable impact of the Rhondda Forest Recreation Project, he draws on the example of Aberdare Country Park :

> Designate these places [Cwmsaerbren Basin, Blaenycwm, Blaenrhondda,] publicise them as beauty spots, and they perish. Perish in themselves, change, become vulgarised. Witness such abortions as Aberdare Country Park, its dozens of fences criss-crossing the landscape, the plethora of signposts, the utterly frivolous artificial cascade (how long has it been dry?) the [unreadable

[384]Although the handwritten draft document is undated, the contents suggests that it was written during 1973, as part of his correspondence with *The Western Mail.* Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14. Berry's prediction is confirmed by Lawrence Kitchen et. al.'s study of the Forestry Commission in south Wales which observes that clear-felling ' leaves orange scars on the landscape', and 'stumps and small off-cuts are left to die on the ground, leaving areas that appear devastated'(Kitchen et al, 149)
[385] Ron Berry Marginalia, 'Working Party Report', Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14
[386]Berry seems to have drawn on this material in *Peregrine Watching* [1987]: 'Here in Wales, the Forestry Commission has effaced a land-grab greater than any since the Roman invasions. Horizons have been degraded, watersheds obliterated, deciduous copses overwhelmed. When the conifers are harvested in the next century, areas of ancient Gwalia will look like the Western Front, reeking of diesel and cordite.' (*PW*, 7)

word] ponds, the over-all atmosphere of purpose-built despoilment.[387]

In this succinct description , Berry captures the way in which simulacra of country parks function. In allocating such a label, the designated spaces 'perish in themselves, change, become vulgarised'; they are no longer what it was intended to protected and celebrate. The 'purpose-built despoilment' that has been introduced to the area in order to make the landscape conform to the expectations of a country park has destroyed the natural beauty of the place. The country park simulacrum has 'no referent or ground in any "reality" except [its] own. A simulation is different from a fiction or lie in that it not only presents an absence as a presence, the imaginary as the real, it also undermines any contrast to the real, absorbing the real within itself'.[388] As such, the idea of natural beauty is subsumed by the manipulated beauty presented by the manmade country park. Berry reflects that an 'utterly frivolous artificial cascade' was installed in the park, presumably because there was an absence of natural waterfalls, or that the waterfalls that already existed were not suitable; this addition simulates the landscape, and only the lack of water running down it signals that it is not a natural environmental feature. On reflecting on publicity events for the Rhondda Forest Recreation Project, Berry reflects on how the simulation of landscape – in this case through the optic of a Land Rover safari tour of the Cwmsaerbren Basin – influences people's reaction to the landscape. He considers the irony that a member of the Recreation Project Committee did not 'realise the total beauty and isolated splendour of our mountain tops and forest walks; until transported by Land Rover'.[389] Only once the landscape is packaged as an attraction does the participant (a life-long resident of the Rhondda) appreciate its importance and beauty: only once the real natural landscape has been simulated

[387] Ron Berry, undated typed draft document, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

[388]Mark Poster, 'Introduction', in Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. and Introduction by Mark Poster (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp1-9, p.6

[389]Ron Berry, Letter of 22nd August, 1975, to A.K. Gillard, Borough Secretary, Rhondda Borough Council, Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

through the image offered by a 'safari'-style tour is it accepted and celebrated.[390]

Baudrillard observed that 'when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning', and Berry's writing exposes this aspect of simulation.[391] As noted above, he reflects in his papers that only the memories of 'the footloose ways' of his childhood, and those of his peers, remain to express the experience of the natural near-wilderness of the upper Rhondda Fawr valley. Berry's perception of the importance of memory in forming an experience of the landscape echoes Baudrillard's remark on the function of nostalgia. Baudrillard reflected that once the real is altered:

> There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production [...] (Baudrillard, 12)

