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'TO SHOW FROM WHERE I CAME'

Cool Cymru, pop and national identity in Wales during the 1990s

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Rebecca Jayne Edwards MA

Swansea University

March 2008

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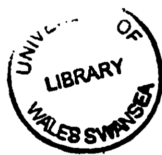
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I Summary of Content

This thesis examines the relationship between pop music and national identity in Wales in the 1990s; of how markers of national identity were evident in the music, performance, presentation and discourse of Welsh pop. It argues that popular culture, and especially pop music, are absent from much scholarly writing on national identity, and that this should be redressed to enable understanding of how national identity manifests outside of state and sporting occasions. It explores the origin of Cool Cymru—a label that was used as shorthand for descriptions of change in Wales, including political, economic and cultural elements—in the press. It further examines how pop was used as a signifier of change by a number of players including politicians, commentators, marketing boards, television producers, playwrights and film makers. It discusses the complex reaction that the label elicited, particularly from the bands that were frequently associated with it.

The evidence collected has come from a wide range of sources, including press archives, film, radio and television programmes, oral testimony and a close examination of Welsh pop itself and the discourse that surrounded it.

II Statements

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

Signed .

Date .15th November 2008

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

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

Signed

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STATEMENT 2

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

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IV Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of people for their help and contribution in various ways to this thesis. Firstly, the staff of the British Library at St Pancras and Colindale, and the staff in the newspaper archive in Cardiff Library for their assistance. Also, to Liz Veasey at the BBC Wales archives for her assistance in locating various recording, and to Darren Broome for copies of programmes he has produced.

I am grateful to all of my interviewees who were so generous with their time and their contacts, and to Ann Rogers for her efforts transcribing my recordings.

Special thanks is given to friends who have provided comments and suggestions on my research at various stages, including Mairwen Harris, Jo Mac Karell, Liz Jenkins, Jeremy Evas, Steve Austins, Paul Holtom, Heike Doring, Rachel Bowen, Paul Stephens, Dave Wyatt and Ceri Davies. Thanks also to Jeremy for help with formatting—I promise never to mock you again. I am especially grateful to Dafydd Evans and Steffan Morgan who have provided encouragement, support and welcome criticism throughout the research and writing-up stages.

My interest in this subject was sparked and encouraged by wonderful teachers who have taught me over the years, including Mr Parkes, Mr Smith and Mr Bradley at Beauchamp College, Leicester; Neil Edmunds, Rob Stradling and Bill Jones at Cardiff University and Beryl Williams and Jeff Pratt at the University of Sussex.

I am appreciative of the efforts of the academic staff at Glamorgan and Swansea Universities who have offered advice, including Prof Gareth Williams, Dr Daniel Williams and Dr Andy Thompson. I owe a huge debt to my supervisor, Prof Chris Williams who has been unfailingly supportive and positive—thank you.

Thanks to my family and friends who have supported me in a hundred different ways through the past five years.

Finally, the biggest debt, which I can never repay, goes to my parents, who have always encouraged me and loved me without exception or condition.

All that follows improved immeasurably with the assistance of those named above. All errors and oversights are entirely down to me.

V Introduction

This thesis examines ideas of identity, specifically national identity, and its relationship with popular culture. It explores how in Wales the relationship between identity, culture and popular music in particular, gave rise to the concept of Cool Cymru in the 1990s. It focuses on three main themes: Firstly, how music from Wales, 'the Land of Song', was reported within the press, and how Cool Cymru came to be constructed with pop music at its heart. Secondly, it demonstrates how the idea of Cool Cymru broadened, and how it was utilised by all manner of agents, including politicians and journalists, while many involved with music in Wales attempted to distance themselves from this. It further uses oral history to explore changes and developments in the music scene in Wales during this period and the effect which increased press exposure had. Thirdly, it challenges the notion that Cool Cymru was *entirely* media hyperbole, demonstrating how bands and their fans contributed to the story. This thesis will argue that although the label of 'Cool Cymru' still elicits strong (negative) reactions from some, it did represent the *zeitgeist* of this period.

This introduction identifies how scholars have accounted for the existence of nationalism, and the role that popular culture, (and specifically music) has played in this. It further considers how constructions of national identity in Wales have used music, examines the emergence of popular music as a source for academic study and considers how the issue of identity has been approached within popular music studies. A brief description of the recent political and social history of Wales is included to provide context. The use of key terms is explained, as is the reasoning behind the choice of sources and the methodologies used. This PhD is broadly located within the field of cultural history, as it uses pop music and the discourse surrounding it as a

source of historical evidence, which contributes to our understanding of changes taking place in Wales in the late 1990s. In using pop as a primary source, it borrows approaches from cultural studies and from sociology; pop is explored as an art form and a cultural practice, and the discourse surrounding pop in the media is of significance. In attempting to understand the changes in Wales in the 1990s, factors such as media depictions of Wales and Welsh identity are considered in detail.

Theories of National Identity

Ideas of identity are frequently raised by politicians and the press as being of importance, from Gordon Brown's assertions of a dual British and Scottish identity to the BBC's 'White Season' in 2008 which explored many aspects of white British working class life.[1] We constantly negotiate multifarious markers of identity: class, gender, sexual orientation, race, age and nationality, with these different markers being of note depending on our surroundings. As Stuart Hall notes, '[i]dentity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an accomplished fact [...] we should think, instead, of identity as a "production".'[2] Within the body of work on nationality, a number of positions have been proposed in identifying the origin and construction of national identities, from the industrial revolution and formalised education (Gellner), to mass-literacy (Anderson), ethno-symbolism (Smith), invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger) and the affirmation of identity in everyday happenings (Billig). All of these offer plausible solutions to question of why and how national identities are constructed and performed. The role of culture is of particular importance to Anderson, Smith and Billig and Hobsbawm.

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[1] See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/7281314.stm—accessed 19/03/08.

[2] Quoted in Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 196.

There is a distinction between definitions of states and nations. Broadly speaking, a state is a formal and reasonably rigid structure 'specifically concerned with the enforcement of order'.[3] A nation, as we will see, is a less rigid formation, though this does not mean that ideas and perceptions exert less of an influence over people. A number of factors, which usually include language, culture, religion and a shared history, bind it. These two concepts may not occur simultaneously and are not interchangeable. National identity is often taken as a natural given, something born into rather than acquired through learning, experience and choice (whether conscious or unconscious). Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, amongst others, locate this phenomenon as a modern development and a product of industrialization. Gellner argues that,

> [...] nationalism does not have any very deep roots in the human psyche. The human psyche can be assumed to have persisted unchanged through the many millennia of the existence of the human race, and not to have become either better or worse during the relatively brief and very recent age of nationalism.[4]

He goes on to define nationalism as the 'organization of human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogenous units', identifying the rise of nationalism as being a product of the industrial revolution and the changes to the structure of society which this brought about.[5] This was facilitated by a centrally structured education system that requires an increasing number of people to pass through it and gain a formal education. This high level of basic training afforded to the vast majority of a society allows mobility between positions hitherto unthinkable.

Anderson's theory on the origin of national identity is also located within the industrial revolution, and closely associated with the rise of the printing press, and the

[3] Ernest Gellner *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p.4.
[4] Ibid, p. 34-35.
[5] Ibid, p. 35.

supplanting of sacred languages with vernaculars in primacy that followed this. This allowed for the standardization of languages and so a gradual awareness that many others share one language, that there is a common element between an individual and an unknown body of people.[6] He argues that nationalism should not be thought of along the lines of 'liberalism' or 'fascism' but as 'religion' or 'kinship'.[7] This terminology appears to seek to move nationalism away from ideas of it as a politically motivated, organised entity towards something more organic, reflecting the common perception that a national identity is something which people are born into, as with kinship, rather than a conscious choice. Anderson is not suggesting that nationalism is not a constructed phenomenon, but that it is more helpful to view it away from more doctrine-orientated political lines. He puts forward the convincing view that the nation is an imagined community as its members will not personally know each other, or even have opportunity to meet all the other members of the nation.[8] The idea of imagined community also has some relevance when considering other large groups whose members often may be found in many countries—fans of a particular sport or members of a religion for example. Anderson's theory relates specifically to the print media—that people reading the same thing in an area constitutes the imagined community. The same is true of music: songs and music provide a connection with a wider number of people and they do not rely on literacy so can cross age, education and disability boundaries. They can even cross the boundaries of linguistic ability—you do not have to understand a song to enjoy it, or even sing it.

Gellner and Anderson's arguments are largely convincing to a point, but their theories come across as 'nationalism from above', concerned with the mechanics of

[6] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* Revised edition (London: Verso, 1991), p. 44.
[7] Ibid, p. 5.
[8] Ibid, p. 6.

the centralized state. The members of the imagined communities are passive consumers of an ideology (or in Anderson's approach, a feeling) fed to them through the centrally organized education system. Whilst it is true that they are talking specifically about the *construction* of a nation, there is little consideration of the *role* of the nation. To discuss solely the construction of the nation suggest that when a nation has completed its formation it ceases to change. Stuart Hall has demonstrated how notions of our identity can vary according to the situation we are reacting to, that identity is formed of malleable parts rather than blocks. Using the example of Clarence Thomas, a black judge in the US accused of sexual harassment, he demonstrates that personal, individual choices of primacy of ethnicity and gender influence how members of one society, culture and national identity will display wildly different reactions.[9] If the nation is an imagined community, imagined by its participants, then it is inevitably shifting and not a monolithic force.

Anthony D. Smith has pointed to these omissions from modernist thought, noting that they have failed to 'accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch, thereby precluding any understanding of the popular roots and widespread appeal of nationalism'.[10] Their arguments imply that feelings of national identity were wholly absent before the industrial revolution; that societies were wholly aligned along such lines as kinship and religion.

The idea of the invented tradition and cultural reawakening are recurrent themes in examinations of nationalism. Gellner stated that,

[9] Stuart Hall 'The Question of Cultural Identity' in *Modernity and its Futures* ed. T. McGrew, S. Hall and D. Held, (London: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 279-280.

[10] Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 8-9.

> Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored. But this culturally creative, fanciful, positively inventive aspect of nationalist ardour ought not to allow anyone to conclude, erroneously, that nationalism is a contingent, artificial ideological invention [...][11]

Although Gellner refers to nationalism's 'ugly head', the above quote shows that he acknowledges that it is a very real component in the construction of identity for many people.[12] Gellner places culture at the very centre of nationalism, describing it as 'the necessary shared medium' and essentially 'one in which they *all* breathe, so it must be the same culture. Moreover it must be a great or high culture...it can no longer be diversified, locality tied, illiterate culture or tradition.'[13] Gellner's ignoring of popular culture is unjustifiable, as is his omitting the role that radio, television and film play in spreading ideology and messages—whether this culture is 'great or high' in the mind of the scholar is immaterial; its very existence justifies its study. As regards religion and nationalism, Gellner argues that '[m]odern man is not loyal to a land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture'.[14] This statement raises a number of issues. Culture is entwined with (and partially comprised of) land, faith and monarch or governing structure.

The theme of invented traditions is recurrent throughout much writing on nationalism and identity. The term 'invented tradition' is used in a broad but not imprecise sense. It includes both traditions invented or constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less traceable manner within a brief and determined period—a matter of a few years perhaps—and establishing themselves with great rapidity. Invented traditions are practices governed by the overtly or tacitly accepted

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[11] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 56.
[12] Ibid, p.45.
[13] Ibid, pp. 37-38.
[14] Ibid, p. 37.

rules, and of a ritual or symbolic nature.[15] These typically take the form of flags and anthems, but this can include, amongst other things, national sports. Sport is particularly relevant in the imagining of the nation, and at specific times, bringing a nation together; one has only to think of the initial excitement, continual references to the England winning the Football World Cup 1966, and the inability of the English football team to get to the final since, to get the point. Similarly, the reaction of Wales and Scotland fans towards England's performance (from studied indifference to *schadenfreude*) speaks volumes about ideas of the nation and national identity, and the relationship between these different groups. In contemporary Britain, these symbols of national identity are most likely to be found in sport, particularly when national sides are playing. England football fans have a brass band which travels to all national games and plays a selection of popular songs, most of which are taken from films about World War Two. Sport provides an arena for wearing clothing stating national identity (in the form of national football shirts, scarves, etc), for the waving of flags, and for performing a national identity.

The nationalist as the re-awakener of the nation is another common theme at the heart of the invention of national traditions. Smith tells us that 'once unearthed and appropriated, the methodology and symbolism of poetic spaces and golden ages casts its own special spell.'[16] He claims that,

> We grasp the meanings of a nation through the image it casts, the symbols it uses and the fiction it evokes [...]. It is in these symbolic and artistic creations that we may discern the lineaments of the nation [...] the nation has become a cultural artefact of modernity, a system of collective imagining and symbolic representations, which resembles a pastiche of many hues and forms, a composite patchwork of all cultural elements included within its boundaries.[17]

[15] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in E Hobsbawm and T.Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 375.
[16] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 200.
[17] Anthony D. Smith, 'Gastronomy or Geology? The role of nationalism in the restructuring of nations', *Nations and Nationalism,* Vol 1, 1995, p. 7.

Eriksen cites Norway as an example where is was '[...] the city dwellers, not the peasants, who decided that reified aspects of peasant culture should become the "national culture"'.[18] Gellner mentions the rise in 'ethnic' recordings during the period in which he was writing, that 'the consumers of "ethnic" gramophone records are not the remaining ethnic rural population, but the newly urbanized, apartment dwelling, educated and multi-lingual population'.[19] This is in common with the findings of, amongst others, Malcolm Chapman. He argues that self-conscious 'Celtic' activity is 'in all probability the preserve either of intellectual incomers with folkloric tastes, or of some small part of the university-educated local youth' who have left the area, and return only periodically.[20] Once again, there is a large element of truth in these statements, though they are sweeping and allow little agency for those who live in these rural areas. Niall McKinnon has argued that university educated young adults ran the folk groups in 1960s Britain. These were found in urban areas, with teachers and lecturers particularly numerous amongst their membership.[21] However, we should be wary of assuming that it is only urban dwellers that have some sort of longing for the earth and who have sung and enjoyed folk music though they may make up the majority.

The idea of the re-awakener and re-interpreter is common not only in nationalism but also has been used as justification for political change. Glasnost and Perestroika were a 'reawakening' of socialism. The explanation went thus: 'True' socialism and Lenin's real intentions for the Soviet Union had been perverted or corrupted or misunderstood (depending on ones politics) by his heirs and especially

[18] T. H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* p. 102.
[19] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* p. 57, citing Yu V Bromley *et al, Sovremennye Etnicheskie Protsessy v SSSR* (Contemporary Ethnic Processes in the USSR) Moscow 1975
[20] Malcolm Chapman "Thoughts on Celtic Music" in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music* ed Martin Stokes p. 30.
[21] Niall McKinnon, *The British Folk Scene*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994).

by Stalin and now this was being reclaimed. Gorbachev instigated something of a 'back to basics' campaign. He presented his new politics as the reawakening of the positive feelings of the early 1920s, ignoring the deprivation and death which happened during Lenin's leadership of the Communist Party and Russia, but instead looked to it as a 'golden age' for the nation.[22]

In the increasingly post-modern era in which we live, the importance of national identity to the individual and the community may well change. New forms of communication have changed relations and there is the feeling that community is moving from being place-based to interest-based.[23] Whilst this is not to suggest that older ties of community no longer exist, there are real changes in people's approach to identity. Society is taking on a more globalised nature – shirts of once local football clubs such as Arsenal and Leicester are now found in many countries around the world.[24] People who associate themselves with these groups, as mentioned, share symbols, flags and anthems that bring their members together. Unlike a nation though, it is doubtful that people would be willing to lay down their lives for a football club. As Anderson argues, dying for one's country still assumes a 'moral grandeur' that dying for a political party or trade union cannot match. In Russia, the World War Two is named the 'Great Fatherland War'. Stalin called primarily for the defence of the Fatherland, rather than a defence of socialism, communism or the battle against fascism. After the war a huge statue of 'Mother Russia' was built in Volgograd to commemorate the battle of Stalingrad—again it was nationalist issues, rather than the *avant-garde* or impressionist art works commissioned after the revolution, that were used to represent the suffering and sacrifice of the people.

[22] Geoffrey Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union 1917-1991* (London: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 463.
[23] Ray Pahl, 'Are All Communities Communities in the Mind?', *Sociological Review*, Vol. 53, No. 4, November 2005, pp. 621-640.
[24] This is not to suggest that such examples of cultural globalisation work in reverse –people are unlikely to find football shirts of teams from less developed countries in the West.

Andrew Thompson argues that, 'few studies point to the necessity of directing attention towards analysing the commonplace and taken-for-granted perceptions', including the presentation of the nation within the media and news reports.[25] The dominance of 'top-down' approaches to nationalism have been challenged by Billig's theory of 'banal nationalism'—this is the nationalism of the everyday, so common it is barely of notice and yet it serves as a constant reminder of who 'we' are. Billig's theory suggests that we 'look and see the constant flaggings of nationhood'.[26] From the language of the press referring to 'us' and 'them' to emblems of the state visible on its buildings and its representatives: 'The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion: it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building'.[27] It is this proposal that is of greatest relevance to this thesis, which seeks to understand everyday representations of national identity within the recent past. However, within Billig's own writings, music receives the scantest of acknowledgements, solely in the form of the national anthem with reference to it being a requisite emblem of a nation. There is no consideration of the everyday role of music in constructing identity, which must be a weakness of this theory—music is also an essential part of the 'everyday' for many people.

The theorists discussed above only briefly mention the representation or 'flagging' of the nation through music and song. Hobsbawm's thesis of the invention of tradition sees music appear only in the guise of anthem or folksong.[28] Anderson, commenting on national anthems 'sung on national holidays', argues that '[n]o matter how banal the words and mediocre the tune there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter

[25] Andrew Thompson, 'Nations, national identities and human agency: putting people back into nations', *Sociological Review,* Vol. 49, No. 1, 2001, p. 31.
[26] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), p. 174.
[27] Ibid, p. 8.
[28] Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', p. 6.

the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance'.[29] This description of unisonance can be helpful in understanding pop and will be explored in Chapter 5, particularly in relation to crowd receptions to pop at the huge stadium events staged by Manic Street Preachers, Stereophonics and Catatonia in 1999. However, these limited references to popular music amount to a glaring omission on the part of the existing schools of thought on nationalism. This thesis attempts to contribute towards redressing this imbalance.

Modern Wales and placing Cool Cymru in context

A few years after the voters of Wales had rejected devolution in 1979, and during a time of particular industrial and social turmoil throughout Britain with the miners' strike and the Falklands War, Gwyn A. Williams wrote that 'Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce. If they want to. It requires an act of choice'.[30] This thesis demonstrates how they did indeed choose to, with popular culture and pop music providing an arena for this identity to be expressed.

Between 1979, and the narrow vote in favour of devolution in 1997, Wales went through a period of massive change. Before the early 1980s, and the bitter defeat of the miners' strike, Wales had been closely associated with coal and heavy industry, despite this being prevalent in only a relatively small area of Wales. This industry was based mostly in south Wales, from Monmouthshire, stretching west to Llanelli, bounded to the north by the Brecon Beacons, and to the south by the coastal plain of the Vale of Glamorgan.[31] Although mining and other heavy industry had declined during the course of the twentieth century, it had once been dominant. In 1914, thanks to migration within Wales, and the arrival of huge numbers from

[29] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.
[30] Gywn. A. Williams, *When Was Wales? A History Of The Welsh*, (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 304.
[31] For a map of the coalfield in 1979, see Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 485.

England and further afield, this industrial belt held two-thirds of the total population of Wales.[32] In addition, there were pockets of industry in north Wales, with the slate mines of the north-west, and coal in the northeast. It was the money from this industry, and from shipping that led to the urbanisation of south Wales, and the massive expansion of Cardiff, granted city status in 1905. Cardiff was named the Capital of Wales in 1955, but its status as Wales' major city has been continually contested, including in the discussions on where to base the Assembly, following the vote for devolution in 1997, ending with Swansea and Cardiff competing against each other.[33] The decline of this mining and heavy industry, and the high levels of unemployment that followed, along with other markers of social deprivation, resulted in the south Wales Valleys and west Wales being awarded Objective One funding in 2000, being named as two of the most economically deprived areas of Europe.[34] In establishing Cool Cymru, numerous articles from across the media repeated the theme of decline, in cultural and economic terms, and in reference to Wales' industrial past. Descriptions of decline provided the basis for claims of an economic 'renaissance' documented in Chapter 3. For the bands from this area of post-industrial Wales, the experience of growing up in an area experiencing the loss of that by which it had been so strongly defined it had a palpable effect on their music.[35]

Musical renaissance was the starting point to the discourse of Cool Cymru. Wales was described as a land of song that had somehow lost her way and was now returning to musical glory. The choral tradition of Wales does indeed have historical

[32] Ibid, p. 1.
[33] Roger Dobson, 'Wales at war over where to assemble', *Independent*, 8th March 1999, p. 4.
[34] No author given, 'Cash issue at heart of row', *Guardian*, 9th February 2000, p. 10.
[35] See Chapters 3 and 5.

roots;[36] however, it was generally not this musical marker that provided the negative counter-point to the new bands, it was the songs of Tom Jones and Shirley Bassey. These two musical references, the choir and the cabaret, do not form the whole of Welsh musical tradition – there was no mention of folk in articles on Welsh music, nor much mention of Welsh language pop. But the choir and the cabaret were enough to paint an (unfair) picture of an irrelevant, and ridiculous past, which was now to be supplanted by the new.

The idea of a national culture in Wales has been influenced, and indeed shaped, by the development of the press and media in Wales. The BBC began broadcasting from their Cardiff station in 1923, a year after it was founded, and the BBC Wales region was established in 1935, the first of the national regions that we know today.[37] This, along with the founding of independent television in Wales in 1958, and the Welsh sister-station to Channel 4, S4C, in 1982, has had a major impact on ideas of identity in Wales.[38] Not only did it give a definition of 'Wales' in sounds, pictures and indeed, language, but it led to the self-exclusion of many people in Wales to this, by turning their television aerials towards England. Resentment was felt by both Welsh and English speakers over perceived privileging of the other in terms of television and radio content.[39] In the early eighties, Williams identified 'shadow-lines' running across the face of Wales,[40] especially in relation to the rows over language and broadcasting: 'English-speaking Welsh people are increasingly being denied membership of Wales. Such people constitute four-fifths of the Welsh

[36] See, Gareth Williams, *Valleys Of Song, Music and Society in Wales, 1840-1914*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998, and Andrew Croll, *Civilising The Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr c. 1870-1914*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).
[37] Stuart Allan and Tom O'Malley, 'The Media In Wales', in A. Thompson and D. Dunkerly (eds) *Wales Today*, (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 135.
[38] Steffan Morgan, 'Tele-Visions of Wales', *Planet* (Issue 191, October/November 2008), pp. 47-53.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Williams, *When Was Wales?*, p. 293.

population and over two-thirds of those who could be considered biologically Welsh. What sort of Welsh nation or even Welsh people is going to survive this?'[41]

The Wales of the period that this thesis covers – the late 1990s – was one that was anticipating, and then undergoing massive political change. No Conservative candidates for MP were successful in Wales during the 1997 election, easing Labour's push for a referendum on devolution. Although the turnout was low, and the winning margin very small,[42] the knowledge that Labour, on election, would hold a referendum provided an arena for debate and reflection in Wales.[43]

One of the interesting things about Cool Cymru is that it took place primarily through the English language. Catatonia performed bilingually when in Wales, but not exclusively in either language, and for Stereophonics and Manic Street Preachers the Welsh language only featured in their performances when crowds at their gigs sang *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau.* Bands more noted for their writing and performing in Welsh, including Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and Super Furry Animals, did not express a preference for either language. Gruff Rhys of Super Furries when asked about language choice said 'Welsh is our first language, but I think English is a really nice language as well'.[44] Throughout the course of this research, no claims have been found that Cool Cymru was not a legitimate expression of identity because it took place through the medium of English. Other factors in the construction and discourse of the label 'Cool Cymru' was questioned continually – whether the label was helpful, whether it was fabricated, the extent to which there was positive change economically

[41] Williams, *When Was Wales?*, p. 294.
[42] Colin Brown, 'Wales decides: "Yes" by a whisker', *Independent*, 20th September 1997, p. 4.
[43] See, for example, Beca Brown, 'A youth culture that's for all of us', part of 'Where Wales? The Nationhood Debate' series, *Western Mail*, 6th March 1996, p. 14.

[44] Angela Lewis, 'The Sound and the Furry', *NME*, 6th January 1996, pp. 15 & 45.

and culturally in Wales, etc. Wales as a construct was not challenged, nor was the use of either English or Welsh.

Using music as a source

The use of popular music within academic study was established during the 1970s and early 1980s with seminal texts such as Simon Frith's *The Sociology of Rock* (1978) and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* (1979), and with the establishment of the International Society for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) in 1981.[45] The majority of studies that contribute to popular music studies are from the disciplines of cultural studies, sociology and music, with the geography of music being something of an emerging subject.[46] There is an increasing body of work on understanding the role of music in the forming of identities (gender, sexuality, race), but relatively little in connection with national identities. As a historical source, pop is greatly under-used, perhaps understandably, as it is only around 50 years old. This thesis seeks to contribute to this under-researched field.

This thesis will use the term 'pop' rather than 'popular'. Pop has associations with the mainstream and the commercial, with 'rock' being constructed in opposition—the serious, thoughtful, authentic and male musical form:

> Pop implies a very different set of values to rock. Pop makes no bones about being mainstream. It accepts and embraces the requirement to be instantly pleasing and to make a pretty picture of itself. Rock on the other hand, has

[45] http://www.iaspm.net/welcome.htm (accessed 23/02/2008).

[46] See Connell, John and Gibson, Chris, *Soundtracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*, (London: Routledge, 2003). Also, Sara Cohen and Brett Lashua (University of Liverpool) have been undertaking work on mapping musical experience in Liverpool, looking at the relationship between music making and the built urban environment. Part of their findings was presented to the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (UK and Eire branch) Biennial Conference in Liverpool, 12th-14th September 2008, Glasgow. An abstract of this paper is available at, http://www.music.gla.ac.uk/iaspm/index.html (accessed 11/09/08).

> liked to think it was somehow more profound, non-conformist, self-directed and intelligent.[47]

These understandings of pop and rock are not without their uses, but they are problematic; rock and other 'serious' genres of popular music, including indie, hip hop and dance, have massive chart sales. American rock group Nirvana reached number one in the charts—that great barometer of popularity—in both Britain and the US, with singer Kurt Cobain's death being widely reported throughout the media. Nirvana may have cultivated the image of an intelligent, profound *rock* act, but their signing to the huge Geffen label and their massive sales are indicative to some degree of a *pop* sensibility. Similarly, with 'indie' bands that formed the Britpop scene (and their ubiquity on Britain's radios and magazines), there was no denying that these groups were part of the mainstream with unashamed pop sensibilities. Madonna and Kylie have reinvented themselves numerous times, are profound, non-conformist, self-directed and intelligent artists. And undoubtedly *pop.* Perhaps it is not that the music has moved on from when these terms were coined, but that mainstream taste had. 'Middle of the road' in the mid-1980s was Dire Straits—a decade later, music press favourites including Pulp, Blur and Oasis had taken their place.

Clearly then both rock and pop are problematic labels as is 'popular music'—taken literally this could be any music with a fan-base, and therefore is rendered meaningless. For the purposes of this thesis, 'pop' will be the label of choice as the bands discussed, particularly Manic Street Preachers, Stereophonics and Catatonia were undoubtedly mainstream (and intended to be) crossing the closing divide

[47] D Hill, *Designer Boys and Material Girls: Manufacturing the 80's Pop Dream* (London: Blandford Press, 1986), p. 8, quoted in Roy Shuker, *Popular Music: The Key Concepts*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 226.

between the 'serious' songs of the music press and the mass-popularity of the mainstream.[48]

The research conducted focused chiefly on Welsh bands that were performing primarily in English during this period. Of the three biggest-selling groups, Catatonia were the only group who (occasionally) sang in Welsh.[49] Welsh language music has often been lumped together (particularly by the music press which finds it incomprehensible that there can be many different types of music performed in languages other than English). Rather than looking at bands because of their choice of language, this thesis will focus mainly on these three most popular groups—I want to look at music with a truly mass appeal, rather than that of niche-markets or the elite. Of course, this does not mean that (arguably more) inventive groups with a smaller following lack in interest or significance, but merely that this thesis is largely concerned with the biggest bands—those whom are the best exemplar of the 'banal nationalism' of pop. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'Welsh pop' will be used to cover all pop from Wales, regardless of the language in which it is performed.[50]

Methodologies and Sources

The sources used in undertaking the research for this thesis are varied, and were chosen according to what they can contribute to the story and their availability.

[48] It must be noted however that the music press, source of much of the research for this thesis, reported on what might loosely be called 'indie-pop' or 'indie-rock'. This was music which in some ways placed itself on the margins, as being independent both financially and aesthetically, and is closely linked to notions of authenticity discussed in this thesis. The concept of independence is something of a misnomer as many of these 'indie-pop' bands (including the three of interest here) were signed to major labels, and therefore worked within the broader music industry. For simplicity therefore, the 'indie' will be largely ignored, and labelled 'pop', emphasising the mass-appeal of these groups.

[49] They recorded a total of five recordings in Welsh.

[50] For recent work on Welsh pop performed in Welsh see Sarah Hill, *'Blerwytirhwng?' Welsh Popular Music, Language and the Politics of Identity*, (2001), unpublished PhD thesis available in Cardiff University Music Library; Craig Owen Jones, '"Beatbox Taffia": Welsh Underground Music in the 1990s', *Welsh Music History*, Volume 6 (2004), pp. 217-238.

The key source identified was the press, and specifically the English-language press.[51] Using bands' names and key phrases as search terms the LexisNexis database, a huge number of UK national press reports, and reports from overseas papers written in English were identified and collected. LexisNexis does not hold *Western Mail* or *Daily Post* articles before 1999. Collecting relevant stories from these papers required using microfiche copies at the British Library in Colindale, and either printing, or writing out, relevant stories. Having looked closely at the structure of both papers, I focused mainly on weekend editions as these had the regular columns and supplements where bands were most likely to be mentioned. In addition, daily searches were carried out around notable dates (including large concerts, album release dates and the National Eisteddfod, where Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and Super Furry Animals both played and performed bilingually).

Of the press sources used, the music press was of particular importance, providing the basis for many of the reports within the more mainstream press, and being (at this time) the most regular link between a band and their audience. There are no databases for the music press, and there is only one collection of the weekly music press (*Melody Maker* and *NME*) available to the public, held at the British Library at St Pancras, London. The collections are held in volumes each containing a couple of months' copies, and are costly to copy because of the fragility of the paper. I examined ten years of the *Melody Maker* and *NME*, from 1991 (when Manic Street Preachers first appeared) to 2000 (when Cool Cymru had begun to be dismissed). In addition, I own several hundred copies of both papers, which provided an additional source when it was impractical to copy many pages of an edition.

[51] Although a Welsh language learner, I am far from capable of using Welsh-language media as a source. The works cited in footnote 50 both provide some comment on the relationship between Welsh language media and pop from Wales.

More informal sources of music journalism, such as fanzines, are not kept by any public library. The few sources which I have managed to obtain have come from the generous donation of friends and acquaintances. Similarly, the more 'serious' monthly music press is also difficult to use, and is not kept by any library. However, several enterprising souls sell collections of clippings from the press on the internet auction site, eBay, from which I bought several. While they vary in quality, and frustratingly it is not always possibly to find which publication a clipping comes from, they nonetheless provided some valuable source material.

In general, I had recorded the television and radio programmes prior to beginning the research. The producer of 'Dragon's Breath' kindly gave a copy of the series to me, and several other programmes were available from the BBC archives in Llandaff. No complete list of programmes on radio or television related to Welsh pop exists, but many of these received some special mention in the press, bringing them to my attention. In addition, staff at the National Library of Wales made suggestions of other recordings that might be of use and provided copies.

In addition to using discourse written about bands and their music, I have used the product itself, songs and the packaging that accompanied all legal sales of music at the time (coming just before iTunes and the age of the download). Aside from interviews, the presentation of a band through the artwork, pictures and merchandise offers valuable information about how the group (and their record label) wish to be understood. Again, collections in libraries are, at best, limited, and I have used my own collection, and those of friends and acquaintances, along with the occasional purchase from second-hand stores and eBay.

The final major source used was interviews with a variety of individuals involved in music at this time. These interviews enabled me to gain a better

understanding of what was happening in music scenes in Wales, and gave context to the stories told in the press. It provides a counterpoint and detail to a number of themes, such as the baiting of Manic Street Preachers for being Welsh, the naming of Newport as 'the new Seattle', and the relationship between the musicians and the media attention. These interviews were semi-structured, and none of the interviewees were known to me prior to beginning my research.[52]

Certain sources were not used, such as record sales and chart positions. This was for two reasons: firstly, that for the purpose of this thesis, I was mainly interested in how and why stories were told, the mercurial evidence available from stories in the press, to the production of Welsh identity by bands. Secondly, that the popularity of the main three bands examined here (Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia and Stereophonics), was evident from their inclusion at major sporting events such as rugby internationals, advertising, celebrity and the mega-gigs that all three staged in Wales. While record sales would tell how many copies of a single or album were sold, they can not tell us how many times a song is played on the radio, or who is consuming pop through this medium, even the incidental playing of music on television (such as in soap operas, on programme trailers, etc.). Such markers cannot measure the pervasiveness of these groups' music at this time.

Chapter 1 discusses the ways in which ideas of identity are expressed and interpreted through pop music, and the link between sport, music and national identity. Chapter 2 looks at the emergence of Cool Cymru as both a term and what it came to represent in the press; through close reading of a wide range of print media, we will see how attitudes towards Wales and Welsh identity were presented in newspapers throughout Wales, UK and overseas. Chapter 3 moves on to document

[52] Further detail is given on the way interviewees were found, and how interviews were carried out, in Chapter 4.

the ways in which the idea of Cool Cymru was used by various individuals and organisations as a short-hand for positive change. Chapter 4 uses oral testimony to explore the reception of Cool Cymru by people involved in the music scene in Wales. Finally, Chapter 5 challenges the idea that Cool Cymru was entirely the invention of journalists, and explores the ways in which bands and their fans contributed to its existence, and how it was performed.

As stated above, the approach in the research undertaken for this thesis is mainly as an historical period, focusing primarily on the period of intense media interest in Cool Cymru, and while the label is now used less frequently use, it still makes the occasional appearance.[53] And the banal flag waving has not completely disappeared; thanks to a company based in London, you can now buy t-shirts bearing the legend 'Cool Cymru' for a mere £28.98 (not including postage and packaging), celebrating the fact that 'Wow! It's cool to be Welsh (outside Wales)—and it is largely music that made it so'.[54] Cool Cymru is largely gone but apparently not forgotten.

[53] Stuart Jeffries, 'Welcome to Cool Cymru', *Guardian*, 8th October 2004, G2 Section, p. 2. Maureen Paton, 'In a taxi with Gavin Henson', *Mail on Sunday*, 19th June 2005, p. 43. Adam Sherwin, 'All-star single to boost Tsunami Aid concert', *The Times*, 22nd January 2005, p. 17. Nicky Campbell. 'Henson's honesty better than a gouge from rugby's gargoyles', *Guardian*, 23rd February 2006, Sports section, p. 8. N.B. This is not a full list, but a selection taken from the last 2004-2007.

[54] http://www.thereddragonhood.com/pages/women_cool.html accessed on 20/03/08.

1 Pop Music and Identity

1.1 Place, identity, nation and pop

Popular music and popular culture have been taken as subjects of study by academics for over twenty five years, with key texts such as Simon Frith's *Sociology of Rock* and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning Of Style* originally published in 1978 and 1979 respectively. That popular music has a close relationship with ideas about identity, whether they be constructed through gender, sexuality, race, class or some other factor, is a recurring theme within writings on the subject, both by academics and journalists. Much of the linking of identity and music comes not only from the music itself, but also from the discourse surrounding it. This discourse, and the mythology that forms an essential part of it, is as important as the music and musicians in trying to understand the dynamics of pop. Also of importance are the economic workings of the record industry: the marketing of artists, the defining of styles and genres into manageable categories (rock, dance, world, folk, etc.) play a role in the association between pop music and identity. A recent discussion between members of the International Association Of Popular Music (IASPM) has shown how influential leading magazines such as *BillBoard* and *Melody Maker* have been in defining music, and also how labelling of styles of music is often specific to particular countries and therefore markets. For example, the term R&B in Britain, is most often associated with groups such as the Rolling Stones and The Who and other white British bands from the 1960s who played a particular kind of guitar music. In the US it is more closely associated with the black groups based in large cities such as Chicago, by whom these British bands were influenced9. Also, Rock 'n' Roll to British audiences suggests a specific place in time, the late 1950s and early

1960s and the beginnings of the popular music industry. For writers in other countries Rock 'n' Roll is a far more general term referring to popular music.[1]

This chapter considers these factors and examines how a number of writers have approached the theme of identity within popular music. It explores how ideas of ethnic identity and music have been linked in America and Britain, and the role which sport has played in pop, particularly in recent years, in articulating constructions of identity. It will finally survey 'musical geographies' and journalism, considering how writers on pop music have approached identity within pop, and look at how constructions of Englishness have been used in pop music.

1.2 Music, Ethnicity and Black Nationalism

Within America, particularly among writers on the blues and other genres of music from black culture, there has long been an acute awareness of the link between music and identity. This can be seen in the defining of early blues recordings as 'race records'—'commercial recordings aimed strictly toward the Negro market' is one of the earliest examples of popular music being associated with clearly demarked construction of identity.[2] They 'swiftly became big business. The companies also began to hire Negroe people as talent scouts and agents so that they would be able to get the best Negro talent available for their new race catalogues'.[3] LeRoi Jones identified an understanding of blues music as being essential to understanding the experience of black people in America. The subtitle to his book, *Blues People*, is 'Negro Music in White America' and he claims in the introduction that:

[1] Online, email discussion between members of the IASPM. To the best of my knowledge this is not available in an archive, however I have copies of this available on request.
[2] LeRoi Jones *Blues People* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperback, 1968) p. 100.
[3] ibid.

> [...] the *path* [emphasis in original] the slave took to 'citizenship' is what I want to look at. And I make my analogy through the slave citizen's music—through the music which is most closely associated with him: blues and a later, but parallel development, jazz. And it seems to me that if the Negro represents, or is symbolic of, something in and about the nature of American culture, this certainly should be revealed by his characteristic music.[4]

In his critique of Jones' assessment, Ralph Ellison responds by accusing Jones of having 'stumbled over that ironic obstacle which lies in the path of any who would fashion a theory of American Negro culture while ignoring the intricate network of connections which binds Negroes to the larger society'.[5] He is also critical of Jones for focusing on politics and sociology, rather than art:

> For the blues are not primarily concerned with civil rights or obvious political protest: they are an art form and thus a transcendence of those conditions created within the Negro community by the denial of social justice. As such they are one of the techniques through which Negroes have survived and kept their courage during that long period when many whites assumed, as some still assume, they were afraid.[6]

This discussion, over whether popular music is primarily a signifier of social experience, or artistic expression lies at the heart of much discussion on pop, and more generally about art. Without wanting to just take a meaningless 'third way', both categorisations are too essentialist. Neither accounts for the different ways in which an audience might interpret or use a song, and neither allows for a combination of the two—social comment and artistic expression—within the same song. To enter into further discussion of this crucial point would move too far from the purpose of this chapter. However, it is important to bear in mind that use of, interpretation and messages within pop music are often ambiguous and open to individual interpretation. Far from detracting from pop, it adds something extraordinary to it. One can choose

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[4] Jones, *Blues People* p. ix.
[5] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow And Act* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1967), p. 253.
[6] Ellison, *Shadow And Act*, p. 257.

either to dance to Kylie Minogue's 'Can't Get You Out Of My Head', or to use it as a starting point of a discussion of the nature of pop.[7] And people can do both.

Tim Wall has charted the way in which *Billboard* magazine changed its use of categorisation of popular music which was sold to African-American audiences between 1942 and 1990, from Harlem Hit Parade, to Race Records, through to Soul and R&B.[8] R&B has been seen by some as contributing an important element of rock'n'roll. Shuker has commented that, 'Some would argue that it *was* [emphasis in original] rock'n'roll, appropriated by white musicians and record companies, for a white audience'.[9] The phrase, rock'n'roll, is often associated with the white DJ Alan Freed, who played R&B records by black artists on his radio show, first in Cleveland and then later in New York. It was Freed and DJs like him, who brought this music to a (generally young) white audience. African-American identity could also be seen in the music of Motown. Ostensibly pure pop music, these records were written, produced, performed by black artists and the label was founded by black entrepreneur Berry Gordy Jr., controlling therefore not only the sound of the music, but also the means of production. In the late 1960s, Motown dubbed itself 'The Sound Of Young America'.

Outside of Motown were other influential black labels, including Stax, and black artists working their own way such as Sly and The Family Stone. The latter came from the Bay area of San Francisco, playing funky soulful music with massive commercial appeal. The Family Stone were made up of men and women, black and white, this being reflected in their sound. Greil Marcus argues that they, 'dismissed the simple, direct sound of the black music of the day, from Stax to James Brown, but

[7] See Paul Morley, *Words And Music: A History Of Pop In The Shape Of A City* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).
[8] Tim Wall, *Studying Popular Music Culture* (London: Arnold, 2003), p. 61.
[9] Roy Shuker, *Popular Music, The Key Concepts*, (London; Routledge, 2002), p. 258.

took advantage of its rhythmic inventions; the Family Stone had much of the exhilaration of the white San Francisco sound, along with the open spirit that sound was already beginning to lose' with songs such as 'Skin I'm In', 'Dance To The Music' and 'Don't Call Me Nigger, Whitey'.[10] While musically their sound moved on from that which had gone before, Marcus is right to argue that Sly Stone also moved mythology associated with black music on too:[11]

> Driving the finest cars, sporting the most sensational clothes, making the biggest deals and the best music, he was shaping the style and ambition of black teenagers all over the country—expanding the old Staggerlee role of the biggest, baddest man on the block. Sly was Staggerlee, and the power of the role was his, but he didn't have to kill anyone to get it.[12]

This close association between ethnicity and identity in pop did not diminish as racial prejudice was confronted in the United States, and began to retreat. Elvis Presley was first imagined by his listeners as a black singer because of his voice.[13] Managed by Colonel Tom Parker against the background of a society deeply divided by racial segregation, he was promoted as a figure more acceptable to white audiences than the R&B by black artists. Nearly 40 years later, the same was being said of Eminem, another poor, young, white man described as selling black music (this time in the form of rap) to a white, and by implication, more middle class, audience. Commenting around the time that British audiences first became aware of Eminem, Andrew Marshall wrote that,

> In the early Nineties, Vanilla Ice nearly killed off the idea of the white rapper, becoming perhaps the most execrated man in American popular

[10] Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images Of America In Rock 'n 'Roll Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000, fifth revised edition), p. 76.
[11] Stagger Lee, sometimes known as Stack Alee, is said to have shot Billy Lion (or Billy Liar) over a disagreement which led to Billy taking Stagger Lee's hat. The (story) song has been interpreted by countless musicians, including Memphis Slim, Mississippi John Hurt, The Clash and Nick Cave. See Cecil Brown, *Stagolee Shot Billy* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 2004) and Marcus, *Mystery Train*, pp. 71-105.
[12] Ibid, p. 77.
[13] Elvis later made the same assumption after hearing a recording of Tom Jones.

> music. He was seen as the Lena Zavaroni of rap: a record company ploy to annex a vast chunk of black culture. [...]
>
> Of course, we shouldn't be surprised: it's an old phenomenon in American music. As the record producer Sam Phillips put it, shortly before he discovered Elvis Presley, "If I could find a white man who had the Negro soul and Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars."
>
> Which is not to say that Eminem is the new Elvis, but he is in a long chain of those who have sought their music on the other side of the tracks, and have often been more successful commercially than the people from whom they took their inspiration. And some black hip-hop advocates fear that Eminem and the rest, however talented they may be, will siphon the audience away from black music, diluting the idea of the music, snatching the microphone from an authentically black voice.[14]

This comparison with Elvis is something of which Eminem himself is acutely aware and shown in the lyrics for 'Without Me': 'No I'm not the first king of controversy/I am the worst thing since Elvis Presley/To do black music so selfishly/And use it to get myself wealthy'.[15] His defence is dripping with irony—he has no problems with his authenticity, and this is backed up by his choice of producer, Dr. Dre of NWA.

The issue of authenticity is of fundamental importance, and is a recurring theme within both pop music and the discourse surrounding it. It is what fans and journalists argue over, and what artists claim to be; as Jennifer Lopez is only to keen to remind her fans, 'Don't be fooled by the rocks that I've got/I'm still/I'm still Jenny from the block'.[16]

One essential difference between the two is that hip-hop and rap had entered mainstream consciousness in America by 1988 with the arrival of the MTV sister channel, Yo! MTV Raps.