Through the closure of the collieries, and the subsequent dismantling of the above ground mining infrastructure (including the iconic symbol of the coal industry, the headframes and winding gears), the industrial history of the Rhondda valleys was largely erased. The pits were allowed to fill with water and their entrances filled in, and the surrounding area was re-landscaped, fracturing the palindromic relationship of the underground and above ground environments. In the void created by this fracture, the concept of heritage was introduced, an attempt to reconnect the communities of the south Wales coalfield with the industrial history of their area. But repackaging industrial experience and history as heritage alters that history, and it becomes an imagined, or idealised, narrative which refers to a real history and experience that has been lost. It is a referential simulacrum. Berry is acutely aware of this function of what he termed the 'sickly pox of *heritage*' culture (*HWYL*, 126). The context of this

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[390] *Rhondda Leader* cutting, 22nd August, 1975 Ron Berry Papers, Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

[391] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', *Simulations* trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983) pp 1-75, p.12

comment leads a reader to examine the Rhondda Heritage Park, established in 1987 as part of the Conservative government's 'A Programme for the People' project which sought to alleviate social and economic problems in South Wales. Based at the former Lewis Merthyr colliery in Trehafod, the heritage park opened a visitor's centre in 1989, and there followed a series of developments which culminated in the opening of the 'A Shift Through Time' underground attraction in 1994. Based in the workings of the former colliery, the exhibition begins with what promotional material for the park describes as 'the thrilling trip to "pit bottom" and the "Underground Experience"'.[392] Here you will ' "live the experience" of life as a miner and hear from your guide about the hazards and the tasks miners endured as part of their daily work' (Ibid). But it is impossible for visitors to 'live the experience' of a miner; the collieries have closed and the experience of working underground remains only with those who experienced coal-getting. Those who enter the underground museum do not, and cannot, experience what colliers experienced: there is no extreme physical exertion, no danger of injury, no need to stoop to work, no coal dust, no lung problems, no noise of industry, no awareness of the close connection to nature, and no fellow miners. Furthermore, the attraction's website explains that the underground gallery is 'not as far [underground] as you would think!': Health and Safety regulations prevent the tour from exploring the deeper tunnels of the mine.[393] What remains, therefore, is a pared-down semblance of the experience of working underground: it is a referential envisioning of the lived industrial experience. This referential aspect is further heightened by the portrayal of a pre-mechanised coalface, a portrayal which conforms to a romantic, near-mythic, representation and expectation of the industry – the mine workings themselves have

[392] http://www.rhonddaheritagepark.com/Shared/Backgroundinformation.aspx, para. 6. Accessed 7th December 2009

[393] http://www.rhonddaheritagepark.com/Shared/Visiting.aspx, 'Frequently Asked Questions'. Accessed 7th December 2009

been altered to fit cultural expectation.[394] As Yi Fu Tuan notes, it risks obliterating the historical narrative by positioning the experience of it in the present. He reflects that 'the effort to evoke a sense of place and of the past is often deliberate and conscious. To the extent that the effort is conscious it is the mind at work, and the mind – if allowed its imperial sway – will annul the past by making it all present knowledge' (Tuan, 198). As such, in Berry's reading of the South Wales coalfield heritage industry, he fears that memory of the working, active coal industry is further obscured and endangered. Indeed, the heritage park functions in a manner parallel to the caves of Lascaux, as considered by Baudrillard in the 'The Precession of Simulacra':

> under the pre-text of saving the original [...] the caves of Lascaux have been forbidden to visitors and an exact replica constructed 500 metres away, so that everyone can see them (you glance through a peephole at the real grotto and then visit the reconstituted whole). It is possible that the very memory of the original caves will fade in the mind of future generations, but from now on there is no longer any difference: the duplication is sufficient to render both artificial.[395]

Like the visitors to the caves, the visitors to the heritage park experience an artificial rendering of the coal industry, which actively constructs that artificiality as reality.