[14] Andrew Marshall, 'The cute little guy on the left is Marshall Bruce III, and that's his Mom Debbie...', *Independent*, 30 September 1999, no page number given.
[15] Eminem, 'Without Me', Universal Records 4977292, 2002.
[16] Jennifer Lopez, 'Jenny From The Block' (2002: Epic, B00007B4E8).

The idea of rap as being an essential component of the construction of black urban (and predominantly masculine) identity in America is something keenly felt by many artists.[17] Chuck D of Public Enemy famously commented that rap is 'CNN for black people'.[18] Producing albums including *It Will Take A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* (1988) and *Fear Of A Black Planet* (1990) their lyrics were explicitly concerned with the experience of Afro-Americans. Described by one reviewer as being, 'the collective conscious [sic] of an entire people at the time of its release. It touches on everything—race, sexuality, entertainment, war, disease, religion, philosophy, politics',[19] the album sold well in the United States, reaching number 10 in the *Billboard* chart in 1990. Tracks included '911 is a joke', highlighting the slow response by emergency services to calls from ghetto neighbourhoods.[20] 'Fight The Power' which included the lyric 'Elvis was a hero to most/But he never meant shit to me you see/Straight up racist that sucker was/Simple and plain/Mother fuck him and John Wayne/Cause I'm Black and I'm proud/I'm ready and hyped plus I'm amped/Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps'.[21] Public Enemy's rhetoric is closely linked to that of the Black Panthers, and Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam. According to one writer, 'Chuck D embraces a nationalist argument that suggests that critiques of black popular culture are best performed by those immersed in the organic

[17] This exclusive, often aggressive, masculinity which is especially prevalent in Gangsta Rap has been challenged by female rappers, including Salt'n'Pepper and Missy Elliot. The extent to which they challenge this successfully or merely adopt a 'male' persona is an important question. For a discussion of Salt'n'Pepper's stance see Simon Reynolds and Joy Press *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock 'n'Roll* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), pp. 299-300.
[18] See, http://www.publicenemy.com/index.php?page=page5&item=4 (accessed 14/03/08).
[19] Patrick Kastner, review of 'Fear Of A Black Planet', http://www.nudeasthenews.com/reviews/944 (accessed 16/01/2006).
[20] This song was later, bizarrely, covered by '80s British pop group Duran Duran, and indicates how far Public Enemy had moved into the mainstream.
[21] Public Enemy, '911 is a joke', (1990, Def Jam/Columbia Records CK-45413)

culture that produces it'.[22] This conclusion echoes that of that most 'English' of composers, Ralph Vaughn Williams, who argued that,

> Art, and especially the art of music, uses knowledge as a means to the evocation of personal experience in terms which will be intelligible to and command the sympathy of others. These others must clearly be primarily those who by race, tradition, and cultural experience are the nearest to him; in fact those of his own nation, or other kind of homogenous community.[23]

Such statements assume firstly that an audience cannot summon a level of empathy necessary to both decode and understand a musical style. Secondly, it presumes that the audience is a passive receptor of information. Once again, we return to the argument over whether popular music primarily provides sociological comment or should be read in terms of art. Once more, evidence of how and where pop has been used must lead us to conclude that the above statement is far too simplistic. Music can be used as both art and social comment simultaneously, even when removed from its place of origin. In Serbia, at the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia in 1991, a news blackout was imposed on radio station B92, preventing it broadcasting accounts or opinions on clashes between groups in Belgrade, including people working at B92, and Miloševic's police. In order to get round this, DJs

> 'hunted out any and every record they could find which described, in sound and lyrics, the violent clashes of the previous day and the state of high tension on the streets outside—rabble-rousing anthems like The Clash's punk war cry 'White Riot' and Thin Lizzy's 'The Boys Are Back In Town'... sound and action fused solid'.[24]

One record played repeatedly throughout the day was 'Fight The Power' by Public Enemy, a different situation but the call for resistance retaining its impact. Whilst it is highly unlikely that any of the people working for B92, or their listeners,

[22] Mark Anthony Neal, *What The Music Said, Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture*, (New York and London, Routledge, 1999), p.142.
[23] Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 1.
[24] Matthew Collin, *This Is Serbia Calling: Rock 'n'roll radio and Belgrade's underground resistance*, (London, Serpent's Tail, 2004), pp. 39-41.

had experience of living in ghettos in the US, the song nonetheless acted as what Vaughan Williams referred to as an 'evocation of personal experience'.[25]

We should also be wary of simplistic assumptions of identity. Neal reminds us that just as there are vast varieties of styles within a given genre, so there are different viewpoints within constructions of identity. He points to Arrested Development's 1992 release '3 Years 5 Months and 2 Days in the Life of…', describing it as 'a challenge to the status quo in hip-hop as its Afrocentric "grunge" style distanced them from both gangsta rap and the political narrative of Public Enemy and KRS-One'.[26] Neal believes that the record,

> […] represented a clear revision of historic class sensibilities that posited southern migrants as the primary threat to black middle-class development in the urban North and Midwest. Within Arrested Development's framework, urbanization had clearly destroyed traditional black communal and familial sensibilities.[27]

Along with ideas of identity expressed through music, lyrics and dress to their audiences, assumptions about hip-hop groups and their audiences were made by outsiders. John Peel recounted how he had been advised by colleagues at BBC Radio 1 not to play any rap (and in later years, jungle) as 'it was the music of the black criminal classes'.[28]

As already mentioned, ideas about identity are also closely linked to authenticity. Chuck D's Black Nationalist argument has been unwittingly reflected in British media reactions to the Radio 1 DJ Tim Westwood, whose show plays almost exclusively rap and hip-hop. White, and the son of an Anglican Bishop, Westwood was rumoured to be the inspiration for Sacha Baron Cohen's creation, Ali G, a parody

[25] Collin, *This Is Serbia Calling,* pp. 39-41.
[26] Neal, *What The Music Said,* pp. 154-5.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Simon Garfield, *The Nation's Favourite: The True Adventures of Radio 1* (London, Faber & Faber, 1998), p. 217 and John Peel and Sheila Ravenscroft, *Margrave Of The Marshes* (London, Bantam Press, 2005), p. 351.

of a white man who thinks as though he is from a black ghetto.[29] Westwood's speech pattern was ridiculed within the media, it was claimed that he was 'ditching his accent for a pseudo-Jamaican patois'.[30] Responding to this criticism, Westwood argued that:

> You know, I'm on the radio and I'm trying to rock the mic with flava. I'm a hip-hop DJ, I'm trying to put out a hot show—understand that. I mean, Trevor McDonald is one of the greatest newsreaders in this country, and he talks as you'd expect a newsreader to talk. I don't know where he's from, but you don't want Trevor McDonald on there with some yardie accent kicking it with street slang because you think, oh, he's black so he's got to do that. I'm a white guy, I'm not aspiring to be anything other than who I am. There's a lot of white people into hip-hop, man. But I don't want Trevor McDonald to end his news broadcast by going 'One love.' And by the same token I don't want to end my rap show by going, 'And today's other news...'[31]

Singer Estelle, commenting on the use of patois not specifically by DJs, but by rappers has argued that, 'If you're going to be a rap artist and you're going to chant patois, be from Jamaica [laughs]. I mean, get it right like that'.[32] This idea of authenticity came into play when Joss Stone, a white teenage girl from Devon, began performing. Her voice is rich and throaty, and described by many writers as being similar to Aretha Franklin,

> The disparity between Stone's sound and her appearance has caused some consternation in the US, where audiences expect soul divas to have been born into appalling poverty and led lives scarred by personal tragedy, which adds a ghoulish power and emotional resonance to their music. They also expect them to be black. It's a hard area for a middle-class teenager from the English village of Devon to crack.[33]

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[29] Michael Eboda, 'We can take Ali G's humour in our stride', *Independent*, 12 January 2000, retrieved from LexisNexis.

[30] Maeve Sheehan and Simon Trump, 'He speaks like a West Indian, is the son of a bishop and was shot in the street. Welcome to the weird world of Tim Westwood, Radio One DJ', *Sunday Times*, 25 July 1999.

[31] Nicholas Barber, 'Tim Westwood: 'Should I be working in a bank because I'm white?', *Independent*, 31 March 2001, Magazine section, p. 20.

[32] BBC Radio One, *Made In Britain* (first broadcast 17 February 2005), retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/onemusic/documentaries/britain506p01.shtml 18/01/2006.

[33] Alexis Petridis, 'Purely Belter: Joss Stone is being hailed in America as a new soul diva, the next Aretha Franklin. Only Stone is 16, white and from Devon', *Guardian*, Friday Pages, 14 November 2003, p. 8.

This comment is particularly telling; it shows the multitude of identities which come into play. It is not just Stone's ethnicity that is 'wrong', but her class, and her age. The only thing in her case that she has got 'right' is her gender. Such criticism and responses illustrate this point once again—that music not only represents, reflects and refracts constructions of identity, but that ideas of authenticity are essential to understanding the role that pop music plays in these constructions. Martin Stokes believes that 'The insistence on locality and authenticity contradicts a post-modernist argument in which history has disappeared in the pursuit of the instantaneous, and authenticity has been supplanted with a celebration of surfaces'.[34]

The desire to reflect in pop an identity that is both different and authentic is the mother of musical invention. In Britain the 1990s saw the rise of UK Garage, where vocals were chopped and mixed, and came to mainstream attention with Craig David's 'Re-rewind' and So Solid Crew's '21 Seconds'. From this followed grime and esky beat. Originating on the council estates of east London, grime mixed drum & bass, UK garage, hip-hop and jungle, all sampled and moved into something new. Artists such as Dizzee Rascal and The Streets have not only received acclaim from critics, with Dizzee Rascal winning the Mercury Music Prize in 2003 with his album *Boy In Da Corner*, but have sold large numbers of records. Simon Reynolds has argued powerfully that 'today's junglists, trip-hoppers and techno-heads' are the true inheritors of the Mod mantle, rather than the Britpop groups of the 1990s.[35]

Immigration and the change in the make-up of society in Britain since 1945 has had a profound effect on music in Britain. Paul Gilroy argues that 'Hip-hop culture had its origins in the adoption of Jamaican sound system techniques and styles

[34] Martin Stokes, 'Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music', in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), p. 21.
[35] Simon Reynolds, 'Britpop', available at http://www.nightsounds.de/britpop.htm No date given, accessed 23rd March 2008.

to the dance culture of the south Bronx [...] It is not surprising then to find that it took root readily in Britain [...and] made significant inroads into the reggae and soul scenes'.[36] Such a comment is somewhat crude in its analysis though; hip-hop did not so much take root as find itself transplanted. In considering the formation of hip-hop in Britain, BBC Radio 1 Xtra DJ, Rodney P pointed out that,

> It's taken a long time for the UK hip-hop scene to find its own voice. For a lot of years it kind of was a copy of what you heard and what you saw on TV [i.e. American] but we've kind of crossed that bridge now. There's groups like Roots Manuva, and Skinny Man and Black Twang and Task Force who all sound UK, who all sound definitely English groups [sic] but none of them sound like each other. For years I always thought UK rap was quite shit but now I think we're at a stage where we're making some of the most boundary-pushing hip-hop out there.[37]

Several of the contributors to a BBC Radio 1 documentary referred to the humour to be found in the lyrics of British hip-hop and grime tracks, identifying this as a definite British quality.[38] Roots Manuva believes that 'Hip-hop culture is cemented into British life' and places Mike Skinner of The Streets into a broader background: 'there's a whole lyrical tradition which came before him which goes back to the David Bowies, the Ian Durys, the Chas and Daves'[39]—a tradition which has as much to do with music hall as it does reggae.

1.3 Calypso and the place of Empire

Before the arrival of reggae to Britain, came calypso, the sound of the Caribbean Diaspora in post-war Britain. When the *SS Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury on 21 June 1948, it carried with it two calypso singers from Trinidad, Aldwyn Roberts, known as Lord Kitchener (or Kitch) and Egbert Moore, known as Lord Beginner. The arrival of the *Windrush* marked the beginning of large-scale post-war

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[36] Paul Gilroy *There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack*, (London, Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 192-3.
[37] BBC Radio One, *Made In Britain*, 17 February 2005, http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/onemusic/documentaries/britain506p01.shtml (accessed 18/01/2006).
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

migration from the West Indies to Britain, and with the migrants came their music and culture. During the journey, Kitch had composed a new calypso in celebration of his arrival in Britain, later recalling that,

> When the boat had about four days land in England, I get this kind of wonderful feeling that I'm going to land in the mother country [...] How can I describe it? It was just a wonderful feeling. You know how it is when a child, you hear about your mother country, and you know you're going to touch the soil of the mother country, you know what that feeling that is? And I can't describe it. That's why I compose the song. Imagine how I felt. Here's where I want to be, London.[40]

Kitch sang this calypso, 'London Is The Place For Me',[41] upon disembarking from the *Windrush*, and was filmed by Pathé news. In the lyric, Kitch sang of how 'I am glad to know my mother country'—it is a song full of optimism and hope. Other songs by Kitch addressed a wide range of subjects, including inter-racial marriages ('Mix-Up Matrimony'), which he saw as a positive move towards integration: 'The races are blending harmoniously/White and coloured people are binding neutrally/It doesn't take no glass/ To see how it come to pass/Coloured Britons arriving fast'. He commented on his everyday experience of life in London ('My Landlady', 'Housewives', 'The Underground Train', 'If you're not white, you're black'), as well as celebrating the freedom of the first sub-Saharan colony to become independent from the British Empire in 1957, Ghana. His song, 'Birth Of Ghana', opens with the words 'This day will never be forgotten/The 6th of March 1957'. It goes on to praise 'Dr Nkrumah went out his way/To make the Gold Coast what it is today/He endeavoured continually/To bring us freedom and liberty', charting Nkrumah's rise to power. It also praises the new flag of Ghana, 'The national flag is a beautiful scene/With beautiful colours/Red, gold and green/And a black star in the

[40] Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise Of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Harper Collins, 1988), p. 66.
[41] All calypso records referred to can be found on 'London Is The Place For Me: Trinidadian Calypso In London, 1950 – 1956', Honest John Records, London, catalogue HJRCD2.

centre/Representing the freedom of Africa'. These songs signify a whole host of identities coexisting in one individual: member of the British Empire, immigrant, returning son, Black man, African man—and give a distinctive insight into the experience of black immigrants to Britain. Other Calypso singers sang about political topics of the day too, and of their mixed experiences in Britain. Young Tiger's song, 'I was there (at the Coronation)', tells of how he stood by Marble Arch all night in order to see the procession. He sings of how 'Her Majesty looked really divine/In her crimson cloak lined with ermine/The Duke of Edinburgh/Dignified and neat/Sat beside her as Admiral of the fleet'. He also lists the other countries from the Empire and Commonwealth represented in the procession: 'Troops from Dominions and Colonies/Australia, New Zealand and West Indies/India, Ceylon and West Africa/Newfoundland, Gibraltar and Canada'. Young Tiger finishes saying that it was a spectacle that 'I shall not forget/As long as I live'. Throughout the song there is a loyalty to the Queen and the Empire, and a sense of fraternity with other nations from the Empire, echoing of Kitch's sense of belonging to the 'mother country'.

The complex nature of the relationship between black immigrants from the Caribbean with the idea of the Empire and the reality of life in Britain is shown best in the 1950 song 'Victory Test Match' by Lord Beginner, one of the most significant of the post-war calypso songs to come from London.[42] Composed at the side of the pitch at Lords, during the second test between England and the West Indies, the lyric describes the match in some detail, the presence of the King, and the West Indies eventual victory:

> Yardley wasn't broken-hearted
> When the second innings started;
> Jenkins was like a target
> Getting the first five into his basket.

[42] This song is also known as 'Cricket, Lovely Cricket'.

> But Gomez broke him down,
> While Walcott licked them around;
> He was not out for one-sixty-eight,
> Leaving Yardley to contemplate.

Following this historic victory, the song was sung by Beginner and other West Indies supporters, firstly on the pitch and then in a procession led by Kitch that left Lords and travelled towards Piccadilly. They danced around the statue of Eros and the victory and subsequent celebration made front-page news:

> [...] and attached to every commentary or report was a description of the West Indies supporters and the style of their celebration. After that afternoon, few people in Britain could fail to be aware of the presence or the individuality of the West Indians. From that point onwards, the cultures and customs the migrants brought with them, or invented, were to become a clearly identifiable strand in the progressive development of British identity; and in much the same way as the few dozen who turned up at Lords, the West Indians in Britain were fated to have an influence which far outstripped their numbers.[43]

The Trinidadian historian, C. L. R. James, was concerned with the political role of cricket, both in the West Indies, and abroad. He pointed especially to the succession of white captains of the West Indies cricket team—captains who were not the best person for the job but chosen on ethnic background: 'The exclusion of black men from the captaincy becomes all the more pointed when the Prime Minister of the West Indies and Chief ministers all over the islands are black men'.[44] Stuart Hall has summed up James' thinking, saying that 'West Indian independence and the national consciousness it required would be impossible until the West Indies had taken on the colonisers at their sacred game and mastered it sufficiently to defeat them at home in open play'.[45] 'Victory Test Match' is the sound of independence coming. Hall believes that this music should be considered alongside other narratives of West Indian migrants to Britain: 'The calypsos of the 1950s therefore must be "read" and

[43] Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, pp. 102-3.
[44] C. L. R. James, *Beyond The Boundary*, (London: Stanley Paul & Co, 1963; repr. London, Serpent's Tail, 1996), p. 231.
[45] Stuart Hall, 'Calypso Kings', *Guardian*, 28 June 2002, retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4449509,00.html 16/01/2006.

heard alongside books like *Lonely Londoners* by Sam Selvon (also a Trinidadian) as offering the most telling insights into the early days of the migrant experience'.[46]

1.4 Sport and music

Sport in general is a sphere of cultural life in which music and song play an essential role in the construction of identity. National anthems play at international matches and international events such as the Olympics and are perhaps the most common association between sport and music. Pop music has its place, but in most sports it is marginal—the songs to which boxers come out before a fight, or Cliff Richard entertaining the crowds at Wimbledon during the inevitable rain. However, within British football culture it has a far more central role. Pop songs are adapted and sung on football terraces,[47] and music is as much a part of football as replica shirts and flags. Adrian Thrills argues that 'It is not that long ago that singing and chanting were arguably the most essential ingredients of the average football fan's match-day experience'.[48] He also acknowledges that 'Plenty of romantic mythology has grown up around the citadels of British football—from the Kop [Liverpool], Stretford End [Manchester United] and the Shed [Chelsea] to Ibrox [Glasgow Rangers] and Parkhead [Celtic]—but this is only understandable in the light of the unique atmosphere that existed at big games in the period from the Sixties to the early Eighties'.[49] After this period terraces at all large football grounds were changed to all-seater stadiums, following the disasters at Heysel and Hillsborough, and the game

[46] Stuart Hall, 'Calypso Kings', *Guardian*, 28 June 2002, http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4449509,00.html (accessed 16/01/2006).
[47] For example, Hull City's rewriting of Pulp's 'Common People' aimed at a former manager, 'He came from Rochdale with a lack of knowledge/He studied management at Bradford college' etc. See Jack Bremner, *Shit Ground No Fans: It's By Far The Greatest Football Songbook The World Has Ever Seen* (London: Bantam Press, 2004).
[48] Adrian Thrills, *You're Not Singing Anymore: A riotous celebration of football chants and the culture that spawned them*, (London: Ebury Press, 1998), p. 8.
[49] Adrian Thrills, *You're Not Singing Anymore* p. 8.

began to appeal to an increasingly middle-class audience.[50] Songs and chants appear in anthologies and on websites (where fans can also post new chants) and still play a role at matches, even if that role has altered along with the audience and the stadiums.[51]

Some writers have commented on the appropriateness of having the British national anthem played at England football (and rugby) matches. Mark Perryman has complained that 'God Save The Queen' is 'A song that celebrates the fact that we're subjects—there's something deeply unappealing and humiliating in such a sentiment'. He has appealed for 'I Vow To Thee' as an alternative as 'It's a haunting, hugely evocative and emotional song, and in some quintessential, difficult to define way, deeply suggestive of Englishness'.[52] Perryman does not elaborate on *why* he finds this song so suggestive of Englishness, although he does mention its association with the horror of World War One. Any further association is left for the reader to reflect on.

Within the book, *The Ingerland Factor*, John Peel contributes an interesting piece on songs which an England fan might want to hear 'played in a stadium overseas that would make you feel specifically English', but avoid 'triumphalism'.[53] This chapter is interesting precisely because it mixes songs which one would associate with football anyway (The Kop singing 'You'll Never Walk Alone) along with The Members' 'Sound of the Suburbs' and The Kinks' 'Waterloo Sunset'. These are songs which Peel believes 'captures something of the England I like' and 'can convey

[50] See Anthony King, *The End of the Terraces: Transformation of English Football in the 1990s* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998).
[51] Bremner, *Shit Ground, No Fans.* Examples of websites can be found at http://www.footballchants.org/ and http://www.ave-it.net/chants.htm
[52] Mark Perryman, 'The Ingerland Factor' in *The Ingerland Factor: Home Truths From Football*, ed. By Mark Perryman (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 1999), p. 25.
[53] John Peel, 'The Ingerland Factor Playlist: Can You Hear The English Sing?' in *The Ingerland Factor*, p. 33.

those subtle shades of feeling that should be the sum of your commitment towards your place of birth' respectively.[54] Again, what is interesting here is that Peel does not feel the need to explain in any more detail why the music or lyrics of these songs makes them, to his ears, specifically English. There is an assumption that both the songs and the way in which they are English will be understood by the reader, and by inference that the reader and the fan are largely the same person.

When considering the origin of music associated with football, Andrew Blake acknowledges the influence of the hymn (for example, 'Jerusalem') and the military march, along with the male voice choir, brass band and music hall. The music hall, with its combination of song and comedy is particularly relevant, with Blake pointing to Baddiel and Skinner, and Fat Les as continuing a tradition that stretches back to Gracie Fields, George Formby and Lonnie Donegan. The latter sang the England World Cup theme of the 1966 England team, 'World Cup Willie'.[55] The linking between comedy, music and football may also come from the below, from the fans. When Wales played Azerbaijan in Baku in November 2002, the Azerbaijani army made the Wales fans stay in the stadium following the game and began performing military marches, presumably as a show of force. The Wales fans responded by singing the theme from the television programme *It Ain't 'Alf Hot Mum*—'Meet the gang, 'cause the boys are here/The boys to entertain you'.[56] Such incidents demonstrate this close link, between sport, music, identity and humour.

While songs associated with football and other sports evoke a feeling of unity, of togetherness, equally they can mark out difference and rivalry. Supporters of Scottish teams, both Catholic and Protestant (the most famous of which are Celtic and

[54] John Peel, 'The Ingerland Factor Playlist: Can You Hear The English Sing?' pp. 33-6.
[55] Andrew Blake, 'Chants would be a fine thing' in *The Ingerland Factor: Home Truths From Football*, pp. 110-1.
[56] The author knows several Wales fans present at the match who have reported this incident.

Glasgow Rangers), have taken up Sectarian songs associated with the conflict in Northern Ireland. Of even greater prominence in the minds of many outside Scotland, would be the racist chants and abuses used by some supporters, particularly during the 1980s. Songs and chants are not necessarily synonymous, but they do both serve similar functions. This has been documented in detail elsewhere,[57] and is too important and complex an issue to explore in detail here, but is nonetheless they play an important part in attempting to chart the links between music and identity.

At international level, singing, and more specifically national anthems, has been seen as contributing to increased tension between sides, and ultimately violence. Sepp Blatter, president of football's international governing body, FIFA, suggested in November 2005 that the playing of national anthems be scrapped before international matches. This was reported widely in the British press, and generally derided as both unworkable and undesirable.[58] Writing in the *Observer*, Paul Wilson argued that,

> Not all anthems are booed anyway. Most of the trouble occurs between nations with a history of conflict, or nations who happen to be playing Turkey. The anthems do not cause the ill-feeling, they just provide a vehicle for its expression. Fair enough, you might say, take away that temptation. But Scots will still hate English, Germans and Turks will not be best of friends, so what then? Will Fifa's next move be to clamp down on those inflammatory national strips, with their flag-derived colours and provocative crests just asking to be kissed or saluted? Are they going to stop all terrace chanting, just in case national stereotypes get a mention? You can see where this argument is going, can't you?[59]

Football and fandom have been presented as a positive expression of national identity. Amongst the chattering on 'Cool Britannia' in the run up to the Labour election victory in 1997, football and music were the twin totems of New Labour's

[57] Perryman , *The Ingerland Factor*
[58] No stated author, 'Blatter keen to end anthems ', *The Times*. No stated author, 'Anthems Face Axe, *Sun*, 23 November 2005. Matt Scott, 'Blatter thinks national anthems may be out of tune with the times', *Guardian*, 23 November 2005, Sports section, p. 5. Stephen Rigely and Ross Kaniuk, 'Let's Ban National Anthems: Footie Chief's Latest Crazy Scheme', *Daily Star*, 23 November 2005, p. 9.
[59] Paul Wilson, 'Football comment: When two tribes go to war should they be singing?' Sports section, *Observer*, 4 December 2005, p. 5.

image. Blair's playing with a band called 'Ugly Rumours' while at university was cited as proof of a new, younger generation of politicians.[60] Pop music had been used before of course, with the Red Wedge movement of the 1980s, most closely associated with punk-troubadour Billy Bragg. The new link with bands though was decidedly different, having less to do with bands playing benefits for the Labour party, and more with hoping that some mysterious 'cool' factor would rub off on the politicians. Quoting Darren Kalynuk, a member of the Parliamentary Labour Party at this time as saying that 'Red Wedge failed because people had too many opinions [...] You would have Paul Weller waxing lyrical about Labour's employment policy. Well, frankly, who cares what Paul Weller thinks?'. The clear message was that the role of musicians and of pop was to vocally support but not to offer an opinion, 'Such was the curt New Labour take on the musical philanthropists of the 80s'.[61] Blair held a meeting with Damon Albarn of Blur in 1995, and after the election, Oasis were invited to cocktails at number ten, their record boss, Alan McGee, being a vocal (and financial) supporter of the Labour party. Steve Redhead argues that along with music, '[f]ootball fandom, rather than the more conservative cricket culture which his predecessor John Major so publicly adopted, seems to be a talisman of the modern man of politics [...]'.[62]

Along with football appropriating pop, pop has taken on football as a defining feature. From Oasis' oft-declared love of Manchester City, to Super Furry Animals becoming a sponsor of Cardiff City in 1999 and painting their tank in Cardiff City colours in 1996, football and pop repeatedly feed from each other. Occasionally

[60] David Lister, 'Blair's in tune with rock'n'roll', *Independent*, 10 November 1994, p. 5. Retrieved from LexisNexis

[61] John Harris, *The Last Party: Britpop, Blair And The Demise Of English Rock* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003), p. 196.

[62] Steve Redhead, 'The Football Nation: Dreams Of Another Country', in *The Ingerland Factor*, p. 201.

bands go further than appropriating football colours and declaring their support for a particular team. Manic Street Preachers changed the chorus of their song 'Everything Must Go' to 'Bobby Gould must go' at gigs in the summer of 1999, in protest against the Wales football team's poor performance. Their covering of the Andy Williams song 'Can't Take My Eyes Off You' was a musical nod to their support of the Wales football team whose supporters adopted it as an anthem after its use in a BBC Wales commercial for Wales vs. Romania in 1993. They have also name-checked Glamorgan cricketer Matthew Maynard in 'Mr Carbohydrate' and bassist, Nicky Wire, has frequently talked in interviews about his love of sport, particularly boxing, cricket, rugby and football.

During the Britpop era, football and pop would meet on the pitch. Various bands who had contributed to an album commemorating the Euro '96 championship, entitled *The Beautiful Game*, were brought together for an England vs. Scotland match.[63] Members of Oasis, Blur and other indie groups would take part in the *NME*'s soccer six competition, which received a couple of pages in the paper.[64] In 1997, *NME* reported that Damon Albarn of Blur was to write the theme to Channel 5's European football coverage,[65] and later Alex James, also of Blur, was one of the collaborators in Fat Les, who released the song 'Vindaloo' in 1998, to support England's World Cup campaign, and a version of 'Jerusalem' in 2000 for the European Championship. Keith Allen, another member of Fat Les, had previously collaborated with New Order with 'World In Motion', the official England song of the 1990 World Cup. Football songs in Britain, and football records, have a long, and somewhat dubious tradition, which is not matched by other sports in Britain. Usually

[63] No author, News section, *Melody Maker*, 6 April 1996, p. 5.
[64] No author, News section, *NME*, 23 May 1998, p. 4.
[65] No author, News section, *NME*, 6 September 1997, p. 4.

musically and lyrically dubious, they demonstrate the dearth of singing talent amongst Britain's elite footballers but are hardy perennials.

Aside from the actual football record, there are songs that are about football or became associated with football through their use. A Nike advert in 1997 which featured leading Premiership players, including Eric Cantona, David Seaman, Robbie Fowler and Ian Wright playing in Sunday League teams on Hackney Marshes, with Blur's 'Parklife' as the accompanying music. In the minds of the advertisers at least, football and pop music could fit perfectly together with a product. Football and dance music had close links too. DJs Andy Weatherall and Terry Farely founded the Boy's Own fanzine after Farley had seen a copy of another fanzine called *The End*.[66] And since 1999, Skint Records in Brighton has sponsored Brighton and Hove Albion, with both the label's name, and DJ Fat Boy Slim's most recent release *Palookaville*, appearing on the team's shirts. Skint promotes the club on their website, includes a round-up of recent performances, and have released a sampler entitled 'We Are Skint', itself an echo of a terraces chant.[67] Songs about football ('Eat My Goal' by Collapsed Lung) and about famous matches ('All Together Now' by The Farm) play a part, along with the novelty tracks performed by teams and supporters groups. Compilations of football songs have also appeared in recent years, such as *Ultimate Football Anthems*, a collection of team songs and songs in support of various England teams over 30 years.[68] Such compilations became endemic around 2000. While the marketing of music as a lifestyle product may not be new, these compilations took this

[66] Interview with Andy Weatherall, from 1993 available at, http://www.peom.co.uk/weatherall_interview.htmaccessed 29/01/2006.
[67] http://www.skint.net/main.htm accessed 26 January 2006.
[68] *Ultimate Football Anthems*, various artists, Crimson Records, CRIMCD244, 2000.

strategy to a new level, where the Swiftian conclusion can be found in the bizarre offering, *Jamie Oliver's Cookin': Music To Cook By*.[69]

Music and football collide perhaps most strongly in these fanzines. The world of the football fanzine is closely linked to that of the punk fanzines that appeared during the late 1970s, and included the legendary *Sniffin' Glue*, for which Danny Baker (later editor of *NME*) used to write, *Ripped & Torn* and *48 Thrills*. In charting the rise of football fanzine culture, Richard Haynes examines the link between football and punk fanzine culture. He describes how 'Fanzines provided graphics and typography that were homogeneous with punk's subterranean and anarchic style. The language was working class, the text jumbled up with typing errors and grammatical mistakes'.[70] Haynes goes on to highlight links between football and punk, notably the re-emergence of skinhead culture in the late 1970s, and the emergence of *The End*, a fanzine from Merseyside in the early 1980s. Written by Phil Jones and Peter Hooton, *The End* was 'designed for fellow "scallies" with the same taste in music, football and fashion'. Hooton went on to sing with The Farm, and as mentioned, collaborated with Weatherall and Farley from *Boy's Own*.[71] The Farm's biggest hit, 'All Together Now' was purported to be about a football game, taking its inspiration from the game played by Allied and German soldiers in No Man's Land, Christmas day 1914.

1.5 Geography& Music

In addition to the expression of broad identities (especially gender) within pop music, this thesis will explore how bands from Wales have flagged locality and identity. Musical ethnography and anthropology are an important part of popular music studies, and while this thesis does not strictly follow this approach, it has been

[69] *Jamie Oliver's Cookin': Music To Cook By*, Sony Records, SONYTV95CD, 2000.
[70] Richard Haynes, *The Football Imagination: The Rise Of Football Fanzine Culture* (Aldershot: Arena, 1995), p. 40.
[71] Ibid, pp. 42-5.

an important influence on this study.[72] Furthermore, while carrying out my research, it became increasingly clear that an ethnographical study of music in Wales would be beneficial to the study of popular music in Wales. Of particular influence is John Connell and Chris Gibson's book *Sound Tracks*, which explores 'the many ways in which popular music is spatial—linked to particular geographical sites, bound up in everyday perceptions of place, and a part of movements of people, products and cultures across space'.[73] Within the book, they consider the many multifarious ways in which music, and specifically pop music, has come to be associated with place and identity, including the role of lyrics, tourism, sound and style and notions of authenticity. As they rightly argue, notions of identity and music are complex. When considering music and the expressing of national identities, they point to the role of 'classical' music and how pop music has been subject to censure under various regimes, such as the banning of soul in Tanzania and the concern over 'imperialistic records' in North Vietnam.[74]

Such concern over popular music was expressed in regimes in Europe too. In Erich Honecker's German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany), rock music itself was a sign of rebellion against the state. The Klaus Renft Combo, a rock band that initially performed covers of songs from the west in the late 1960s, before writing their own songs suggesting 'rebellion, poignancy and hope'.[75] They were monitored by the authorities and interrogated by the GDR secret police, the Stasi, until some

[72] These include: Sarah Cohen, *Rock Culture In Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Matteo Cullen, *Positive Vibrations! Musical Communities in African Dublin*, unpublished paper delivered at the IASPM UK and Ireland conference, Limerick, 2004. H. Kruse, 'Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture', *Popular Music*, Volume 12, Issue 1 (1993). Sheila Whitely, Andy Bennett and Stan Hawkins (eds), *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (London: Ashgate, 2004).
[73] John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks; popular music, identity and place*, (London, Routledge, 2003), p. 1.
[74] Connell and Gibson, *Sound Tracks*, pp. 118-9.
[75] Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories From Behind The Berlin Wall*, (London, Granta Books, 2003), pp. 184-94.

members of the group managed to move to West Germany. When Klaus Renft returned to eastern Germany after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, he discovered that the group he had founded had become a cult hit.[76]

More recently, Serbia became the home of turbo-folk, a style which became popular at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, in the run up to the start of the war, it was a musical polar-opposite to the songs being played by radio B92 in opposition to Miloševic. Described as 'a gloopy melange of chirpy techno-pop and traditional folk melodies; a naïve re-creation of an imagined West gleaned from MTV, mixed with resynthesised relics of village life', it was promoted heavily by state television and radio as the acceptable face of pop music. One journalist commented that 'Turbo-folk was the state soundtrack of the regime, and Miloševic was its star'.[77]

Connell and Gibson have pointed to the importance of tourism in associating music with place, citing Nashville in the U.S., Tamworth in Australia and Liverpool in Britain as examples of places that have successfully capitalised on links with music.[78] Others exist purely because of pop—Graceland and Dollywood for example. Some are visited by fans because they are mentioned in songs—Strawberry Fields or Penny Lane.[79] An entire guidebook has been written to 'Morrissey's Manchester' highlighting places named in songs, or where famous photo shoots of the band were taken.[80] Central to this tourism are the places of pilgrimage for music fans that are associated with the individual rather than the music. Jim Morrison's grave in Paris is a good example, as is Morrissey's childhood home in Manchester, where fans still leave flowers on his birthday. Graves and death sites are always particularly popular

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Collin, *This Is Serbia Calling*, p. 78-9.
[78] Connell and Gibson, *Sound Tracks,* p. 222.
[79] For further discussion on Liverpool and pop see Sara Cohen, 'Identity, Place and the "Liverpool Sound"' in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music* ed. by Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), pp. 117-134.
[80] Phill Gatenby, *Morrissey's Manchester* (Manchester: Empire Publications, 2002).

with fans—Marc Bolan's tree in Staines still receives its share of pilgrims, as does the entrance to the Dakota building in New York, the site of John Lennon's assassination.[81] These places and the significance that they hold should not be dismissed as foolishness on the part of music fans. They fuel the myths that surround pop, myths that enrich it further.

The association of pop as protest has given rise to new forms of music, closely linked to ideas of national identity and political struggle in the Basque Country that straddles the border between France and Spain. Basque Radical Rock is 'a peculiar phenomenon of political mobilisation in Euskadi (the Basque name for Basque country).'[82] Lahusen charts how the confrontational element of punk was harnessed by young people in the country, and used to both protest and comment on the political situation as they saw it.[83] Bands such as Negu Goriak (Hard Winter) and Eskorbuto (Scurvy) both wrote songs in Euskera (the Basque language) and sometimes Spanish. They covered some British and American songs (in Euskera) by singers and bands who have political associations. Kortatu covered 'Jimmy Jazz' by The Clash, while Negu Gorriak produced an album of covers *Salum, Agur*, which included songs by N.W.A., Linton Kwesi Johnson, Bob Marley and Public Enemy—the message of rebel songs being sung in what was for so long an illegal language is unavoidable.

1.6 Music, Place and Journalism

Within journalism, there is a regular connection made between place, identity and music. This was a recurrent theme during Britpop, with music journalists postulating constructions of 'British' identity. Journalists are essential in pop as they

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[81] For further details of death sites, see Chuck Klosterman, *Kill Yourself To Live: 85% of a true story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006).
[82] Lahusen, 'The aesthetic of radicalism: the relationship between punk and the patriotic movement of the Basque country', p. 263
[83] Ibid, pp. 263-80.

provide much of the discourse that fuels the industry. Scenes and sounds are identified, defined and discussed within the music press (and now, the internet).[84] Cohen argues that '[...] music papers such as *New Musical Express* are more likely to focus upon "local scenes" because of their concern with notions of authenticity'.[85] While this may broadly be true, the music press consciously and 'artificially' create scenes at whim. During the later 1990s, the *Melody Maker* repeatedly tried to launch an ill-fated 'Romo' scene on an unimpressed public. Former *NME* journalist Stuart Maconie has written of how '[o]n a good day, Steve Lamacq [former journalist and Radio 1 DJ] could invent three fiery, short-lived movements before his cider and scampi fries in the Stamford Arms' and of how the journalists at *NME* tried to out-do each other in inventing these scenes.[86]

The linking of groups by geographical origin and proclaiming that this constitutes a 'scene' is not only the past time of the music press—it is something in which the broadsheets are happy to indulge. In July 2005, the *Independent* reported on the rise of 'Rural Rock' with the emergence of several successful acts coming from the country.[87] More recently, the *Independent* heralded the rise of 'Yorkshire Beat' following the success of, amongst others, Arctic Monkeys from Sheffield and Kaiser Chiefs from Leeds.[88] The extent to which such labels bear any resemblance to reality is a contested issue. The economics of the record industry means that record labels will travel to a particular place if there is a buzz about local bands, and this in turn will be hyped within the media. The 'scene' as documented in the press is better

[84] This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, section 3.2.
[85] Sara Cohen, 'Identity, Place and the "Liverpool Sound"', p. 118.
[86] Stuart Maconie, *Cider With Roadies* (London: Ebury Press, 2003), p. 259.
[87] Louise Jury, 'Cream of Devon puts rural rock on music map', *Independent*, 25 July 2005, available at http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/cream-of-devon-puts-rural-rock-on-music-map-499897.html .
[88] Ciar Byrne and Nicholas Mayes, 'Cool Artic breeze heralds the birth of Yorkshire beat', *Independent*, 7 January 2006, p. 17.

understood as refraction, rather than reflection, of what is happening musically in an area.

More generally, a band's origin is given in reviews, particularly if a group is reasonably unknown. Taking a recent copy of *NME* as an example, of the seven albums and twelve singles reviewed, six of the album reviews mentioned the geographical origin of the singer or band as did seven of the single reviews.[89]

Journalists who have written in depth about pop have approached issues of identity, though not in as direct a manner as Bracewell. Greil Marcus subtitled his book *Mystery Train* as 'Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music'. He sees Elvis as reflecting something of national culture in America:

> Elvis gives us a massive road-show musical of opulent American mystery; his version of the winner-take-all fantasies that have kept the world lined up outside the theatres that show American movies ever since the movies began. And of course we respond: a self-made man is rather boring, but a self-made king is something else. Dressed in blue, red, white, ultimately gold, with a Superman cape and covered in jewels no one can be sure are fake, Elvis might epitomise the worst of our culture—he is bragging, selfish, narcissistic, condescending, materialist to the point of insanity. But there is no need to take that seriously, no need to take anything seriously. 'Aw, shucks,' says the country boy; it is all a joke to him; his distance is in the humor [sic], and he can exit from this America unmarked, unimpressed, and uninteresting.[90]

In his book about Jimi Hendrix and post-war pop, Charles Shaar Murray repeatedly shows his awareness of the issues of race, identity and pop in the U.S. Writing about Hendrix's performance of 'The Star Spangled Banner' at Woodstock in 1969, he says that,

> The ironies were murderous: a black man and a white guitar; a massive, almost exclusively white audience wallowing in a paddy field of their own making; the clear, pure, trumpet-like notes of the familiar melody struggling to pierce through the tear gas, the explosions of cluster bombs, the screams of the dying [...] One man with one guitar said more in three and a half

[89] No author, *New Musical Express (NME)*, 31 December 2005, pp. 22-7.
[90] Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music* (London, Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 134.

> minutes about that particularly disgusting war and its reverberations than all of the novels, memoirs and movies put together.[91]

Throughout the book, Shaar Murray explores ideas of identity and Hendrix's music, and is especially keen to destroy the myth that Hendrix was 'rejected by a callous and insensitive black community and adored by imaginative, understanding whites'.[92]

Ideas of understanding music being dependent on where the listener is from crop up regularly in writings by journalists, although not in such strong terms as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Chuck D might argue. Lester Bangs writing about The Clash said that they 'are so committed they're downright militant. Because of that, they speak to the dole-queue British youth today of their immediate concerns with an authority that nobody else has quite mastered. Because they do, I doubt if they will make much sense to most American listeners'.[93]

Perhaps most importantly, it is through journalism that bands can explain and expand upon their music. Ralf Hutter of German band Kraftwerk explained in an interview how his ideas about identity influenced Kraftwerk's music, turning the idea that 'it's not where you're from, it's where you're at' on its head. He rejected both British and American cultural domination, and believes that the structure of his language actually shapes the sound of his music:

> After the war, German entertainment was destroyed. The German people were robbed of their culture, putting an American head on it. I think we were the first generation born after the war to shake this off, and know where to feel American music and where to feel ourselves. We are the first German group to record in our own language, use our electronic background, and create a Central European identity for ourselves. So you see another group like Tangerine Dream, although they are German they have an English name, so they create onstage an Anglo-American identity,

[91] Charles Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and Post-War Pop* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989. Republished 2005), p. 32.
[92] Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic,* p. 4.
[93] Lester Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, ed. by Greil Marcus (London: Serpent's Tail, 1996. Republished 2001), pp. 226-7.

> which we completely deny. We want the whole world to know our background. We cannot deny we are from Germany, because the German mentality, which is more advanced, will always be part of our behaviour. We create out of the German language, the mother language, which is very mechanical, we use as the basic structure of our music. Also, the machines, from the industries of Germany.[94]

Like the 'Turbo-folk' of Miloševic's Serbia, this music is inextricably linked to the culture from which it came. Perhaps it is significant that both of these examples come from places closely associated with wars. As Hutter said, Kraftwerk was born in a country recovering from war, while Turbo-folk was born in a country gearing up for it.

1.7 British and Englishness in pop

The question of what it is to be English has been the subject of discussion by many writers, and appears with some regularity in the broadsheet press. The British government launched its 'Icons Online' project in 2006, with over 300 symbols of Englishness nominated. Of these, eight were musical, these being 'Greensleeves', 'Jerusalem', the Christmas number one, the music of Vaughan Williams, punk, the proms, brass bands and Britpop.[95] These probably say as much about the people nominating icons as they do about constructions of national identity—to say that punk is a reflection of a specifically English identity is to ignore the records that came from Scotland and Northern Ireland, not to mention these from the US. The terms 'English' and 'British' are often used interchangeably, ignoring the essential differences between the two. Tony Mitchell refers to 'Julie Burchill's claim that British pop groups are the main reason for being proud to be English'.[96] As Norman

[94] Ibid, pp. 158-9.
[95] http://www.icons.org.uk/-accessed 22/01/2006
[96] Tony Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), p. 19.