It has been argued that 'nostalgia in the present tense relies heavily on an aestheticized landscape', and this is what the much of the industrial heritage sector provides.[396] The vision of industry offered is nostalgic, as it 'seems pregnant with meaning, [...] because, it omits any reference to that which will follow. Its aura of poignant significance derives from the absence of portents of the pain that will come'.[397] It is this absence that Berry's autobiographical and fictional work seeks to

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[394] Promotional material outlines how at the end of a tour 'you will be transported back to the surface in a 'Spake' - an amazing simulated Coal Truck Ride where you are catapulted through dark and twisting tunnels with a surprise at every turn!' (Rhondda Heritage Park 'Experience' leaflet, 2009). For many of the visitors, this ride must seem more real than the reconstituted coalface, but it too is far removed from the truth of the mining industry. It is a simulacum that appears to make the real more readily accessible, but in doing so, it replaces the real.

[395] Jean Baudrillard, p.19

[396] Jonathan Smith, 'The Lie That Binds: Destablizing the text of landscape' in eds James. Duncan and Duncan Ley, *Place/Culture/Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993) , pp78-92, p.80

[397] Ibid.

correct. He addresses the artifice offered by the Rhondda Heritage Park, as it is far removed from the 'lived experience' recalled from his memories and those of his colleagues. His writing reinscribes the human histories of the industry and goes beyond the nostalgic simulation of the contemporary underground experience and the recorded statistics used to define the dangers of coal mining. Indeed, his writing has been described as a 'subterranean account of a life lived under the shelf of normal historical narrative'.[398] Occupying this space beneath the conventional historical narrative, Berry is able to re-populate the lost industry. In *History Is What You Live* he lists the names of forty miners in a near incantation, as this excerpt illustrates, reminding the reader that the effects of mining resonate far beyond the experience of working underground:

> Black histories all right, the old Graig level, where we slaved in dust and water, where I worked with or in the same headings as Sid Hullen (dust, dead), Jimmy Shanklyn (rheumatic fever, dead), Frank Carpenter (wry-necked and droop shouldered from injuries, dead), Walt James (dust, dead), Cliff Williams (TB, dead) [...] (*HWYL*, 4)

Unlike the heritage park, what Berry recalls is not nostalgic. It is acutely aware of 'that which will follow' as he reflects on the fate of his friends and former colleagues. As Gareth Williams has observed, this 'is not just a list of deaths and their causes; it is a litany inviting a response'.[399] Berry is preserving the collective memory of a passing generation in an accessible, accurate form, seeking recognition of their experience, and attempting to reconcile a community with its industrial legacy.

Berry's evocation of, and deep engagement with, his habitat reveals that he is a writer of place. His writing on landscape moves beyond the aesthetic and cultural resonances of rural imagery and reveals a concern for society's engagement with the natural environment, placing him, if unexpectedly, as an often ecocentric writer. The

[398]Alun Richards, 'Review of *History Is What You Live*', *New Welsh Review* 41, pp.78-9, p.78
[399] Gareth Williams, 'History is What You Live: Understanding Health Inequalities in Wales' eds. Pamela Michael and Charles Webster *Health and Society in Twentieth-Century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006) pp.287-328, p.287

locatedness of his writing creates sustained consideration of the social, economic and environmental issues of the Upper Rhondda Fawr valley and indeed the wider South Wales coalfield. In reading the narratives inscribed in the landscape, Berry reasserts the importance of land in the history of the area, but his ability to perceive the 'deepening of time' that the landscape signifies also allows for a longer perspective, stretching into prehistory. This awareness of, and appreciation for, the long history of the land informs Berry's wonder at the natural world. He does not discount the visceral and emotional responses that nature can prompt, indeed in his non-fiction writing such responses are central to his interaction with the environment and this is also reflected in his fiction. It is Berry's sense of awe that triggers his attempts to recapture the nondualistic engagement with nature he experienced as a child, but as an adult he is aware of the risks of becoming lost in nature. He explores the primal aspect of nature in *So Long Hector Bebb* and also reflects on what would have happened had he chosen to write in his primitive *cwtch* on the hillside. Although the experience of watching peregrines for two seasons makes Berry realise that he cannot fully overcome the distinction between man and nature, he does succeed in dislocating the conventional anthropocentric position: he does not place himself at the centre of the natural world, but rather sees himself as a constituent of it.