Davies has argued, rarely have names of countries been as confused as they have within the United Kingdom of Great Britain.[97]

Britpop is another example of the jumble that is associated with defining what is 'British' and what is 'English'. Britpop was to all extents and purposes English, based primarily in Manchester and London. While it may have appropriated the Union Jack and red, white and blue as a symbol, the bands involved were almost exclusively English. It followed all of Martin Cloonan's six aspects of 'self-defining Britishness', namely working class/punk realism, a conflation of 'British' and 'English' music with the latter being seen as exclusively representing the former, exclusion of non-white groups, 'laddishness', an anti-American ethos and a nostalgia for the 'swinging sixties'.[98]

Within writings on pop music, there is a growing body of writing on constructions of English identity, most notably on The Smiths and the Britpop era—itself an example of the misused lexicons of English and British. Nabeel Zuberi has focused on how

> Englishness is readily and regularly invoked in popular culture through representations of the nation's working class. In popular *music* [emphasis in original], the Smiths [sic] and Morrissey activate collective memory about this proletarian, plebeian past in contradictory ways, reworking it in song lyrics, music, record sleeve design, performance, and statements to the press.[99]

He argues that the past to which Morrissey alluded, using images taken from films by kitchen sink dramas such as *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning, A Taste of Honey, Billy Liar* and *The Collector* is specifically English, white, and working class. Pictures of working class heroines were used, such as Pat Phoenix from Coronation

[97] Norman Davies, *The Isles*, (London, Macmillan, 1999), Introduction, pp. xxi-xlii.
[98] Martin Cloonan, 'State of the nation: "Englishness," pop, and politics in the mid-1990s', *Popular Music and Society*, Volume 21:2 (1997), pp. 47-71.
[99] Nabeel Zuberi, *Sounds English: Transnational Popular Music*, (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 20.

Street (the cover of 'Shakespear's Sister') and Pools winner Viv Nicholson ('Barbarism Begins At Home' and 'Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now'). Zuberi claims that 'Morrissey's particular fascination with the white English working class can be charted through record sleeves, songs, videos, and the visuals of his gigantic concert stage backdrops.'[100] A sample from the film *The L-shaped Room* was used as the opening of the 1985 album, 'The Queen Is Dead', in which a woman can be heard singing 'Take me back to dear old Blighty' as though in a music hall. Playwright Shelagh Delaney was quoted, directly and indirectly in songs. For example, the quote 'I dreamt about you last night and I fell out of bed twice' from *A Taste Of Honey* was used as a lyric for 'Reel Around The Fountain', as did the line 'It's time our tale was told' from *The Lion in Love.*[101] More recently, the great new white hope of British indie pop, Artic Monkeys, have used a quote from *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* as the title for their album, *Everything you think I am, that is what I am not*. Again, the band's songs are associated with life in a city associated with heavy industry in the north of England, this time Sheffield. Like The Smiths, their lyrics are praised for their deft wit and insight, and their presentation of everyday life.

Zuberi questions the constructions of working class identity used by Morrissey. Referring to the video for 'Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before', which featured some of his obsessively loyal fans, dressed like Morrissey, cycling around Coronation Street in Salford,[102] he argues that,

> [...] areas like it across the north have been peopled by others, who are just *not there* [emphasis in original] in popular representations of the working-

[100] Nabeel Zuberi, *Sounds English,* p. 35.

[101] For further discussion of Morrissey's influences, see Simon Goddard, *The Smiths: The Songs That Changed Your Life* (London, Reynolds and Hearn Ltd., 2004)-Shelagh Delaney referenced p. 36 and p. 68.

[102] This was the site of the original 'Coronation Street' used in the Granada soap opera. It runs adjacent to Salford Lads Club, the location for an earlier Smiths photo shoot for the album 'The Queen Is Dead'. This site is still visited by Smiths fans, and the club has a room dedicated to the Smiths. http://www.salfordladsclub.org.uk/ (accessed 15/05/06).

> class landscape. Where are the Asians and African-Caribbeans who are British?[,,,] I recognize the salty humour and northern vernacular poetics in Morrissey's work. But he seems to deny that we nonwhite Brits belong in this mythical black-and-white documentary landscape past or present, even though we have walked those same streets in Salford.[103]

This statement echoes Julian Stringer, who has also commented on the white-ness of the group:

> It is clear from the start that we are dealing with a totally white-identified national identity, and it is important to say at every turn that critics of the Smiths always ignore this. Unlike musicians involved in the Two-Tone or Acid House movements, the Smiths never directly embrace the political changes of multi-racial Britain.[104]

Within constructions of national identity in pop, the north of England, particularly the north east, have provided more than their share of the discourse.[105] Centred on Manchester and Liverpool, seminal groups and scenes have emerged from this region, including the Smiths, the Beatles, the Fall and the Stone Roses. Madchester, Merseybeat and the rise of house music in Britain are inextricably linked with the area.[106]

Class awareness has remained an essential part of English pop music, and particularly working class credentials, or failing that, pretensions. Blur used images of a white working class identity, especially noticeable on their album 'Parklife'. The album cover used pictures of dog racing, and the release party was at Walthamstow dog track. The single cover artwork featured a picture of a pint of bitter and Phil Daniels, star of the iconic mod film, Quadrophenia, performed the song along with the band. The lyrics are about the everyday 'I get up when I want/Except on

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[103] Zuberi, *Sounds English*, p. 48.
[104] Julian Stringer, 'The Smiths: repressed (but remarkably dressed)' in *Popular Music* Volume 11, Issue 1, 1992, pp. 15-26.
[105] For a general background to music in the north, see, Dave Russell, 'Music and northern identity, c. 1890-*c*. 1965' in *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northerness'* ed. Neville Kirk (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 23-46.
[106] See Michael Bracewell, ' "Lucifer over Lancashire": Billy Liar, Bramwell Brontë, John Cooper Clarke, Mark E. Smith and the North' in, *England Is Mine: Pop Life In Albion From Wilde To Goldie* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 164-86.

Wednesdays/When I get rudely awaken by the dustmen/I put my slippers on/Have a cup of tea/And think about leaving the house'—they may be on Top of the Pops, but they haven't forgotten how the rest of us live.

Another group associated with Englishness is Britpop band Oasis, from Manchester. Their expressions of an English-British identity were all pervasive, from their sound which drew heavily (to the point of pastiche) on The Beatles, their dress—sports casual—the look for the *Loaded* generation, the links with the 'Modfather' Paul Weller, and their background-fable centred on the two brothers, Noel and Liam Gallagher, as working class boys made good.

Sean Campbell has pointed out that most discussion of these bands and others focus on England, and ignore the immigrant history of such groups, many of who were second generation Irish, including the Gallagher brothers from Oasis, and both Morrissey and Johnny Marr of seminal group The Smiths. He argues that,

> [If cultural studies'] reception of second- and third-generation African-Caribbean and South Asian cultural practitioners has tended to foreground questions of race and ethnicity, it has been almost axiomatic in cultural studies simply to overlook the particular immigrant background of second-generation Irish, who have instead been subsumed in an all-encompassing, and largely undefined 'white ethnicity'. Moreover, in a great deal of work on questions of race, ethnicity and popular music, second-generation Irish musicians have been recruited for a putative Anglo-Saxon 'centre' against which the descendents of African-Caribbean and South Asian immigrants can be differentiated.[107]

Elsewhere, he has pointed to the irony of The Smiths, and John Lydon of the Sex Pistols (again, second-generation Irish) being 'conscripted for what *Melody Maker* called the "Home Guard" of Britpop'.[108]

[107] Sean Campbell, 'Sounding out the margins: ethnicity and popular music in British cultural studies', in *Across The Margins: Cultural Identity And Change In The Atlantic Archipelago*, ed. by Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 117-36.
[108] Sean Campbell. 'What's The Story?: Rock Biography, Musical "Routes" and the Second-generation Irish in England' in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2004), 63-75 (p. 63).

The glorification of suburbia is a trait of English pop, running through The Kinks, The Jam and through to Britpop. The Jam had their first hit in 1977 with 'In The City', splitting in 1983, a period which coincided with Margaret Thatcher's first term as Prime Minister. According to John Harris, 'in Britain's small towns and suburbs, their songs became a kind of folk music, treasured by exactly the people that Paul Weller—a working-class native of suburban Surrey—had a habit of writing about.'[109] Harris, and DJ Taylor, interviewed for this article, put Weller into a broader English literary background, of Philip Larkin and George Orwell.

More recently, the Libertines, and later Babyshambles, have been associated with constructions of English identity.[110] These two bands are more overt in their flagging of notions of national identity than most, but nonetheless, they are a useful example of just how wide this flagging can be. It is not restricted to their music, but is evident in the artwork for their records, their interviews, their dress and their fans—all of which are relevant in subsequent chapters examining flaggings of Welsh identity within pop.

A Radio 1 documentary celebrating the tenth anniversary of Britpop included a synopsis of pop from Britain since the decline of Britpop, with narrator Leslie Phillips saying,

> But 2004, and hark, what's that? A clarion call to arms? The Bow Bells? Why, if it's not cheeky cockney scamps, The Libertines. Sailing forth in the good ship Albion, to do battle against Puddle of Mud and Good Charlotte,[111] fighting them on the beaches, fighting them in the fields, and in the streets, and *never* surrendering.[112]

[109] John Harris, 'The Jam? They Were A Way Of Life', *Guardian*, 3 February 2006, Film and Music section, p. 5.
[110] The Libertines was founded by Carl Barat and Pete Doherty, the latter forming Babyshambles after leaving The Libertines.
[111] Two American nu-metal bands.
[112] 'Albion Rovers', BBC Radio 1, broadcast 26 April 2004.

The war analogies are, as Harris has pointed out, a 'rather unfortunate British tic that leads to most statements of national self-belief being wrapped up in the imagery of the Second World War'.[113] You only have to think of the way in which sport, and particularly football, is reported, with its infamous 'Achtung! Surrender! For You Fritz Ze Euro 99 Is Over' tone. Within the British music press, this is particularly the case in relation to pop from the United States. Words such as 'army' and 'invasion' are regularly used, one article in *Select* in February 1993, towards the start of Britpop, featured a 'Dad's Army' style map and the heading 'Who do you think you are kidding Mr Cobain?' and continued in the same vein.[114]

During the documentary, Carl Barat of The Libertines said that,

> 'When we were trying to encapsulate what we were trying to do years ago, we used to envisage this ship, which we called The Albion. And depending on the day we'd be below deck in the gloom or above decks in the sun. But Albion was us and where we are from...and we were travelling to find Arcadia.'[115]

Band mate Pete Doherty went on to say that 'We decided to set sail together on The Albion, which coincidently is the mediaeval name for Britain, the land that we're both from and we both have an obsession with'. The then editor of the *NME,* Anthony Thornton, elaborated on this idea,

> The Libertines' take on Englishness—in fact it's Britishness rather than Englishness—it's an idealised view of it. It's a Britain without MacDonalds and without Coca-Cola, it's a Britain of poetry and tea cups and sailing on The Albion to Arcadia, which is their big phrase. Arcadia is this kind of—depending on what day you catch them on—is this kind of idealised utopia if you will, and The Albion is the British way of getting there. It's a celebratory thing, it's about everything that they think is great about Britain which has been lost in the homogenisation of world culture.[116]

[113] Harris, *The Last Party*, p. 87.
[114] A reference to Kurt Cobain, lead singer with American band Nirvana.
[115] 'Albion Rovers', BBC Radio 1, broadcast 26 April 2004.
[116] 'Albion Rovers', BBC Radio 1, broadcast 26 April 2004.

It is a fear of America that is little removed from the 'over paid, over sexed and over here' concerns of World War 2. The group's construction of identity also referenced the British Empire, having more to do with *The Man Who Would Be King*, with their military jackets and romanticism, than the sports casual of Britpop. A place permanently lit in soft focus, not too far removed from long shadows on the village green, the sound of leather on willow, warm beer and old maids cycling home from church. Thornton's view is especially enlightening as all the threats mentioned are external; if only Arcadia would be left alone then life would be better. This is evident in their lyrics such as, 'He knows there's fewer more distressing sights than that of an Englishman in a baseball cap' from 'Time For Heroes'. These references can also be found on the artwork of their debut album 'Up The Bracket' (a phrase taken from comedian Tony Hancock) with the album layout looking like a collage or fanzine (a nod to authenticity). Musically it shows the influence of British punk, with a line up featuring drums, bass and two guitars. Doherty and Barat's accents can be heard when they sing, and the album was produced by Mick Jones of The Clash.

Doherty's next band, Baby Shambles, continued to use these themes. The artwork for the single 'Killamangiro' featured a Union Jack, crown and wreath, along with shields showing three lions, a lion rampant and a harp. Superimposed onto these images are the words 'Baby Shambles of the Albion', 'My turn to make the tea' (the title of an autobiographical book by Monica Dickens, daughter of Charles) and the date 1902, the year the second Boer war ended.

The Libertines' association with London, especially east London, can be seen in their videos, such as 'Time For Heroes' which is obviously shot around London.[117] Talking about Chas and Dave, Barat said that, 'I like the spirit, I like the feeling, I like

[117] Video can be viewed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwhHdeHJ1Yk (accessed 22/03/08).

the tradition, the romanticism about their lives, the way they tell stories in three minute songs which evoke a whole landscape of lives, dreams, traditions, generations'.[118] Doherty explained his interest in this image, 'I think an old fashioned...aesthetic, you know what I mean. The days when footballers didn't have slogans emblazoned across their shirts, you know, adverts. Pipe smoking, brandy, big old chairs in the front room, open fires...' This is an urban, rather than rural, Arcadia.[119]

While The Libertines have taken urban London as their starting point for their constructed English identity, British Sea Power has taken rural East Sussex via Cumbria as theirs.

They play with ideas of identity in their music, lyrics, artwork and clothing. On stage they dress in World War One-style uniforms, complete with puttees, the stage covered in camouflage, branches, and (occasionally) stuffed birds. This image of Britain (and it is Britain, rather than England), which owes more to Baden Powell than the Beatles, is evident on their records. The cover of their debut album *The Decline Of British Sea Power* comes in a fetching shade of mustard yellow and features silhouettes of birds, leaves and guns with gardening tools affixed instead of bayonets, reminiscent of books that would tell you how to 'dig for victory'.

That they are playing with Britishness, rather than Englishness, is evident in their music. Rather than using punk, mods or music hall as their starting point, their sound is closer to David Bowie around *Heroes*, sung in non-specific accents. Song titles include 'Gale Warning In Viking North' and 'The Smallest Church In East

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[118] Albion Rovers', BBC Radio 1, broadcast 26 April 2004.
[119] Ibid.

Sussex', and lyrics have referred to 'this Corpus Christi isle'[120] and 'Wiltshire fields'.[121] The influence of World War Two can be seen in the tracks 'Lately' and 'Favours In The Beetroot Field', the first is described as 'An epic story of a soldier's thoughts and sights in World War 2' and the latter as 'Field Marshall Montgomery taking care of his troops' sexual desires'.[122] They have described themselves as 'militant pastoralists' but have complained that '[t]hough we talked about it, explained it carefully, we somehow ended up being called eccentric World War Two fetishists'.[123] This identification with rural Britain is evident in their links with The Copper Family of Rottingdean,[124] a family who perform traditional Sussex songs, and with their collaboration with The Wurzels in 2005, touring with them, and performing their classic 'I'm A Cider Drinker' while The Wurzels covered 'Remember Me'.[125] Away from musical collaborations, they have been invited to play at the centenary celebrations for John Betjeman, a poet who was much concerned with Britishness, probably best known for his poem 'Slough', which opened with the lines 'Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough/It isn't fit for humans now'.[126]

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to establish the relationship between identity and pop music. It has demonstrated how music can be a prime signifier of identity, including

[120] British Sea Power, 'Carrion' on *The Decline Of British Sea Power* (Rough Trade, rtradecd090, 2003), on CD.
[121] British Sea Power, 'It Ended On An Oily Stage' on *The Decline Of British Sea Power* (Rough Trade, rtradecd090, 2003), on CD.
[122] See an interview given by the band here: http://www.largeprimenumbers.com/pukka-gallery/interviews/british%20sea%20power-english.html Montgomery is said to have used 'favours in the beetroot fields' as a euphemism for visiting prostitutes.
[123] No stated author, 'Operation Berlin: The Militant Pastoralists British Sea Power Are Seeking New Horizons', *Independent*, 1 April 2005.
[124] 'Open Season' was dedicated to the memory of Robert Copper. British Sea Power, *Open Season* (2005: Rough Trade, RTRADCD200).
[125] British Sea Power & The Wurzels, 'Remember Me/I'm A Cider Drinker', (Rough Trade, RTRADS302, 2005), (7" vinyl).
[126] Email, sent from news@Britishseapower.co.uk, entitled 'Newsboost Lulworth Skipper', 4 April 2006.

class identities, racial identities and national identities through its style, lyrical content, performance, and the discourse that surrounds pop. Within this discourse, the notion of authenticity is of fundamental importance. This authenticity is constructed in a number of ways, of which performance is usually the most obvious.

To understand ideas about identity and pop, the use of music in the broader cultural experience is also important; within sporting events (and especially national sporting events), the use of chants and songs is a clear marker of identity, incorporating (and working with) flags and costumes, such as football shirts, to establish a clear position. Adding to this is the role of media discourse; Billig's proposition of 'Banal Nationalism' provides a useful starting point in exploring the role of the media in constructions of identity. The use of 'Cool Britannia' and of Britpop in this combining of pop, sport and media, is a relevant example with which to compare and contrast how music was used in the identification and development of Cool Cymru in the following chapters.

2 Pop Music as Metaphor

This chapter will explore how pop and Cool Cymru appeared outside of the immediate discourse surrounding popular music; how Welsh pop was used by what are best described as third parties—individuals and groups (usually) not directly involved with bands who named pop as a signifier for a 'new' Welsh identity. Most striking of these was the use of pop by politicians, particularly in relation to the referendum for devolution in Wales in 1997. The chapter will begin by exploring Cool Britannia—a period to which Cool Cymru bears a striking resemblance. It will then move on to examine how Cool Cymru was used by politicians, in television and film, advertising and sport. It will demonstrate how even when the phrase itself isn't used, the use of pop music and the constant repetition of pop being representative of a 'new Wales' indicate just how central pop was to this imagining of a revived cultural, political and economic identity.

2.1 *Cool Britannia, Britpop and New Labour*

The phrase Cool Cymru consciously echoes the Cool Britannia tag, associated with Tony Blair and the election of the Labour party into government in 1997 after eighteen years of Conservative rule. The curious way in which this phrase came into use can be charted through its presence within various articles in the national British press. The name, 'Cool Britannia', comes from the title of a Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band song from their 1967 album *Gorilla*. This band and its contemporaries, such as The Who, are often associated with ideas of 'swinging London' from the late 1960s. The song itself included the deeply ironic lyric of 'Cool Britannia/Britannia takes a trip/Britons ever ever ever/Shall be hip'.[1] It reappeared in November 1995, with the *Scotsman* reported that the American ice cream company, Ben and Jerry's, had

[1] Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, *Gorilla* (LBL/LBS 83056, 1967).

launched a new 'British flavour' and named it Cool Britannia. The name and ingredients had been suggested by the winning entrant in a competition set up by the company.[2] This was reported in most of the national papers in Britain over the following months.[3] By the autumn of 1996, the label 'Cool Britannia' was named in positive articles about fashion and tourism.[4] October 1996 saw the first articles that discussed this phrase in relation to British politics, *The Times* saying that '[e]conomic optimism has been rising since the onset of "Cool Britannia". Yet the optimism refuses to leach into poll support for the Tories. It is as if the electorate feels rich enough to risk a Labour victory'.[5] The following month, the *Independent* reported that then Prime Minister, John Major, had 'painted himself as the architect of Cool Britannia, which rules the pop-music airwaves, has taken over the fashion catwalks of Paris and upstaged Broadway.'[6] Lifestyle and comment pieces followed, particularly in the *Guardian*. In November 1996, they declared '[g]one are the days of anxiety and self-doubt. Suddenly Britain is bustling with confidence, and cool with it'.[7] Articles linked the musical success of Britpop with the rise of New Labour, with Jon Savage commenting shortly after Labour's May 1997 election victory that,

> Noel Gallagher endorsed Tony Blair at the 1996 Brit Awards, of course—an act much mocked but which to me seemed courageous and fitting. Following a triumphal Glastonbury 1995—the festival and the stadium are, of course, ideal locations for all these 'best bands in the world'—the 1996 awards marked that moment when Brit pop [sic] knew that it had won. The Brits were cock-of-the-walk again, and the result was a series of hyped-up, breathless articles in Britain and America about Swinging London, Cool

[2] No author, 'Scotsman Diary', *Scotsman*, 29 November 1995, p. 11.
[3] For some examples, see, no author, 'If it's July it's time to…', *Sunday Mirror*, 30 June 1996, pp. 16-7. No author, 'Pass notes no. 846: Ben & Jerry', *Guardian*, 4 July 1996, features page. Fiona Beckett, 'Chocs away', *The Times*, 6 July 1996, features section.
[4] Louise Jury and Simon Calder, 'Cool Britannia rediscovers its style again; Tourists are flocking to join in a cultural renaissance', *Independent*, 27 September 1996, p. 3. Carol Midgley and Damian Whitworth, 'London takes style crown as "cool Britannia" rules the raves', *The Times*, 29 October 1996, Home news.
[5] Simon James, 'Major can come back', *The Times*, 20 October 1996, features pages.
[6] Anthony Bevins, 'Cool Britannia: Major claims the credit', *Independent*, 12 November 1996, p. 1.
[7] Henry Porter, 'Second Front: Blowing Hot and Cool', *Guardian*, 14 November 2006, p. 12, features section. .

> Britannia and all that guff. Everyone from Noel Gallagher to Geri Spice sported Union Jacks in their iconography. It would also be part of New Labour's success to wrest control of the red, white and blue from its little Englander constituency. In this, pop and politics seemed to work in tandem to redefine the soul of a nation.[8]

As mentioned in the last chapter, Damon Albarn of Blur was invited to a meeting with the then leader of the opposition, Tony Blair in 1995.[9] However, this link between pop and politics did not only come from politicians shamelessly trying to associate themselves with the latest pop sensation. The Creation record label boss, Alan McGee had given donations to the Labour party of £100,000,[10] and expressed support for them.[11] By 1996, Noel Gallagher of Oasis was regularly photographed playing his Union Jack guitar. His brother, Liam and wife, Patsy Kensit, appeared on the cover of US magazine *Vanity Fair*, posed under a Union Jack duvet.[12] Geri Halliwell of the Spice Girls wore a Union Jack mini-dress for the Brit Awards that year, photos of her being printed extensively in the press.

The Union Jack is a loaded symbol, often associated with the far right, racism, and football hooliganism, and its use within pop has not been without controversy. In 1992, shortly before the start of Britpop, Morrissey had been pilloried by the press for dancing with a Union Flag at the Madstock festival, Finsbury Park. Having previously been accused of racism (for songs such as 'Bengali In Platforms' (which had the chorus 'Life is hard enough when you belong here'), 'National Front Disco' and 'Asian Rut'), and of romanticising skinhead culture through his use of skinhead

[8] Jon Savage, 'The Boys' Club: Pop music is booming, right? British bands are taking over the world, right? Wrong. The Yobbish lads of Brit rock are about to hit the rocks', *Guardian*, 4 July 1997, Features section, p. 2.
[9] John Harris, *The Last Party: Britpop, Blair And The Demise Of English Rock* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003), p. 198.
[10] Andrew Grice, 'Labour conned me, says Oasis guru', *Independent*, 17 July 2000. Available from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-conned-me-says-oasis-guru-707251.html.
[11] Harris, *The Last Party*, pp. 299-309.
[12] Ibid, p. xx.

imagery on artwork and onstage, this was too much for the music press.[13] *NME* in particular attacked Morrissey for what they saw as dallying with fascism. The cover of *NME* asked if he was 'Flying the flag or flirting with disaster?'.[14] Inside, several pages were devoted to the incident, with various journalists commenting on events, quoting previous interviews with Morrissey that had raised questions of race, identity and music. It concluded that,

> So why, at the end of all this, is *NME* bothering? Why are our knickers in such a twist? Well, there's nothing new in this. In the past, when the likes of Eric Clapton, David Bowie and even Elvis Costello have dipped their unthinking toes into these murky waters, the music press have been equally quick on the case. [...] But Morrissey, the bright lad we know he is, must know that once you start cavorting with the Union Jack, with all its ambiguities, and surrounding yourself with the paraphernalia and imagery of the skinhead cult, then that celebration has moved, whether he likes it or not, into entirely different and altogether more dangerous territory. And that territory is not the green and pleasant land of Morrissey's dreams.[15]

The music press in general, and especially *NME* were not above displaying a 'Little-Englander' mentality themselves, particularly with Britpop, of whose associated bands were overwhelmingly white and male. Two weeks after publishing this article *NME* ran a story entitled 'The Brettish Movement' (a pun on the far-right group, the British Movement) on new band, Suede. The opening paragraph was full of knowing references to English pop history:

> They're grandly egocentric, they're glad to be fey,[16] they think they're God's gift—and they might be right. Heaven knows they're visceral now,[17] and Suede are here to answer our fevered English guitar pop prayers. Stuart Maconie luxuriates on the *hubris* [emphasis in original] of a punch of

[13] This debate has been rumbling on now for nearly twenty years. The most recent accusations have been levelled at Morrissey by *Word* magazine, and *NME*, both of whom Morrissey has taken to court over this matter. For further information, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/6music/news/20080403_morrissey_court.shtml and http://www.bbc.co.uk/6music/news/20071128_mozza.shtml (accessed 03/04/08).

[14] *NME* front cover, 22 August 1992.

[15] Danny Kelly, Gavin Martin and Stuart Maconie, 'Caucasian Rut', *NME*, 22 August 1992, pp. 12-6 (p. 16), transcript also available at http://motorcycleaupairboy.com/interviews/1992/caucasian.htm.

[16] A pun on Tom Robinson's single 'Glad To Be Gay' (1978).

[17] A pun on The Smiths single 'Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now' (1984).

passionate, self-possessed Yankophobe dandie [...]'[18]

The background graphics to the article were the royal crest of the unicorn and lion, with the text printed over the top, along with the knowing puns included within these few sentences—puns that are signals to the intended readership of exactly where this band comes from. The Anglophile tone of the article even extended to the brand of cigarettes smoked—the British Benson & Hedges, as opposed to the American Marlboro or Lucky Strike. This was an attempt to wrestle any American influence away from *English* pop. The article illustrated the highly complex relationship between ideas of national identity and pop, with the use of flags being seen as reprehensible when used by some, and part of some sort of awakening of national feeling when used by others—context is everything. And because such imagery was used in what is meant to be a throw-away medium—pop music and pop journalism—this does not mean that the bands and writers are not aware of how they employ such imagery. The use of flags and symbols within pop is a long-established motif. From The Who's use of the Union Jack, Springsteen and the US flag, Bob Marley and the Jamaican flag, they repeatedly appear within album artwork, clothing, and instruments. Just a week after the 'Brettish Movement' article cited above, *NME* ran a special feature on the use of flags, which did not try to condemn or laud their use, but merely survey those bands and musicians who had made use of them.[19]

When asked about this period, the then deputy editor of *NME* Iestyn George said that,

> The Cool Britannia thing was, in its own way, was weird, because that had come off the back of, you know —I was at the NME when that—when the Morrissey/Racism palaver when—which obviously was hugely overstated, but, you know, it was good news, and a meaningful debate. Not meaningful, but it promoted—stimulated a tremendous amount of

[18] Stuart Maconie, 'The Brettish Movement', *NME*, 8 September 1992, pp. 32-3.
[19] No author, 'Flag Special', *NME*, 19 September 1992, pp. 24-5.

> debate during a particularly... [...] Yeah, during a particularly tedious time in music, you know, so, we were just being—to be honest, we were just being... I think everybody believed that Morrissey had some—was romanticising with the wrong, sort of, imagery, and loved—and was just being... we feared that Morrissey *did* believe, you know, a lot of the, the stuff that—he seemed so patently, obviously ... not to believe in—the kind of jack-the-lad, boot-boy, boxing, east-end thuggery, sort of thing—you know that kind of stuff that he'd started glorifying for while, but at the same time, we just suspected that maybe he was a bigoted old queen or something, you know. And that was something that was probably as a fan—most people were fans of his and it was a bit disappointing and that was the subtext to it—that was—all that kind of.... But Cool Britannia to come out of a period when there had been a lot of soul searching and stuff about Britain, and what it meant, was a bit mental, wasn't it, really?[20]

This apparent contradiction in the attitude toward Morrissey and Suede of one publication in just a matter of weeks is in many ways unsurprising. Firstly, as the above quote illustrates, there was a fear amongst fans that Morrissey had racist sympathies, which were directed against black and Asian minorities in Britain. Secondly, and arguably more importantly, Suede's distrust of 'others' was explicitly directed towards the US, and so can be imagined (by the press, the band and their fans) as being a David and Goliath battle, with the plucky underdog (England) being pitted against the Goliath of American rock. It wasn't that Suede *weren't* prejudiced, it was that it was the *right* sort of prejudice.

Historically the music press has been left-leaning, along with the vast majority of the musicians on whose work it reports. From the founding of Red Wedge and Rock Against Racism, through to the support of New Labour by various bands and record labels, support of left-of-centre politics had been a theme within the music press. Of course, punk had some association with far-right groups, as did 'Oi!', an offshoot of punk.[21] And the ska group, Madness, have attracted a far-right following,

[20] Interview between author and Iestyn Jones, August 2005.
[21] An 'Oi!' compilation was released, compiled by Garry Bushell, entitled *Strength Through Oi!* It was alleged that (at best) there was an ambivalent relationship between Oi! bands and right-wing groups.

though not with the encouragement of the band. However, the point remains that within mainstream politics, pop is generally associated with, and used by, the left. Occasions of the right attempting to use pop are rare, and frequently unsuccessful.[22]

In addition to this overt political presence, politically-natured pop has been produced because new forms of music bring with them hysteria that the fabric of society is being threatened. Successive subcultures in pop have been demonised, from punk through to rave and beyond. Media uproar, sometimes accompanied by restrictive legislation, can lead to music being politicised when the songs are not about politics.[23] Additionally, musicians tend to take an anti-authoritarian stance, from Crass' response to Margaret Thatcher and the Falklands War (the banned single 'How does it feel (to be the mother of 1000 dead?)') to Mogwai's reaction to the enforced curfew of children in Glasgow in the late 1990s with 'No Education = No Future (Fuck The Curfew)'.[24] One Conservative MP attempted bring a prosecution against Crass under the Obscene Publications Act for their anti-Falklands singles.[25] And so, as artists often approach political subjects within their music, music

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The band Sham 69 attracted so many right-wing fans that singer Jimmy Pursey split the group up. Various Artists, *Strength Through Oi!* (Captain Oi, 1985 (reissue) AHOY PD 230)

[22] See John Redwood, 'There's Always England', *Guardian*, 20 March 1996, Features section, page 13. In this article Redwood suggests that a Lightning Seeds' song, 'Everything's Blue', might be a call for Conservatism and a warning about Labour. This was firmly rebuked by the song's writer, Ian Brody – see, Nicholas Barber, 'What's the story? Mourning Tories!', *Independent*, 3rd November 1996. Available from: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19961103/ai_n14079482.

[23] The build-up to the Criminal Justice & Public Order Act of 1994, proposing legislation against gatherings which would have huge impacts on anti-hunt protesters, New Age Travellers, raves and specifically music with repetitive beats, responded to concerns from some sections of the press. For some examples see: Detective Chief Inspector Alan Burrell, 'How to stop this happening in your village as Britain braces itself for more rave parties', *Daily Mail*, 6 June 1992, p. 6. Richard Pendlebury. '3,000 lay siege to police station; fury over rave party raid', *Daily Mail*, 1 February 1993, p. 5. Jamie Dettmer, 'Farmers set for invasion by hippies', *The Times*, 7 April 1993, no page number given. Alan Travis, 'Raves left in firing line, amid concern at Police powers', *Guardian*, 4 November 1994, p. 8. The Act can be found here: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1994/Ukpga_19940033_en_1.htmwith the sections relating to raves to be found in Part V.

[24] Crass, 'How does it feel (to be the mother of 1000 dead?)', (No record label given, cat number 221984-6, 1982). Mogwai, 'No Education = No Future (Fuck The Curfew)', (chem./026, 1998).

[25] Anne Murray, 'Prosecute Falklands record, says MP', *Guardian*, 21 October 1982, p. 2. John Street, *Rebel Rock: The politics of popular music*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 17. M. C. Strong, *The Great Indie Discography*, 2nd Edition, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003), p. 42.

journalists reflect this within their articles. As mentioned, broadly speaking these journalists, like the bands, are more often aligned to the left of the political spectrum, as are their audience. During the 1990s, for a time this relationship became closer than it had been since Neil Kinnock had appeared on the cover of *NME* in 1987.[26] In an attempt to demonstrate that he understood the concerns of readers of the music press, Tony Blair was photographed reading a copy of *NME*.[27]

This (generally) loose association with the left and Labour was occasionally mobilised into overt support. Shortly before the 1997 election, *Melody Maker* ran an article entitled 'What's The Tory?'.[28] In it, readers were strongly encouraged to exercise their right to vote, and several musicians who have links with the Conservative party were then 'named and shamed'. These included Labour stalwart Paul Weller who had briefly expressed admiration for Margaret Thatcher sometime around 1977, and Genesis drummer Phil Collins, who had declared that he would leave Britain should Labour win. To this statement, *Melody Maker* responded with 'You know what to do kids'.[29] By March of 1998, this cosy relationship was crumbling, with Tony Blair pictured on the cover of *NME*, with the caption 'Ever had the feeling you've been cheated?'. The main feature in this issue attacked the policies of Labour since their taking power.[30] Echoing Cool Britannia, the mobilisation of pop for a political campaign, and the complicated relationship between pop and politics were to become a feature of Cool Cymru too.

2.2 Cool Cymru

Like Cool Britannia, Cool Cymru had its origins within the media, and

[26] *NME*, 13 June 1987.
[27] See, John Harris, *The Last Party*, back cover.
[28] Simon Price, 'What's The Tory?', *Melody Maker*, 26 April 1997, pp. 18-20
[29] Ibid.
[30] Front page, *NME*, 14th March 1998. See also, Sean O'Hagan, 'Labour's love lost; According to this week's NME, the honeymoon between pop and the Government is well and truly over.' *Guardian*, 13th March 1998, p. 12.

specifically the press. The first use of the phrase 'Cool Cymru' occurred in *The Times* in 1998, in a story about 'rebranding' of Wales that opened with,

> Welcome to Cool Cymru. Ron Davies, the Welsh Secretary, who has serious ambitions to rule the Principality, wants to drop its flag and create a new symbol for the nation. Secretly, he has asked the College of Arms to come up with a fresh design, which will be displayed for the first time when the coat of arms of the new national assembly will be unveiled. 'We will get rid of the stereotypical images,' says Peter Hain, the Welsh minister. 'Modern Wales is about Manic Street Preachers and Catatonia rather [than] women in shawls and rain-sodden valleys.[31]

It went on the mention 'go-faster stripes' being added to the dragon on the Welsh flag, and canvassed the opinion of Cerys Matthews of Catatonia and former Wales rugby player Gareth Edwards, neither of whom were particularly impressed with the proposals. No one contacted in the course of my research has any definite idea of where the phrase came from, although the two origins most frequently suggested were the 'London press' (although it is fair to say that by this most people would mean national broadsheets rather than the tabloid press) and the *Western Mail.* No one suggested the *Daily Post,* probably because the vast majority of the people interviewed are from south Wales, rather than north, where the *Western Mail* is sold. While many respondents were unsure of exactly who coined the phrase, they were definite in who they identified as perpetuating its use—the media in south Wales. Andy Barding commented that, 'I think it was definitely, *definitely*, the *Western Mail* and the *Argus* and the...*Echo*, and HTV. They were all on it really. They were desperate to make something cool out of it all.' While Iestyn George, at this time writing for *NME*, linked Cool Britannia and Cool Cymru, also named the *Western Mail* as being important in the use of the phrase:

> ***Researcher:*** *Do you think it [Cool Cymru] could have happened without the whole Cool Britannia hype?*

[31] Jasper Gerard, 'Davies delivers his call to arms ', *The Times,* 4 April 1998. Accessed from 21 November 2005

> ***Iestyn George:*** No. Nobody would have come up with Cool Cymru, which is *typically* crap, second-hand Welsh. You know, *how* crap is that? [...] Oh, it's just rubbish isn't it? I mean you know, the.... The Cool Britannia thing was, in its own way, was weird, [...] But Cool Britannia to come out of a period when there had been a lot of soul searching and stuff about Britain, and what it meant, was a bit mental, wasn't it, really? [...]But the Welsh thing is a crap inherited terminology, that the *Western Mail* and the newspapers and the media in Wales were *desperate* to cling on to, bearing in mind that, you know – the media in Wales is a fascinating thing in that it's not very, eh, it's not very – it's not dynamic at all – it doesn't lead in any way, shape or form, but because it – and it's not popular in any way, shape or form really, when you consider how few it sells, but considering the fact – it's still got a monopoly of the market which is mental. So you've got a newspaper in south Wales anyway that has a complete domination and monopoly so even if you have no real – you know, probably – I don't know what there figures are but six or seven times as many people who buy the paper will see it or kind of – you know what I mean? So that's why I think the Cool Cymru thing was always – they were just desperate lengths to maintain that because it was the *only* good news that was comparable to what was going on in England.[32]

One journalist working at the *Western Mail* at this time claimed that there was encouragement from the editor to use the phrase, something confirmed by Neil Fowler, editor of the paper at this time. When asked about this, he said that, 'When I was editor I saw one of the *Western Mail's* roles was to be an active supporter of Wales plc—without being unnecessarily sycophantic—or without distorting the truth, but to say "hey, yes, something interesting is happening, let's (i.e. the readers) be part of it. We wanted Wales to be successful—and if a cultural movement was gaining momentum, we wanted to reflect that and support it'.[33] When asked if he thought that Cool Cymru was a media fabrication he replied,

> ***Neil Fowler:*** I don't think it was a media fabrication. But many people (and not just in the media) understood a whole range of interesting events were coinciding to produce a fair amount of dynamism. Music, the three events mentioned above, the new national stadium, the prospect of inward investment jobs—all came together at about the same time.
> ***Researcher:*** *Do you think it came more from the media in Cardiff or in London?*
> ***NF:*** Cardiff—the London media were happy to ignore Wales at the time.
> ***Researcher:*** *Could Cool Cymru have happened without Cool Britannia?*

[32] Interview with Iestyn George, 10th August 2005.
[33] Correspondence between the author and Neil Fowler.

> *NF:*Definitely. Cool Britannia was manufactured—as Britain as a whole has always (well, since the 1960s) been a leader in cultural developments.
>
> This may not always have been seen as true from the inside (or by the French) but now that I have lived away from the UK for two years I see it as very true. So Cool Cymru was a genuine movement as it came out of one particular component of the UK being specially rich in output at the time.[34]

This is in opposition to the opinion of Iestyn George, who as demonstrated in his comments above, saw Cool Britannia as representing something of a genuine, general feeling, whereas Fowler described Cool Cymru as coming from the media. Both however acknowledge the role of the media within such constructions.

As the initial article from *The Times* showed, the phrase, and more importantly the cultural landscape that it purported to describe, was closely associated with the political scene at this time. In 1997, Welsh musicians were actively utilised by the broad left coalition of the 'Yes' campaign as an attempt to increase support for devolution, and not just passively as examples cited by politicians seeking to prove their point. In many ways this was unsurprising, considering both Labour and Plaid Cymru—the two parties who were leading the 'Yes' campaign. As illustrated, Labour has used bands before, during the 'Red Wedge' era and in the run-up to the 1997 general election. The involvement of the Manics was also perhaps unsurprising given their visual and lyrical displays of Welsh identity since their 1996 comeback, with the flag on stage and the describing of 'Design For Life' as 'the nearest song ever to writing about Wales'.[35] They had, for many years, displayed a strong political awareness in their interviews and song lyrics—a politics which was very much of the left.[36] Whilst it would be foolish to see this as evidence that they would inevitably

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[34] Correspondence between the author and Neil Fowler.

[35] Nicky Wire, 'The Big Noise – Concert in the Bay', BBC Radio Wales, 11 May 1997.

[36] For example, the lyric 'Hospital closures kill/More than car bombs ever will/But it saves money because people are expendable' from 'New Art Riot', to another with the accusatory lines 'Churchill no

support the 'Yes' campaign, it was always likely that they, and especially Nicky Wire, would comment on the proposal and express their opinions.[37]

Other groups were also involved: Cerys Matthews of Catatonia was pictured wearing a 'Yes' t-shirt, while the *Western Mail* reported that Peter Mandelson was in Cardiff as part of the campaign and met up with Stereophonics 'a trio from Cwmaman, near Aberdare, [who] were promoting their new single, *A Thousand Trees* in Cardiff. They were happy to plaster themselves with 'Yes' stickers'.[38] The *Western Mail*, talking about Catatonia that same month concluded that '[l]ike many Welsh bands Catatonia manages to exude a combination of political awareness, cool and self-depreciation?'.[39] In September, shortly before the vote, Gruff Rhys of Super Furry Animals was interviewed on the BBC's Newsnight programme to discuss devolution. Again, Rhys had been politically active, outside of party politics through his involvement with the Welsh language movement. Rhys had formerly been a member of Ffa Coffi Pawb, who were signed to the label Ankst.[40] Many bands who sang in Welsh were involved in benefit concerts for Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh Language Society, CYIG) at gigs around Wales, and as part of the 'Maes B' celebrations at the annual National Eisteddfod and the Cnapan festival in west

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different/Wished the workers bled to a machine' from 'The Intense Humming Of Evil', or more directly relating to left-wing politics and the experience of south Wales during the miners' strike, 'Close the pits sanctify Roy Link an OBE' from the track 'Gold Against The Soul' from the album of the same name.

[37] Nicky Wire was, since the disappearance of Richey James in 1995, principle spokesman for the band. He and Richey James had shared the writing of lyrics since the band's beginning, with most songs being a combination of their work.

[38] No author, 'Prince of darkness entertains shoppers in helter-skelter campaign', *Western Mail*, 16 August 1997, p. 2.

[39] Darren Waters, 'Catatonia's Cerys shrugs off date with Bailey and pop divas', *Western Mail*, 22 August 1997, p. 11.

[40] For further information on the role of bands and popular music in the Welsh language movement, see Sarah Hill, *'Blewytirhwng?' Welsh Popular Music, Language and the Politics of Identity* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cardiff University, 2002).

Wales.[41] In interviews within the music press, the bands were asked about the vote for devolution and all pledged their support for change in Wales, although they had varying degrees of enthusiasm for the proposed form that the Assembly would take.[42] Bands were not ignorant ofbeing used by politicians either. Owen Powell of Catatonia said in one interview with the music press that,

> I think there's been a certain jumping on the bandwagon of the success of Welsh bands by certain political parties. Which is quite sad, because if politicians who've been elected to be spokesmen for the people, then feel it necessary to turn to *bands* [emphasis in original] to hear what they should say, then we're living in quite a screwed-up world.[43]

When asked why musicians are asked for their political opinion when actors and sportsmen [sic] are not, Catatonia guitarist Mark Roberts responded saying that, 'I think it's cos [sic] people connect with music—and rock'n'roll in particular —with rebellion and youth. So they want to hear what tomorrow's voter's gonna be like. But personally I think that's a load of crap'.[44]

As mentioned above, it was in an article about Welsh politics that the phrase was first used, with Peter Hain using pop as a metaphor for some sort of 'new Wales'. This theme was something to which he would return five years later. In a lecture

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[41] Maes B is the name given to the second field at the Eisteddfod, which usually holds gigs by bands who perform in Welsh. Both Gorky's Zygotic Mynic and Super Furry Animals have been criticised for wanting to perform at least part of their set in English at these event, this being widely reported in the press. For some examples see, Emyr Williams, 'Pop Band To Break Welsh Rule At Festival', *Daily Post*, 10 July 1997, p. 1. For Super Furry Animals at the Cnapan festival, see, no author, 'SFA Cause Welsh Wales', *Melody Maker*, 3 August 1996, p. 5, and Stephen Dowling, 'That furry feeling', *Sunday Star Times* (Auckland, New Zealand), 28 February 1997, Entertainment section, p. 3. In response to this criticism, Super Furry Animals released '(Nid) hon Yw 'r Gan Sy 'n Mynd I Achub Yr Iaith' (This Song Is Going To Save The Welsh Language (Not)), as the b-side to their 1996 sing 'If You Don't Want Me To Destroy You'.

[42] No author, 'Catatonia disillusioned with the Welsh Assembly...A lready!', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 5. No Author, 'Super Furry Animals: Welsh Assembly A Let-Down', *Melody Maker*, 24 July 1999, p. 6.

[43] No author, 'Catatonia disillusioned with the Welsh Assembly...Already!', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 5.