In his liminal position moving between nature and community, the wild and civilised, in both his life and his work he does become a mediator in the two spheres. It is in this role of mediator that Berry explores the process of reinhabition. Seeking to reconnect his community with its environment, he became an environmental activist of sorts, an aspect of his profile that has been long overlooked. His work also challenges conventional perceptions of the coal industry, as he deconstructs the actions of coalmining and reconstructing the practices as an interaction with natural resources. Perceiving place and the narrative of place as inseparable, in addition to advocating a

reconnection with the natural environment Berry also urges reengagement with the history of a place. His recounting of the narrative of Blaencwm is elegiac as he also reflects on how distant the industrial past of the area now seems. But in reinscribing the industrial history of the Upper Rhondda Valley which was obscured when the coal industry was dismantled, and further overwritten by the re-greening of the landscape, Berry offers the opportunity to access the lived experience of the historical narrative. He enacts Yi Fu Tuan's observation that 'to strengthen our sense of self the past needs to be rescued and made accessible'.[400] It is not only his own sense of self that Berry seeks to strengthen, but the identity of his community, and of the wider society of the former coalfield. His work, both fiction and non-fiction, published and unpublished, provides a guide for the reader to inhabit or re-inhabit the history, landscape and environment of the Upper Rhondda Fawr.

[400] Yi Fu Tuan, p.187

Conclusion

'They (we) are inheritors of natural and industrial history [...]' [401]

In their vivid depictions of the landscape, environment and communities of the south Wales coal field, Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry draw on their knowledge of their *cynefin.* Although both writers are 'immersed by inheritance in [the] Rhondda' their depictions of their familiar landscape engage with different aspects of the ambiguous concept. [402] Indeed, Thomas can be seen to write 'through' the landscape, while Berry writes 'of' the landscape: for Thomas landscape functions as a literary device, for Berry it is a character.

Thomas frames his approach to landscape through an awareness of design and aesthetic culture: it is a *tirlun.* His engagement with the landscape reminds the reader that it is a cultural artefact in addition to a natural one, as he traces the resonances and uses of landscape and rural imagery in culture and society. Landscape provides Thomas with a means of exploring the social issues that it is seen to embody and reflect. For Berry however, landscape is a non-human space that society occupies: it is a *tirwedd.* His interpretation and exploration of the landscape that surrounds him is informed by the materiality of the land and the natural world.. In this way, Berry attempts to defuse the dualistic approach to society and nature and present his experience of his non-dualistic habitat. The work of both Thomas and Berry resides in the dialectic space between society and nature, and it is this space of convergence between the human and non-human, the industrial and the rural, official record and lived experience, that their textual inscriptions of the Rhondda valleys capture.

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[401] Ron Berry, typed letter dated 1st July 1975, Ron Berry Papers, (Rhondda Forest Recreation Project Papers), Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

[402] Ron Berry, typed letter dated 1st July 1975, Ron Berry Papers, (Rhondda Forest Recreation Project Papers), Swansea University Library Archives, WWE/1/10/14

The analysis of the literary depiction of landscape, the literary geography that writers present, offers many future research opportunities. The work of Ron Berry in particular would lend itself to 'literary mapping', that is the (digital) mapping of imagined spaces in relation to the actual landscape it represents. Berry's rootedness in the Upper Rhondda, reflected in both his fiction and non-fiction writing, provides a fascinating case-study to investigate. Furthermore, his extensive archive has yet to be examined in a sustained manner, and would offer new material for re-evaluating overlooked writer. Examining the significance of landscape in the work of Gwyn Thomas also opens new approaches to his wider oeuvre, in particular the development of his vision of Meadow Prospect.

As Matthew Jarvis has reflected in his study of contemporary poetry from Wales, the landscape of the nation presented 'is a far cry from Welsh space understood merely as scenery. Rather it suggests [...] an environment that is both abundantly non-human and supremely social'.[403] The same is true of the fiction and related writings of Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry. Both authors share a concern with their *cynefin*, and the narratives and histories imbedded within it. In exposing the 'geology of remembrance' that their landscape contains, their texts also provide us with the means of reading the narrative that it has to offer.

[403] Matthew Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p.143

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