[44] No author, 'Catatonia disillusioned with the Welsh Assembly...Already!', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 5.

entitled 'Partnership, not separatism—the future of a world class Wales' given at the University of Wales Institute Cardiff in 2003, he said that,

> There is now a modern Welsh identity emerging, hesitant but increasingly self-confident, one symbol being the international success of Welsh rock bands—such as the Manic Street Preachers and the Stereophonics.
>
> They represent a new, dynamic and modern Wales, far removed from the old stereotypes of rain-sodden, black Valleys, mams in shawls, leeks and daffodils. The brash populism of these groups is distinctively Welsh. At their concerts, the National Flag is everywhere: the Red Dragon unfurled with a pride that is moving. The bands' lyrics are distinctively Welsh, with themes of community and solidarity.
>
> Nicky Wire's lyrics for the Manic Street Preachers have a political flavour: one of the band's albums contains a haunting track on the destruction of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War, and lines from Nye Bevan, as well as a song about the drowning of a North Wales valley, Tryweryn, for a reservoir serving England, in the early 1960s.[45]

What is interesting here is that Mr. Hain, rather than merely listing bands, is attempting to demonstrate some meaningful knowledge of Manic Street Preachers songs, possibly to counter any cynical claims that the use of pop songs is expedient. While the lecture did not use the phrase Cool Cymru, it did allude to it by mentioning the international success of bands from Wales and the idea of this being representative of increasing self-confidence. It is also of note that the themes which he identified in the Manics' songs as being representative of a Welsh identity are those which have historically been associated with Wales, namely radical working-class politics and the destruction of rural communities through increasing numbers of holiday homes. Mr. Hain's argument in this lecture echos themes taken up by the *Western Mail* during the late 1990s, with one particularly hysterical article claiming that,

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[45] Peter Hain, 'Partnership not separatism – the future of a world-class Wales', lecture given at the University of Wales Institute Cardiff, 17 January 2003. Transcript available from http://www.walesoffice.gov.uk/2003/sp_20030117.html 21/11/2005.

> If Wales one day basks in the warmth that only a country at ease with itself can, the historians of the future may well trace its first stirrings back to the efforts of a group of Valley boys from Blackwood.
>
> A newfound confidence, Cool Cymru, new Wales, whatever you call it, numerous people cite the success of the 'Welsh bands' as an inspiration, a motivating factor. [...] If the Manics were to fail, the effect on the confidence of the people in the country would be immense. The Manics are Wales's most prestigious brand name. [46]

An article written by the same author a couple of weeks earlier that discussed this 'rebranding' of Wales claimed that 'Mr. [Ron] Davies was quick to cite the example of Welsh pop bands upon whose shoulders rest much of the enthusiasm in the country'.[47] This is something which Mr. Davies himself has denied, claiming that he saw the use of bands and pop culture as threatening to trivialize the campaign for devolution. In 1998 he was reported as being 'deeply sceptical about the phrase',[48] something which he has since confirmed, saying that

> I was sceptical about it certainly. I felt that it was a bit naff, I mean, right from the outset I was deeply sceptical about all of the spin associated with New Labour, where everything that happened was, sort of, jumped on... from the "People's Princess", you know, all that stuff, and I felt it was totally embarrassing. And then when I saw Peter using the term Cool Cymru, I felt ahh! I just felt it was trivial because the big issues that I was involved with were details of substance in terms of – I don't want to sound pompous about it – but the details of substance in the legislation that I was trying to deal with were about having equal opportunities for everybody in Wales, sustainability. And those are rather more fundamental and lasting values than the transient candyfloss of Cool Cymru or what was on Tops of the Pops at the time. I was just not comfortable in that way of marketing politics, I guess.[49]

As mentioned above, the origin of the phrase is unclear with it ascribed to journalists in both London and Cardiff (and it is specifically Cardiff and the *Western Mail* that are usually named, rather than the *Daily Post*). The first use of the phrase

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[46] Darren Waters, 'The Manic Truth Comes Out', *Western Mail*, 22 August 1998, magazine section, pp. 4-10.
[47] Darren Waters, 'Image-makers project a modern Wales', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1998, p. 3.
[48] Andrew Parker, ' "Cool Cymru" will not slay its red dragon', *Financial Times*, 4 June 1998, p. 9.
[49] Interview with Ron Davies, 23/11/2005.

found in the *Western Mail* is from May 1998, shortly after its use in *The Times* article cited previously.[50] The article which focused on many genres of music, had the headline 'Pop explosion or classical tradition – Cool Cymru is hip' and asserted that 'Wales – Land of Song is no cliché. In fact, the truth beggars belief – such is the diversity of musical interests and talents in Wales'.[51] This timing is curious. The campaign for devolution had already taken place, after Labour's victory in the general election in May 1997, and the vote took place in September of that year. Yet these articles within the *Western Mail* talking about re-branding and confidence appear after the (admittedly small) vote in favour of devolution. This possibly indicates that the slim victory for the 'Yes' campaign instigated this period of self-conscious national navel-gazing, which echoed previous periods of self-examination for the paper. The *Western Mail* had produced a collection of editorial pieces in 1996 entitled 'Where Wales? The Nationhood Debate' back in February and March 1996, eighteen months before the vote for devolution, and over a year before the Labour party came to power.[52] When considering youth culture, and focusing largely on new Welsh language music from Wales, Beca Brown argued that there was a 'new confidence and energy that prevails amongst the creative youth and youthful of Wales'.[53] Along with these articles, several others were run on the broad theme of identity,[54] and looking at 'Ireland and the image makers' as a positive case study.[55] And while the *Western Mail* was often keen to promote Wales as the 'Land of Song', not all articles

[50] Admittedly my search focused on articles about music, particularly pop music, so there is the possibility that the phrase may have been used in other articles within the paper. However, as the phrase is usually associated with stories on Welsh pop, this is unlikely.
[51] Mike Greenow, 'Pop explosion or classical tradition – Cool Cymru is hip', *Western Mail*, 29 May 1998, 'The Sound Of Wales' supplement, p. 12-3.
[52] Various authors, 'Where Wales? The Nationhood Debate', *Western Mail*, March-Feb 1996. These essays were also available in a single publication from the paper.
[53] Beca Brown, 'A youth culture that's for all of us' ('Where Wales? The Nationhood Debate' series), *Western Mail*, 6 March 1996, p. 14.
[54] 'Why we love to hate the English', 3 February 1996, 'Arena' Magazine, front cover.
[55] 'Ireland and the image makers', *Western Mail*, 2 March 1996 'Arena' Magazine.

on Wales mentioned music. One St David's day supplement in 1997 included articles on the Welsh language, heritage industry, the NHS, schools, fashion, cheese and dairy industry, Dewi Sant (Saint David), surnames, sport, the media and film industry, but nothing on music.[56]

Other articles, in the national British press, reported on Cool Cymru, again with music as a focal point, but with other factors also raised as significant. A piece in the *Mirror* informed its readers that,

> If you thought "Cool Cymru" was all about Catatonia, Manic Street Preachers and Stereophonics—think again. A new poll has revealed more than half the young adults in Wales also think it's trendy to be anti-monarchy and care passionately about the future of the nation's politics. And it shows more than 25 per cent of young people believe independence is the only way forward—cutting links with "Cool Britannia". Far from tapping into the traditional Welsh symbols of the landscape, rugby and industry, youngsters are developing a new type of Welshness. The findings will be revealed on BBC Wales' Week In, Week Out programme tonight. Producer John Fraser Williams says it provides a fascinating insight into the psyche of Welsh youth. He said: "We found that the sense of Welshness among the young has grown and strengthened. The young appear to have a radical Welsh identity with 29 per cent saying they feel Welsh, not British. Very significantly we found the Cool Cymru pop bands have captured young people's imaginations. 'In a sense that is not surprising. But the poll reveals young people think the bands are the most potent public symbol of Welshness.' The poll also shows 21 per cent of people want the new Welsh Assembly to have the same powers as the Scottish Parliament. It was carried out for the BBC among over 1000 young people aged between 18 and 29. The findings will be aired at 10.20 tonight. Poll organisers were also amazed by the extent the National Assembly has captured the imagination. Mr Williams added: 'It's amazing that nearly one in five believe the National Assembly gives the most positive image of Wales but it is telling that 68 per cent say they are not interested in politics.' The poll also revealed that 35 per cent of young Welsh people can speak the language well—significantly more than in the last census. In the show, Stereophonics and Catatonia talk about Welsh politics and give their views on the monarchy. Political commentators last night said the results reveal a nation in transition. Richard Wyn Jones from the Institute of Welsh Politics in Aberystwyth said: "This shift to a more exclusively Welsh identity is occurring right through the

[56] Various authors, 'St David's Day' supplement, *Western Mail*, 1 March 1997.

age band. 'My gut feeling is that the Wales we will see 20 years from now will be radically different from what we have now' he added.[57]

The rising profile of bands from Wales was frequently cited as 'proof' of a positive general change (especially in cultural terms) as the following extract illustrates. It expands on the initial description of a 'new' Wales made by Peter Hain.

> Not long ago Welsh culture, to many, meant bards and eisteddfods, male voice choirs and small trains carved from lumps of coal. Dylan Thomas and Richard Burton were dead, and Tom Jones was as cool as Harry Secombe.
>
> But for the generation which has grown up since the closure of the mines and steel mills, Tom Jones has been resurrected as an icon, Cardiff is the capital of 'Cool Cymru' and it's trendy to be Welsh.
>
> The evidence of Wales's revival came when three Welsh performers were included in the top five 'coolest people in rock' in a poll by the readers of the music magazine Melody Maker.
>
> The chart was topped by the lead singer of Catatonia, Cerys Matthews, who made the lyrics 'Every day when I wake up I thank the Lord I'm Welsh' part of a new national anthem. [58]

The piece went on to list other cultural players from Wales including actors, directors and fashion designers, and concluded with,

> John Osmond, director of the Institute of Welsh Affairs, believes that Cool Cymru can be linked to devolution and a new sense of national pride. 'It was the under-45s who carried the vote in favour of a Welsh Assembly,' he said, 'and it's the young who have strength and confidence in expressing themselves'. [59]

Linked to the music, by association in this and other such articles, was film, fashion and often sport and politics. Mass pop (and it is nearly always the three biggest selling groups of Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia and Stereophonics), was regularly used to introduce other 'good news' stories relating to Welsh culture. In April 1999, the *Observer* reported that

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[57] Philip Pope, 'Why Cool Cymru Is About So Much More Than Music; You Say They Hate The Royals', *Mirror*, 23 June 1999, p. 7.
[58] Simon de Bruxelles, ' "Land of Song" gets a cool new image', *The Times*, 19 June 1999, home news section, no page number given.
[59] Ibid.

> The heaving bar rises in unison, transfixed as their boy weaves his way through the opposition lines to steal the match in the final minutes. 'YEEESSSS boyo,' comes the cry. 'Wales, Wales!' [...] Wales is finding its full-throated voice again. A renewed pride in sport and music is swelling. At last Sunday's game at Wembley, Max Boyce—himself an emblem of Wales old and new—led singing at a volume usually restricted to the now-deceased Cardiff Arms Park. This is a wave that a crop of ambitious politicians are hoping to ride when the National Assembly for Wales forms at the end of May. [...] 'We need the Assembly to act for Wales, to be a unifying force for a nation that is historically divided,' says Rhodri Morgan, unsuccessful candidate for the Welsh Labour leadership. He admits that the politicians will have to work hard to catch up with the public mood. 'At Wembley the emotional release was incredible. Just incredible. The challenge is for us politicians to prove that the Assembly is not just a talking shop, that we can make a real difference.' So far the signs are that, politically at least, the Welsh nation is being born reluctantly. The referendum for the Assembly was won by the narrowest of margins. Cardiff, the capital, voted against its creation. It is in the cultural and sporting spheres that the resurgence is to be seen: the ubiquitous Cerys from Catatonia, the talent of the Manic Street Preachers, a nascent film industry generating films such as Twin Towns, the explosive pace of Scott Gibbs and icy calm of Neil Jenkins at the finale of the match against England, the old enemy. And of, course, that goal. 'I feel really, really proud to be Welsh at the moment,' says Becky Carr, pulling pints at the Continental Cafe, in the shadow of Cardiff's new rugby stadium. [...] 'We'll see what it [the National Assembly] is like; but it is music and sport that gets us going now.' The same is true of the men watching Manchester United on the big screen. 'You should have seen Cardiff on Sunday night,' says Bryn Lang. 'You knew you were in Wales then all right. I don't think you'll get those cheers when this Assembly thing starts, do you? Good luck to them, mind, but they can't compete.' [...] Surrounded by the snow-capped mountains of his Caerphilly constituency, he [Ron Davies] knows that the intricacies of devolution, the powers of the Assembly and the infighting within Labour cannot compete with the hype around 'Cool Cymru'. Forget Ron and Rhodri: Gibbs and Giggs are the icons of the new Wales. 'We have long way to go to win people's confidence in the Assembly,' he says, 'but I don't think it is a choice between political and cultural identity. I think the two can do it together.' Despite the hype, Wales remains the poor Celtic cousin ranged against Scotland, with its fierce sense of nationhood, and Ireland, the fastest-growing economy in the European Union. Economic output per head lags 20 per cent behind the UK as a whole, and Wales is poor enough to have been granted Objective One status for regeneration funding by the European Union.[60]

As this article illustrate, the irony of much of this discussion of a 'new Wales' was based on stereotypes and historical half-truths; the opening line using the word

[60] Richard Thomas, 'Cool Cymru is fine in voice again', *Observer*, 18 April 1999, p. 10.

'boyo', the references to rugby and singing. Notably absent is the third section of this holy trinity of (south) Welshness—references to mining or heavy industry. Also pertinent again is the comparison made by the author between Wales and Scotland and Ireland, the three being placed under the heading of 'Celtic' despite their differing economic, social and political structures.

In May 1999, the National Assembly had its opening ceremony, with accompanying concert. While *The Times* reported that,'Michael Bogdanov, the artistic director, has scoured the Valleys to find an eclectic selection of performers, some of whose artistic achievements have been overlooked in recent years', it is a familiar list of names which is listed in the opening sentence.[61] Of significance is the choice of music chosen by the organisers as suitable for such an event, with Shakin' Stevens performing 'How Could You Be Like That?', Bonnie Tyler singing 'Total Eclipse Of The Heart' and Charlotte Church with 'Pie Jesu'. Of the acts which both the performer and the song could be described as 'Welsh', only John Cale performing Dylan Thomas' 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night' stands out. Additionally Cale, unlike the other performers, does not have a mass, popular following, and is more closely associated with the avant-garde. The article went on to say that,

> It will be an occasion to make every Welsh heart swell with pride. The largest gathering of Welsh entertainers, from Sir Harry Secombe to Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey to Max Boyce [...]. The show will build up to a chest-beating climax. Current favourites The Stereophonics will play. Tom Jones will lead a rousing Green, Green Grass of Home. Then the entire company, including Sir Harry, Max Boyce and Michael Ball, will sing Catatonia's International Velvet, with its chorus "Every day when I wake up, I thank the Lord I'm Welsh." The crowd will depart to a rousing new anthem for Wales by Karl Jenkins.[62]

[61] Adrian Sherwin, 'Stars are reborn for Cool Cymru', *The Times*, 20 May 1999, no page number given.
[62] Ibid.

The reason for the absence of the new Welsh pop was ironically, politics: Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia and Super Furry Animals had apparently declared that they would not play in front of a Royal audience.[63]

2.3 Plays and Films

Along with providing a soundtrack for political campaigning, during the 1990s Welsh pop found a place for itself as the soundtrack for films and plays being produced in Wales, especially Ed Thomas' *House Of America* (1997) and Kevin Allen's *Twin Town* (1997). *House Of America* was originally performed as a play in 1988, with the soundtrack for this stage production featuring The Velvet Underground and The Doors, two iconic bands from America, but by 1997, the soundtrack featured some contemporary Welsh bands.[64] Writing about this change and the plays of Ed Thomas, Shaun Richards has argued that,

> [...] not only had Welsh culture taken a different tone from that defined by Harry Secombe but Thomas's attitude to his native culture had consequently modified. Celebrating the explosion of Welsh bands he said '[we're] [in original] all outed now. Wales is full of different voices and the more the merrier. Take the bands for example, Catatonia, Super Furry Animals, the Manic Street Preachers, they all have a different sound but they're all Welsh.'[65]

A few years earlier, in an article in the *Western Mail*, Thomas spoke on this theme, saying that,

> There are two musical canons in the film for the Lewis family. Dad is into the Velvet Underground and the whole Beat Generation thing, Mum is wedded to Tom Jones—also very apt, the Boy from Nowhere who found the American Dream in Las Vegas. And the there's the music for the kids. [...] What's happening in Wales at the moment is fantastic, and I think *House of*

[63] No stated author, 'Super Furry Animals: Welsh Assembly A Let-Down', *Melody Maker*, 24 July 1999, p. 6.
[64] Shaun Richards, 'Cool enough for Lou Reed?: The plays of Ed Thomas and the cultural politics of South Wales [sic]', in *Across The margins: Cultural identity and change in the Atlantic archipelago*, ed. by Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 145.
[65] Shaun Richards, 'Cool Enough for Lou Reed?' p. 146.

> *America* rightly capitalises on that. The fact that there are bands like Catatonia who go for that slightly American guitar sound fitted into our needs brilliantly.[66]

In addition, the original score for the film was provided by former Velvet Underground member, John Cale, a native of Garnant, whose origin is mentioned within the film in an early scene in a pub. The use of Welsh bands added not only to the atmosphere of the film, but to its marketability. The cover of the video advertised the fact that the film featured the music of Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia, Velvet Underground, Tom Jones, The Prodigy, Blur (both from the south east of England) and Teenage Fanclub (from Scotland).[67]

Thomas has commented on the theme of 'America' repeatedly in relation to both his own work and more generally to the national myths of Wales. Writing specifically about this play, Daniel Williams has argued that the character of the mother, wearing a Welsh hat and daffodil 'represents a vacuous and redundant network of nationalist symbolism' whilst 'the family's belief that their father now lives in America is based on a wholly fabricated invention'.[68] The way in which Thomas employs music within the film though is slightly different to this visual imagery. The canon he cites for the parents have little in common with contemporary Wales, other than exactly as that—as canon which have been drawn upon.[69] But the music used for Sid, Gwenny and Boyo is very much of contemporary Wales, and had been constantly cited (as illustrated elsewhere in this thesis) as representing a move

[66] Rob Driscoll, 'Chasing the American Scream', *Western Mail*, 3 October 1997, p. 13.
[67] *House Of America*, First Independent Films, 1997. See either the DVD or Video cover.
[68] Daniel Williams, 'Harry Secombe in the Junkshop: Nation, Myth and Invention in Edward Thomas's *House Of America* and David Mamet's *American Buffalo*', in *Welsh Writing In English*, Volume 4 (1998), pp. 139-40.
[69] Tom Jones did not receive his rehabilitation, until 1998 with the release of the *Reload* album which featured collaborations with Stereophonics, Manic Street Preachers and Catatonia.

away from the older images of Tom and Shirley. Thomas himself said in an interview in 1997 that,

> [...] the important thing for me is to see a grown-up Wales, which is self-defined and not stereotypical. It's healthy to have a self-defined myths. I find that our culture can sometimes be very servile to stereotypes, and my argument is that we have to construct our own sense of who we are [...] Wales is all inside-out, back-to-front and postmodern without even knowing it. Take this as an example. Richey James from Manic Street Preachers once went whistling along Pontypool High Street and then his car was discovered abandoned on the Severn Bridge. Do you know that some people in America think that Richey James is a mythical figure? Pontypool High Street than becomes like Jim Morrison's grave in Paris or the Chelsea Hotel in New York where Dylan Thomas stayed. It's wonderful seeing Americans walking Pontypool High Street looking for the grave of Richey James. So you don't have to have your 'hero' in the Chelsea Hotel in New York any more. You can find him in Kwik Save in Ponty, asphyxiated auto-erotically![70]

Links between pop and film can be found amongst the individuals who work in the media in Wales. Somewhat inevitably, given the small size of the media in Wales, paths frequently cross. For example, Marc Evans, the film's director had previously worked with several Welsh-language bands, making pop promos which were shown on S4C's 'Fideo 9' programme. These groups had included members who what went on to become part of Catatonia and Super Furry Animals.[71]

Twin Town featured songs by Welsh bands, as well as choral standards including 'Myfanwy' and 'Calon Lan'. Frequently the film was mentioned in the same breath as *Trainspotting*, partly because of its anarchic style and drug references, and because its producer, Danny Boyle, directed *Trainspotting*. Not all of the articles that did this necessarily agreed that the film was a 'Welsh Trainspotting', but by

[70] Edward Thomas and Hazel Walford Davies, 'Not much of a dream then is it?' in *State Of Play: Four Playwrights Of Wales*, ed. Hazel Walford Daviers, (Llandysul, Ceredigion: Gomer Press, 1998), p. 117.

[71] Steve Blandford, 'Making *House of America*: An interview with Marc Evans and Ed Thomas', in *Wales On Screen*, ed. by Steve Blandford, (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 2000), p. 74.

continuing to mentioning this comparison, reviews and articles reinforced the association between the films.[72] The main characters were dismissive of Wales;

> Rugby. Tom Jones. Male voice choirs. Shirley Bassey. Snowdonia. Prince of Wales. Daffodils. Sheep. Sheep lovers. Coal. Slate quarries—if that's your idea of Welsh culture, you can't blame us for trying to liven the place up a little bit, can you?[73]

These words echo the tone of most pieces within the media on Welsh bands—referring to negative stereotypes and then challenging them. At least one reviewer commented that, as with *House Of America*, the soundtrack to *Twin Town* was being used as a major part of the marketing strategy of the film, saying that,

> Like Trainspotting [sic], it [*Twin Town*] is being marketed by Polygram with a kind of brazen energy usually reserved for new Britpop albums. Strident red and black posters of the terrible twins with a manic glow in their eyes have begun to spring up in magazines and on railway station hoardings. Inevitably, the tie-in soundtrack album is being hyped heavily. This time, instead of Iggy Pop shrieking out 'Lust for Life', the signature tunes are Petula Clark's 'Downtown' and Mungo Jerry's 'In the Summertime'.[74]

Within theatre, Patrick Jones's 1999 play *Everything Must Go* had even closer links between drama and pop. Jones is the elder brother of Manic Street Preachers bassist Nicky Wire, whose fourth album was entitled *Everything Must Go*, although the album was named after the play.[75] The play itself was set in the post-industrial south Wales valleys, where electronics factories and unemployment have taken the

[72] See, No author, 'Taffies all screen for ice cream', *Mirror*, 27 March1997, p. 19. David Atkinson, 'Swansea: everything you need to know; The town Dylan Thomas described as "ugly lovely" is set to become the most happening place in Britain. Maybe.', *Independent*, 6 April 1997, p. 3. Derek Malcolm, 'Screen: How Grim Is My Valley; other new releases', *Guardian,* 11 April 1997, features section, p. 7. Martin Wroe, 'Sprawling, Joy-riding, hot-bed of mediocrity', *Observer*, 13 April 1997, p. 16. Angus Wolfe Murray, 'Mirth becomes mayhem as twins turn into natural born killers', *Scotsman*, 24 April 1997, p. 17.

[73] *Twin Town*, 1997.

[74] Geoffrey Macnab, 'Made in Wales; but "Twin Town" isn't a film about male voice choirs or the death of the mining industry. And it's not a Welsh "Trainspotting" either. Even if Danny Boyle was executive producer', *Independent*, 3 April 1997, film section, p. 6.

[75] Simon Price, *everything (A BOOK ABOUT MANIC STREET PREACHERS)*, (London: Virgin, 1999), p. 212. See also, no author, 'Theatre', *The Times*, 13 February 1999, features section, no page number.

place of heavy industry. When asked if he had always intended to accompany the film with a soundtrack, Jones replied that,

> First, I thought I'd use all different bands, then a year ago, Phil [Clark, director] suggested using all Welsh bands. The lyrics are especially important. For example, originally we were going to use 'Faster' as the opening song. We switched this to 'Design For Life' because we thought the lyrics and energy of 'Faster' would be better suited to the second half.[76]

Within the published script of the play, it is striking how much of a role music plays within the play. The opening lines of the play are a translation of the Welsh national anthem, *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau,* with the lead character, 'A', saying 'Oh land of my fathers so dear to me', followed Curtis, Cindy and Pip joining him.[77] Throughout the play, the majority of scenes (referred to in the play as Units) included a specific song within the stage direction. Unit 15 opens with the first verse of 'Everlasting' by Manic Street Preachers, and the play ends with a motif which has been used throughout; 'This is my truth, tell me yours'—lines spoken by Aneurin Bevan which were used by Manic Street Preachers as the title to their 1998 album.[78]

All reviews of the play in the press mentioned the soundtrack: indeed, it would be surprising if they did not considering both the extensive use of music within it and the writer's close relationship to Manic Street Preachers.[79] Phil Clark said that he saw people coming to see the play on the back of the soundtrack as positive, and that he believed that there was a link between the success of Welsh bands and an increased 'interest in nationalism',

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[76] Alexandra Lewis and Rachel Harding, 'From Despair To Where?', *Gair Rhydd*, Grip magazine, pp. 6-7.
[77] Patrick Jones, 'Everything Must Go ', in *Fuse, selected plays and poetry* (Cardiff: Parthian Books, 2001), p. 139.
[78] Patrick Jones, 'Everything Must Go ', in *Fuse*, p. 176 & 204.
[79] For examples see, Caroline Sullivan, 'Arts: Everyone must go; What do you get when you cross the Manic Street Preachers with a Welsh poet? A highly unlikely stage hit that has punters flying into Cardiff from the States', *Guardian*, 25 February 1995, Features section, p. 9. Maeve Walsh, 'Theatre: Something missing in the post-natal department', *Independent*, 12 March 2000, p. 7. Hettie Judah, 'Manic drama from a brother up in arms ', *The Times*, 8 May 2000, features section, no page number given.

> It's [music and increased nationalism] definitely related to it and now it's important to work in partnership. Its [sic] a case of the Welsh standing together—united we stand, divided we fall. We must cross boundaries. For example, Patrick is a poet but he becomes a playwright. We don't have a tradition, unlike other countries' theatrical history which goes back for centuries. [...] If it's [theatre] nurtured from people across cultures—actors, poets etc.—then it will grow.[80]

Clark expanded on this in his introduction to the printed script, saying that it, 'is a fusion of music and theatre in which one art form serves to compliment, enlighten and enrich the other'.[81] One reviewer commented that the use of songs extended beyond background music, saying that, '[e]mphasising the interdependence of the Welsh arts scene, one character even talks in Manics song lyrics, shouting, "This is my truth, tell me yours" at appropriate moments'.[82] When asked about the purpose of the play Jones said the play,

> [...] attacks so-called Cool Cymru, the idea that Wales is suddenly sexy. We're so apathetic, so used to accepting second-best. We're down on our knees grovelling to foreign investors, be they Japanese and Korean, who come in and use us as fodder. I'm not xenophobic and I don't want to romanticise the mines, but they did stitch communities together, and factories fracture them.[83]

The same reviewer claimed that, 'Everything Must Go is striking enough to do for Welsh theatre what the Manics and Catatonia have done for its music—bring it to prominence as no longer a poor relation but the artistic equal of the rest of Britain'.[84] And while Jones may well have intended the play to attack the idea of Cool Cymru, it is likely that it received far more publicity within the national press than would otherwise be expected of a new play in a small theatre by a first-time writer. This is

[80] Alexandra Lewis and Rachel Harding, 'From Despair To Where?', pp. 6-7.
[81] Phil Clark, 'Patrick Jones – A Ranter for the 21st Century', in Jones, *Fuse*, p. 131.
[82] Caroline Sullivan, 'Arts: Everyone must go; What do you get when you cross the Manic Street Preachers with a Welsh poet? A highly unlikely stage hit that has punters flying into Cardiff from the States', *Guardian*, 25 February 1995, Features section, p. 9. *This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours* was the title of the Manic Street Preachers 1998 album, taken from a speech by Aneurin Bevan, and referred to elsewhere in this thesis.
[83] Caroline Sullivan, 'Arts: Everyone must go', p. 9.
[84] Ibid, p. 9.

something which Jones himself has acknowledged in correspondence with this author (though not referring specifically to his plays), saying that, '[...] in a way cool cymru [sic] did open a new view and praps [sic] we were taken seriously for a change and we had a chance to speak to the world not just to the fuckinf [sic] eissteddforrrddddddd'.

2.4 Advertising and Television

Along with sound-tracking drama, Welsh pop was used to market Wales, with Manic Street Preachers being used by the Wales Tourist Board (WTB), as part of its 1998 'Two Hours And A Million Miles Away' campaign and also for its 1999 Rugby World Cup campaign. The first of these took a remix of 'A Design For Life' by the Stealth Sonic Orchestra which had been available as a b-side to the CD release of the single. It showed shots of crowded city streets, some of them clearly London, and contrasted them with shots of leisure activities in Wales; and what is two hours from (south) Wales and particularly Cardiff? London, of course.

Specifically referring to this series of adverts, Robin Gwyn of the WTB spoke at length about using pop as a metaphor saying that,

> We and other people within Wales feel that it's a new beginning for Wales. With the Assembly and high-profile international events such as the Rugby World Cup coming to Wales in 1999, we feel there's a dynamic here in Wales that we want to tap into, and at the forefront of the new Wales, we've got talented Welsh rock groups coming through. The Manics have led the way, and obviously, Catatonia are topping the album charts this week. We, as a Tourist Board want to be involved in that kind of thing and not just the old images of male voice choirs, daffodils and miners singing on their way home from the pit. We believe there's a new Wales emerging and flourishing. Having an orchestral track feel to the Manics' album track enables us to use it to market Wales to a wider age-group than just the youth market. By using a song that's almost an anthem, we want to tap into the new feeling that there is about Wales, that it's a happening place and no longer a backwater—if it ever was. The Manics were very supportive. They're very proud of their Welshness. The same goes for Catatonia—they've got that line in "International Velvet" which says "Every day when I wake up, I thank the Lord I'm Welsh". It's as modern, fashionable and groovy as any other part of the UK.[85]

[85] No author, 'Manics head campaign for Real Wales', *Melody Maker*, 23 May 1998, p. 8.

At least one *NME* journalist had taken the song that Gwyn referred to, 'International Velvet', as being an ironic take on nationalism.[86] The band made several comments in interviews to this effect, demonstrating how a songwriter can lose control of their creation, and used to represent the opposite of that which they intended.[87]

This linking of pop and an idea of Welsh culture and identity was worked into a broader framework of Wales as 'Land Of Song'. The *Western Mail* produced a supplement in May 1998 entitled 'The Sound Of Wales', with Cerys Matthews featured on the front cover with the slogan, 'The Queen Of Taffrock'.[88] Inside, was a review of the Cnapan festival, including a quote from the Wales Tourist Board. There was an article about pop, entitled 'Driving forward on Taffrock' with the subheading 'Manics, Super Furries and Stereophonics vanguard for the '90s Land of Song', which followed the typical pattern seen elsewhere:

> Wales is known as the Land of Song but for years its only songmakers, according to the outside world, were Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey and male voice choirs.[...] This is Wales's contribution to Cool Britannia and it has become known as Taffrock.[89]

Within the offices of the *Western Mail,* this phrase of 'Taffrock' may have been common, but it does not appear elsewhere.[90] The rest of this article was made up of old interviews with various bands, including Super Furry Animals and Stereophonics. Along with looking at the state of contemporary Welsh pop, it named bands to look out for in the future, therefore cursing them with ever-lasting

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[86] Steven Wells, 'Feds and Rockers!', *NME*, 7 February 1998, p. 30.
[87] Mark Jenkins, 'Welsh Band Catatonia: Internationalists Abroad', *Washington Post* (USA), 9 August 1998, Sunday Arts section, p. G01. See also, David Owens, *Cerys, Catatonia And The Rise Of Welsh Pop'* (London: Ebury Press, 2000), pp. 176-7.
[88] *Western Mail*, 'The Sound Of Wales' supplement, 29 May 1998.
[89] Mario Risoli, 'Driving forward on Taffrock', *Western Mail*, 'Land of Song' supplement, 29 May 1998, p. 3.
[90] This term has never been used by the national press, according to search of LexisNexis. Neither have I found any reference to it in either *Melody Maker* or *NME.*

obscurity.[91] Welsh pop was mentioned in an article on male voice choirs and another on various music festivals taking place throughout Wales.[92] It opened by claiming that,

> Wales—Land of Song is no cliché. In fact, the truth beggars belief—such is the diversity of musical talents in Wales. [...] If music is the international language, then we must believe that the Welsh speak it well. Perhaps it's something more than that—perhaps it is a way of life that appeals to the musical soul and nourishes it.[93]

Unfortunately, the author does not give any further information about this special 'way of life'. In the last few sentences of the final article, the purpose of the supplement, besides reporting on music in Wales, becomes clear,

> So clearly, for anyone planning a musical holiday there is plenty of material to work with irrespective of the location or time of year—and the Wales Tourist Board and its associated tourism companies will help you make the best of it. For further information please contact the Wales Tourist Board.[94]

As with Robin Gwyn's comments about using the idea of Cool Cymru as shorthand for a new modern Wales, it was employed by other organizations. The Scouts have mentioned 'bringing "Cool Cymru" into Scouting!', although they don't explain how they plan to do this.[95] The phrase was used elsewhere, such as part of the 'Your Voice Heard' competition in schools in 1999 to raise awareness of the Assembly, with children being asked to design websites, with prizes being awarded by Alun Michael, the then Welsh Secretary. The report in the *Western Mail* was accompanied by an illustration of three children, with the Welsh flag painted on their faces standing in a terraced street, like those in the Valleys of south Wales. A banner

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[91] No author, '60 Ft Dolls surf the new wave', *Western Mail*, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, 28 May 1998, p. 3.
[92] Piers Martin, 'I could have been the next Tom Jones', *Western Mail*, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, 28 May 1998, p. 5. Mike Greenow, 'Pop music or classical tradition – Cool Cymru is hip', *Western Mail*, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, 28 May 1998, pp. 12-3.
[93] Mike Greenow, 'Pop music or classical tradition – Cool Cymru is hip', *Western Mail*, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, 28 May 1998, pp. 12-3.
[94] Ibid.
[95] http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/wales/new/merc/ accessed 22/04/2006

below the illustration said 'Cool Cymru'.[96] The National Assembly's 'Plan for Wales, 2001' referenced 'the emergence of Cwl Cymru [sic]' as being a signifier of a 'strong identity'.[97]

Along with advertising, both the phrase Cool Cymru, and the idea of a new emerging Wales made its way onto television. In September 1998, BBC 1 showed a film entitled 'Cool Cymru' as part of its 'Scrutiny' series. It followed the efforts of the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) to attract inward investment from overseas into Wales, and their trips to Ireland and Catalonia, in Spain, to see which schemes have been most successful there. The film opened with shots of Wales—of green fields, a choir (the women in 'traditional' costume), and rugby. Over the top of the film was a loop from Catatonia's 'International Velvet', with its infamous chorus of 'Every day, when I wake up/I thank the Lord I'm Welsh'. Edited into this was a brief shot of the Plaid Cymru MP Elfyn Llwyd saying,

> We used to be able to play rugby—not any more! We're a proud race and we've got our own language and culture, and, actually, at the moment we're at the very top in terms of rock culture and youth culture. So what is it to be Welsh? Well, I suppose, to be Welsh is to be cool.[98]

The introduction then cut to a clip of a miner. Clearly the talk of clichés being left in the past did not extend to this particular programme, and for all the talk of a new dawn, much of the past remained visible in this film, and in much else which heralded the idea of change.

These multifarious uses of Welsh pop, as selling point and signifier, artistic reference and aural marker, were used with varying degrees of involvement from the bands themselves. While Manic Street Preachers gave explicit permission for Patrick

[96] No author, 'Plenty to shout about now that the dragon can roar with its own voice', *Western Mail*, 12 May 1999, Education section, p. 1. Illustration by James Davies.
[97] 'Plan For Wales, 2001', p. 19. Accessed as a PDF from: http://www.planforwales.wales.gov.uk/pdf/plan_for_Wales_English.pdf Accessed 6/2/05.
[98] 'Cool Cymru', *Scrutiny*, BBC 2, 13 September 1998.

Jones and the Wales Tourist Board to use their music, Catatonia may have had no say in the use of 'International Velvet' by the Scrutiny programme.[99] While pop songs and performance could clearly flag Wales and be positive, or even proud, the use of pop as a musical metaphor for Cool Cymru more often took place outside their sphere of influence. All they could do is express their scepticism in interviews, as shown by Owen Powell and Mark Roberts of Catatonia earlier in this chapter.[100]

Where bands frequently were involved to a high degree was in radio and television documentaries on themselves. Between the late 1990s and 2000, several radio and television documentary programmes about pop in Wales were broadcast. It is unsurprising that several of these were produced by BBC Wales, but a number were broadcast on national British channels. BBC Wales dedicated two episodes of its arts programme, 'The Slate' to Stereophonics and Manic Street Preachers.[101] In addition, BBC2 Wales showed a series entitled 'A Family Affair', with an episode each on the bands Melys and Ether.[102] Shortly after these came a programme on avant-garde musician John Cale.[103] It was not just the BBC that were getting in on the act: HTV[104] showed an episode of its series 'Artyfax' dedicated to the rise of actors from Wales.[105] Meanwhile, S4C were, as would be expected, focusing on the role that Welsh language music had played, and especially that of the Ankst record label, with its programme 'Ankstmusik'.[106]

[99] Interviews given by the band and referenced in Chapter 3 would strongly suggest that they did not appreciate their music being used in this way. Their record label or publishing company may well have given permission without needing to consult the group.

[100] See page 77. No author, 'Catatonia disillusioned with the Welsh Assembly...Already!', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 5.

[101] Stereophonics – 'The Slate: The Great Escape', BBC 1 Wales, 20 January 1997. Manic Street Preachers, 'The Slate: Libraries Gave Us Power', 12 January 2000.

[102] 'A Family Affair', BBC 2 Wales, 6 August 1998 (Melys) and 13 August 1998 (Ether).

[103] 'John Cale', BBC Wales, Autumn 1998.

[104] At this time, HTV was the regional ITV for Wales.

[105] 'Artfax', HTV, 19 September 1998.

[106] 'Ankstmusik', S4C, 28 December 1998. This programme was named after the Welsh record label Ankst, and focused solely on bands signed to it.

In radio, several programmes were broadcast on the rise of Welsh pop. First came Radio 1's 'Made in Wales', which looked at various bands and their origin, and asked the interesting question of why dance music is rarely described as being located in a specific place. This was especially pertinent given the number of DJs working in Wales.[107] Radio 1 also put on a large gig in Cooper's Field, Cardiff, the following year. The show featured several acts, including Manic Street Preachers. Their set was greeted with huge enthusiasm from the crowd (which numbered several thousand) with chants of 'Wales! Wales!', drowning out singer James Dean Bradfield's attempt to speak.[108] On national British television, Cool Cymru appeared in pop documentaries, albeit without the phrase itself being used. John Peel's 'Sound of the Suburbs' explored music coming from several places around Britain which are not usually associated with producing pop, such as Lanarkshire, Oxford, Isle of Wight and Humberside.[109] In the episode on south Wales, Peel commented that '[i]t's [Wales] become cool, but it went through a very long period of being about as un-cool as it's possible to be.'[110] One theme that ran throughout most of the programmes was economic deprivation, through the loss of heavy industry, and the loss of working class identity. When discussing English nationalism with folk singer Norma Waterson, Peel opined that,

> It [English nationalism] also has fairly sinister overtones in some people because it's kind of acceptable, if you're Welsh, to be proud of being Welsh and want to get involved in Welsh cultural things. And ditto Scottish or Irish. But English, it's seen as almost kind of slightly racist.[111]

The Morrissey-quandary apparently haunts more than just the Indie music press. Within the Welsh media, concerts and documentaries were commissioned on

[107] 'Made in Wales', BBC Radio 1, 11 March 1997.
[108] 'Radio 1 Big Weekend', BBC Radio 1, 12 September 1998.
[109] The cities most often associated with the production of pop, especially in the music press, are Manchester, Liverpool and London.
[110] 'Sound of the Suburbs – South Wales', Channel 4 and S4C, 13 March 1999.
[111] 'Sound of the Suburbs – South Wales', Channel 4 and S4C, 17 April 1999.

bands from Wales. Radio Wales broadcast a concert from Cardiff Bay in 1997, featuring Paul Weller as the headline act. Before the show (broadcast live on Radio Wales), Nicky Wire of Manic Street Preachers, and his brother, the poet Patrick Jones, were interviewed about their work. The interview focused on their background, class, influences and the devolution movement. This was shortly after the Labour victory in 1997 in the General Election, and while the 'Yes' campaign had yet to be launched, its inclusion within the interview indicates that it was gaining momentum. Wire said in the interview that,

> In terms of devolution [...] I think there's two ways we've got to go. We've either got to renounce our Welshness completely and say we're British, and there's no England, there's no Wales, there's no Scotland, there's just Britain. Or we've got to become completely separate. I think the idea of an Assembly which has no real power is just so in-between and impotent I just don't see the point of it. [...] It's a really confusing thing being Welsh. Not only are you from south Wales, you're from north Wales, you're from the United Kingdom, you're from Europe. We're a principality, we're a nation, we're a country. Before we can enter Europe we need to decide what we are ourselves, in terms of being within Britain.[112]

The following year, Radio Wales broadcast an in-depth interview with Nicky Wire around the time of the release of their album *This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours*. The interview again focused on his influences, and once more, devolution and identity were running themes, with Wire saying that,

> Hopefully, we'll never be used as guinea pigs for a Westminster Government again. I think there is hope, I think, you know, there's got to be more confidence in Welsh people. It's the first chance we've had to be more confident and we can't throw it away.[113]

He went on to say that,

> I'm not cynical about the Assembly. I know it's got limited powers, but I actually think it's a really good thing and hopefully something like that [the drowning of the Tryweryn Valley to form a reservoir to service Liverpool] could never happen again.[114]

[112] 'The Big Noise Concert In The Bay', BBC Radio Wales, 11 May 1997.
[113] 'This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours', BBC Radio Wales, 12 September 1998.
[114] Ibid.

It is interesting that it is this incident, usually associated with nationalist groups such as Cymuned, that he used to illustrate his point, rather than the experience of south Wales and the miners' strike of 1984-5, indicating a shift perhaps in Wire's own identity. Wire also pointed to the role which sport and music can play saying that,

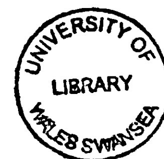
> [...] I think it [sport] can lift a nation. I think music can do it, and I think 'the arts' can do it and I think sport can do it, like I said. [...] I just think it can lift the spirit of the nation, and I think it's really important.[115]

Shortly after the end of 'Cool Cymru', in 2001, Radio Wales produced a major six-part documentary on the history of pop music in Wales, presented by the respected former *NME* journalist John Harris. In the final programme, several contributors cited Cool Cymru as being instrumental in changing the music industry in Wales, and in getting A&R people from major labels to come to Wales. This programme, and the others looking at pop in Wales and ideas of change and cultural fertility, were not commissioned or broadcast in a vacuum, but were reflecting and contributing to a continuing discussion on the place of music in Wales.

2.5 Sport

As the quote above from Nicky Wire noted, sport and Welsh pop became closely associated, with more direct involvement on the part of the bands themselves, again as a sign of a new Wales, one which occasionally tasted victory, especially in rugby.[116] Under Graham Henry in 1998-9, the national Welsh rugby team began winning games again, beating both France and England during the Five Nations championship in 1999. Wales hosted the Rugby World Cup later that year, and on the

[115] Ibid.
[116] Of course, Max Boyce and his leek have long been a fixture at Wales matches, but I would argue that while genres are limiting, Boyce is more at the 'cabaret' end of things, rather that 'pop'.



athletics field, Wales was well represented by the likes of Jamie Baulch, Iwan Thomas and Colin Jackson. The complex relationship between sport, pop and identity was discussed in the last chapter, and these played an important part in the idea of Cool Cymru. In many ways this was inevitable, given that two of the most popular stereotypes of Wales are 'Land Of Song' and 'Land of Rugby'. Rather than breaking down this image and turning to something new, Cool Cymru saw the balancing of new clichés on top of the old ones.

Individual bands already had associations with various sports: Super Furry Animals sponsored Cardiff City in 1999, and Nicky Wire of Manic Street Preachers had long been wearing his Cardiff Devils ice hockey shirt and had also sponsored a player. Once again, new pop music was used to add a sense of national occasion to sporting events. Sometimes this would involve playing suitable songs, such as the Manics' 'Design For Life' at national rugby and football games. More important however was the use of the bands themselves, performing live before games. Previously Max Boyce or the obligatory choir, now supplanted by Catatonia and Stereophonics, entertained crowds. This began to happen at the zenith of this period, in 1999. Stereophonics played at Wembley, Wales' home stadium that year for the Five Nations, before the match against Ireland. Later that year, Cerys Matthews performed at the opening ceremony of the Rugby World Cup, with Shirley Bassey and Bryn Terfyl. These two examples also illustrate quite how much both bands were part of mainstream culture in Wales. Far from being obscure indie bands, they were chosen to represent an idea of national identity by the Wales Rugby Union board.

Similarly, BBC Wales ran a campaign in the run up to Wales' final game of the Five Nations, featuring Kelly Jones from Stereophonics.[117] Jones was shown busking, singing about Wales' recent mixed results in the tournament, the song ending with the lines 'As long as we beat the English/We don't care'. The song went on to be cited as a form of aggressive nationalism later that year after the band's Morfa stadium gig. Another BBC advert the following year featured Kelly Jones in cartoon form, playing with the Wales team. Again, this illustrates how far bands were well known across a broad section of society, chosen because they were instantly recognisable to the majority of the population.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate how pop may be used as both a focal point, and the soundtrack to, the idea of cultural change, examining firstly Cool Britannia, and then Cool Cymru. I showed how pop can be used by various actors, including sporting bodies, media and politicians to provide cultural capital and 'proof' of positive changes. It was used to 'sex up' otherwise dry speeches about national identity, providing useful, memorable sound-bites that suggest the speaker has an affinity with youth culture, and therefore the future. It provided a soundtrack to television programmes, adverts, sporting events, plays and films, being evocative of a sense of identity and place. It further illustrated the juxtaposition between the positive 'new' and the negative 'past' constructs of identity, hinting at a brighter future.

This chapter has focused on how pop was used externally to the bands—how other players referenced pop to demonstrate Cool Cymru. Bands frequently expressed distaste to the label, but were complicit in its creation. The next chapter will examine

[117] Of course, Max Boyce and his leek have long been a fixture at Wales matches, but I would argue that while genres are limiting, Boyce is more at the 'cabaret' end of things, rather that 'pop'.

how bands themselves flagged their national identity in a variety of ways, actively taking part in the idea of Cool Cymru.

3 Creating or reporting? The story of Cool Cymru

This chapter examines, to a greater degree, how pop from Wales was discussed within the media. This discussion does not isolate pop from other aspects of popular culture; there is inevitably much crossover between music, film, theatre and sport, etc. demonstrated in chapter 2, and needs to be understood within this context. The purpose of this chapter is not to raise pop above other aspects ofpopular culture, but pop is often treated as secondary to other cultural products, particularly film, literature and 'serious' music. The national press (mainly the broadsheets, which tend to have more reviews etc. than the tabloids) almost invariably give more space to other forms of popular culture, such as television and cinema, than pop. When pop does get centre stage, it is usually because of celebrity, rather than the music. The column inches given over to Madonna or Victoria Beckham are more likely to be about their marriages or their appearance than their music. Equally television shows on the arts, such as 'Newsnight Review' usually sidelines pop, despite including journalists Paul Morley and John Harris on its panels, both of whom began their careers in the music press. This chapter attempts to redress this imbalance and argues that, in this instance, pop was the central component of a broader cultural idea. It will examine how local, national and music press sources reported the on bands from Wales, the common themes and the differences. While Chapter 2 demonstrated how music was central to the idea of Cool Cymru, this chapter will focus on the reporting of Welsh pop in several sectors of the media, and consider if this period represented any real change from the media in its attitudes towards Wales, Welsh culture, and Welsh pop.

The chapter will explore a number of inter-related themes; the images of Wales presented though articles, how these images were repeated, sometimes clearly

from one piece to the next; the stressing of 'authenticity' within articles' the presentation of a single 'scene', the denial of, and therefore confirmation and perpetuation of this self-same scene. It will begin by exploring the invention of the label Cool Cymru, before moving on to discuss the themes identified above in detail.

Understanding the discourse which is played out within the media is important in understanding how the industry as a whole works. It is through interviews that band characterisations are played out and formed, and press interpretation is often key in the placing of a group, and even creating the place in the guise of scenes. As Shuker argues, the press 'plays a major part in the process of selling music as an economic commodity, while at the same time investing it with cultural significance'.[1] Shuker goes on to state that 'General accounts of the development of pop/rock make considerable use of the music press as a source, while largely ignoring its role in the process of marketing and cultural legitimation.'[2] It is precisely this last point, of cultural legitimation, which is of concern here, and is the major theme of this chapter. The purpose of using the music press as the primary source is not to 'prove' the importance of pop music, but to use discourse about pop in the media to examine how ideas of national identity are discussed and also given credibility.[3]

While the role of the critic and their readers, who act as 'ideological gatekeepers'[4] is a concept which is well recognised, relatively little empirical work has been done of the role of the press in defining exploring exactly how the press, and particularly the wide array of publications known collectively as the music press,

[1] R. Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 83.
[2] Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music*, p. 86
[3] It should also be noted that all of the publications referred to are aimed at consumers, rather than being industry papers.

[4] S. Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll*, (London: Constable, 1983), p. 165.

influence listeners.[5] Brennan has begun to explore the relationship between musicians and the music press, rightly saying that this association (when it is considered), is done so primarily from the journalists' perspective.[6] This is presumably because as writing is the journalists' profession, it is only natural that they are able, and inclined, to write about their experiences as both music fans and critics, and quantifying the influence on possibly many thousands of readers would be incredibly difficult.[7] Sarah Thornton has demonstrated how the media gives birth to 'scenes', and indeed, 'scenes' would not exist without this media which includes the press and music press.[8] In this study, we can see themes identified by the music press being picked up in the general press, and indeed the music press is on occasion used by the press in general to 'prove' the existence of Cool Cymru.

Similarly, while there is an increasing body of works on place, identity and pop, these tend to ignore the role of the press, and particularly the music press, in this process. For example, Connell and Gibson's wide-ranging and thoughtful exploration of (in their words) popular music, identity and place, includes within it discussion of the role of numerous factors (including lyrics, musical sounds, architectural spaces, marketing and tourism) in contributing to associations between these three factors, yet fails to consider the role of the journalist, or more generally, the writer.[9] Other

[5] Two examples of this relatively unexplored area are, J Stratton, 'Between Two Worlds: Art and Commercialism in the Record Industry', *Sociological Review*, (1982: Volume 30, Number 1), pp. 267-285. S. Jones, 'Covering Cobain: Narrative patterns in journalism and rock criticism', *Popular Music and Society* (1995: Volume 19, Number 2), pp. 103-118.
[6] M. Brennan, 'The rough guide to critics: musicians discuss the role of the music press', *Popular Music*, (2006: Volume 25, Number 2.), pp. 221-234 (p. 233).
[7] See, for example, S. Maconie, *Cider With Roadies*, (London: Ebury Press, 2003). A. Collins, *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now: My difficult student 80s* (London: Ebury Press, 2005).
[8] S. Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, (London: Polity Press, 1995)
[9] J. Connell and C. Gibson, *Soundtracks: popular music, identity and place* (London: Routledge, 2003).

academic works considering identity and pop generally follow suit.[10] Writing concerned with a specific place and identity, mention the music press slightly more, though still not frequently; Zuberi's *Sounds English* mentions the *New Musical Express* (*NME*) twice, while Bracewell's *England Is Mine* refers to various journalists who have worked within the music press including Garry Bushell, Julie Burchill and Simon Reynolds, but does not mention the music press particularly.[11] Harris's *The Last Party*, the definitive book on Britpop to date, has rather more references to the music press, listed in the index as 14 for the *Melody Maker* and 62 for *NME*. However as Harris is a journalist and a former hack for *NME* it is unsurprising that he refers to the press more than some other authors. Harris also places the role of the music press, (especially the *NME*) as central in capturing the *zeitgeist* of the Britpop era, particularly in relation to the aftermath of the Labour election victory of 1997.[12] While this could reflect a personal bias on Harris's part towards his old publication, the disillusionment reported by the *NME* with the new government was itself reported on elsewhere.[13]

3.1 The Themes

Through close reading of the source material, a number of themes become apparent. These move through the different press sources, often visible first in the music press, then moving into the mainstream press, and can broadly be grouped into three trends. The first is the repetition of stereotypes in the imagining of Wales, with Wales as both an unlikely source of musical talent, and simultaneously an exotic

[10] See T. Mitchell, *Popular Music And Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1996),

[11] M. Bracewell, *England Is Mine,* pp. 95 (Bushell), 214 (Birchall), 228 & 234 (Reynolds).

[12] Harris, *The Last Party,* p. 358.

[13] See: Will Woodward, 'Uncool Britannia; Pop stars ditch Labour after Blair honeymoon; rock newpaper *NME* thinks it is uncool to support Labour', *Mirror*, 12 March 1998, p. 9. Martin Jacques, 'Uncool Brittannia: Pop blows out Blair', *Observer*, 15 March 1998, p. 25. Cayte Williams, 'Talkin' about a revolution', *Independent*, 4 October 1998, Features section, p. 2.

other. The second is the idea of a 'new' Wales, of a cultural renaissance in which pop played a pivotal role. Closely linked to this, particularly from the press in Wales, is the repeated identifying of these bands as being an authentic representation of contemporary Wales.[14] The third is the self-conscious identification, and also the dismissal of, a scene in Wales. This last is particularly complex and presents many challenges in understanding as those who are keen to present this scene as fabricated by external forces may also have in some way benefited from the attention which accompanied the hyperbole.

The identification of all of the groups from Wales who came to prominence in the 1990s, as being identifiably Welsh in some way was played out largely through the press in the first instance, especially the music press. Their Welsh origin almost invariably formed a major part of the introduction to an article, with comments by bands in the main body of the interview adding to this, and such labelling provoked a dialogue about identity between bands, the press and their fans.[15] The music press, which prided itself on finding out about new music first, who 'broke' bands constantly labelled these bands as Welsh, whether they performed in English or Welsh. Indeed, such was the concern of Super Furry Animals about this labelling that their debut EP release was entitled 'Llanfairpwyllgwyngyllgogerychwyn-drobwllantysiliogogogochynygofod (In Space)'.[16] Speaking about this a few years later, singer Gruff Rhys said, 'In the beginning we put out "Llanfair..." EP because in the past, if Welsh language bands like Y Cyrff got reviews it'd go "catchy title guys".

[14] Authenticity is also a continual theme within the music press. One especially infamous incident followed a discussion between *NME* journalist Steve Lamacq, and Richey James of Manic Street Preachers, during which Lamacq suggested that the Manics were a pale imitation of punk rebellion, resulting in the latter carving '4 REAL' into his arm. '4 REAL' became a phrase used within the music press, and fans in their letters subsequently. For further details of this, see: S. Price, *Everything: A book about the Manic Street Preachers,* (London: Virgin, 1999), pp. 46-56.
[15] These appear to be both prompted by the interviewing journalist, and also unprompted.
[16] Super Furry Animals, 'Llanfairpwyllgwyngyllgogerychwyndrobwllantysiliogogogochynygofod (In Space)', (1995, Ankst 057)

So we decided "Here's your Welsh cliché. Have it. Eat it. And leave us alone"'.[17] Such comments demonstrate how acutely aware Welsh bands were of the stereotypes within the media, and how they dealt with them from the outset of their careers.

This chapter explores how this labelling happened and will demonstrate that frequently, the labelling of a group as 'Welsh' came not from any musical style, but from a band's geographical origin, with an extra layer of exoticism added if they sang in Welsh. While this may be something of a 'common sense' judgement, geographical origin is after all one of the most commonly used definitions of identity, this brought with it its own cultural baggage, grouping bands together within the press despite their different musical styles and different fan groups. This brought about a sense of frustration for some, who felt they were being 'lumped' together with groups with whom they had little stylistically in common. Along with this corralling of bands from Wales together came the use of pop as a metaphor for the idea of a 'new Wales', utilised by some politicians, advertisers and journalists and other bodies, including the Scouts and the Wales Tourist Board.[18] This chapter includes interviews carried out with journalists from various publications, and demonstrate that editorial lines were taken with regard to Welsh bands at this time. Chapter 5 will move on examine how bands themselves flagged their identity, particularly the three biggest-selling groups, Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia and Stereophonics. It will look at their music, merchandise and interviews in an attempt to understand fully the complex discourse that they expressed: their attitude towards Cool Cymru was often ambivalent, but the same cannot be said for their feelings towards their cultural identity.

[17] Simon Price, 'The Rhys Process', *Melody Maker*, 6 December 1997, pp. 18-19.
[18] Scoutbase Cyrmu has expressed a desire to 'bring Cool Cymru into scouting!'- http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/wales/new/merc/-accessed 15/02/2006

3.2 The Forming of a 'Scene' and of 'Cool Cymru'

This chapter will now examine how the idea of a scene formed, where the material for it came, and who the key players were. The 'why' will be explored in more detail later in this chapter and demonstrates how the 'good news' angle was a major factor in the Cool Cymru stories. After the invention of Cool Britannia had demonstrated quite how much mileage could be got from the self-conscious re-presenting of a country, then it can not be surprising that it was used as a starter, if not a model, elsewhere.

Some explanation of the term 'scene' is necessary. Many factors contribute towards the formation and identification of a scene, and once identified it is likely to be contested as invention or exaggeration. One of the main factors in its construction is several players, bands or solo artists, (usually) coming from a specific geographical area. Individuals within bands may well know to each other, and different bands may play to similar audiences at the same venues. They may share resources, including rehearsal space, and use the same promoters. This 'musical community' is a common experience, but conscious identification of a scene usually takes place within the media, and specifically the music press, providing the journalist with label to use as a marker. Similarity in musical style can be expected of any scene, and indeed this is often the case, but it is not a given; for example, the 'Blonde' scene was based on nothing more than several groups all having blonde, female lead singers.[19]

The essential point about the construction of scenes is they are often understood as artificial—either as the creation of journalists or as lazy shorthand— a way of artificially linking several bands together, therefore promoting the image of the journalist as 'discoverer' —a brave pioneer, scouring the country for new talent.

[19] http://www.cherryred.co.uk/cherryred/artists/darlingbuds.htm

Stuart Maconie, a journalist with the *NME* has written about how much this was a part of music journalism, and how inventing scenes was a game played by him and his colleagues.[20]

As with much relating to pop, 'scenes' are mercurial, being continually identified and denied by different players, their identification in the wider media being proof that the scene is now passé. For the purpose of this thesis, 'scene' is used to name the grouping of the bands from Wales, which was to constitute a central theme within the imagining and discourse of Cool Cymru. The response of the bands in this study towards the idea of a scene is generally negative and unusually, one of the fiercest opponents of this idea of a movement or scene was the Welsh journalist, Simon Price, a regular writer for the *Melody Maker.*

In order for these stories to be written in the mainstream press (and not remain relegated to the specialist music press), these bands must be broadly in mainstream consciousness. All of the groups examined in this study had top ten hits in the singles and albums charts, and all of them had signed to major labels, or subsidiaries thereof.

In pieces on Welsh bands in the Welsh press, the notion of authenticity was very important. Connell and Gibson offer an interesting definition of the role of authenticity in relation to 'traditional' musics, but this could, I would argue, apply to ideas of 'regional' sounds (Merseybeat and the like), and of how bands from Wales were portrayed;

> Authenticity remains an intangible concept. Essentialist perspectives construct authenticity in relation to concepts such as 'spontaneity' (live), 'grassroots' and 'of the people', in opposition to the antithesis: 'manipulation', 'standardisation', 'mass' and 'commercial', [...] Authenticity in its strictest sense applied to museum objects—a process where historical artefacts were verified: scientifically 'proven' to have

[20] Stuart Maconie, *Cider With Roadies*, (London; Ebury Press, 2003), pp. 258-59.

> originated from particular places and be genuinely what they claimed to be. However, in terms of more fluid and ephemeral aspects of culture, such as music, it is impossible to measure authenticity against any given scientific criteria. Discussions of musical authenticity imply a different use of the term, constituting interpretations of the validity of music from particular contexts and in certain modes of consumption. What is 'authentic' is socially constructed in various ways.[21]

The 'imaginary identification' between the artist and consumer, and the related 'ideologies of authenticity' are fundamental in enabling understanding of how people consume pop. A performer is understood as reflecting a very real, personal experience of the audience, and especially the audience that comes from their place of origin, hence Bob Marley is understood as representing the lived experience of poor black Jamaicans, and not just performing songs, or Bruce Springsteen's representation of blue-collar male workers in the US. And even those who have a highly-produced sounds still strive to present themselves as representative of a particular reality, which is why Jennifer Lopez felt the need to remind us that despite her millions of dollars and showbiz-lifestyle, she's still 'Jenny from the block'.

The presentation of bands from Wales as constituting a scene did not happen automatically. Musically, some similarities between the bands are clear; all comprise of guitar, drums and bass, with other instrumentation (including strings and horns) added to this basic structure. For the majority of the time, their songs follow a classic rock and pop format of 'verse-chorus-verse-chorus' with a bridge included in the second half of the song. All of the bands have clearly been heavily influence by rock and pop from the US and Britain since the post-war years, with elements of punk, pop and rock consciously used. Stereophonics, Catatonia and Manic Street Preachers in particular produced songs with a more 'American' feel while Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, and Super Furry Animals have more pronounced folk and psychedelic influences.

[21] Connell and Gobson, *Sound Tracks*, pp, 28-29.

Despite these similarities, the bands each have distinctive, individual sounds, which come especially from their vocalists. While it is difficult to identify anything specifically Welsh about their music, these bands have vocalists who not only *perform*, but can also *sing*; tonally they have a very wide range, and can sing unaccompanied or with an acoustic backing, demonstrating this frequently when playing live. This may appear to be a weak point, but it is important. British and American musical history is littered with iconic performers who are not naturally gifted as singers, from Bob Dylan, to John Lydon, Kurt Cobain to Liam Gallagher. That all of the bands from Wales discussed in this thesis could sing and placed an importance in song arrangements on the vocals being audible (and the lyrics printed on all album sleeves) demonstrates something unusual. This particular similarity did not feature in any of the articles collected during the course of my research, though Nicky Wire of Manic Street Preachers had noted it.[22]

To return to the grouping of these bands together in the press, it was their geographical origin which was repeatedly identified as being a uniting factor. When the Manic Street Preachers began receiving attention in the music press in the early 1990s, there were no other Welsh bands of significance around. The acts that they were most frequently compared with included Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey and The Alarm—they were seen as a break with the first two, and carrying on in the same style as the latter. Two events happened to change this; the first was the emergence of more bands from Wales, and the second was the identification of Newport (Gwent) as being the 'New Seattle'.

[22] Nicky Wire, interviewed on the *Manic Millennium* DVD notes that 'the difference between most Welsh bands and everyone else is that every one of them can sing'.

As mentioned earlier, this label of the 'New Seattle' had been coined after an article by the American rock critic Neil Strauss in 1996,[23] and receiver further attention in the press after Paul Flynn, MP for Newport West, proposed an Early Day Motion (EDM), which stated that;

> This House applauds the prophetic article in the *New York Times* that hailed Newport, Gwent, as the home of an exceptionally vibrant musical life which is likely to become the new Seattle through a growing recognition of the top quality of Newport groups including 60ft Dolls, Flyscreen, Dererro, Novocaine, Rollerco, Give Me Memphis, 2$ Hooker, Armstrong, Membo Jet, Disco, Five Darrens, Jester, Ninja, Swerve and Choke Teens.[24]

As with many things in the music industry, Strauss had a link with Newport that perhaps informed his discovery of these groups.[25] Nevertheless, this piece and Paul Flynn's EDM were the catalyst for several articles examining both Newport, and music which was coming from there, and a few which used this phrase as a starting point to look more widely a culture in Wales, as demonstrated by the number of (often substantial) pieces written as a result.[26]

Within interviews, bands were frequently asked about where they are from, and to a lesser extent, their politics. Bands did not have to talk consciously about the formation of a scene, nor endorse it to become part of it. In interviews, Super Furry Animals expressed disdain when the subject of a Welsh scene was brought up.

[23] Neil Strauss, 'Critic's Choice/Pop CD's; Of Reggae And Rock From Wales', *New York Times*, 4 June 1996, section C, p. 13.

[24] Paul Flynn MP, 'Newport's Musical Life', an Early Day Motion proposed 15 October 1996 (although the online search engine also gives the date of 28 October 1996). For further details see http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=11823&SESSION=699

[25] In an interview carried out with Huw (Pooh) Williams, he mentioned that Neil Strauss had in fact stayed with him and his wife in Newport. Huw was then manager of the 60 Ft Dolls, and was assisted in putting out their first single with his friend Iestyn George, deputy editor of *NME*.

[26] Caroline Sullivan, 'Into the valley of the 60 Ft Dolls', *Guardian*, 4 October 1996, Features section, p. 14. Martin Wroe, 'Rock fans swap grunge for Welsh grime', *Observer*, 24 November 1996, p. 26.Caroline Bennett, 'The budget: Chummy Ken on another planet', *Guardian*, 28 November 1996, City Page, p. 13. Emma Cook, 'Cooler than London…; Newport the new Seattle?', *Independent*, 1 December 1996, p. 3. Brian Logan, 'Newport was the new Seattle. So is Splott the new Hollywood?', *Guardian*, 15 February 1997, Features page, p. 6. David Atkinson, 'Swansea: Everything you need to know', *Independent*, 6 April 1997, p. 3. Byron Rogers, 'Move over Seattle, here comes Newport', *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 May 1997, 'Sunday Telegraph Magazine', pp. 28-34.

However, there was also a conscious effort, particularly on the part of Gruff Rhys who acted as the main spokesman for the group, to explain the politics and cultural factors surrounding their use of the Welsh language. This inevitably made their Welsh origin a major theme in articles, but in a markedly different way to that of Manics' interviews. When asked why the songs on an album were sung in English, he replied that,

> We have it written into our contract that we have the option to do Welsh songs. One of our aims is to get a Welsh-language single into the charts. It would be a hell of a laugh. Welsh is our first language, but I think English is a really nice language as well. Sixty percent of the world speaks more than one language. Having a country where people speak only one language does not exist, it's bollocks. No island can have one language, one culture. Our music reflects that.[27]

And one of the more cynical hacks at *NME* identified the Welsh language as being a way of getting noticed, a marketing ploy. Speaking about Catatonia, he claimed that 'They've cut loose from the expected path from Wales to successville (you will play up to your minority status; you will say nothing consequential; you will wibble inordinately for you are *weird*) and gone POP!!'[28]

Later interviews continued, and expanded upon SFA's use of Welsh, and touched on the debate within the Welsh-language community of their use of English;

> Misconception one: That they're bonkers Welsh hippies who've done too many magic mushrooms. 'Well that is bollocks' says Gruff. 'But it doesn't worry us if we're seen as a novelty Welsh band now, cos we know we've got the songs to get away from that. [...]
>
> Misconception three: That by singing in (spit!) English, they are single-handedly destroying the Welsh language. 'God, there was a whole current affairs programme on S4C about us last week', says Dafydd. 'Loads of Welsh language intellectuals call us Thatcher's children and saying we were

[27] Angela Lewis, 'The sound and the furry', *NME*, 6 January 1996, pp. 15 & 45.
[28] Mark Beaumont, 'Catatonia at the Splash Club, King's Cross, London', *NME*, 13 January 1996, p. 29.

> a disgrace to the Welsh language. When we've done more for it with one single that they have in their entire careers.'[29]

But the Super Furries presented a complex relationship which they held with ideas of national identity, and expressed this clearly within interviews from the beginning of their career onwards. One began with the writer explaining that;

> They don't even want to explain how they temper their fierce pride in their Welsh heritage and language with an abhorrence of national borders, or detail any of their run-ins with the Welsh language zealots who patrol the corridors of media land. They suspect you've heard it all before.[30]

But identity continued to be an issue which was discussed in interviews with the group. Gruff Rhys said shortly after the above interview that 'We can do things to reassess our identity as Welsh people: as far away from Max Boyce as possible.'[31] In the same interview, fellow band member Guto Pryce, said that 'Wales is such a straight society. There are all these people telling you that being Welsh means doing this, and this, and going to the Eisteddfod; one of those things is not being an international dope smuggler [reference to Howard Marks]'.[32]

Identity was a regular theme in Catatonia interviews too. This article opened in the similar way to the early Manics' pieces, 'Forget the Alarm, Welsh bands are cool. And feisty Cardiff rockers Catatonia are no exception'.[33] It continued with band members talking about the role of the Welsh language, a development that would have been highly improbable in earlier times, though the old clichés were still present, this time with the reference to non-conformism.

> Ah yes, the Welsh rockers are their abrasive, non-conformist ways. Notably, there's the Manics and the 60 Ft Dolls who wear their alienation like crowns.

[29] Mark Sutherland, 'Mammal weer all crazee now', *NME*, 9 March 1996, pp. 16-17.
[30] Ted Kessler, 'Logical Mystery Tour', *NME*, 18 May 1996, pp. 12-13.
[31] John Robinson, 'Howard's Wa-hey!', *NME*, 6 July 1997, pp. 12-13.
[32] John Robinson, 'Howard's Wa-hey!', *NME*, 6 July 1997, pp. 12-13.
[33] Stuart Bailie, 'Calmer Coma', *NME*, 28 September 1996, pp. 25-26.

> Then there's Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and Super Furry Animals with their otherworldly sounds and a recourse to sing in the native language. Even in Wales' coolest ever year for music, these misfits and outsiders have succeeded without acclimatising—keeping separate to the Britpop part.[...] We're like real ale' figures Owen [...] 'It's been a shock to me. I always thought people in Wales were always the same a people in England and Scotland. It's only when you get out of Wales you realise we're not the same at all.' 'It's hard to fit in anywhere,' Mark says, 'unless you're reigned to staying in you own little ghetto. People in Cardiff have been knifed for speaking Welsh. The only ones who speak it there, their mams work in the media, or something. It's like a false scene. But now things are changing. You have little kids from the docks speaking Welsh now. Owen tells us how Guto from the Super Furries was recently stopped in town by a 12-year-old and asked for his autograph—in Welsh. It symbolised everything thrilling about the current climate; the native rock culture is now sexy and vibrant, and emphatically not some straight copy of the English scene. Plus there's the audience out there, who understand all the references and love what they heard. You wonder how much this is due to the image-trashing style of the Manic Street preachers, who made the most out of their dissenter traditions and who demonstrated that any dismissive view of this nation as cultural inferiors was utterly inappropriate. Given that Catatonia are about to tour with the Manics—culminating with an almighty homecoming at Cardiff International Arena on December 12—how much so the younger bands owe to the old generation terrorists? 'The Manics were never apologetic,' Mark remembers. 'they were always in your face. Maybe they showed that you could come from Wales and be really confident about what you're doing.' 'When we started out as a band,' Cerys says, typically changing the debate, 'coming from Wales was never anything to do with what we were about. We just thought, we'll write good songs and that's it. There's no way of failure, even if you were from Alaska.[34]

Within the same publication, there was hostility from another journalist at the suggestion of a Welsh scene, saying 'Sir Anthony Hopkins' wrinkly bollocks to the whole patronising New Welsh Wave tag'.[35]

When asked about the comparisons made between Super Furries, and other Welsh bands, the journalist reported that 'the band loathe this comparison with a passion, incidentally, seeing it as a typically patronising English way to lump all Welsh bands together.[36] The band expressed a strong dislike of flag-waving—an inherent part of Britpop (to which this following quote came from a discussion of),

[34] Stuart Bailie, 'Calmer Coma', *NME*, 28 September 1996, pp. 25-26.
[35] Stephen Dalton, 'Review – Catatonia, Way Beyond Blue', 28 September 1996, p. 54.
[36] Everett True, 'Hell have no furry', *Melody Maker*, 9 March 1996, pp. 12-13.

but also used by the Manics and their fans following their return in 1996. Gruff Rhys claimed that 'We hate flags man. We don't go around with f***ing Red Dragons tattooed to our arses'.[37]

While another reviewer, writing about singles releases from several bands from south Wales, including Stereophonics, as being 'More fuel for the "South Wales [sic] is the new Manchester/Seattle/Camden bandwagon'.[38] This same journalist had been openly sceptical on the idea of a scene previously. Writing about the Super Furry Animals, Price complained,

> How many pieces have you read this year which began, 'They drink a lot! They speak a funny language with no vowels in it! And they're from...Wales!!!' And how forlorn does it all look when we've rammed those exclamation marks back up yer *Saesneg* [sic] arses?
>
> Don't patronise us. Yes, Wales has discovered indie (just when this Welshman is heartily sick of it, but never mind [sic]). Yes, until recently, Cardiff/Newport was rhythm'n'ooze/Motley-metal hell. But as for the tentative whispers proposing Glamorgan as the new Manchester/Seattle/Camden... let's not get carried away. Here's what's really happening. Perennially isolated from pop's north-south Divide (Wales is neither north nor south, but... the *side* [emphasis in original], Welsh bands have been allowed the freedom to mutate unchecked into invigoratingly unfamiliar shapes, like hybrid flowers growing in a sewer.
>
> The Manics may have opened a few English ears, but it's been the patient groundwork of Ankst Records, for whom almost all the new wave have recorded, that has allowed anything resembling a scene to develop.[39]

By the time of the annual 'Review of the year', in December 1996 in the *Melody Maker*, entitled, 'Enter The Dragon', Price was still denying the existence of a scene. While the piece quoted below had no named author, much of it repeated the review above, and argued that,

> [...] the cliché [referring to the 'new Seattle' label) does contain a little truth. But any new Welsh scene is purely mythical. [...] But there has,

[37] Ben Stubbs, 'Super Furry Animals – It's a kind of magic', *Melody Maker*, 11 May 1996, pp. 19-21
[38] Simon Price, 'Singles', *Melody Maker*, 16 November 1996, p. 46.
[39] Simon Price, 'Killer Wales!', *Melody Maker*, 15 June 1996, p. 35.

> undeniably, been some sort of renaissance. There are two basic reasons for this.
>
> The first, and highest-profile, can be expressed in three words, Manic Street Preachers. For years, the Manics bore the brunt of the usual sheep-shagger jokes, but, as they gradually accrued respect, and success, a new confidence began to spread throughout the country. *If they can do it....* In the last year or so, the Manics have become more conscious of their Welshness, both in their lyrics ('A Design For Life'), and in their choice of support bands (A Welsh-only policy gave exposure to Catatonia, SFA, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and Stereophonics).
>
> The other factor, mostly unsung amongst the hype, was the network of Welsh language indie bands which already existed through Ankst Records, and to a lesser degree, through Crai. These labels allowed bands the freedom to grow in isolation from the London-centric trends, and mutate unchecked into invigorating, unfamiliar shapes [...].[40]

But this account, which was repeated by various people, ignores several other factors. Firstly, the bands from Newport had little to do with the Manics, and the scene which was described within the broadsheets earlier in this chapter certainly did not really mention Welsh language bands. Secondly, there were personal links, particularly between Super Furry Animals, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and Catatonia, along with a shared producer (Gorwel Owen) which made the image of a scene stronger.[41] Thirdly, despite what Price argues, the Manics taking Welsh bands on tour with them leant well to the idea that this was a scene, which grew stronger the following year. Come May of 1997, the *Melody Maker* had on its front cover 'Never say Dai! Why it's *finally* cool to be Welsh' which informed readers that 'Wales is now the coolest place in Britain.'[42] While such pieces could be dismissed as fluff, they firstly fuel the idea of a scene (which other writers in the same paper were happy to dismiss), and secondly this became a constant theme within interviews with bands. And while the media may have fuelled the hype, bands were (perhaps unwittingly)

[40] No author, but likely to be Simon Price, 'Enter the dragon', *Melody Maker*, 21-28 December 1996, p. 43.

[41] Dafydd Ieuan and Guto Price of Super Furry Animals both played with early incarnations of Catatonia.

[42] Dave Simpson, 'Evans Sent', *Melody Maker*, 10 May 1997, pp. 20-21.

contributing to it. For example, a review of Stereophonics at Cardiff Castle mentioned seeing members of Catatonia, 60 Ft Dolls, Manic Street Preachers and Super Furry Animals at the gig.[43] Another event in Cardiff carried a picture of Cerys Matthews wearing a Manic Street Preachers t-shirt with 'Valley Girl' emblazoned across the chest, accompanied by two members of the Stereophonics, with the caption 'To Dai for'.[44] On the cover of the *Melody Maker* at this time, Kelly Jones was pictured outside Cardiff Castle wearing a Super Furry Animals, 'Fuzzy Logic' shirt.[45] While the music press, and other sections of the media, might stand accused of making a business from hype (and reinforcing that idea by reporting on bands together[46], they were, to an extent, aided by Welsh bands. This linking of Welsh bands together was commented on by another writer from the *Melody Maker* who commented that 'When an album from a Welsh four-piece lands in your lap, you must abide by the Murray The Hump commandment: Thou must not reference albums by Welsh bands only in terms of other Welsh bands'.[47]

In the Welsh press, the idea of a more general Welsh scene was discussed from the spring of 1996, and continued to be reported on (as a new story) for much of the rest of the century. In the *Western Mail*, a 'crib sheet' was published, giving a beginners' guide to Welsh pop published in April of 1996. It made reference to older bands from previous eras—Man, Budgie and Amen Corner—along with the usual stalwarts of Tom and Shirley. It attributed the resurrection of Tom and Shirley to post-modern irony, claiming that they were 'kitsch' and that 'You need to have studied the New Musical Express for the past 20 years to understand it properly, but

[43] Stuart Bailie, 'Jones Addiction', *NME*, 20 June 1998, p. 35.
[44] Paul Mathur, 'Cardiff you tolerate this...', *Melody Maker*, 19 September 1998, pp. 24-25.
[45] Cover photo, *Melody Maker*, 20 June 1998, p. 1.
[46] No author, 'Welsh round up', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 5.
[47] Stuart Dade, 'Review: Melys – Kamikaze', *Melody Maker*, 17 and 25 May 2000, p. 60.

basically it's this: So shiny, happy and uncool, it eventually became cool again'.[48] The piece went on to name Catatonia, Super Furry Animals, 60 ft Dolls, Gorky's Zygotic Mwynci [sic], Dubwar and 'even the Manic Street Preachers'.[49] It concluded by trying to name this change, 'Any problems? The only one is the lack of a genre-defining tag. We've had Merseybeat, Madchester and Britpop. But, somehow, Cymrock doesn't quite work. Suggestions needed, please'.[50]

As the formation of a Welsh scene had been identified by the music press bands were frequently asked how they felt about this. These varied, depending on the band, and depending on the interview. Super Furries, a group that actively discouraged flag-waving at their gigs, consistently tried to distance themselves from the idea and promotion of a Welsh scene, and tended to talk down the whole idea, despite journalists insisting on naming them as a contributing factor:

> Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia, Stereophonics, 60 ft [sic] Dolls, Super Furry Animals… Yep, they're all Welsh—but try pigeon-holing them as such, talk about a Welsh scene, and you'll get a look as black as coal shot in your direction. 'It's not so much that Wales is a country and not really a city but it's so diverse', says Guto Pryce, bassist with the new age prog-rockers Super Furry Animals. 'The Stereophonics are from a totally different background to Gruff (Rhys, vocals/guitar), who is from a slate mining place in North Wales [sic]. And there's more Welsh spoken in the North.[51]

An interview with Cerys Matthews described her as being 'unimpressed' with the labelling,

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[48] No author, 'Chorus of approval for Welsh pop', *Western Mail*, 30 April 1996, 'Arena' magazine, p. 3.

[49] This last comment is significant in that in much of the rhetoric surrounding Cool Cymru, the revisionist history was that the Manics had in some way paved the way in establishing Welsh pop. An alternative position would be that even without their presence, there would have been a change at some point simply because of the number of good bands coming from different regions of Wales, many of whom came from within the Welsh language scene, rather than being necessarily influenced by the Manics.

[50] No author, 'Chorus of approval for Welsh pop', *Western Mail*, 30 April 1996, 'Arena' magazine, p. 3.

[51] Simon Wilson, 'Diversity from the Valleys', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 May 1998, p. 23.

> Newport is the town that first brought the Welsh music scene to the general public's attention, after Neil Strauss, the rock critic for the *New York Times* labelled it 'the new Seattle'. Matthews is unimpressed. 'I thought (the Seattle label) was quite funny,' she laughs. 'I didn't know what he was trying to say. Were we all on smack or something! I'd never been to Seattle in my life!' Matthews is actually quite sick of the whole Welsh cool thing. After all, it's hardly new, it's just been discovered and marketed. U2's The Edge (a certain Mr Davis from Aberystwyth) is about as Irish as a leek and is a cousin of Aled, Catatonia's drummer. But now he can be out and proud too. 'Now everybody's got a Welsh dog, do you find?' mocks Cerys, 'or a Welsh grandmother!'[52]

Gorky's Zygotic Mynci were equally uninterested in the label,

> 'I find it patronising to describe it as a Welsh invasion,' says Megan Childs, the 27-year-old violinist and sister of the singer and keyboard player Euros Childs, 23. 'We're part of Britain. No one would say "here's a new band from England" '. ' "New Welsh Invasion" is a load of b****cks [sic],' agrees her brother. 'It's still the same as it was ten years ago. There have always been great Welsh songwriters.'[53]

Complaints that journalists have their own agenda are hardly uncommon within discourse in the music press and songs.[54] However, these quotations from bands are not one-offs—they were often repeated in interviews, as is clear from the number of times you can find a similar remark made by an individual, and will be illustrated further in the section of this chapter examining the music press. From its initial identification, the idea of a scene first in Newport and then more broadly in Wales was questioned, and yet the actual reporting of it served as confirmation of its existence. This is admittedly something of a paradox, but by identifying the scene and contributing to the discourse, it becomes a story – the chattering alone promotes

[52] Cayte Williams, 'Just call me duchess', *Independent on Sunday*, 17 May 1998, Features section, p. 2.
[53] Charlie Porter, 'Mynci business', *The Times*, 15 August 1998, Features section, no page number given.
[54] Specifically about giving bad reviews, see Steven Wells, 'Music Hack Attacks', *Guardian*, 8 January 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2008/jan/08/musicalhackattacks For a more general attack on the music press, see Samuel Strange, 'Hack Attack: Jack White rants about journalists', *Drowned In Sound*, 3 August 2007, http://drownedinsound.com/news/2269955 Musical examples of spats between journalists and bands include Adam Ant's 'Press Darlings' (CBS 8877 1980), Nick Cave's 'Scum' (STUMM 28 1986), Guns n' Roses 'Get In The Ring' (Geffen 24420 2002) and Stereophonics' 'Mr Writer' (V2 B000056KPP 2001). Demonstrating just how recognisable this contentious relationship is, see Half Man Half Biscuit's 'Bad Review' (Probe 45 1997).

its existence, although this continues to be contested. For example, one story about Newport asked, if there was 'an actual "Welsh scene" or do a lot of new bands just happen to come from there?'[55]

Super Furry Animals were also separated from the Cool Cymru bands, characterised here as being less commercial than some of their contemporaries, with the band's 'Welshness' being discussed, the inference here being that the others mentioned are using this to sell records.

> [...] as Catatonia's popularity swells by the second, and the Manic Street Preachers cruise at stadium status, they [Super Furry Animals] could easily have hitched a ride on the Taffrock bandwagon, but that just isn't the way SFA [sic] do things. [...] Their Welshness isn't used as a marketing ploy, and nothing would stop them recording in their own language.[56]

While there was some contact between groups, what cemented the idea of a scene was the continual naming of bands in relation to each other. Becoming a self-fulfilling statement, it formed the crux of the construction of a 'scene' and therefore, Cool Cymru. These comments relating bands to one another were often quite casual, as were those that mentioned this scene. In short, the main subject of these articles was not to create a scene, but the continual description of it did exactly that.

> Super Furry Animals [...] along with Catatonia, the 60 Ft Dolls and the Manic Street Preachers, were the impetus behind the explosion in the Welsh music scene.[57]
>
> The Stereophonics are Wales's brightest new hope for chart success in 1997, hotly tipped by major music papers and magazines to carry the Welsh musical torch into 1997 just as the Manic Street Preachers, Super Furry Animals and 60 Ft Dolls did in 1996.[58]

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[55] Caroline Sullivan, 'Review: Bewitchment and weirdness in world of Welshpop', *Independent*, 11 November 1996, p. 2. See also, Emma Forrest, 'Leek Jokes: just say no', *Independent*, 6 December 1996, Pop section, p. 8.

[56] Emma Yates, 'Today it's Corwen. Tomorrow the world', *Daily Post*, 18 June 1999, p. 27.

[57] Hannah Cleaver, 'Rock star admits to cocaine in car then keeps silent', *Western Mail*, 14 February 1997, p. 1.

[58] Christopher Rees, 'Stereotyped for sound success', *Western Mail*, 24 January 1997, p. 13.

1997 saw bands also beginning to actively distance themselves from the idea that they were part of this scene. Stereophonics interviewed early on in their careers, before releasing their debut album *Word Gets Around*, said that, 'We were brought up in a different place, educated differently and have a different story to tell'.[59] Grant Nicholls of Feeder said that 'Even though we've not been a part of the so-called Welsh scene, playing in Wales is really important to us'.[60] Such references to a 'so-called' scene reinforce the idea of such a connection, even when the speaker openly questions the construction. Comparisons with 'Celtic' nations continued, again with repeating the idea that Wales had played 'second fiddle to other Celtic nations' in the past and that this was changing, with pop at the forefront'.[61]

This idea of association between bands did not occur *only* in the stories of the *Western Mail* and other publications; large, high profile events reinforced such ideas. The 'Big Noise' festival in Cardiff Bay in March 1997 featured 'Welsh favourites' 60 Ft Dolls, Stereophonics, Dub War, Gene and Catatonia, with the report in the paper telling the reader of each bands specific place of origin in (south) Wales.[62] And while Manic Street Preachers did not release any albums in 1997, they appeared within the *Western Mail*, again in relation to their missing guitarist, Richey James. While this just retold a biography that would be familiar to most music fans, it gave band-member Nicky Wire an opportunity to comment on the future of Wales, and about ideas of identity.[63]

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[59] Christopher Rees, 'Stereotyped for sound success', *Western Mail*, 24 January 1997, p. 13.
[60] Christopher Rees, 'Feeder frenzy grows on "High"', *Western Mail*, 10 October 1997.
[61] Pauline McLean, 'Irish calling tune in year of the poor relation', *Western Mail*, 15 March 1997, p. 12.
[62] Pauline McLean, 'A little music in the bay', *Western Mail*, 21 March 1997, p. 11.
[63] Catherine Norton, '...and memories of the one who was left behind', *Western Mail*, 10 May 1997, 'Arena' magazine, p. 3.

In a supplement entitled 'The sound of Wales', bands were once again linked together in the idea of a scene, this time given the clunking name of 'Taffrock'.[64] The article began with an attack on writers outside Wales, and particularly the London-based media for coining such a term, although I have found no evidence that any other publication used this label.[65]

> Taffrock was the uninspiring soubriquet given to the waves of Welsh bands that last year swept over and drowned many of those pop critics who said nothing cool could ever come out of Wales. Six months into 1997 and many of those music journalists are still looking sodden and cocking on the volumes of salt that effectively clogged up their poisoned pens. How many times did we have to suffer low blows and cheap cracks about Tom Jones and Shirley Bassey, or had to suffer in silence when Wales' answer to U2, The Alarm, failed to break into the bigtime? [sic] Too often. Last year it was oh so sweet, enjoying the sight of music journalists eating humble pie as first the Manic Street Preachers, then Super Furry Animals, followed hotly by Catatonia and 60 Ft Dolls stormed the once impregnable walls of *NME* and *Melody Maker.*[66]

While there was some truth in Waters' accusations about the treatment of Welsh bands, the piece is exaggerated. The examination of the music press later in this chapter demonstrates that, while there was some mocking of Welsh bands, particularly Manic Street Preachers, it was not as simplistic as Waters would have his readers believe. There was undoubtedly mocking made of Welsh bands, and the *idea* of Welsh bands. However, some journalists had been supportive of Manic Street Preachers, and the others groups, from the beginning. When it comes to accusations of mocking the past, the regular mentioning of Tom Jones and Shirley Bassey came, as demonstrated, from the *Western Mail* itself as well as from other sources. Many

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[64] Darren Waters, 'Taff rock brings English music press to its knees and begging for more ', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1997, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, pp. 4-5.

[65] Searching for the words 'Taff' and 'rock' within five words of each other on the LexisNexis database, including all dates and all newspapers, brings up only 4 relevant articles, all but one of which are from papers based in south Wales (the other being the *Edinburgh News*). Most significantly, all of these were printed in 2001, well after the article cited below claimed the term had come into common usage.

[66] Darren Waters, 'Taff rock brings English music press to its knees and begging for more ', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1997, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, pp. 4-5.

articles included references to these two as being representative of the bad old days, in opposition to the change represented by these new bands. In addition, Waters' chronology given above is wrong. The 60 Ft Dolls received favourable attention from the music press, and from the *Western Mail*, from 1994 onwards, as did Catatonia. Super Furries did not release their first EP until 1995. The article referred to much of the interest which came after Neil Strauss's article and the 'new Seattle' label as having 'astounded all of us who have ever spent a dreary evening in East Wales's [sic] "hippest" town.'[67] Within this article, the story of Welsh pop was being established, and the facts do not always get in the way of the story. Similarly, in an interview with Stuart Cable, drummer with Stereophonics, he said that 'The Manics turned people's heads towards South Wales [sic]. They made them realise that we can actually sing and play instruments'.[68] The truth behind this statement is questionable, but it is the crux of the story. In this same article, Waters is dismissive of the idea of a scene—one which had been identified and repeated by the *Western Mail* that he has just been reporting on.

> When London-based journalists refer to the Welsh 'scene', they are really using short-hand for a gaggle of Welsh language bands that have broken into the English scene. The Super Furry Animals and Gorky's Zygotic Mynci were long criticised by the English music press for their desire to sing in their mother tongue, Welsh, and seemingly forgo a wider appeal. While it is no coincidence that the success of the Super Furry Animals' first album was tied to their decision to sing in English, the band itself has made light of the whole English vs. Welsh debate: 'We are a Welsh band who sing in both English and Welsh.' The whole issue is a non-starter. Singing in English, Welsh, or gibberish (see Gorky's Zygotic Mynci) is irrelevant when one considers the talent we have. The true breadth of talent in Wales can be appreciated on the wonderfully entitled *Dial M for Merthyr*. Bands like Catatonia, the Manics and Dub War, the elder statesmen of Welsh pop,

[67] Darren Waters, 'Taff rock brings English music press to its knees and begging for more', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1997, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, pp. 4-5.
[68] Darren Waters, 'Taff rock brings English music press to its knees and begging for more', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1997, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, pp. 4-5.

> bristle alongside up-and-coming bands Suzy Pepper, Teen Anthem, Trampoline and Melys.[69]

Again, it is the press in London, and specifically the music press, which is criticised for not paying attention to music from Wales, and yet the *Western Mail*, and indeed the *Daily Post* had little better of a track record. It is the music press which is accused of being unsympathetic to Welsh language pop. As will be demonstrated further on in this chapter, while the music press may indeed have treated Welsh language music as exotic curiosity, I have found no examples of bands choosing to sing in Welsh being criticised for that decision. Rather than being criticised they were simply ignored, which in an industry which thrives on publicity and exposure is possible worse. In the few examples where Welsh language pop received proper consideration, the opposite can often be found with journalists praising this as a positive thing.

The 'London based music press' and their associates became the bogeymen, cited often as being in some ways responsible for holding Welsh bands back, but were now changing their collective minds. The following year (1998), it was still being reported that 'At last, the London-based music meisters are recognising that not only is Welsh music cool, but it's here to stay'.[70] This piece, and others like it, again played on age-old stereotypes themselves; that Wales was depressed and that it was London which was to blame. The truth or otherwise behind such an assumption is essentially unimportant. What is significant is that it is the story which is being told again and again.

[69] Darren Waters, 'Taff rock brings English music press to its knees and begging for more ', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1997, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, pp. 4-5.
[70] Patrick Fletcher, 'Word gets out about Welsh rock 'n roll', *Western Mail*, 11 August 1998, p. 3.

3.3 Wales: An Unlikely Origin for Pop

> A Welsh rock scene? It ranks up there with the Jamaican bobsleigh team and the Swiss navy in terms of viability and joke value. [...] From Newport to Bangor, there is a battery of musical talent kicking into gear, learning a few power chords and beating a path to the doors of the London-based record labels who are signing them up with fey abandon. The Manic Street Preachers paved the way of course, and can be considered the grand-daddies of the scene, but followed hard on their heels are bands such as 60ft [sic] Dolls, Super Furry Animals (whose album Fuzzy Logic was one of the best of last year), Catatonia, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, Novocain [sic] and the Stereophonics—the list is not endless, but it proves that something is afoot in the erstwhile land of leeks and bad moustaches.[71]

The above quote, taken from an article from the *Scotsman* in 1996 reflects the common-held view of the press outside Wales in the reporting on the success of Welsh bands. This pattern was clearly evident in the music press from the first articles written on Manic Street Preachers in the early 1990s.

The Manics began receiving attention in earnest around 1991, in both music papers. From the beginning of their careers they were regarded as being arch-propagandists, who read the music press avidly, and repeatedly contacted their favourite journalists.[72]

True to the form of later pieces, the tone of these articles was one of surprise, if not incredulity:

> 'We're the most glamorous rock band around today...' No, don't laugh. Cocky Welsh bastards Manic Street Preachers actually believe this [...] Four 21 year olds from Gwent have reduced us to shocked, appalled silence. Who the fuck do they think they are?[73]

[71] Barry Didcock, 'Welsh rock storms the Celtic twilight', *Scotsman*, 28 October 1996, p. 15.
[72] Simon Price, *everything: A BOOK ABOUT MANIC STREET PREACHERS* (London: Virgin, 1999), p. 17.
[73] The Stud Brothers, 'Manic Street Preachers – Death or Glory', *Melody Maker*, 2 February 1991, pp. 36-37.

Shortly afterwards, the papers 'TalkTalkTalk' pages (which, along with *NME*'s 'Thrills', included spoof articles and cartoons) contained the following extract;

> Manic Street Preachers. No. 137 in our short series—'Lippy Little Buggers of The Nineties'
>
> Interviewer: So you're the Manic Street Preachers, you're (suppresses smirk) from Gwent...[74]

In the following week, a letter was printed with the request that 'they'd [Manics] f*** [sic] off back to Wales or wherever they spewed forth from'.[75] The Manics inspired both hugely positive and negative responses from readers, with another *Melody Maker* journalist complaining that there were now only three subjects in readers' letters—about Manic Street Preachers, about the Gulf War and about the Brit Awards.[76] By the summer of that year, the opening to articles which was to become so common in articles on Welsh pop was established with the following,

> You have to keep reminding yourself that they have dropped out of a poop hatch called Wales, a country whose sole contribution to rock'n'roll has been, to say the most, negligible. John Cale, Steve Strange, Darling Buds, Harry Secombe, Max Boyce Shakey, Racing Cars and Man. Perhaps the last genuinely maddened teenage roar before the end of the millennium could only come from Britain's last remaining cultural void.[77]

Within the *NME* there was a similar response to the band. Their first major interview with the band opened with one of *NME*'s most well-known journalists saying, 'The following article is 100 per cent head over heels with hype. I am in hate with a poxy Welsh rock band'.[78] The piece went on to place the band firmly within the industrial region of south Wales saying that, 'in 1986, they see the local mining community kicked to crap by the police and starved back to work by the Tories and they see The

[74] No author given, 'Manic Street Preachers, No. 137 in our short series – "Lippy Little Buggers of the Nineties" ', *Melody Maker*, 9 February 1991, pp. 12-13.
[75] Andrew Mueller (editor of page), 'Backlash', *Melody Maker*, 16 February 1991, p. 35.
[76] Everett True (editor of page), 'Backlash', *Melody Maker*, 2 March 1991, pp. 42-43.
[77] Jon Wilde, 'Manic Street Preachers take no prisoners', *Melody Maker*, 1 June 1991, pp. 36-37.
[78] Steven Wells, 'Manic On The Streets Of London', *NME*, 5 January 1991, pp. 12-13.

Clash perform on a Tony Wilson-presented tenth anniversary of punk TV show. Something clicks'.[79]

The Manics were further characterised as naïve, with one write identifying 'their Welsh exile' as leading them to believe 'too much of what they read in the papers' in terms of what music can achieve, with 'exile' here clearly meaning 'not in London'.[80] Elsewhere they were described as being 'outsiders' and 'from Wales'— these two factors being apparently related.[81] Such responses to their origin were by no means present in every piece on the band, but they did play a part in many reviews, interviews, etc.[82] This continued as a familiar pattern throughout the early part of their career, with their apparent naivety and Welsh background being at odds with being in a rock band.

> And, for all their obeisance to rock convention, the Manics are oddballs. They're Welsh, James and Wire wear drag-queen eye makeup and the shortest, least charismatic member is the lead singer.[83]

Welsh pop in general received some gentle mocking from *NME.* In 1991 it published a spoof of Pete Frame's 'Rock Family Trees' within the 'Thrills' pages.[84] The family tree, entitled 'Welsh Rock', told of how Tom Jones was, in 1960, reborn as a 'poor black boy in Detroit, where he learned to make Cawl', that John Cale played scrum half for Wales and Andy Warhol lived in Maesteg for fifteen minutes and that the Alarm featured former Welsh footballer, John Toshack. It also named

[79] Steven Wells, 'Manic On The Streets Of London', *NME*, 5 January 1991, pp. 12-13.
[80] Adam Sweeting, 'Preachers full of contradictions', *Guardian*, 11 February 1992, Features section, p. 32.
[81] David Toop, 'Genuinely hopeless?', *The Times*, 15 February 1992, Features section, no page number given.
[82] Andy Gill, 'Preaching to the converted', *Independent,* 13 February 1992, p. 27. Ben Thompson, 'Post-punk clerics and spam again', *Independent*, 23 February 1992, p. 21.
[83] Caroline Sullivan, 'Manic Street Preachers', *Guardian*, 25 June 1993, Features section, p. 10.
[84] These diagrams showed how bands were related through members and associates, and had been made into a popular BBC2 programme later in 1995. The original map was released in 1980: Pete Frame, *Rock Family Trees Volume 1* (Map), (1980, Omnibus Press, London).

Manic Street Preachers, Darling Buds, Anrhefn (a punk band from the 1980s who performed in Welsh and were led by Rhys Mwyn), and Visage.[85] The idea of Welsh pop, was, in short, regarded as something of an unlikely at best, and a joke at worst.

This is reflected in the headlines and illustrations that accompanied many of the articles about Welsh bands, particularly Manic Street Preachers, and the issue of whether these constituted racism on the part of the music press. The use of Welsh puns by the music press accompanying articles on the Manics from 1992 onwards. These are too numerous to provide a complete list but include, 'Taffer than the rest',[86] 'All together now… (We'll keep a welcome on the hillside)',[87] 'Guns N' Daffodils',[88] 'The leek shall inherit the earth',[89] 'Dai Hard',[90] and 'Meek Leek Manifesto'.[91] The *Melody Maker* had generally more of the puns than the *NME*, but as demonstrated below, the *NME* still used Welsh stereotypes to mock the Manics. When asked if he'd ever felt used by the music press, Richey James replied,

> Of course. We are just brain-dead, sheep-f***ing [in original], rugby-playing, leek-eating morons. Racist—oh no. 'To Live And Dai In LA', 'The Welsh Drag On', The Rhyll [sic] Thing', 'Guns N' Daffodils', 'You Sexy Merthyr-F***ers' [in original], 'The Newport Dolls', 'Meek Leek Manifesto', 'Dai Harder', 'The Boyos Are Back In Town'. Would 'Potato Eating Paddy' ever get a Therapy? cover line?[92]

Clearly James was rankled by the way his band had been reported on within the music press. And it was not only the Manics who did not appreciate the puns.

[85] No author given, 'Pete Frame is on holiday', *NME*, 18 May 1991, p. 9.
[86] Jon Selzer, 'Taffer than the rest', *Melody Maker*, 8 February 1992, p. 24.
[87] Simon Price, 'Manic Street Preachers – Drags to riches' (see accompanying picture), *Melody Maker*, 25 January 1992, pp. 36-37.
[88] Simon Price, 'Guns N' Daffodils', *Melody Maker*, 8 February 1992, p. 30.
[89] David Fricke, 'Manic Street Preachers at CBGBs, New York' (see accompanying photo), *Melody Maker*, 6 June 1992, p. 25.
[90] Sally Margaret Joy, 'Dai Hard', *Melody Maker*, 19 December 1992, pp. 76-77.
[91] Stuart Bailie, 'Meek leek manifesto', *NME*, 19 Jun 1993, p. 31.
[92] No author, 'Don't believe the type', *Melody Maker*, 18 August 1993, p. 11.

One *Melody Maker* journalist, Simon Price (who comes from Barry), wrote in 1993 that,

> A recent BBC Wales programme asked why The Land Of Song never seems to produce successful bands. The answer, to anyone who's lived there, was depressingly obvious: most of them are crap. I'm not saying prejudice doesn't exist. Wales doesn't have Ireland's oppression chic or even Scotland's self-rule righteousness (years of economic oppression apparently count for nothing), so it's deemed OK to make endless sheepshagger jokes or invent 'hilarious' racist headlines accompanying every Manics article (the same people who were horrified when I suggested 'Couch Potatoes' as the perfect Therapy?[93] pun).[94]

Richey James also complained about the treatment the band had received back in Wales, explaining that hostility to them was not limited to the London-based music press. After being bottled off at a gig in Singleton Park, Swansea, James complained that,

> Most bands look forward to their homecoming gig. I don't expect roses and petals at my feet, but the grief we get here is non-stop. Anything from Welsh bands complaining about us 'betraying Wales' for not singing in Welsh, to gangs of blokes pouring lager over me saying 'What are you going to do about that'. Tom Jones doesn't get it![95]

It is too simplistic to describe the music press as being constantly anti-Welsh, there is no doubt that they did mock, parody and make use of stereotypes in reporting on the Manics and other bands from Wales. This is evident in the cartoon accompanying the review of Manic Street Preachers' debut album, *Generation Terrorists* for *NME*. By this point the band were arguably more well known for their clothing (tight white jeans, shirts with stencilled slogans), their make-up and Richey mutilating his arm to prove a point to a journalist. The cartoon showed a woman in a Welsh hat and shawl identified as 'Mam', stencilling

[93] Therapy? are a band from Northern Ireland.
[94] Simon Price, 'State of the nation: Wales', *Melody Maker*, 2 October 1993, pp. 46-47.
[95] No author, 'Manics bottled', *Melody Maker*, 14 August 1993, p. 2.

'Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogegerchwyndrobwlltysiliogogogoch Calling', while another band member wearing a shirt bearing the legend 'Guns and Daffodils'. But it was more than Welsh references which the band was being mocked for—their hair, clothing and makeup were lampooned, (the review referred to them as 'raccoon-eyed dreamers from the Welsh Valleys') and their was also the implication that they're 'Mammy's boys'.[96] The cartoon and the accompanying review, also alluded to the accusations that they were nothing more than a Clash cover band. Another spoof piece from *Melody Maker* from later on in 1992 carried the title 'After the Scottish Sex Pistols, it's ...The Welsh Clash' accompanied by a picture of the Manics.[97]

The baiting had continued with the release of the second Manic Street Preachers album, *Gold Against The Soul.* Accompanying the review came another cartoon, this time in the 'Gren' style.[98] Featuring three martyred figures, with Welsh hats instead of halos, they were stood in a graveyard, with a coal works visible behind them, with rugby posts and Hollywood-style letters on the hill spelling Blackwood. The slogan's stencilled onto the band's bare skin were parodies of those which they had covered their clothes in,[99] and included 'I ? Sheep', 'Neath RFC', 'Stop sneering at us rugby player pushead', a leek instead of a burning heart, a daffodil tattoo, and another saying 'Mam'.[100] It is too simplistic to describe this cartoon as simply mocking the Manics' Welsh background—again their style and sloganeering are also targeted here. The illustrator is Jon Langford, a native of Newport who has played in

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[96] Barbara Ellen, 'Rocket to Blusher' (accompanying cartoon by Simon Cooper), *NME*, 8 February 1992, p. 31.
[97] No author, 'After The Scottish Sex Pistols... It's The Welsh Clash!', *Melody Maker*, 14 November 1992, p. 50.
[98] 'Gren' cartoons originally were published in the *South Wales Echo* and drawn by the cartoonist Grenfell Jones. For more information go to http://gren-art.co.uk/gac/index.htm
[99] The band were well known for their sloganeering in their song lyrics, record sleeves, and on their clothing —these included things such as, 'Dead Flower', 'Condemned To Rock And Roll', 'Death Sentence Heritage' & 'You Love Us'.
[100] Stuart Bailie, 'Meek leek manifesto' (See accompanying illustration drawn by Jon Langford), *NME*, 19 Jun 1993, p. 31.

many bands, and worked as a cartoonist along with another Welshman, Colin B. Morton, under the pen-name Chuck Death. This idea for this particular cartoon had come from *NME* Deputy Editor Iestyn George,

> One of the worst things that was ever done about—I can't remember—it might've been [for] *Generation Terrorists*, or something—I can't remember which album—but it literally had a—we did a—it was my idea—I got Jon Langford, who's in the Three Jons—a sort of post-punk band who're based in Leeds, but Jon's from Newport, or from just up the road. And we did a faux-Gren cartoon—which is way… […] It was quite offensive, but we thought was *brilliant* because we thought two Welsh blokes—I mean it wasn't mine—I just said—people at the *NME* were like 'What the *fuck* are they on about?—a Gren cartoon?' I said to Jon, 'Do a Gren cartoon of the Manics—sheep, conical hats—everything'. I mean, that was just an in joke, done by a bunch of Welsh people. But I can *completely* understand why the Manics at that time—I mean I'm not crediting myself with it ego wise, but they [Manics] knew everybody at the *NME*—or they had kind of dossiers about us and he thought I was a Welsh speaking, sort of anti-Valleys Welsh middle-class tosser anyway. Which was probably quite right! And… so I wasn't in the Manics' camp—I wasn't a big fan, we weren't at all friendly or anything and never had any dealings with each other. But, otherwise, yeah, it was all 'Live and let Dai'—that kind of thing—and anything. But it's just convenient—you know—we had the Sugarcubes eating puffins all the time, you know.[101] We're just a bunch of, probably irresponsible *twenty-something* journalists. You know, we're not at the engineers of politics—we're not political—we weren't running the country. So I mean, you know, you can exaggerate the impact of a couple of divs from the *NME*.[102]

This demonstrates that despite the protestations of the Manics, and particularly Nicky Wire and Richey James, the claim that the music papers were simply biased against the band because they are Welsh is too simplistic, and ignores the role that individuals at both the *Melody Maker* and *NME* played. And the mickey-taking, as George states, was not confined to Welsh bands.[103]

While the Manics were credited by others for taking most of the flak, the puns and mocking were not confined to them. In 1994, Dub War from Newport began to

[101] The Sugarcubes were a band from Iceland.
[102] Interview with Iestyn George, 10 August 2005.
[103] See above about response to bands from Belgium.

receive attention and had accompanying headings such as 'Cymru as you Jah' and 'Welsh sheep raggas'.[104] The Stereophonics received similar treatment several years later. The release of their second album, *Performance and Cocktails*, was accompanied in the *NME*, by a cartoon of the three members of the band in a bath, drawn as dragons, accompanied by a sheep. The side of the bath bore the legend 'Croeso I Gymru', and the bands were holding champagne glasses, one of which had a leek coming out of it.[105] The headlines had not disappeared either, with examples like 'Shine on you crazy Dai men', continuing to be used.[106]

In the mainstream press, the likelihood of Welsh pop success and credibility was also characterised as unlikely, with a list of dubious predecessors named as evidence for the prosecution. The article that initiated the 'New Seattle' label was written in this same tone, albeit not as harshly;

> There may not be a Welsh pop invasion anytime soon, but prepare for a small offensive this summer. Outside of Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey, John Cale of the Velvet Underground and the Young Marble Giants, Wales has not been known for producing high-caliber [sic] pop. But it should come as no surprise that there's a thriving music scene in Wales since it has produced so many great voices in classical music (Bryn Terfel, Margaret Price, Robert Tear). Wales's pop voices range from mostly southern groups making loud guitar rock as if they were the next Seattle (Gouge, Novocaine, 60 Ft. Dolls [sic], Flyscreen, Dub War) to innovative, mostly northern pop-makers who mix Welsh and English (terrific bands like Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, Datblygu, Super Furry Animals and Ectogram, all well-documented on last year's 'Triskedekaphilia' compilation on Ankst records).[107]

But despite the complex approach to Welsh groups, and especially the Manics, by the music press, there was doubtless a change in heart by the music press towards bands from Wales. Coverage became far more positive, especially compared with the

[104] Ben Wilmott, 'Cymru as you Jah' (See photo caption also), *NME*, 23 July 1994, p. 8.
[105] Johnny Cigarettes, 'Review: Stereophonics – *Performance and Cocktails*' (see accompanying illustration), *NME*, 6 March 1999.
[106] Mark Beaumont, 'Shine on you crazy Dai men', *NME*, 10 April 1999, p. 18.
[107] Neil Strauss, 'Critic's Choice/Pop CD's; Of Reggae And Rock From Wales', *New York Times*, 4 June 1996, section C, p. 13. .

divisive response that Manic Street Preachers had received, and there were far more bands from Wales receiving attention within the national press. By the release of the Manics' third album, *The Holy Bible* in 1994, references to Wales were nonexistent within many reviews.[108] The disappearance of Richey James from the band in February of 1995, cited by some as being a catalyst for the increased success of bands from Wales, received a fair amount of coverage within the press, both as news and as a starting point for pieces on mental health issues.[109] Shortly afterwards, James' disappearance was described as having given 'the dour reality of contemporary Welsh life a romantic, Kerouac-like edge.'[110]

In 1995, some other bands began to receive some attention within the national press. Gorky's Zygotic Mynci were picked up on with the release of their album *Bwyd Time* in July 1995. Some mentioned their place of origin, but generally little was made of it, and there was certainly no reference to other Welsh bands made by reviewers in the broadsheets.[111] The first example of referencing Welsh bands together was in a review of a compilation put out by Ankst of some of their bands, and in such a case, it would of course be absurd for a reviewer not to name the bands together. With all of them performing in Welsh, their musical differences are mentioned, but it is their belonging to 'the wonderful weird world of Welsh language

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[108] Andy Gill, 'Destination zero', *Independent*, 1 September 1994, p. 29. Caitlin Moran, 'Gorgeous in spite of himself', *The Times*, 7 October 1994, Features section, no page number given. Simon Warner, 'Manic Street Preachers', *Guardian*, 10 October 1998, Features section, p. 7.

[109] Examples: Ian MacKinnon, 'Preachers prophesies become all too real', *Independent*, 18 February 1995, p. 6. Caroline Sullivan and Alex Bellos, 'Sweet Exile', *Guardian*, 22 February 1995, Features section, p. 6. No author, 'Fears grow for cult rock star', *Daily Mail*, 22 February 1995, p. 25. David Sinclair, 'Out of the blue, into the noir', *The Times*, 24 February 1995, Features section, p. 35.

[110] Clare Bayley, 'Thomas the voice; Thought for St. David's Day from Edward Thomas: when was the last time you watched a good sex scene in Welsh.', *Independent*, 1 March 1995, p. 26.

[111] Ben Thompson, 'Young Conservatives', *Independent*, 11 June 1995, p. 23. Stewart Lee, 'Pop the phoenix spreads its wings', *Observer*, 23 July 1995, Review section, p. 11. Ben Thompson and Phil Johnson, 'Record reviews: new releases', *Independent*, 23 July 1995, Arts section, p. 24.

pop' that unites them.[112] Another review of *Bwyd Time* questioned whether Gorky's are 'perhaps the world's only Welsh language indie band.'[113] Significantly though, these examples, a few other reviews of this album, one (very short) review of a Datblygu album,[114] and a passing mention from John Peel of Ankst,[115] are the only references I found within the national British press to Welsh language pop until the end of 1995, confirming what Iestyn George termed as its 'tokenistic' appearance within the press.

There came the familiar pattern when reporting on this new pop, in comparing it again with an unfavourable past:

> Sing ho! for [sic] the new illustrious legacy of Welsh rock'n'roll. Budgie, Man, The Alarm... And now, from Cardiff, there are Super Furry Animals, Welsh-speaking and proud of it, but happy to rock the English-speaking world on its own terms.[116]

The release of the film *Twin Town* in 1997, saw the linking of cinema and music. While the film's largely Welsh soundtrack was mentioned by some reviewers, it is the tone of the reviews which largely matches the tone of music reviews—namely one of surprise or bemusement that something 'hip' has come from Swansea, and that it is breaking down age-old stereotypes, at times accompanied by a dodgy pun of a headline.[117]

These stories were to continue over the next few years. In 1999, an article from the *Sunday Times* claimed that 'Cool Britannia may be passé, Cool Cymru is real enough. It manifests itself in bands such as Catatonia, Stereophonics and Manic

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[112] No author, 'A record Christmas', *Independent on Sunday*, 17 December 1995, Sunday Review section, p. 22.
[113] Caroline Sullivan, 'Your essential guide to the weeks CD's [sic]: Pop', *Guardian*, 28 July 1995, p. 14.
[114] No author, 'Records; new releases', *Independent*, 15 October 1995, Sunday review section, p. 20.
[115] John Peel, 'State of independents', *Independent*, 23 April 1992, p. 14.
[116] Adam Sweeting, 'Rock: Super Furry Animals', *Guardian*, 12 June 1996, Features section, p. 13.
[117] David Atkinson, 'Swansea: everything you need to know', *Independent*, Reporter section, p. 3. Simon Rose, 'The boyos dun good', *Mirror*, 21 August 1997, Features section, p. 8.

Street Preachers [...]'.[118] That the 'burgeoning Welsh scene' was still labelled as such in the summer of 1999 perhaps says as much about journalists of these pieces as the music scene itself.[119] Even when a group was singled out because of musical originality, for being unique, it was done within the context of other bands from Wales, with the writer locating their Welshness in their music. The title to the piece also includes a bad pun,

> Gorky's are traditionally the band whose scene-synthesizing, indolent music hacks add as an afterthought when they concoct their tiresome 'There Must Be Something In The Water' pieces on Welsh music. The subtext for this sort of article is always astonishment that someone not hailing from a major media centre actually has the gumption to craft a successful pop career. Yet the music is anything but astonishing. Stereophonics, Catatonia and Manic Street Preachers are workhouse city bands through and through, with few regional quirks to their fiercely unexotic stadium-indie music; they might celebrate their Welshness with flag-waving at gigs, but regionalism fails to distinguish their records. These bands might as well come from a different planet from Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, who, without feeling the need to bang on about nationalist pride in interviews, have managed to say so much about Wales in six albums. Listen to a Stereophonics song, you see an everyman void, a generic blank page. Listen to Gorky's, and you get rolling hills surmounted by bearded wizards playing flutes, schoolbound children dropping lunchboxes as they hurdle streams, picnics on windswept beaches, and mystical medieval roots. Whether Gorkyworld represents an accurate Wales is not the point; Gorky's heritage is nourishing their imagination, hoisting them above the music business's London-centred morass.[120]

3.4 Imagining Wales and Imagining of Wales: Local bands, for local people

Imaginings of Wales were a constant feature of articles relating to Welsh pop; these painted pictures of the geography, the history, the social fabric and with some the national psyche, often finding links with the band or song being discussed. These descriptions came primarily from journalists, but sometimes from bands themselves. They were complex in their makeup, when positive or negative. This section of the

[118] Paul Donovan, 'Voices Off', *Sunday Times*, 18 April 1999, Features section, no page number given.
[119] Mark Edwards, 'Brighter outlook in Wales', *The Times*, 6 June 1999, Features section, no page number given.
[120] Tom Cox, 'Campaign for real Wales', *Guardian*, 8 October 1999, 'Friday pages' section, p. 13.

chapter will examine how imaginings of Wales played a role in the reporting on Welsh pop. It will look firstly at the music press, and then move on to examine the Welsh, national and international media.

As noted previously, for the Manic Street Preachers, their coming from south Wales was a regular feature of their early interviews. Their relationship with their home town was complex and could be paradoxical—they described a desolate place which they were nonetheless fiercely proud of:

> Where we come from, that's what everybody did all the time. Everyone's just a wage slave or a dole slave, and every night you just get bombed off your head. [...] Where we come from in Wales, it's very working class; but there is a tradition of bettering yourself. Our parents never wanted us to go down the pit. Self-education is a really big thing. The work ethic is just massive.[121]

And,

> [Richey James] '[...] the very fact we're from Wales—everybody's first opinion is that we're pricks, Alarm copyists, wankers, country bumpkins [...] People have this Dylan Thomas idea of Wales, that it's all a big smiling place with people going to work in the morning *(completely untrue, no one has this idea [Interviewer—Andrew Collins])* but it's like a museum, everything is closed, it's like a long walk down a graveyard.' [Andrew Collins] Now *that's* [emphasis in original] how outsiders view Wales which is why the Manics' fervent disassociation must irk so many expatriate Welsh living in England [...]. You don't get *hiraeth* then? 'I do sometimes' whispers Nicky. We could go on about Wales all day, suffice to say the Manics' geographical heritage has been no spring board into the London-centric-music-biz spotlight. Burton re-learnt his accent, Ruth Madoc has to parody hers, Kinnock must put up with a column by A. N. Wilson in London's *Evening Standard* recently headlined 'Why We Hate The Welsh'. Into the Valley? No us, guv.[122]

Their wearing of makeup and women's clothing was explained in terms of their background,

> [Nicky Wire:] The role model of the typical Welsh male was a nice pressure to fight against. But now you just see so many great hulking Welshmen

[121] Simon Reynolds, 'Manic Street Preachers', *Melody Maker*, 20 July 1991, pp. 28-30.
[122] Andrew Collins, 'The Newport Dolls', *NME*, 2 November 1991, pp. 15-17.

> doing the shopping, it's sad. The image of the man has been destroyed in Wales.[123]

But when asked explicitly whether they felt an affinity with any identity, whether that be Welsh, British or European, Wire replied, 'Nothing. I wish we could feel something—we might be more rounded people. But we've always been too alienated'.[124]

One interviewer commented on how often Richey James uttered the phrase 'When we were growing up' in answering a question.[125] And this continued in later years, in 1994, James told of how,

> Where we come from there's a natural melancholy in the air. Everybody, ever since you could comprehend it, felt pretty much defeated. You've got the ruins of heavy industry all around you. You see your parents' generation all out of work, nothing to do, being forced into the indignity of going on courses for relevance. Like a 50-year-old miner worked in the pit all his life, there's not much joy for him in learning how to type. It's just pointless. And that's all around us, ever since we were born.[126]

Such comments demonstrate the continual reinforcement of a particular imagining of south Wales by the band themselves. While they complained of their treatment at the hands of the music press, they were also involved in the imagining of Wales, and this being a part of their marketing—after all, the music press is part of an industry whose prime concern is the selling of units.

Following their enforced absence after the disappearance of Richey James, and their return to making music, it was clear in their new songs and the interviews conducted that place, and their background in south Wales was still a pertinent theme. They continued to describe their home in south Wales in terms of class and industry,

[123] Simon Price, 'Singalongamanics', *Melody Maker*, 29 August 1992, pp. 46-47.
[124] Simon Price, 'Singalongamanics', *Melody Maker*, 29 August 1992, pp. 46-47.
[125] Simon Price, 'Manic Street Preachers – Drags to riches', *Melody Maker*, 25 January 1992, pp. 36-37.
[126] Dave Bennun, 'All that glitters...', *Melody Maker*, 29 January 1994, pp. 26-7.

but now in a generally more positive light, (although the emphasis on education and self-improvement echoes comments made earlier in this chapter), as demonstrated in this statement from Nicky Wire,

> One thing I'm proud of is that where I come from, throughout the whole mining era, every colliery in every town gave money to build an institute, with a library, with complete access for free, which was a way of keeping your class but having access to learning and education [...]. 'A Design For Life' was inspired by a library that's still in Newport that was set up by the miners in 1904, and there's a huge engraving over the door that says 'LIBRARIES GAVE US POWER' [sic]. And I still find things like that inspirational.[127]

Wire admitted later on that in part this change was due to the disappearance of band-member Richey James in 1995, claiming that, 'At the start, we never went around wearing Welsh credentials. Richey was always really paranoid about ever coming across as Welsh. He always called it the Neil Kinnock Factor: "Turn the lights out!" I've become more conscious of it lately'.[128] Following their return, they were no longer the only Welsh group in the music press, and not the only Welsh group to define themselves in terms of their national and class identity. Richard Parfitt of 60 Ft Dolls forcefully described the band within a particular social identity, 'We're white, we're Welsh, we're on edge, we're not very well educated, we all left school at 16, but we're not stupid, and we understand things that other people will never know',[129] and that 'We are the lowest social class in Britain. The Anglicised Welsh have been robbed of their language, their culture and their mineral rights. We lack confidence—we've got an inferiority complex'.[130] While Parfitt clearly felt strongly about his background, he criticised 'all those stupid Welsh stories' as getting

[127] Taylor Parkes, 'Escape from our history', *Melody Maker*, 1 June 1996, pp. 28-30.
[128] Simon Price, 'Street Life', *Melody Maker*, 4 January 1997, pp. 14-16.
[129] Everett True, 'We're a highly moral group', *Melody Maker*, 29 June 1996, pp. 11-13.
[130] Martin Wroe, 'Rock fans swap grunge for Welsh grime', *Observer*, 24 November 1996, p. 26.

in the way of their music.[131] This is the constant paradox in the relationship between the music press and bands; bands will discuss their background, and how it has perhaps influenced them in some way, but then resent the way this was used by some journalists in the forming of stories, or in the use of stereotypes and truisms.

When Stereophonics appeared in late 1996, once again place was a regular feature of early interviews. Singer, Kelly Jones, described how he was influenced by his upbringing and experiences to write; 'I only write like I do because I've never been anywhere. The stories are based on people I know and things I've seen, yet, they're world-wide themes. Where we live, people do shitty jobs and have miserable lives. We could never take the piss out of that'.[132] In another, he said, 'It's trying to make it real, that's the passion I'm trying to get over rather then how frustrating it is to live in a mining village [...] We've never even seen a mine! And we don't like leeks or f***in' [in original] rugby for f***s [in original] sake'.[133]

This new English-language Welsh pop was discussed collectively for the first time at the end of 1995, this time focusing mainly on a number of bands from Newport.[134] Proclaiming that 'From the depressed valleys of South Wales [sic] rises the Welsh equivalent of the Seattle grunge scene. Tortured souls always did turn to art' it looked not only at pop but also poetry groups based in south Wales. But it was exclusively urban, post-industrial, deprived south Wales that the article was concerned with.[135] The south Wales described is an imagining which does not seek to back up its claims with figures on employment, life expectancy, dependence on state benefits or any other of the numerous barometers used to signify the relative wealth or

[131] Everett True, 'We're a highly moral group', *Melody Maker*, 29 June 1996, pp. 11-13
[132] Ben Myers, 'Feelin' supersonic', *Melody Maker*, 29 March 1997, p. 10.
[133] James Oldham, 'Cwmaman Kids!', *NME*, 18 January 1997, p. 10.
[134] Emma Forrest, 'Land of my fathers, poets and punks', *Independent*, 21 December 1995, Arts section, p. 7.
[135] While Gorky's Zygotic Mynci are named, they are not placed within this piece.

poverty of a region, suggesting that this portrait would be one which the reader was familiar with. However, it is critical of the Arts Council of Wales, suggesting that to this particular body, 'Wales is romantic, poetry in the soul and pretty accents.' Place is important within the article in not only emphasising the creativity coming from 'the economically and spiritually depressed valleys of South Wales' [sic], but also in bands themselves explaining their background. Richard Parfitt again explained the importance to his creativity of coming from Newport:

> To me it's as important as New Jersey is to Bruce Springsteen. I was born in an industrial town built around steelworks. The Thatcher sold us to the Japs and now you see grown men packing batteries for £3 an hour. People walk around with a look of defeat. This is a town full of losers.[136]

Within the piece, Dubwar, Flyscreen and Novocaine from Newport were named, along with Gouge from Cardiff and Gorky's Zygotic Mynci. The collective description of 'valleys bands' were used, and conflated with Cardiff and Newport, with the bleak accompanying descriptions;

> And as in Seattle—the rainiest city in America—the relentlessly bleak weather in Newport and Cardiff reflects in the faces of the kids who battle through it on their way to school. Unlike Seattle, there is no booming economy, no airplane industry. No nothing.[137]

As with the later articles, it is Manic Street Preachers who were named as the vanguard of Welsh pop, although this time as the first band to escape, rather than the first to epitomise any kind of cultural renaissance;

> The band who expressed this emptiness best, and the band who managed to prise open the barriers, were the Manic Street Preachers. In 1992, they tore on to the scene from their ex-mining town of Blackwood, with a manifesto of 'culture, alienation, boredom and despair'. [...] People who've escaped

[136] Emma Forrest, 'Land of my fathers, poets and punks', *Independent*, 21 December 1995, Arts section, p. 7.
[137] Emma Forrest, 'Land of my fathers, poets and punks', *Independent*, 21 December 1995, Arts section, p. 7.

> Blackwood describe it as the kind of place the government keeps meaning to do something about. They say that growing up there locks the sadness into you for ever. [...] After the pits closed, the miners in Blackwood were told they had to retrain. Part of the retraining involved learning how to type. But having spent every working day of their lives in the pits, their fingers were too thick to use the keyboards.[138]

This last description of Blackwood probably came from the band themselves who, as illustrated earlier in this chapter, spoke about Blackwood in many early interviews.[139] Again it is an image which might well have been familiar to readers, but with the emphasis on artistic creativity *despite* coming from south Wales.

Later that year, Caroline Sullivan in the *Guardian* wrote about Newport, repeating Neil Strauss's now infamous 'new Seattle' tag, talking to several bands from the town. Talking about the bands, fanzines, pubs and clubs again promotes the idea of a scene, despite the protestations that it was not, and all of them apparently had an opinion about Wales.

> Bands like Flyscreen—whose intense singer, Paul Karter, says: 'People can't use their Welshness as an excuse for failure any more.' Prepubescent-looking Disco, who idolise Kylie Minogue: 'If you're stuck in a deprived area like this, you either become a pop star or a footballer.' Then, glam-poppers Suck: 'I'm furiously patriotic, and I'm angry I never had the privilege of learning Welsh as school.' [...] The Manic Street Preachers, revered as the first South Wales [sic] band to make it big, are on the jukebox, as in every Newport pub.[140]

Such articles and quotes should not be taken at face value though according to interviewees who have contributed to this study. Iestyn George claimed that Sullivan was 'a bit gullible', while Andy Barding said that Sullivan had come down to south

[138] Emma Forrest, 'Land of my fathers, poets and punks', *Independent*, 21 December 1995, Arts section, p. 7.
[139] See Simon Price, 'Singalongamanics', *Melody Maker*, 29 August 1992, p. 46-47. Dave Bennun, 'All that glitters...', *Melody Maker*, 29 January 1994, p. 26-27.
[140] Caroline Sullivan, 'Into the valley of the 60 Ft Dolls ', *Guardian*, 4 October 1996, Features section, p. 14.

Wales as she fancied Richard Parfitt, from 60 Ft Dolls.[141] Within some interviews with bands, they attempt to distance themselves from any particular scene. However, the suggestion made by both George and Barding within the interviews conducted for this thesis were that the bands, from Newport at least, were not duped partners, but found the attention amusing;

> And, you know the *Argus*, the *South Wales Argus* would be like trying to write things and it was like, 'Fuck off, you weren't supporting us when we were trying publicise little gigs a while ago so bollocks to you'. HTV came and it was 'No *fucking way*—you're not filming our bands, piss off' and we eventually did—we did do a little thing on it and German telly came over to do some stuff and eh, yeah oh the....*The Telegraph* just had the piss taken out of them basically. [...] Caroline [Sullivan]—she was great—she desperately wanted to shag Parfitt, that's what all that was about.
>
> *[Researcher] So how did you feel about this sudden attention from broadsheet journalists and Sunday supplements?*
>
> AB: It was a strange one because—yeah—some people had been interviewed by them [...] and some wouldn't. Neil Strauss was cool because he was from America and he seemed—he was a funny little guy and you know he seemed to have credentials and he knew about all the bands—he knew about a lot of the bands that people were coming to see in TJ's like Action Swingers [...] and, you know, Jesus Lizard and stuff like that. He was... he was sort of one of us, sort of thing, so he was alright. Caroline was funny, um. The *Telegraph* person I didn't have anything to do with that one—I can't remember much about it. There was a *Q* feature as well which was OK. Again, because the 60 Ft Dolls were getting a bit of attention there were—these things were largely about them and sort of, all the other stuff would come in as a result. Um... So yeah, it wasn't, you know—it was Ok. All these things were sort of at the tail end really though. I suppose at the earlier end they would have been shown the door in the traditional fashion, you know.[142]

Barding, a former journalist for the *Western Mail*, claimed that the paper showed little interest in local bands until they began to receive attention from outside.

> At that time on the *Western Mail* you'd get paid £14 above your wages sort of thing for a review—an arts review. So you'd get little old biddies in the office doing sort of consumer stuff, who'd go and see a play, write a hundred

[141] George was the deputy editor of *NME* during this period, and Barding ran a music fanzine in Newport which largely focused on local bands.
[142] Interview with Andy Barding, 30/11/2005

> words about it and get themselves 14 quid. Which is, you know, great. At that time 5 packs of fags maybe. So I started doing—I started writing about bands like Down By Law and Midway Still and Pop Am Good and stuff and they'd get printed. And later on it would become really hard to get things in the *Western Mail* because they became a bit weird about it. I had to sort of lie to them and pretend these bands were in the charts.[143]

Because of this, Barding started his own fanzine called *Frugg*, while still working for the *Western Mail*;

> I'd already been given no end of warnings at work. *The Western Mail* really saw the fanzine as—they didn't *know* I did it, but um, someone wrote a letter to the editor referred to, you know, me doing this fanzine and the shit hit the fan—they didn't like it at all.[144]

Barding had also been the first journalist from the *Western Mail* to write stories on bands from Newport, demonstrating that while the reporting on bands from an area might well be a legitimate story, the journalist involved may well have a personal involvement. A piece by Barding from the *Western Mail* in 1994 was one of the first found during the course of this research which heralded the rise of a number of new bands Wales, with the bias leaning towards the south;

> Great venues like the revamped and revitalised Sam's Bar and Clwb Ifor in Cardiff and The Legendary TJs and Le Pub in Newport are becoming entangled in a 'South Wales Band Explosion'. It's a corny expression but it's entirely accurate. Bands like Catatonia, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and a whole brace of Swansea, Newport and mid-Gwent bands are dragging more and more music biz types across the Severn Bridge.[145]

The piece went on to focus largely on the 60 Ft Dolls, with the postscript mentioning Catatonia, Gorky's and Hugh Genius, also known as Huw Pooh (Huw Williams) from Swansea band, The Pooh Sticks. Catatonia and Hugh Williams were known to Barding personally, as were 60 Ft Dolls. Throughout 1994, there were

[143] Interview with Andy Barding, 30/11/2005
[144] Interview with Andy Barding, 30/11/2005
[145] Andy Barding, 'Valley of the Dolls ', *Western Mail*, 2 April 1994, 'Weekender' supplement, p. 4.

pieces on Gorky's Zygotic Mynci,[146] and Dub War (another band based in Newport),[147] along with an article on Mike Peters.[148] The local bias was essential in enabling Barding and others to get their stories printed in the papers, and explain the continual stressing of background in these pieces. Along with the emphasis on this local link, later articles (in both the *Western Mail* and the *Daily Post*) frequently resorted to truisms about Welsh identity, while simultaneously criticising the 'London' press for doing the same. The use of imaginings of Wales within the Welsh press was inextricably linked to notions of authenticity, as mentioned above, and of the bands also choosing to maintain tangible links with the places in which they grew up. These were biased towards the immediate locality; the *Daily Post* was keen to stress the local connections with Catatonia and Super Furries to north Wales, while the *Western Mail* was with groups from the south. Manic Street Preachers were described (and this list is by no means exhaustive) as 'Blackwood's prodigal sons',[149] 'Valleys boys',[150] 'three guys from Blackwood, Gwent',[151] 'the Blackwood band',[152] 'Newport band',[153] 'Welsh rock giants',[154] 'the Blackwood trio',[155] and 'Wales' most successful ever pop group'.[156] Similarly, Stereophonics were described as 'The

[146] Andy Barding, 'The melody swells to 80,000 fans for Zygotic Mynci', *Western Mail*, 'Weekender' supplement, p. 6.
[147] Andy Barding, 'Top of the bill at huge rock festival', *Western Mail*, 23 July 1994, 'Weekender' supplement, p. 6.
[148] Andy Barding, 'A glorious return after Mike changes direction', *Western Mail*, 19 February 1994, 'Weekender' supplement, p. 8.
[149] Darren Waters, 'The dark mourning after the wild night before', *Western Mail*, 14 September 1998, p. 3.
[150] Darren Waters, 'The Manic truth comes out', *Western Mail*, 22 August 1998, 'Western Mail Magazine', pp. 4-10
[151] Pauline McLean and Christopher Rees, 'Salute to the brave Preachers', *Western Mail*, 13 December 1996, p. 3.
[152] Pauline McLean, 'Three from Manic make sentimental comeback', *Western Mail*, 10 January 1996, p. 2.
[153] Pauline McLean, 'Unknown from Wales tipped to top the US chart', *Western Mail*, 27 July 1996, p.1.
[154] Neil Jones, 'Dawning after the night before', *Western Mail*, 1 January 2000, p. 1.
[155] No author, 'Early Preachers', *Western Mail*, 22 August 1998, p. 11.
[156] Colette Hume, 'The lonely man who left the Manics', *Western Mail*, 29 August 1998, p. 3.

Cwmaman group',[157] 'The Welsh band [who] strive to keep in touch with their roots',[158] 'The big Welsh hope',[159] 'The Cwmaman band',[160] 'the Cwmaman threesome',[161] etc. As with Manic Street Preachers, Stereophonics contributed to the stories and significance of their origin and upbringing—'We've all purposely stayed in the small town we grew up in, Cwmaman. It's a small down-to-earth place in a valley between Cardiff and Swansea, a mining village although the pit went somewhere round about 1960.'[162] Whilst one might not doubt the truth of this statement in the mind of its speaker (Stuart Cable of Stereophonics) it undoubtedly reinforces ideas about Wales as an industrial heartland filled with pit villages. Therefore when a journalist commented that the band 'prefer a pint back home and insist that it's village life that helps them cope', it was within a framework used by the band themselves. Articles on all Welsh bands during this time stressed their maintaining of links with home, and therefore that their image is authentic, not affected.[163] Similarly, writers would choose to note that band members had known each other for most of their lives,

> The Stereophonics were all born in Aberdare Hospital, a few miles from their beloved Cwmaman, a village halfway between Cardiff and Swansea. Kelly and Richard, born ten days apart, became friends at school'.[164] The national press presented their home town of Cwmaman as a backwater with close community ties, as 'The sort of place where the bus stops outside your house and the highlight of the social calendar is the Amateur Operatic Society's performance of Fiddler On The Roof', and one local pensioner was quoted as saying that 'we're delighted for them—they are such lovely boys.'[165]

[157] Darren Waters, 'Taff rock brings English music press to its knees and begging for more', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1997, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, pp. 4-5.
[158] Darren Waters, 'The boys are back in town', *Western Mail*, 10 October 1997, p. 6.
[159] Pauline McLean, 'A little water music in the bay', *Western Mail*, 21 March 1997, p. 11.
[160] Pauline McLean, 'A little water music in the bay', *Western Mail*, 21 March 1997, p. 11.
[161] Charles Williams, 'An entertaining spectacle off-stage', *Western Mail*, 16 August 1997, 'Arena' magazine, p. 8.
[162] David Belcher, 'Keeping up with the Joneses', *Herald* (Glasgow), 19 March 1999, p. 19.
[163] Lucy Turner and Stephen White, 'How Noisy Was Our Valley', *Mirror*, 12 May 1999, pp. 22-23.
[164] Paul Connolly, 'Small Town Heroes', *The Times*, 10 July 1999, Features section, no page number given.
[165] Lucy Turner and Stephen White, 'How Noisy Was Our Valley', *Mirror*, 12 May 1999, pp. 22-23.

Along with the male voice choir, older pop music was naturally enough referenced in the vast majority of articles identified. The regular mention of Tom Jones and Shirley Bassey, and the humour to be found in remembering Shakin' Stevens, Bonnie Tyler and The Alarm was obvious to the reader, in that no explanation of the joke was required. This was, it should be remembered, before the resurrecting of Tom and Shirley's reputations—a time when the former was a Las Vegas performer, and the latter known primarily for the Bond film themes. In short, a Wales where the distortion of 'How Green Was My Valley' is performed as a cabaret act, with the obvious comedy value that this brings. Echoing the Manics' experience, south Wales is characterised as a 'backwater', an unlikely origin for pop.

Stories on Welsh pop in the *Daily Post* were initially limited to bands that performed in Welsh. For example, while the disappearance of Richey James from Manic Street Preachers received a good deal of coverage in the national British press and the *Western Mail*, it received scant mention in the *Daily Post*. In terms of music reviews there was more interest, including one following release of a Welsh-language track, 'Hen Wlad Fy Mamau',[166] recorded at the Sain studios, and described as 'Perhaps the most original cassette and CD ever released by a Welsh recording house is issued this week, just in time for the National Eisteddfod.'[167] Aside from Welsh language bands, other groups who received any mention in the *Daily Post* were from nearby Liverpool, the local interest factor again being the prime reason for their inclusion.[168] The only other Welsh pop act to receive some attention from the *Daily*

[166] Tra Di Di, 'Hen Wlad Fy Mamau', (Blue Rose/V2, BRRC5013, 1997).
[167] Iorworth Roberts, 'Old and new combined', *Daily Post*, 27 July 1995, p. 14.
[168] Tony Kenwright, 'The rock band who have woken up to their own future', *Daily Post*, 2 August 1996, p. 19, Tony Kenwright, review of *Eno Collaboration* by Half Man Half Biscuit, *Daily Post*, 9 August 1996, p. 19, Tony Kenwright, review of *Spiders* by Space, *Daily Post*, 28 September 1996, p. 16.

Post was the ever-present Alarm, and their singer Mike Peters. Again, Peters' links to the area (living in Rhyl) was enough to provide the inevitable local interest angle.[169]

Assertions about an inherent Welsh style of music and performance were in evidence in the writings of other journalists, including writers in the Welsh press. For example, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci single 'Patio Song', reviewed in the *Daily Post*, included reference to bards, and the Welsh language, and defined their music within explicitly Welsh terms, saying that the song was 'swathed in a gorgeous yet understated arrangement that owes much to the Welsh choral tradition'.[170] Quite how the author reached this conclusion is a mystery, but it was a belief repeated in the following year.[171]

As mentioned, locality was an integral part of reports from both papers, particularly when the band hailed from the same readership as the paper's readers, although such statements were not always accurate. For example, the article referred to above mentioned the Manic Street Preachers were from Cardiff (although they actually come from Blackwood, Gwent), that Gruff Rhys of the Super Furry Animals is from Bethesda, and that Catatonia 'began life playing the pubs and clubs around their home in Llanwrst'.[172] The connection between the band and Llanwrst was regularly repeated in articles on the group, sometimes with comments about the band

[169] Tony Kenwright, 'No cause for alarm', *Daily Post*, 13 November 1996, pp. 18-19. David Jones, 'Llangollen – it won't escape me this time', *Daily Post*, 4 December 1996, p. 5. Philip Key and Iorworth Jones, 'Singer on his way home to meet a gathering of fans', *Daily Post*, 31 December 1996, p. 13.

[170] Tony Kenwright, review of 'Patio Song' by Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, *Daily Post*, 2 November 1996, p. 20. It should be noted that Kenwright was based in Liverpool, not north Wales, and so arguably brought an 'outsiders' perspective.

[171] Tony Kenwright, 'Rock' column review of *Barafundle* by Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, *Daily Post*, 3 May 1997, p. 20, and also, Tony Kenwright, 'Top ten of 1997'. *Daily Post*, 26 December 1997, p. 18..

[172] No author, 'Can they rock to the top and be as big as Bryn?', *Daily Post*, 23 June 1997, p. 7. This last statement is rather inaccurate; while Mark Roberts and Paul Jones were both members of Y Cyrff, formed while at school in Llanwrst, Catatonia were formed in Cardiff, and many of their early gigs took place in the city. For background information of Y Cyrff, see David Owens, *Cerys, Catatonia and the rise of Welsh pop*, (London: Ebury Press, 2000), pp. 16-19.

'remaining loyal to its North Wales [sic] roots',[173] naming them as 'North Wales' Catatonia'[174] or describing them as having 'a strong North Wales feel.'[175] Another, about Super Furry Animals, mentioned that the band 'includes three musicians from North Wales [sic]'.[176] Super Furry Animals received coverage when they contributed to a campaign to turn Bethesda Tabernacle into an arts centre, again with it being clear that a band were being linked to a specific community, implying that they had not forgotten their roots.[177] This implication was sometimes reinforced with comments from journalists saying that 'It's good to see that the Super Furries have not forgotten where they are from.'[178]

Whilst an accusation of parochialism might be slightly harsh, after all a regional paper is supposed to cover regional interests as defined by the editor, the north Wales paper did have a heavy bias towards north Wales bands, and the same can be said of the *Western Mail* in its coverage of south Wales bands. This is clear not only in the detectable bias in the number of articles on bands (with the *Western Mail* focusing on Manic Street Preachers and Stereophonics, while the *Daily Post* has more on Super Furry Animals and Catatonia), but also in the number of stories about other, older figures, in Welsh popular music, especially Meic Stevens and Mike Peters of The Alarm. While such interviews did not appear on a weekly basis in the *Daily Post*, they were certainly regular, and tended to be more in-depth, especially with

[173] No author, 'Catatonia all set to float at Wales' biggest concert', *Daily Post*, 10 May 1997, television supplement, p. 3. See also, Richard Williams, 'On the brink of super stardom', *Daily Post*, 23 January 1998, p. 12. Joe Shooman, 'Catatonia getting the acclaim they deserve', *Daily Post*, 17 April 1998, p. 22. Joe Shooman, 'Triumphant homecoming of true musical talent', *Daily Post*, 20 April 1998, p. 12.
[174] No author, 'Catatonia all set to float at Wales' biggest concert', *Daily Post*, 10 May 1997, television supplement, p. 3.
[175] David Greenwood, 'I still wish them well. Says the man who saw Catatonia slip through his fingers', *Daily Post*, p13 may 1998, p. 3.
[176] No author, *Daily Post*, 14 February 1997, p. 11.
[177] David Greenwood, 'Super Furry bid to build arts centre', *Daily Post*, 10 July 1997, p. 7.
[178] Richard Williams, 'The other Eisteddfod is on band's home ground', *Daily Post*, 4 August 1997, p. ?

Peters, with only Bryn Terfyl receiving more coverage.[179] Unlike the articles on new bands, these were in-depth interviews, whereas many of the pieces on younger bands contain general quotes or comments which are likely to be quotes from articles in other papers and give the feeling that their primary use is to provide some sort of 'youth' interest and to fill up space. Again, as with the younger bands, Peters' origin in north Wales was mentioned with regularity, often by Peters himself. For example, when interviewed about playing a charity concert at Llangollen, Peters said that 'coming from North Wales [sic] is obviously means so much to me.'[180] Peters was described at one point as the 'Father of Welsh cool', with the author claiming that 'he first exploded onto the same scene in 1983'.[181] Much of this coverage was undoubtedly because of the concerts which Peters puts on every year in north Wales, referred to as 'The Gathering', which attracts people from around the world, and also because of his diagnosis with cancer and subsequent recovery. Nonetheless, within the body of the paper, and its coverage of music, he remained a visible figure throughout this period.

Along with the local angle, there were a number of stories implying that north Wales was the true origin of new Welsh pop. Much of this focused on Catatonia, not only with two of their number having been in Yr Cyrff (from Llanwrst), but on their early recordings in Welsh. Pieces included an interview with Dafydd Iwan, owner of the Sain recording label, of whose subsidiary label, Crai, Catatonia were at one time

[179] For example: Interviews with Mike Peters: No author, 'Local hero rolls in for sell-out concerts', *Daily Post,* 13 January 1996, p. 7. David Greenwood, 'When alarm bells rang', *Daily Post*, 15 January 1996, p. 12. Tony Kenwright, 'No cause for alarm', *Daily Post*, 13 November 1996, pp. 18-19. Peter Elson, 'Well, there have been one or two alarms ', *Daily Post*, 9 January 1998, p. 22. Ian Parri, 'Father or Welsh cool', *Daily Post*, 1 January 1999, p. 21.

[180] David Jones, 'Llangollen – it wont escape me this time', *Daily Post*, 4 December 1996, p. 5.

[181] Ian Parri, 'Father of Welsh cool', *Daily Post*, 1 January 1999, p. 21.

associated.[182] Another reported on a documentary about the Ankst label.[183] Again, there was the implication that the seeds of the current success of Welsh artists came primarily through this Welsh-language music scene.

> Cool Cymru—it was the hottest issue of '98, catching fire over night—right? Yes and no, says the producer of a major documentary that charts the rise and rise of the music scene in Wales. It may have hit the charts quicker than you can say Catatonia—but Welsh rock has been simmering away for years.[184]

The article went on to include quotes from the programmes producer, Emyr Glyn Williams, (also a founder of the Ankst label), in which he argued that 'the fruition of that time [the founding of Ankst] was what happened this year'.[185] The article was accompanied by photos of Catatonia, Super Furry Animals and Manic Street Preachers. This last inclusion was peculiar because the band had no links with the Welsh language scene and do not speak Welsh, and that one member (Richey James) had described the Welsh language as being irrelevant and representative of a 'dead culture'.[186] The story being told was done so simplistically, and with the locality being brought to the fore. Similarly, later that year, an article was published with the headline 'The man who shapes Wales' rock structure', referring to Rhys Mwyn, of the Welsh-language band Anrhefn, who were one of the first Welsh language punk bands in the 1980s.[187] Once again, the adjective 'Wales' was used in a subjective way, implicitly defined as being the north Wales readership of the *Daily*

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[182] David Greenwood, 'I still wish them well. Says the man who saw Catatonia slip through his fingers', *Daily Post*, p13 may 1998, p. 3.
[183] Sain, Crai and Ankst primarily release recordings performed in Welsh.
[184] Jill Tunstall, 'Try another flavour – ankstmusik', *Daily Post*, 26 December 1998, Television supplement, p. 3.
[185] Jill Tunstall, 'Try another flavour – ankstmusik', *Daily Post*, 26 December 1998, Television supplement, p. 3.
[186] S. Price, *Everything,* p. 25. See also R. James discussing lyrics and patriotism, Simon Price, 'Singalongamanics', *Melody Maker*, 28 August 1992, pp. 46-47.
[187] Ian Parry, 'The man who shapes Wales' rock structure', *Daily Post*, 6 November 1998, Entertainment supplement, p. 24-25.

Post, rather than, for example, considering what was happening outside of the Welsh language community, and in other parts of Wales.

These articles, which chose to place the bands in a geographical context (rather than, for example, a musical one), presented different ideas about Wales, and sometimes suggestions of a 'Welsh' psyche, with which these groups either fit in with, or were rebelling against. The describing of bands as retaining links with their home towns (discussed above) is part of this—it promotes an idea of community, that despite being famous, these people have something in common with 'us', the readers.

There was much discussion of bands being representative of Wales, particularly to the world outside Wales. One interview with Catatonia included a statement by the writer that 'Their fierce Welsh passion has become a more powerful advertising campaign than the Wales Tourist Board could ever dream up, and countless politicians and businesses have tried to harness their spirit...to no avail'.[188] The irony of this statement of course being that one of the bodies attempting to harness this spirit was none other than the *Daily Post*. The band again demonstrated their awareness of them, and their music, being used by others, and expressed unease at being asked to record an acoustic version of the chorus of *International Velvet* as a loop for a television company, presumably to be used for promotional purposes.[189]

With the prospect of their concerts at Llangollen the above interview and many others constituted a glut of positive coverage on the band, reiterating the good news of a new, improved Wales, while not necessarily naming Cool Cymru. Catatonia were referred to as 'the fresh new face of Wales' and were said to be 'ever

[188] Emma Yates, ' "I thank the Lord I'm Welsh" ', *Daily Post*, 20 May 1999, p. 22.
[189] Emma Yates, ' "I thank the Lord I'm Welsh" ', *Daily Post*, 20 May 1999, p. 22.

eager to stress their Welshness, and to appear on home soil as often as possible'.[190] There were more interviews,[191] and the economic impact on the local area of the Llangollen concerts was reported on.[192] This was on top of coverage of the concert itself, which was illustrated by pictures of Cerys Matthews and Welsh flags.[193] The review mentioned 'roars of approval' like the sound of a huge sporting event, the 'anthemic' 'International Velvet', flags, and claimed that 'some of the English audience [were] [...] looking desperately for Celtic ancestry'.[194] It also acknowledged that bands were often annoyed 'about being tagged with this Taff Rock thing' and expressed hope that Catatonia won't forget north Wales with their increased fame.[195] The coverage continued in the subsequent days, with columnists putting in their two cents worth. These articles continued with the by-now familiar themes of national identity and younger people, talking about how it was 'a joyous sight to behold so many young Welsh people draped in the Welsh flag',[196] while another echoed the chorus of 'International Velvet', running with the heading 'Thank the Lord I'm Welsh'.[197]

While the *Daily Post* may have been keen to report on Welsh-language pop, the music press rarely bothered. When it did, it was as music oddity, and records were reviewed together as a job lot; for example, a review of several Welsh-language albums from the Ankst label were coupled together with the headline 'Into the

[190] No author, 'Crest of a musical wave', *Daily Post*, 21 May 1999, pp. 12-13.
[191] Emma Yates, 'Class will always tell', *Daily Post*, 21 May 1999, 'Entertainments Guide' section, p.p. 28-29
[192] David Powell, 'Catatonia bring tourist bonanza', *Daily Post*, 22 May 1999, p. 10.
[193] Richard Williams, 'Flying the flag for Cerys', *Daily Post*, 24 May 1999, pp. 1, 5.
[194] Richard Williams, 'Flying the flag for Cerys', *Daily Post*, 24 May 1999, p. 5.
[195] Richard Williams, 'Flying the flag for Cerys', *Daily Post*, 24 May 1999, p. 5.
[196] David Banks, 'Singing proud as the flag flies for Cerys and Catatonia', *Daily Post*, 25 May 1999, p. 9.
[197] Daloni, 'Thank the Lord I'm Welsh', *Daily Post*, 26 May 1999, p. 9. D

Valleys... and beyond'.[198] This was one of the few references found within the music papers to Welsh-language pop at this time.[199] In another, Iestyn George informed readers that Welsh language group Datblygu 'are here to punish you for your belief that the Welsh are no more than just an enclave of sheep-shagging quasi-religious half breeds'.[200] The previous year Y Cyrff received a short review for their *Llawenydd Heb Ddiwedd* album in the 'In Brief' section of the *Melody Maker*.[201] Such occasional mentions back up Iestyn George's summation of the response to Welsh-language music as being 'tokenistic', as did the response from one reader a few issues later, where he criticised both the brief treatment the band were given, and, in his opinion, 'the reviewers patronising and blatantly offensive remarks.'[202] Y Cyrff's next album *Mae Ddoe Yn Ddoe* received a more in-depth review from the *Melody Maker*, but the singing in a language other than English remained the prime point of interest for the review, with the writer questioning whether their singing in Welsh was an artistic or political choice,

> Y Cyrff sing exclusively in Welsh. This is because they fail to see why they should voice their innermost thoughts and feelings in someone else's language. If they also use Welsh to deal with the mundanities [sic] of life and feel they can only express themselves in their mother tongue, then this is an admirable pursuit. But if singing in Welsh is some sort of nationalistic statement, they're pathetically alienating a large proportion of their audience and preaching only to the converted. Elitism—like misplaced pride—sucks, and gives cold comfort to the lonely and ignored.[203]

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[198] Iestyn George, 'Into the valleys... and beyond!', *NME*, 31 August 1991, p. 35. This title is also a pun on The Skids' song, 'Into the Valley'.

[199] The following year, George again reviewed a clutch of Welsh language albums from Ankst: Iestyn George, 'Iestyn George delays his return to the Valleys for a couple more years by reviewing some of his countryfolk [sic]', *NME*, 25 January 1992, p. 29. Iestyn George was also a friend of Huw Pooh – even in the glamour of the pop industry, Wales is a very small place.

[200] Iestyn George, 'Datblygu – Peel Session', *NME*, 19 September 1992, p. 38.

[201] No author, 'In brief' (album reviews), *Melody Maker*, 23 June 1991, p. 34.

[202] Dave Jennings (editor of page), 'Welsh Wails' (letter from Gareth ap Bidlan Goch, from south Wales), *Melody Maker*, 6 July 1991, p. 43.

[203] Ian Watson, 'Y Cyrff – Mae Ddoe Yn Ddoe', *Melody Maker*, 12 September 1992, p. 45.

The *NME*'s 'blatantly racist attitude towards the Welsh and Scots' was criticised by one reader in a letter printed shortly after this. He went on to object to 'your few articles on Welsh music (which I am sure deserve more than the measly airing it receives in your papers) which make the Welsh out to be valley-born/rugby crazed/hymn-singing/beer swilling/thick Taffys' and went on to refer to Wales as 'one of the last oppressed countries by your magnificent empire.'[204]

Shortly afterwards, there were several more letters on the treatment of the Welsh in the music press and in the media more generally. These letters should be placed in context; this was during the run-up to the 1992 election, where Welsh politician Neil Kinnock was leading the Labour Party, and had received some negative reactions within the press (for example, the A. N. Wilson article cited above).[205] Some of the letters within the page referred to the election itself, with writers bemoaning the news that Joan Armatrading had apparently pledged support for the Tories, and all of the letters had headings relating to the election, regardless of their actual content.[206] Within the letters on Wales more general discussions within the press were referred to in addition to the specific treatment of Welsh bands within the *NME*. One criticised other readers for complaining about the treatment of Welsh bands claiming that 'the English are so culturally narcissistic that all this flattery passes them by.'[207] Another reader argued to the contrary, that the *NME* had done much for Welsh (again, Welsh language) bands saying that,

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[204] Andrew Collins (editor of page), 'Didn't we do Welsh'('Angst' page—letter from Huw Dylan Owen, Gwynedd), *NME*, 7 March, 1992, p. 52.
[205] For further information about media attitudes towards Wales and the Welsh at this time, see James Thomas, ' "Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief" Anti-Welshness, the Press and Neil Kinnock', *Llafur*, (Volume 7, Number 2, 1997), pp. 95-108.
[206] Andrew Collins (editor of page), 'Vote Labour!!!' ('Angst' page—letter from Keith Flott, London), *NME*, 7 March, 1992, p. 52.
[207] Andrew Collins (editor of page), 'Vote for the Welsh one', 'Angst' page—letter from Gwyn Vaughan, Caernarfon, Cymru, *NME*, 7 March, 1992, p. 52.

> Huw Dylan Owen is right. Wales does get a raw and semi-racist deal. The Media [sic] are comfortable calling Neil Kinnock 'The Welsh Windbag' whereas to call Gerald Kaufman 'The Jewish Fool' would send a thousand liberals flying to the typewriter [...] One day England will learn that, yes, Welsh is Europe's oldest language; yes, the Act Of Union of 1536 was a piece of cultural terrorism, and, oh yes, the Welsh eat many things beside leeks. But what has this got to do with music and the *NME*? The only paper that ever urged its readership to investigate Tynal Tywyll, Y Cyrff and U Thant can't really be accused of siding with Henry VIII, Robert Browning, the blue book [sic] inspectors etc. *NME* does its bit by covering Welsh language acts as well and Welsh English-speaking bands. Time this Huw directed his anger against the real enemy—though by the looks, Wales will be a republic before he's worked out who they are.[208]

Throughout 1996, particularly within the *Melody Maker*, bands repeatedly spoke of their origins in Wales, and the picture which emerged reflected the bipolar images of Wales; either of working-class, post industrial south Wales, or of rural, Welsh speaking, north Wales. For example, the songs of Super Furry Animals were described as having a 'techno influence [...] obvious in their skewed riffs, their Welshness evident in the fact that they will often sing in Welsh, and their rural backgrounds clearly in singer/guitarist Gruff Rhys' lyrics.'[209] Talking about their musical style, Guto Pryce, again with more than a hint of sarcasm, told one writer that 'We overwhelm people with out close harmony singing. We're Welsh you know.'[210] In another interview, when asked about their choice of singing in Welsh, Dafydd Ieuan replied that,

> I suppose it's a fair question but I f***ing [sic] resent it anyway. Cos [sic] Welsh was our first language man, so it's natural for us to sing and write in it. I do resent the idea that just cos [sic] we sing in Welsh you automatically assume we're going to burn down your f***ing [sic] holiday cottage.[211]

[208] Andew Collins (editor of page), no title, 'Angst' page – letter from R. Llewelyn Edwards, Pontypridd/London, *NME*, 11 April 1992, p. 54.
[209] Ben Stubbs, 'Super Furry Animals – It's a kind of magic', *Melody Maker*, 11 May 1996, pp. 19-21
[210] Everett True, 'Hell have no furry', *Melody Maker*, 9 March 1996, pp. 12-13.
[211] Ben Stubbs, 'Super Furry Animals – It's a kind of magic', *Melody Maker*, 11 May 1996, pp. 19-21

But they also expressed an understanding of where other groups had come from. Talking about Manic Street Preachers, Gruff Rhys said that 'I understand the kind of area The Manic Street Preachers came from. I think where I come from in Wales is pretty similar to Blackwood, but I've never had a problematic life.'[212]

3.5 The view of Wales from overseas

Articles collected from the overseas press demonstrate that while bands from Wales found varying levels of success around the world, much of the background detail for articles was lifted directly from the British press, and therefore repeated many of the truisms which, as demonstrated above, were legion in these pieces. Sometimes repeated verbatim, for example that Wales was named as an unlikely place of origin for pop. Imaginings of Wales clearly influenced interpretations of the music in many examples. The placing of the bands within a specifically British context was quite different though. While the British press tended to describe the bands solely in terms of Wales and Cool Cymru, the overseas press was more likely to place them within the context of Britpop, comparing Welsh groups with more popular acts English Britpop acts that were likely to be familiar to their readership.

Within the overseas press, Wales was again an exotic location, and usually a brief description of the geography and history was given for the benefit of the reader. Of all the groups from Wales at this time, Catatonia received the most attention from the press in the US. Many of the articles refer to the press coverage which Catatonia had received in the British press at this point; coverage which often focused on Cerys Matthews alcohol consumption and her distinctive voice.[213] Virtually every article

[212] David Bennun, 'We've never taken acid', *Melody Maker*, 13 July 1996, pp. 32-34.
[213] For examples, see, Ben Werner, 'With Britpop fading, Wales' Catatonia step into the spotlight', *Orange County Register*, 13 August 1998, entertainment section, no page number. Also, no author (Associated Press), 'The Next Courtney Love. Leading Catatonia into the limelight', Telegraph Herald

from the US makes an attempt to describe her singing style, with it being noted that her voice can 'shift abruptly from girlish to growling',[214] and compared Matthews's style to that of Bjork from Iceland, an indicator of Wales's status as exotic unknown.[215] Their coming from Wales was invariably mentioned, sometimes merely as factual biography, but often in relation to the music itself, linking physical geography and musical style. One writer opened an article describing Matthews's voice as being, 'Breathy and vaporous as a highland mist, it ascends past the rolling *r*s of her native Wales, then crashes onto the glottal rocks of her Celtic consonants.'[216] Another claimed that 'Bjork's music is entirely informed by her Icelandic heritage, as is Catatonia's by the smoky hills of Wales. The cultures [of Wales and Iceland] share this in common: a fervent but suppressed national culture, which develops a self-depreciating reflex in the natives.'[217] Some twisted ideas of heritage even further; 'There are Celtic influences and the band seem to have been influenced by The Smiths and Blondie.'[218] Catatonia were not alone in having their sound closely linked to (imaginings) of their place of origin; a piece on Super Furry Animals claimed that 'When you live in the mountains of northern Wales, inspiration comes from different places than usual: nature (the aurora borealis), the Weather Channel [sic], other like-minded bands (the criminally unheard Gorky's Zygotic Mynci), et cetera. You take

(Dubuque, IA), 28 May 2000, features section, p. 13. . And also, Bruce Newman, 'Rule Catatonia!', *Details For Men*, April 2000, pp. 113-6. Given that Richard Burton was probably the most famous Welshman that America had experienced, this kept in with ideas about the Welsh.

[214] Mark Jenkins, 'Welsh Band Catatonia: Internationalists Abroad', *Washington Post*, 9 August 1998, Sunday Arts section, p. 1.

[215] Thomas Conner, 'Catatonia: International Velvet', *Tulsa World*, 28 August 1998, Backbeat section, no page number given. Steven Gertz, 'Rising popularity of Welsh pop revives British invasion', *Michigan Daily* via University Wire (U-Wire), 24 September 1998, no page number given. Ben Wener, 'With Britpop fading, Wales' catatonia steps into the spotlight', *Orange County Register*, 13 August 1998, no page number given.

[216] Bruce Newman, 'Rule Catatonia!', *Details For Men*, April 2000, pp. 113-6.

[217] Thomas Conner, 'Catatonia: International Velvet', *Tulsa World*, 28 August 1998, Backbeat section, no page number given. .

[218] Johanna Buran, 'Catatonia's "International Velvet" ', *Campus Times* (via University Wire, Rochester), 30 March 1999, no page number given.

solace in the one-to-one communication of sympathetic spirits that modern technology affords'.[219] And once again, claims were made that the band's Welsh origin could be found in their music, with 'Gathering Moss' being described as 'a song that speaks eloquently of broken promises in a region of Britain that has seen its social fabric almost completely unravel in the wake of the mine [sic] closing'.[220]

Other reviewers placed the success of some new Welsh bands abroad within a broader 'Celtic' heading, reporting that, 'Thanks largely to "Riverdance," [sic] sales of so-called Celtic CDs are booming',[221] suggesting that while bands from Wales may have been receiving some attention from abroad, ideas about Wales were still, at best, fuzzy.

As with the British media, Wales was identified as an unlikely source for pop music, with writers commenting that 'In the history of rock'n'roll, many cities have been the home of great bands? [sic] Memphis, New York, San Francisco, London, Manchester, Wales. Wales?' – this particular writer seemed unaware of Wales' status as a country, rather than a city.[222] Another wrote that,

> Wales lists as its major exports coal, iron and steel, various agricultural products and, as of the past several years, top-notch pop bands. An unlikely hotbed of young talent, Wales has produced a surge of bands that specialize in creating some of the most finely-honed, hook-laden ear candy on either side of the Atlantic, with Super Furry Animals (SFA), Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, and Catatonia as the three most popular contenders.[223]

While the bands were often linked together within the press, the phrase Cool Cymru was never used, presumably because unless the reader was aware of Cool

[219] Jay Babcock, 'The Citizens Band', *LA Weekly*, 6 August 1999, Music section, p. 55. .
[220] Drew Gibson, 'Band plays fast and furry-ous', *Daily Yomiuri* (Japan), 21 November 1996, p. 10.
[221] Mark Jenkins, 'Rare Welsh Nits; Two Bands' Fresh Sound Unappreciated in the States', *Washington Post*, 11 February 1998, Style section, p. D07. .
[222] Mike Nartker, 'Super Furry Animals' "Radiator" ', *Hatchet* (via University Wire, George Washington University), 19 April 1999, no page number given. .
[223] Stephen Gertz, 'Rising popularity of Welsh pop revives British invasion', *Michigan Daily* (via University Wire), 24 September 1998, no page number given. .

Britannia it would mean very little, and the word Cymru would mean even less to most of these readers.

More general articles on bands from Wales linked them together, and again implied that this unlikely place for new bands to emerge from,[224] with decline of heavy industry noted once more.'[225] Some acknowledged that the naming bands from Wales together was something of an anomaly, as musically they were quite different; 'Hailing from the tiny South Wales village of Cwmaman, Stereophonics invariably gets compared to other Welsh bands such as Manic Street Preachers, 60 Foot Dolls and Super Furry Animals. In actual fact, the trio is closer to Credence Clearwater, AC/DC, Ocean Colour Scene, ZZ Top, and Reef'.[226] While the writer is correct on pointing out that the sounds of the bands from Wales is disparate, connection between them is still made in the opening sentence, even if it is questioning the legitimacy of this.

Generally, the roots of these stories are found in articles from the British press, and the music press, along with the authors' ideas about Wales and Welsh culture. They suggest that these writers had clear imaginings of Wales, and find this links between this and the music. However, these imaginings do not bear resemblance to the place people living in Wales experience daily.

3.5 Cool Cymru—a Good News Story

The telling of the story of Cool Cymru (and not just the writing about bands and a scene, but taking a broader view), was invariably told in a buoyant, optimistic

[224] Drew Gibson, 'Band plays fast and furry-ous', *Daily Yomiuri* (Japan), 21 November 1996, p. 10, C Eliezer, 'Welsh Rare Bits', *Courier Mail* (Queensland, Australia), 20 November 1997, What's On section, p. 20, Simon Beattie, 'Not Stereo Types', *Evening Post* (Wellington, New Zealand), 18 March 1999, Entertainment section, p. 18, No author given, 'Welcome hone to Wales', *Southland Times* (New Zealand), 29 November 2000, Travel features, p. 14.

[225] Drew Gibson, 'Band plays fast and furry-ous', *Daily Yomiuri* (Japan), 21 November 1996, p. 10.

[226] C Eliezer, 'Welsh Rare Bits', *Courier Mail* (Queensland, Australia), 20 November 1997, What's On section, p. 20.

tone—a good news story which injected some celebrity and cool into the most disparate of subjects. These stories generally appeared in the Welsh press, and these will be looked at first, but were not confined to it; for example, the *Financial Times* and other broadsheets also weighed in.

The reporting of a good news story is in itself not unusual but the use of pop to provide apparently proof of an economic or cultural renaissance deserves closer examination, especially in relation to devolution, and the idea of Wales being somehow more confident.

Bands were said to be supporting devolution without providing any supporting quotes, while interviews often revealed a more complex picture. One article, typical of this time, quoted Eluned Morgan as saying that 'It [Devolution] is becoming a popular movement, involving a Welsh pop group like Catatonia who are ambassadors for Wales'.[227] While Cerys Matthews was happy to be photographed wearing a 'Yes' t-shirt, other band members later expressed scepticism about the linking of pop music and politics, and as cited in the previous chapter, saw this as something of a cynical ploy on the part of politicians.[228]

Articles that promoted this success focused on success outside Wales (and indeed, outside the UK) while still stressing Welsh origin.[229] Another change was that articles were now included in the main body of the *Western Mail*, rather than in the supplements. And for the first time there was mention of Welsh pop within a wider debate on Welsh culture and identity, the following being typical in tone and content;

[227] Tom Boedden, 'Yes, we all support devolution for Wales', *Daily Post*, 11 February 1997, p. ?.
[228] No author, 'Catatonia: Disillusioned with the Welsh Assembly…Already!', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 5.
[229] Pauline McLean, 'Video hits show why Gorky's have fans all over the world', *Western Mail*, 1 April 1996, p. 8. Mario Risoli, 'Rock band on verge of achieving chart glory', *Western Mail*, 21 May 1995, p. 3. Pauline McLean, 'Unknown from Wales tipped to top the US chart', *Western Mail*, 27 July 1996, p.1. Pauline McLean and Christopher Rees, 'Salute to the brave Preachers', *Western Mail*, 13 December 1996, p. 3.

> Three years ago you'd have been hard pressed by to [sic] name one decent Welsh band—and we don't count Shakin'Stevens or Tom Jones, but how things have changed. Is being Welsh trendy at last! I may seem unlikely but Wales is at last catching up with its Celtic cousins in Scotland and Ireland. The people who have been called the 'untrendy Celts' and are the butt of jokes on par with the Belgians (what did we do wrong?) are in the charts and are now also moving onto the big screen.[230]

National navel gazing continued with the rise of New Labour and their promise of a referendum for devolution. As part of the *Western Mail*'s series, 'Where Wales? The Nationhood Debate',[231] Beca Brown wrote a piece on pop music in Wales, which was re-printed the following year following the Labour victory.[232] The piece spoke of 'A new confidence and energy drives the creative youth and youthful Wales'.[233] It began by refuting claims allegedly made by Noel Gallagher of the Britpop band Oasis that 'nothing good had ever come out of Wales'. It placed the new wave of Welsh pop solely within a Welsh-language setting, and all of the bands named were 'members of the Welsh pop scene, and their members had played the wonky stages of that scene for years'.[234] Repeatedly, these references to a 'Welsh pop scene' refer solely to the Welsh-language music scene, and it was the issue of these bands choosing to perform partially in the English language which formed the focal point of the article. No mention was made of the monoglot English-speaking Welsh bands, Stereophonics and Manic Street Preachers. And it was Welsh language broadcasters only which were mentioned (S4C and Radio Cymru) while the author states that Wales is 'a home to both English and Welsh languages'. The idea though of a 'new confidence' was one which was to be repeated regularly, as was the claim that people outside of Wales were taking notice of what was happening in Wales.

[230] No author, 'Pop parade gets longer', *Western Mail*, 9 November 1996, p. 10.
[231] Several commentators, journalists, and writers contributed towards this series.
[232] Beca Brown, 'A youth culture that's for all of us', *Western Mail*, 24 May 1997, p. .
[233] Beca Brown, 'A youth culture that's for all of us', *Western Mail*, 6 March 1996, p. 10
[234] Beca Brown, 'A youth culture that's for all of us', *Western Mail*, 6 march 1996, p. 10.

By the end of 1996, the idea that music and bands were representative of more general success had made its way from columns and the arts pages to the editorial, albeit in slightly more muted form than was found elsewhere.

> To have bands as varied, innovative and popular as the Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia, Super Furry Animals, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and more emerge from a confined area in such a short time is particularly striking, given the thin gruel Wales has previously served up for the charts.
>
> Wales has had to rely on the past glories of the likes of Tom Jones, Shakin' Stevens and The Alarm. Never before has Wales been able to boast such a cluster of success.
>
> Suddenly Wales becomes trendy, and the eyes of the music business are on Cardiff, Newport and the rest. The stereotyped vision of a Wales stuck in a 1950s time warp is beginning to disappear.
>
> The short-term effects of Welsh pop in tourism, business and prosperity? Minimal. The long term effect? By itself, still very small. But it will form part of a larger picture which tells the outside world what we who live here already know: that Wales has changed, and continues to change.[235]

Such pieces demonstrate that the bands were exposed to a readership that went beyond their usual fan-base—they were entering a more mainstream consciousness. Similarly, a review of Manic Street Preachers' concert at Cardiff International Arena in the December of 1996 demonstrated just how much had changed. Firstly, the concert was reported on the front page of the paper. This may not have been the busiest of news days, but nonetheless, such prominent reporting on pop suggests that at an editorial level it was felt that such a report would appeal to readers. Once again there was an emphasis on the Welsh origin of the bands who had played, with the photo of James Dean Bradfield accompanied with the caption, 'It was an all-Welsh occasion, with the stars of the current Welsh pop revival—Catatonia and the Super Furry Animals—providing the warm-up [to Manic Street Preachers] at Cardiff

[235] Editorial (Neil Fowler), 'Suddenly it's the land of pop song', *Western Mail*, 13 December 1996, p. 14.

International Arena.'[236] A more in-depth review was printed on page three, again using words such as 'Welsh' and 'homecoming' and the reviewers reported that an orchestral version of their recent single 'Design for Life' was used at the start of their set and 'introduced the band together with symbolic television footage as the crowd warmed up their voices'.[237]

In 1997, this trend of increased exposure of bands within the main body of the paper continued, and within these the 'story' of Welsh pop was told, retold and established. One of the core elements to this story was that previously bands had to leave Wales in order to find success. The band Feeder, from Usk, were described as having 'found success by moving [from south Wales] to London six years ago, emerging though the live circuit there [...] Feeder have made their mark outside Wales, but are now keen to re-establish their Welsh roots'. Singer, Grant Nicholls, commented that their reason for leaving was that there was no music scene in Cardiff.[238] Advice was offered to bands on getting a record deal, with Huw Williams saying,

> In Wales in the past the situation was complicated by geography; talent scouts were loathe to leave London. But not now. In the last three years there have been lots of groups signed which has been great. Lots of scouts have come down, although not much has happened in the last 12 months.[239]

Greg Haver, who had worked closely with Manic Street Preachers was quoted, saying that 'There was a time in Wales when any band with a contract was treated like

[236] No author, 'Preachers triumphant return to all-Welsh concert', *Western Mail*, 13 December 1996, p. 1.
[237] Pauline McLean and Christopher Rees, 'Salute to the brave Preachers', *Western Mail*, 13 December 1996, p. 3.
[238] Christopher Rees, 'Feeder frenzy grows on "High" ', *Western Mail* ,10 October 1997, p. ?.
[239] Darren Waters, 'Breaking through the rock barriers', *Western Mail*, 13 October 1997, p. 10.

a god. Now the younger bands learn from the more experienced bands'.[240] These stories, while not relating directly to the more general pieces on Wales' fortune, continue with the same themes—that the outside world (London) had ignored talent from Wales, but now was taking some notice.

The idea of 'Selling Wales' was discussed the following year in 1998, and followed the typical pattern set up in articles on pop from Wales; to begin with the negative and then contrast this with an apparently more positive future,[241] with others taking this hysteria to a new zenith;

> If Wales one day basks in the warmth that only a country at ease with itself can, the historians of the future may well trace its first stirrings back to the efforts of a group of Valley boys from Blackwood. A new found confidence, Cool Cymru, new Wales, whatever you call it, numerous people cite the success of the 'Welsh bands' as an inspiration, a motivating factor [...] If the Manics were to fail, the effect on the confidence of people in the country would be immense. The Manics are Wales' most prestigious brand name.[242]

Language more associated with marketing was used in the discussion of 'rebranding' Wales; one writer claiming that 'Mr [Ron] Davies was quick to cite the example of Welsh pop bands, upon whose shoulders rest much of the enthusiasm in the country'.[243] This was something that Mr Davies refuted when interviewed during the course of this research and indeed, I have found no quotes in newspapers or other publications that contradict his claim.

The discussion about rebranding Wales also took place outside the pages of the *Western Mail.* The first article to use the label of 'Cool Cymru' was a response to

[240] Darren Waters, 'Breaking through the rock barriers', *Western Mail*, 13 October 1997, p. 10.
[241] Clive Betts, 'Selling Wales – The hunt for a new image', *Western Mail*, 20 June 1998, p. 12.
[242] Darren Waters, 'Manic truth comes out', *Western Mail*, 25 July 1998, 'Western Mail Magazine', p. 4.
[243] Darren Waters, 'Image-makers project a modern Wales', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1998, p. 3.

a speech by Peter Hain in *The Times*.[244] Such chatterings inspired one MP, Owen Patterson, to put forward an Early Day Motion entitled 'Conduct of the Honourable Member for Neath and the Welsh', it proposed,

> That this House condemns the proposals by the Welsh Office Minister, the honourable Member for Neath, to replace Wales's noble Red Dragon with a red kite which is nothing more than a thieving scavenger; notes that the dragon has been, since the reign of King Vortigern in the 5th century, an exotic, fiery and powerful symbol, in whose name Owain Glyndwr fought the English in 1400, which provided Henry VII's motto at Bosworth Field 'The Red Dragon is our inspiration' and under whose colours thousands of soldiers of the Royal Welch Fusiliers died in two world wars; disagrees with the honourable Member's idiosyncratic view that 'Modern Wales is about Manic Street Preachers and Catatonia'; questions both his judgement and knowledge of Welsh history and culture; deplores the considerable public expense which the banning of the Welsh Dragon will entail; and suggests that the Red Dragon will be remembered and loved long after the honourable Member for Neath and the Manic Street Preachers have been forgotten.[245]

This led to a response shortly afterwards from a Welsh Labour MP which called for an amendment to the above proposal from line one, so that it would read,

> [That this House] noting that the honourable Member of Neath has expressly and publicly stated that there is no question of replacing the Welsh flag or the Welsh Dragon, but that it will continue to fly proudly for Wales over the National Assembly for Wales and instead that consideration is being given as to what might be an appropriate symbol for the Assembly; also notes that the House of Commons has in the portcullis a symbol which is different from the Union Jack and that the Assembly may or may not wish to have a different symbol [sic] from the Welsh flag; regrets that Conservative honourable Members have displayed their total ignorance of both Welsh politics in suggesting that the Welsh Dragon might somehow be banned by the Welsh Office, and the success of excellent, internationally renowned Welsh rock groups like the Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia, 60ft Dolls, Stereophonics and Gorky's Zygotic Mynci; and congratulates the honourable Member for Neath for his acknowledgement that they are indeed part of the

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[244] Jasper Gerard, 'Davies delivers his call to arms', *The Times*, 4 April 1998, Features section, no page number given.

[245] Owen Patterson, 'Conduct of the Honourable Member for Neath and the Welsh', EDM 1254, 27 April 1998. Available at http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=14797&SESSION=701

> modern and dynamic face of the New Wales which is going from strength to strength under the Labour Government.[246]

While such exchanges perhaps say more about Parliament than they do about identity in Wales, they do show the strength of feeling that discussion of identity within the media inspired.

The hysterical tone of some articles within the Welsh press about the importance of pop may have taken on an exaggerated tone, but they were not written in a vacuum. Major events, including the founding of the National Assembly, the European Summit held in Cardiff in the summer of 1998, and the building of the Millennium Stadium in preparation for the 1999 Rugby World Cup, were international good news stories for Wales.[247]

The link between Wales' economic fortunes and the success of its musicians was explicitly brought together by the *Western Mail* in relation to tourism with their 'Sound of Wales' supplement in 1997 and 1998. In the 1998 edition, Cerys Matthews graced the front cover, with the caption, 'The Queen of Taffrock'. Under the heading 'Driving forward Taffrock', it was reported that, 'Wales is known as the Land of Song but for years its only songmakers, according to the outside world, were Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey and male voice choirs.' It went on to list the new wave of bands and this time tie it into a wider, British, context, 'This is Wales's contribution to Cool Britannia and it has become known as Taffrock',[248] with the supplement geared towards advertising Wales as a holiday location. The final piece of this supplement was entitled 'Pop explosion or classical tradition—Cool Cymru is hip' telling a

[246] Jackie Lawrence, 'Conduct of the Honourable Member for Neath and the Welsh dragon; Amdt. line 1', EDM 1254A1, 28 April 1998. Available from, http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=14803&SESSION=701
[247] See Chapter 4 – correspondence between Researcher and Neil Fowler, editor of the *Western Mail*.
[248] Mario Rissoli, 'Driving Forward Taffrock', *Western Mail*, 29 May 1998, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, p. 3.

familiar story that 'If music is an international language, then we must believe that the Welsh speak it well. Perhaps it is something more than that—perhaps it is a way of life that appeals to the musical soul and nourishes it'.[249] Such statements play on cultural stereotypes, and while not every reader might have agreed with such characterisation, they do represent popular notions of Wales as 'land of song'. Both articles also play on the idea that somehow 'the English'—this time in the guise of journalists—are in some way out to do 'us' down. The purpose of the piece is perhaps clearest in the final sentences:

> So, clearly, for anyone planning a musical holiday, there is plenty of material to work with, irrespective of location or time of year—and the Welsh tourist board and its associated tourism companies will help you make the best of it. For further information, please contact the Wales Tourist Board.[250]

Bands made statements about place and identity. Cerys Matthews claimed to be 'influenced by the mentality of the Welsh—that we are no good at anything. So in a way what we do, we do despite all that. We are beyond influences, people in London are too cool for their own good'.[251] When this quote was read back to her, Matthews said, 'Of course I was generalising', suggesting that she did not take her pronouncements as seriously as they were by others, including the journalists who quoted her. The interest which she and other members of the band took in Wales came across most strongly in interviews with the music press which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

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[249] Mike Greenow, 'Pop explosion or classical tradition – Cool Cymru is hip', *Western Mail*, 29 May 1998, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, pp. 12-13.

[250] Mike Greenow, 'Pop explosion or classical tradition – Cool Cymru is hip', *Western Mail*, 29 May 1998, 'Sound of Wales' supplement, pp. 12-13. As noted in Chapter 3, the Wales Tourist Board had been using an orchestral mix of Manic Street Preachers' 'Design For Life' as the soundtrack for their '2 hours, and a million miles away' campaign the following year, in 1999.

[251] Darren Waters, 'Catatonia's Cerys shrugs off date with Bailey and pop divas', *Western Mail*, 22 August 1998, p. 11.

Nicky Wire did not always talk explicitly about devolution, he was quoted at length discussing Welsh identity, particularly around the time of the release of the Manics' album *This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours* in 1998. In an interview with BBC Wales, Wire claimed that 'In some ways I think that this is the first ever true Welsh folk album.'[252] In an interview in the *Western Mail*, he argued that 'There is more confidence now [...] We are on the cusp of something and it's important that we don't internally self-destruct which is our way. It's a village mentality sometimes: we should have a country mentality. The benefits, if we do achieve it, are being at ease with ourselves as a country'.[253] Later on that summer, he was quoted as saying that,

> The good thing is that now every gig we turn up to, Welsh people are coming out of the woodwork everywhere and have something to shout about. There are lots of friendly faces. [...] To have a cultural explosion in Wales in general, the rugby, the music, the sport, is just something that we never thought we'd see, but we are seeing it now.[...] We would love to put something back into our home country.[254]

This, and other interviews, demonstrate that the linking between ideas of national identity and pop came not only from the media, but to some extent also from the individuals within bands.[255] Such comments confirmed links already made by the press, and served to reinforce ideas of a new Wales, which made the much lauded 'new found confidence' a self-fulfilling prophecy. This navel-gazing reached perhaps its most extreme level during the 'silly season' in 1998 when several members of Welsh bands had been voted into the *Melody Makers*' 'Sexiest People' poll. This was reported prominently within the *Western Mail*,

[252] 'This is my truth, tell me yours', BBC Radio Wales, 12 September 1998.
[253] Darren Waters, 'The Manic truth comes out', *Western Mail*, 22 August 1998, 'Western Mail Magazine', pp. 4-10 (p. 7.).
[254] Brendan Williams, 'Preaching to the converted', *Western Mail*, 9 October 1999, 'Western Mail Magazine', pp. 4-8 (p. 8).
[255] This will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, along with how groups (and their PR and management companies) 'flagged' their Welsh identity.

> The poll is undoubtedly a reflection of the quality of the Welsh music scene and not just the aesthetics of good bone structure. The poll has already had approval from a politician who is hoping to top a different kind of poll in the near future—Welsh Assembly First Minister candidate Rhrodri Morgan MP said, 'This has been a long time coming. We are not used to success and celebrity in Wales.'[256]

The coverage which followed in 1999 carried on in much the same tone, with notions of a new Wales and the phrase 'Cool Cymru' entering into many articles, but it also saw the beginning of the backlash. St David was described as the 'original manic street preacher',[257] images of children's faces painted with the red dragon accompanied by the slogan Cool Cymru appeared,[258] and there was some excitement over the creation of a Geri Halliwell-style dragon dress.[259] A wider view of Welsh popular culture was pointed to in the publication of a book of '50 Welsh greats', which along with the ubiquitous Cerys Matthews, included actors and sportsmen.[260] Along with the assertions that 'Wales has long earned itself a reputation for being a hotbed of pop talent', came the familiar complaint that 'For years the Welsh have had to contend with comments and jibes about leeks, sheep, rugby and Tom Jones' hip action on stage, but at last it seems the rest of Britain has realised there's more to Wales'.[261] If the following piece is anything to go by, that realisation was based on celebrities, rather than anything more profound.

> At the rally, organised by the Yes for Wales campaign, the ITV weather forecaster Sian Lloyd introduced Mr. Davies to a crowd that included entertainer Max Boyce, the former Welsh rugby international Nigel Walker and the actor Phillip Madoc. Other Welsh stars, including footballer Ryan

[256] No author, 'Welsh artists nose ahead in sexy singers chart', *Western Mail*, 8 September 1998, p. 3.
[257] Carolyn Hitt, 'The first manic preacher', *Western Mail*, 1 March 1999, p. 13.
[258] No author, 'Plenty to shout about now that the dragon can roar with its own voice', *Western Mail*, 12 March 1999, 'Education' supplement, p. 1.
[259] Nick Horton, 'Fire and passion to sell the Assembly', *Western Mail*, 26 March 1999, p. ?.
[260] Catherine Jones, 'Siân captures "cool Cymru" [sic] for album of Welsh greats', *Western Mail*, 18 September 1999, p. 8.
[261] Emma Pearson, 'What will it take to keep Cool Cymru in the music limelight', *Western Mail*, 17 April 1999, p. 15.

> Giggs, the actress Sian Phillips and the chart-topping bands Manic Street Preachers and Super Furry Animals, sent messages of support.[262]

Celebrity sheen and pop music were brought together in one glorious fame-tinged endorsement of Welsh identity; 'Sian Lloyd last night claimed that "there's a new street cred to being Welsh [...] There's a new confidence among young people in Wales," as she proclaimed a message of support from Welsh pop group Super Furry Animals—no 24 in the chart'.[263]

The reporting the previous year on SWS, was now followed by more 'good news' stories about Welsh people outside of Wales.[264] These included pieces on the 'Hollywood Welsh',[265] on how 'since the Cool Cymru explosion the presence of the Welsh accent has improved, if only slightly' within broadcasting.[266] The more typical pieces on pop continued to appear, with BBC Radio 1 DJ Bethan Elfyn saying how '[Cool Cymru] has made every young person in Wales just so proud, when they go to parties or clubs in England they are still playing Welsh music'.[267]

By the turn of the century and the Manic Street Preachers concert at the newly-built Millennium Stadium, some questions had been raised on the validity of Cool Cymru, within the *Western Mail* and other media sources. However, this had little bearing on the general tone of many stories,[268] including the reporting on this

[262] Mark Henderson, 'Celebrities join the devolution party', *The Times*, 23 July 1997, Features section, no page number given.
[263] Lucy Patterson, 'Welsh devolution', *Guardian*, 23 July 1997, p. 8.
[264] 'Sws' stood for 'Social, Welsh and Sexy', and means 'kiss' in Welsh. Described as a 'Welsh networking group', if was founded by the actor Stifyn Parry, and members included Catherine Zeta Jones and Sian Lloyd. It was ironically apparently far more active in London than in Wales. http://www.swsuk.com/
[265] Get author, 'Hollywood Welsh: triumphs and tears in tinseltown', *Western Mail*, 1 May 1999, 'Western Mail Magazine', pp. 1-7.
[266] Rhodri Owen, 'Celts accentuating the airwaves', *Western Mail*, 22 May 1999, p. 9.
[267] Nick Dermody, 'Pop spotter digs for rich seam of new talent', *Western Mail*, 16 July 1999, p. 13.
[268] No author, 'Cerys adopts "rustic" look for exhibition', *Western Mail*, 14 January 2000, p. 5. Dean Powell, 'Manics still on song for success', *Western Mail*, 15 January 2000, p. 7. Claire Savage, 'National pride spurs the trend for Welsh names', *Western Mail*, 21 January 2000, p. 3. Darren Waters,

gig, which maintained the good news story and the idea a changing Wales, claiming it to be,

> [...] a crystallisation of something happening in Wales [...] a new-found confidence, a new Wales: Whatever you want to call it Wales is at last finally finding its voice and Manic Street Preachers are one of a growing number of artists who are writing the soundtrack.[...] If one combined the joy of every time Wales beats England at rugby—of every Triple Crown and Grand Slam—the would be a close approximation of the atmosphere enjoyed by an audience who were there to be more than just entertained by a rock band [...] But this was not a concert of petty-nationalism. There were chants of 'Wales. Wales' but this was about inclusion not exclusion.[269]

Simultaneously others questioned it, usually claiming that Cool Cymru had served its purpose and should be dropped.[270]

From the beginning, the good news angle was repeated in the British press, particularly in the broadsheets; although not quite so emphatic in tone, pop referenced as symbolic of broader changes in Wales' fortunes. The *Financial Times* examined the economic changes which were going on in Wales, reporting on Peter Hain's speech, and the re-branding idea was very much in the established lexicon of New Labour and their election victory of 1997, as this extract illustrates,

> The government is to draw up proposals to rebrand Wales as part of its drive to secure a high turnout in next year's elections to the planned Welsh assembly [sic]. The proposals will be also seen as part of the government's campaign to rebrand Britain as a modern, technology-based nation—although most ministers now baulk at the phrase 'Cool Britannia'. Ron Davies, the Welsh secretary, was deeply sceptical about the phrase 'Cool Cymru', but insisted that the idea of rebranding Wales was important. 'We have got to find a way of raising the image and profile of Wales,' he said.[271]

And within such pieces, pop was named as playing a significant role,

'Tired symbols clash with our exciting new identity' *Western Mail*, 26 February 2000, 'Western Mail Magazine', pp. 4-8.

[269] Darren Waters, 'Manics preach to the converted', *Western Mail*, 1 January 2000, p. 2.

[270] H. Jones, 'Jealous Jo warns of the danger of Cool Cymru label', *Western Mail*, 21 October 2000, p. 16. Darren Devine, 'Actors say "Cool Cymru" is meaningless', *Western Mail*, 2 November 2000, p. ?.

[271] Andrew Parker, 'Cool Cymru will not slay its red dragon', *Financial Times*, 4 June 1998, p. 9.

> Wales is enjoying a cultural renaissance, largely thanks to its burgeoning rock talent. The Manic Street Preachers, and more recently Catatonia, have given Welsh rock music a new credibility after years in the doldrums. A Welsh Office spokesman said the aim was to get rid of the stereotypes that dominate coverage of Wales by journalists from outside the principality. Articles and broadcasts regularly include references to male voice choirs and coal mines. The rebranding exercise should help generate more awareness of and interest in the Welsh assembly, and the elections to the body next May.[272]

Similarly, reports on the hosting of the European Summit in 1998 in Cardiff were reported in terms of representing a renaissance,

> Next week Cardiff is the host city for the final summit of Britain's EU presidency. The choice of the Welsh capital is a fitting acknowledgement of the city's renaissance and the principality's broader resurgence. After last year's tentative endorsement of the new assembly, the Welsh are taking confident strides towards a new and valued position in an evolving Britain. The invocation of Cool Britannia may now cause metropolitan cynics to shrug, but the emergence of Cool Cymru is something no one should feel ashamed to celebrate, on either side of Offa's Dyke.[273]

Much of the article went on to discuss the developments which were taking place in Cardiff Bay, but it also noted that of importance were cultural changes, saying 'The Welsh cultural revival is not restricted to the Eisteddfod. Bands such as The Manic Street Preachers and Catatonia have transformed perceptions of Welsh song'.[274] And many of the actual physical signs of this much discussed 'new Wales' were also based in Cardiff—the Millennium Stadium and the Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay. Pieces which were dismissive of Cool Cymru did not necessarily deny that changes in Wales' image were underway;

> Not surprisingly this irredeemably naff offshoot of Cool Britannia was disowned by ministers and their spokesmen almost as soon as it was coined. Politicians have long tried to harness pop music to their cause and have

[272] Andrew Parker, 'Cool Cymru will not slay its red dragon', *Financial Times*, 4 June 1998, p. 9.
[273] No author given, 'Cool Cymru', *The Times*, 13 June 1998, Features section, no page number given. See also, Brian Groom and Juliette Jowit, 'Cool Cymru is hottest spot for office workers', *Financial Times*, 12 July 1999, p. 1.
[274] No author given, 'Cool Cymru', *The Times*, 13 June 1998, Features section, no page number given.

> almost always managed to emerge looking like buffoons. For a while it looked like happening again as political diarists talked about New Labour plans to rebrand Wales and replace the dragon with something more modern... the image of Wales that is now being thrust in front of young people in Britain no longer consists solely of leeks and coal mines. Instead pop stars like Cerys Matthews and Nicky Wire of the Manics dominate.'[275]

Another paper reported that pop music was to supplant 'centuries-old traditions embodied in the State Opening of the Westminster parliament' instead using pop music 'showcasing the trendy side of Wales.'[276]

The discussion of the change in Welsh culture became one repeated continually. Some articles seemed to have little obvious new content,

> Not long ago Welsh culture, to many, meant bards and eisteddfods, male voice choirs and small trains carved from lumps of coal. Dylan Thomas and Richard Burton were dead, and Tom Jones was as cool as Harry Secombe. But for the generation which has grown up since the closure of the mines and steel mills, Tom Jones has been resurrected as an icon, Cardiff is the capital of 'Cool Cymru' and it's trendy to be Welsh.[277]

However, what is clear is how much such descriptions of Wales were based on well-known imaginings of industrial south Wales. In addition to journalistic ponderings, academic weight was added to the argument,

> John Osmond, director if the Institute of Welsh Affairs, believes that Cool Cymru can be linked to devolution and a new sense of national pride. 'it was the under-45s who carried the vote in favour of a Welsh Assembly,' he said, 'and it's the yo ung who have strength and confidence in expressing themselves.'[278]

Links between constitutional changes and pop were made following the establishment of the Assembly in Wales. In a poll conducted in 1999 which reported that over half of young adults in Wales 'feel the Queen does not have an important

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[275] Andrew Davies, 'National pride spills from politics into arts', *Financial Times*, 4 March 1999, Survey section, p. 6.

[276] Gaby Hinsliff, 'Queen to be sidelined by trendies from the hillside', *Daily Mail*, 4 March 1999, p. 17.

[277] Simon de Bruxelles, ' "Land of Song" gets cool new image', *The Times*, 19 June 1999, Home news, no page number given.

[278] Simon de Bruxelles, ' "Land of Song" gets cool new image', *The Times*, 19 June 1999, Home news, no page number given.

role in their future', comparisons were drawn between this and bands apparently declining to play in front of the Queen at the opening of the National Assembly. Accompanying the piece, and reinforcing this link between pop and politics was a picture of Cerys Matthews, with the caption, 'Influential: Cerys Matthews of Catatonia'.[279]

Within finance and business, Cool Cymru was both an explanation for economic change and a way of introducing other topics—sexing up the news from, in this example, Welsh dairies;

> The Welsh music scene, led by bands such as Catatonia and the Manic Street Preachers, have raised the region in the public consciousness, and the Welsh are also keen rugby fans, proud of their team. The Rugby World Cup is due to be held there later this year, and the Welsh team was influential in this year's Five Nations championship, even though it didn't figure in the outcome. The World Cup should provide opportunities for local producers to showcase their goods, including Bedwas-based Welsh food specialist Cegin Cymru, which, to mark the occasion, has produced a commemorative cheese wrapped in wax dyed the colour of the Welsh flag.[280]

Another manufacturer, this time of alcopops, was quoted as saying that Cool Cymru had helped boost his sales as 'People want Welsh things.'[281] A shop opening to sell crafts made in Wales, was 'cashing in on Cool Cymru',[282] with support for local produce also coming under the label.[283] Equally, it was attached to fashion, again via celebrity. While the *Western Mail* had previously used Julian MacDonald as an example of Welsh success within fashion, now Cerys Matthews, actress Catherine Zeta Jones and then Conservative Party leader William Hague's wife Ffion

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[279] No author given, 'Royals are not cool for Cymru', *South Wales Evening Post*, 23 June 1999, p. 5. See also, Philip Pope, 'Why Cool Cymru Is About So Much More Than Music; You Say They Hate The Royals', *Mirror*, 23 June 1999, p. 7.

[280] Helen Gregory, 'PR Promotions: Catering for a proud nation', *Supermarketing* (From Financial Times Information), 13 August 1999, p. 16.

[281] No author, 'Cool Cymru creates', *South Wales Evening Post*, 27 October 1999, p. 7.

[282] No author, 'Opening up to the world', *South Wales Evening Post*, 3 November 1999, Sports section, p. 5.

[283] Susan Buchanan, 'Cool Cymru – get the hots for Wales', *South Wales Evening Post*, 1 March 1999, p. 14.

named as exemplars of fashionable women from Wales, and the reason, 'top designers are hailing 'Cool Cymru' as one of the hottest fashion spots on the planet.'[284] This article focused on a designer from Cardiff, with the city used interchangeably with the country. The celebrity articles continued throughout 1999, with several other pieces.[285]

3.6 The Backlash or Cooling Down Cymru

Along with these 'good news' stories, there came the backlash. This did not happen at a specific moment, and nor did it herald the end of the 'good news' approach, both types of articles were published simultaneously. Not all reactions to the Cool Cymru project, or Welsh bands were positive. One reviewer said that Catatonia's use of Welsh on record, and on occasion at live gigs, 'appeals to cheap nationalism'.[286] This particular comment prompted an indignant reaction from the writer Jan Morris in the same paper, which referred to the infamous description of the Welsh by A. A. Gill.[287] Morris' article (and argument) focused on the already-identified 'new Wales',

> Times are changing in Wales. The international success of rock bands like Catatonia, Manic Street Preachers and Super Furry Animals, the proud Welshness of stars like Anthony Hopkins and Bryn Terfyl, are only the most obvious signs of vivacity: it is the general state of Welsh intellectual and artistic life that really counts. Poetry, for example, historically the prime Welsh medium, thrives both in Welsh and English—probably a thousand poets, so an American authority recently assured me, now actively practise the fearfully difficult poetic form called cynghanedd. Welsh drama and cinema are wonderfully alive. Welsh classical music burgeons. Welsh historiography has stormed into a new maturity, and there has been a

[284] Dominic Herbert, 'Cool Cymru is now hot for fashion', *News Of The World*, 29 August 1999, no page number given.
[285] See, Jason Lamport, 'Cool Cymru stars are hot: Official', *Mirror*, 6 September 1999, p. 22.
[286] Stephen Dalton, 'Tending to dragon and on', *The Times*, 30 January 1998, Features section, no page number given.
[287] A. A. Gill, 'Smile – you're on cameo camera ', *Sunday Times*, 28 September 1997, Features section, no page number given.

> remarkable resurgence of the visual arts, generally supposed to be a blind spot of the Welsh culture.[288]

The first of the more in-depth pieces in the Welsh press, questioning the upbeat reporting, came from *Daily Post* journalist David Banks. He referred to the 'Voice of a nation' concert, held to celebrate the opening of the National Assembly, as being made up of 'the tired clichéd cast that will only fuel more tiresome English jibes at the Welsh.'[289] The 'tired clichéd cast' he referred to included Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey and Max Boyce, as Catatonia, Manic Street Preachers and Super Furry Animals had declined to play. In his column, two months later, he was more explicitly critical, claiming that Cool Cymru was part of an artificial media discourse, 'a convenient label for a lazy London-based media, starved of ideas who every now and then gird their loins, pack their polenta and venture into the provinces to patronize the natives'.[290] In a review of the year, Adam Walton continued his dismissal of Cool Cymru, saying that,

> Hopefully we will ditch this whole notion of Cool Cymru before it poisons the talented, young Welsh people who are coming up. The notion of cool is fickle, whereas the reality of talent is immutable. We should celebrate the latter and allow others to award the former without proclaiming it for ourselves.[291]

Elsewhere he argued that,

> Cool Cymru sucked from day one. [...] I always thought the whole idea was insulting. There was a renaissance in Welsh music which should have been there anyway. Having talked to a number of Welsh bands I think they hate the concept of Welshness being attached to them anyway. They just want to be international bands.[...] But the whole Cool Cymru thing is dangerous. It seems to be causing an awful lot of resentment, if you look at the way the *NME* reacted to the Morfa concert. In all honesty a lot of people including me thought the whole flag waving was a bit pathetic. I thought it went a

[288] Jan Morris, 'The dragon still breaths fire', *The Times*, 28 February 1998, Features section, no page number given.
[289] David Banks, 'Was this really the best that Wales could offer?', *Daily Post,* 26 May 1999, p. 17.
[290] David Banks, 'Enjoy the cool Cymru spell before it blows over', *Daily Post*, 6 July 1999, p. 9.
[291] Adam Walton, 'Ear buzz', *Daily Post*, 24 December 1999, p. 19.

> little bit overboard. I saw [the Stereophonics] once at Newport and I couldn't hear the music because people were chanting 'Wales' all the time.'[292]

Walton's concerns and criticisms were quite specific. Firstly he argued that unlike many other place-based scenes, there was no distinctly singular musical style, and that secondly, that there would be a backlash from record companies who would move on and stop signing Welsh bands.

His reaction is complex though; while he referred to Cool Cymru as being 'well past its sell by date' he simultaneously named something called 'New Welshness'.[293] Along with Walton, some new bands began to actively disassociate themselves from the label, including Big Leaves.[294]

Regardless of the opinion of Walton and Banks, the tone of the *Daily Post* in articles about Wales and Welsh culture did not really change; the headlines that 'thanked the Lord' continued with the opening of the Rugby World Cup.[295] Similarly, the *Western Mail* continued with the articles that promoted the idea of a new Wales, while others distanced themselves from the label of Cool Cymru. A readers' poll from the end of the year though suggested that for all of the discussion of Cool Cymru within the paper, its readers still identified with more established images of Wales. The top three in the 'icons' poll were the flag, Bryn Terfyl and the Welsh language, with Cerys Matthews coming in at number 13.[296] The paper named the 'climax' of Cool Cymru as being the staging of the first Welsh Rock and Pop Award in

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[292] Rhodri Owen, 'Cooling down Cymru', *Western Mail*, 30 October 1999, 'Western Mail Magazine', pp. 4-8 (p. 5).
[293] Adam Walton, 'Ear Buzz', *Daily Post*, 14 May 1999, p. 27.
[294] Penny Fray, 'Something for everyone' (Big Leaves), *Daily Post*, 10 December 1999, p. 21. Penny Fray, 'Master mixers with real klass', (K-Klass), *Daily Post*, 14 January 2000, p. 19. Adam Walton, 'Ear Buzz' (Gwacamoli), *Daily Post*, 10 March 2000, p. 23.
[295] Tom Bodden, 'The day we thanked the Lord we're Welsh', *Daily Post*, 2 October 1999, pp. 2-3.
[296] Penny Fray, 'The pride of Wales', *Daily Post*, 14 & 15 October 1999, p. 14-15.

Caernarfon. Again, as if to underline that the older images of Wales had not been completely usurped, Dafydd Iwan performed at the ceremony.[297]

The economic upsurge which had been identified in the previous couple of years was now re-assessed in some quarters, with the claim that, 'Cardiff's flashy new prosperity—a powerful symbol of all that is right about "Cool Cymru"—disguises deeply-rooted problems in the wider Welsh economy.'[298] Another report, later in the year, described how 'a bleak picture of high death rates, low income and poor exam results that flies in the face of Cool Cymru.'[299]

And Cool Cymru as a façade was a theme picked up by reviewers of Patrick Jones's play, *Everything Must Go*, which opened in the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, in early 2000, and by Jones himself. He argued that, 'The "Cool Cymru" image glosses over the fact that there is still anger there.'[300] At the same time, he mentioned the problem that some bands had come across in terms of confidence, nationalism and flags, saying,

> You can go overboard with cheap patriotism and the play's not about flag-waving and Welsh dragons. But there is a confidence to Welsh culture that is entirely healthy. It came out of difficult times with Thatcherism and the closing of the pits. As first it produced a malaise in Welsh society, then it turned to anger. That's surfacing now, it's been led by the bands and I hope it's reflected in the play.[301]

Other plays opening around the same time were reviewed again, in opposition to Cool Cymru—'The myth of Cool Cymru is exploded in a new set of plays

[297] Ian Parri, 'The very best of Welsh pop', *Daily Post*, 4 February 2000, pp. 20-21.
[298] Christopher Adams, 'Welsh revival must go beyond capital city, economy upsurge limited to Cardiff', *Financial Times*, 10 February 2000, p. 3.
[299] Jon Clements, 'It's cruel Cymru, Trends report says country is suffering', *Mirror*, 28 September 2000, p. 21.
[300] Nigel Williamson, 'Play of the week; Review; Theatre', *Times Educational Supplement*, 25 February 2000, p. 21.
[301] Nigel Williamson, 'Play of the week; Review; Theatre', *Times Educational Supplement*, 25 February 2000, p. 21.

exposing racism and bigotry in the heartland of Wales.'[302] The idea of this resurgent Wales had itself become the object of speculation and questioning.

This deflation of Cool Cymru transferred from art to celebrity, as it had in its formulation; it was reported that some Welsh celebrities were moving away from Wales,[303] while another announced that 'We're all sick of Cool Cymru now'.[304] Actor Ioan Gruffydd, speaking about Cool Cymru, said that 'I've always been of the opinion that labelling someone gives the impression that it's transient and manufactured'.[305]

It was earlier though, as the Stereophonics concert at Morfa Stadium, Swansea, where the backlash really picked up in the music press, which in turn was reported in the mainstream press. While there had been some questioning in the music press previously over the appearance of Welsh flags at concerts, their presence had been seen as being akin to sporting events, and indeed many of the reports within the music press reflect this.[306] However, some attendees to the concert wrote letters of complaint to the *NME*, causing much debate within the letters page of that publication over the issue of flags and nationalism within pop. The debate was picked up by the *Western Mail*, which reacted rather defensively, warning that,

> Rugby fans attending today's Wales-France clash at the Millennium Stadium are being warned to be on their very best behaviour. Any excessive shouting, patriotic singing or flag waving on behalf of Wales could be seen as a display of rampant nationalism if the experience of top band Stereophonics is anything to go by, The trio have been lambasted in the national music press for being, well, just too Welsh. Their behaviour at the

[302] Patrick Mcgowan, 'How uncool is my valley', *Evening Standard*, 27 March 1999, p. 59.
[303] No author, 'The stars who have gone cool on Cymru; Hopkins is not alone in moving overseas', *Mirror*, 15 April 2000, p. 15.
[304] Annie Leask, 'Why we're all sick of Cool Cymru now; It's time to stop this Welsh talent ghetto', *Mirror*, 8 July 2000, p. 6.
[305] Brendon Williams, 'It's not Cool Cymru admits Hornblower; Star Ioan dismisses label', *Mirror* (Welsh edition), 1 December 2000, p. 11.
[306] Piers Martin, 'Stereophonics at Cardiff International Arena', *NME*, 9 January 1999, p. 26. Stuart Bailie, 'Kelly, watch the stardom', *NME*, 14 August 1999, pp. 28-29.

> gig when they hung a Welsh flag on stage and encouraged the crowd to join in when they sang their rugby song *As long as we beat the English we don't care* was, apparently, deeply upsetting for many English fans present.[307]

And once again, the usual discourse of this being anti-Welshness on the part of England was repeated, along with quotes from a member of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh Language Society) saying that,

> There is a new-found confidence in Wales at the moment with the National Assembly and the fact that so many bands and actors are doing so well. [...] To align us with Germany especially with our proud socialist heritage is insulting and I would say that this is yet another attempt to put the Welsh down and smacks more of an anti-Welsh feeling than it does an anti-English feeling.[308]

The article went on to name the other people who had been included within the label, including rugby coach Graham Henry, Charlotte Church and designer Julian MacDonald, along with the use of the phrase by politicians and the Wales Tourist Board.[309]

Those within the article who subscribed to the idea of Cool Cymru and saw it as a positive thing were from the 'public' end of Welsh life, from the BBC and the Wales Tourist Board. Both of these bodies had been involved in the naming of Cool Cymru; the Wales Tourist Board with its adverts featuring Manic Street Preachers, and the BBC with the documentaries they produced for radio and television which contributed towards the idea of change coming about in Wales. Both bodies had certainly found the phrase useful.

Through the reporting of Cool Cymru within the *Western Mail* and the *Daily Post*, a change in the reporting on Wales and popular Welsh culture more generally can be identified. Pop became normalised, and viewed as a legitimate area of regular

[307] Anna Meredith, 'Welsh are a Nazi piece of work say pop fans', *Western Mail*, 28 August 1999, p. 3.
[308] Anna Meredith, 'Welsh are a Nazi piece of work say pop fans', *Western Mail*, 28 August 1999, p. 3.
[309] Rhodri Owen, 'Cooling down Cymru', *Western Mail*, 30 October 1999, 'Western Mail Magazine', pp. 4-8 (p. 4).

reporting. The *Daily Post* moved away from only really reporting on occasional Welsh-language performers (many of them could be politely referred to as veterans, such as Meic Stevens), with the commissioning of Adam Walton's column and there was a real, regular emphasis on new local music from Wales.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has documented how Cool Cymru was formed and played out within the media through three main themes—the repetition of stereotypes in the imagining of Wales, the idea of a 'new' Wales, of a cultural renaissance in which pop played a pivotal role and the self-conscious identification, and also the dismissal of, a scene in Wales. The media reports cited demonstrate the way in which origin is a regular feature of articles on pop, and can inform the depiction of the group and their music. Articles from the music press frequently informed reports in other sections of the media, providing proof of credibility and kudos on the part of Welsh pop. The positive spin on pieces of Welsh pop transferred with ease to stories on other aspects of life in Wales, including politics, culture, economic change and celebrity, with pop a metaphor for positive change in Wales. The backlash that followed generally dismissed the idea of a Welsh music scene, rather than challenging the discourse of a Welsh renaissance.

As with Cool Cymru, mention of a Welsh renaissance still makes an occasional appearance. The *Western Mail Magazine* had a cover in August 2007 which had the title 'From Rags To Riches, Wales has had an image overhaul'.[310] Inside, five pages were dedicated to documenting apparent changes in Wales, with opinions offered by David Emmanuel, Stifyn Parri (of SWS infamy) and Sian Lloyd,

[310] *Western Mail Magazine*, 11th August 2007, p. 1

but pop was missing from the piece. Within articles on pop though, the increased visibility of Welsh pop in the 1990s continues and the theme of positive change in Wales has endured.[311]

[311] Caroline Sullivan, 'Wales: Nicky Wire reflects on the music tradition of his home country', *Guardian*, 15th February 2008. Accessed from http://music.guardian.co.uk/pop/story/0,,2256760,00.html 15/02/08

4 Experiencing Cool Cymru - remembering the hype

With the emergence of Cool Cymru came a pattern in the telling of the story Welsh pop, which, as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, repeated across the media, in radio programs, television interviews and in stories in newspapers and magazines. The brief version of this is that Wales was a pop music joke; a country tied to images of Shirley Bassey, Max Boyce, and Tom Jones—this is borne out by the many introductions to bands from Wales, and especially Manic Street Preachers. Another theme which came up in these articles was just how few bands had been signed from Wales, with the opinion that A&R men from record companies were unwilling to travel from London. However, so the story goes, Manic Street Preachers were the vanguard of change, followed by Catatonia, Super Furry Animals, Stereophonics and more—Wales proving to be fertile ground after having been left fallow for so long.

This chapter explores how people involved in the music scene in south Wales experienced this period, beginning in the mid 1980s, with many still involved in some way for the following twenty years. It provides a narrative account of their experiences of promoting, producing, writing about and playing in bands, mainly in south Wales.[1] The evidence used so far in this thesis have come from external sources; media reporting and responses to the idea of a scene were created largely (although not exclusively) by individuals whose major link to music in south Wales was that writing about it was part of their job. The individuals interviewed all had some link with music in Wales—five of the interviewees were also journalists (Andy

[1] It should be noted that almost without exception, my interviewees had experience of at least two of these roles. In addition, many of them are known to each other. I was frequently given the contact details of potential interviewees during interviews, meaning it is possible to write out a family tree, in the style of Pete Frame, from my research. I would argue that this reflects the relatively small size of south Wales. All of my interviewees are/were involved more with bands, rather than DJs. Therefore this is a study of the live music scene, and does not explore the possibly different experience of dance DJs – that would be something for another PhD.

Barding, Iestyn George, Simon Price, Rhodri Owen and Dave Owens), the first two of these were heavily involved in music in Newport. Most of the interviewees are connected to each other in numerous ways. Three of the interviewees had been in bands at some point, Huw Williams with the Pooh Sticks, Andrea Lewis with The Darling Buds, and Owen Powell with Catatonia. I did not only seek to interview members of bands though for two main reasons for this: firstly, people in bands (particularly when they are as popular as Stereophonics or Manic Street Preachers) are difficult to speak to as agents and managers act as gatekeeper. Secondly, people in bands have an opportunity to talk about issues such as Cool Cymru in press interviews, so by speaking to individuals whose involvement is predominantly 'behind the scenes' we can hear from different perspectives to those normally available to the researcher.

The evidence gained through the interviews carries with it the issues of bias and fallibility which oral testimony inevitably has: the accounts and opinions expressed are personal—there are some (mainly minor) differences between recollections from people putting on concerts at this time. Fallibilities aside, these testimonies provide valuable evidence, which when used with the other sources examined in the chapters three and five, helps to provide a fuller understanding of how the music scene in Wales changed and developed in quite a short period of time. Statistical information about music at a local level in Wales (attendance figures at gigs, numbers of bands, sales of singles and tapes) does not exist, meaning that oral testimony is simply the only source of evidence available.[2]

[2] Venues rarely keep attendance details, especially when the audience has paid cash on the door. Sales of independently produces tapes and singles are incredibly hard to guess, and these are often sent to labels and magazines in the hope of attracting further attention.

The interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis, recorded onto mini-disc and then later transcribed. I did not know any of the interviewees prior to the interview, and in almost all cases, the interview was our first meeting. The background of the people interviewed was similar—typically men who were in their late 30s to 40s—with the only exception to this being Andrea Lewis from the Darling Buds, a band from Caerleon which had formed in 1986.

The interview was semi-structured, with only the barest of questions prepared in order to enable the interviewee to freely talk about what they thought was relevant, and typically lasted around an hour, although more informal chat continued after the interview proper. Some respondents preferred to communicate via email, rather than conducting an interview, and these responses are used within the thesis and footnoted as such. The interviewees were contacted directly by me, with the exception of *Western Mail* journalist Rhodri Owen who was already known to Professor Chris Williams, my supervisor. Often an interviewee would then offer me the contact details of other people known to them who also might be of help to my research.

This chapter explores the musical and cultural landscape of (primarily) south Wales before the idea of a cultural renaissance—the dark days of the late 1980s and early 1990s. It then documents the perceived changes in attitudes towards Welsh music, both inside and outside Wales. It will finally focus on the whether, in the opinion of the interviewees, there has been a discernible permanent shift in the reception that bands from Wales receive, and what, if any, changes there have been to the pop landscape of Wales.

4.1 BCC: Before Cool Cymru

As discussed in detail throughout this thesis, one of the most frequently quoted beliefs within the music press was that A&R people from record companies never

travelled to Wales before the emergence of Manic Street Preachers, and of Cool Cymru—something repeated by the majority of interviewees. Andrea Lewis of the Darling Buds recalled how there was very little interest from the press in Wales.

> **Andrea Lewis:** [...] A&R men never came down to Newport and I suppose even though we were very much a bedroom band—started off as a group of friends, you know, getting a band together, you know, just doing it ourselves—we always wanted to, you know, get signed up and move on and do records and all that. Even though we started off as a tiny little thing, we had ideas that we wanted to do that. [...] But, yes, no A&R men came to see us or anything like that but there was a buzz about us. And Newport [...] was quite underground but, you know, it, sort of, went around quite quickly, new bands starting up and all that. And so their support was there and I knew that we came from this, sort of, core, quite coolness, within Newport because they were all real massive music fans that knew what they were talking about, you know, kind of, really into it—so we had a lot of support from them. But even, you know, Cardiff and the media, there was just nothing, you know, nobody would put their neck out and say 'this band is good' or 'this band is doing something different' or 'listen to these guys', you know, nobody really did that. Geraint, our guitar player, he was left some money and we decided to print off a 7" single, double A-side and, you know, literally (and this is true) he went up to London and he took it into *Sounds*, *Melody Maker* and *NME* and the cleaners, virtually—well, in one of the places the cleaners said—'Oh, put it in this pile here'-and he just slotted the record into a load of records that were about to be reviewed. [...] The boys wouldn't move to London. We did used to go to London to do lots of recording because after that we signed to Sony and Sony then, you know, wanted us to ..... we could record wherever we wanted to record—but basically we were up there a lot of the time. But the boys never wanted to move to London—I was, sort of, up for it because I'd lived there for a little while. Their hearts were really in Wales and I think, we, kind of, just ignored it then, you know, ignored that we weren't getting any attention and just thought that, well, the attention is coming from, you know...... you, kind of, gravitate to where it's coming from. So we'd go up to London and be interviewed and, kind of, do some really wicked gigs and stuff and, kind of, come back and be normal in our homes. But there just wasn't any interest.
> **Researcher*: So nothing in the local press?***
> **Andrew Lewis:** Yes, when we started doing stuff in England. It was almost like—oh, we'd better take attention now, we'd better pay attention—which is, you know, so sad but quite typical that people won't ... You know, but maybe they are now because I don't really read much, sort of, Welsh Music Press at the moment. I suppose, obviously, there is more of a buzz now, isn't there? A lot of people are championing it, you know, but back then, no, there weren't. And, you know, you couldn't get on TV because you weren't a Welsh speaking band.
> **Researcher*: Obviously like the S4C kind of Fideo Naw?***

> **Andrew Lewis:** Exactly, yes, whatever was going at the time, you know, I remember that, you know, we approached them and they were like—'no, you're not Welsh speaking'. But what did turn around was as we were getting more attention then—because we started doing front covers for *NME, Melody Maker* and like the 'end of year' vote for favourite bands, we started getting in a lot of the polls and stuff like that, we did a lot of TV, *Top of the Pops* and, you know, Saturday morning programmes and stuff—then, yes, they started knocking the door then and saying 'Can the Darling Buds appear on *Elinor*?'—and, you know, all these quite, sort of, mainstream programmes—which we did. But it's funny the beginning though because I knew there was something exciting about us because, like I said, it's quite hardcore in Newport, always has and I think always will be, it's got something, it definitely has. I think TJ's is a really, sort of, like a root there of what goes on. So I knew we were doing something right but we just weren't getting ... I remember Huw [Williams] and his friend, we did a gig in Port Talbot that they came along to—and I found out about that, like I said, on that trip we had—so, you know, people would get in touch with us independently but it wasn't sort of in any of the papers or the media.[3]

Lewis' description of the 'scene' in Newport being 'hardcore' is corroborated by others involved in it during the late 1980s and early 1990s. John Sicollo, owner of TJs, said that 'I mean to say there must have been about, I would say, at least sixty good bands, you know, and they were predominantly from the Newport and Blackwood area'—Andy Barding who was working promoting gigs at this time verifies these figures. The idea of a musical community was mentioned a number of times. Simon Philips at Rockaway Records in Newport,

> [...] in terms of infrastructure, Newport, in particular, has always had a very self-supporting attitude, which is great. If there's a need for something, somebody will set something up to satisfy that need. At one point, there was a need for rehearsal rooms, so somebody set up a rehearsal room; there was a need for a PA hire company, so somebody set up a PA hire company. There was a need for a good local fanzine, so set somebody set up a good local fanzine for a while—that sort of thing.[4]

And while Barding supported this, he went further, claiming that musicians, along with infrastructure, was shared by bands playing in and around Newport,

> [...] of those bands there were only two or three drummers, and so they used to play in like four or five bands at once, you know. Dean Pool particularly

[3] Interview with Andrea Lewis, 22 October 2005.
[4] Interview with Simon Philips, 10 November 2005

> was playing drums with everyone. He's a great drummer, a proper meat and two veg drummer, but he was like in Five Darrens, Rollerco, Drains, Jester I think they were called. Apart from that I can't remember. And there were a couple of bass players playing in a few different bands. Yeah—there was a lot of that going on. And a lot of, you know, camaraderie and gigs and stuff.[5]

For some of those involved with music in Newport interviewed for this research, Newport is remembered as being far more alive than its larger neighbour, Cardiff. John Sicollo described Cardiff negatively as being 'a cultural backwater, a cultural dishwater', and Andrea Lewis spoke of this communal feeling,

> Yes, Newport was really thriving, it really was—much more than Cardiff I'd say. [...] I thought about that before. I don't know whether it's just that there's not much going on in Newport so people, kind of, something grows from that, doesn't it, that kind of boredom and that, kind of—oh, well we'll do something then. I can't put it into words or put my finger on it but there's definitely a sense and feeling, you know—we're talking about ten years ago—of a really healthy attitude, with people just 'having a go', you know what I mean—we'll get a band together, yes alright, we'll get a band together—and they just did it. And they might play a few gigs in TJ's and then the drummer would go and join another band and the guitar player .... Do you know what I mean? It was just very healthy, having a laugh, not taking it all too seriously.

Barding went further in his dismissal of Cardiff

> Cardiff had always had a string of terrible bands with awful names [...] to us in Newport, the Cardiff lot were always sort of horrible. Sort of, like, you know, grant pursuing idiots who just want to...to carve a career for themselves really. And we always saw that as riding on the coat tails of all of the hard work that we'd done, you know.[6]

Iestyn George, working as a journalist in London recalled the antipathy he felt from some people in Newport,

> [...] but the great thing about Newport, you know [...] was that they weren't looking for people from Cardiff—they *hated* people from Cardiff. Hated people from Bristol. Didn't want them coming here. They weren't really that impressed when I used to go down there—I had as many people who were antagonistic—who had obvious antipathy towards me as I had people who were enthusiastic. You know, nobody wanted to sell me a story. It was

[5] Interview with Andy Barding, 30 November 2005.
[6] Interview with Andy Barding, 30 November 2005

> like [disinterested tone] 'Whatever—he's here. How's it going? Look what we're doing—we're just doing it anyway'.[7]

Andy Barding explained that this feeling stretched on his part to bands from elsewhere, and most areas of the media.

> These Animal Men came with there sort of you know 'Oh, we're speeding' you know? 'Look at us we're taking speed'. Didn't impress the TJ's crowd one iota and there was a great exchange—unforgettable—when Bo the singer from These Animal Men said between songs, 'So, what's Newport like then?' and someone shouted out 'None of your fucking business'. Which is great. That's how it went really. It really wasn't anyone's fucking business how things were going here, you know? And, you know the *Argus*, *The South Wales Argus* would be like trying to write things and it was like, 'Fuck off, you weren't supporting us when we were trying publicise little gigs a while ago so bollocks to you'. HTV came and it was 'No *fucking way*—you're not filming our bands, piss off' and we eventually did—we did do a little thing on it and German telly came over to do some stuff and eh, yeah oh the....*The Telegraph* just had the piss taken out of them basically. But it was good, it was very irreverent, no one did anything daft like sending demos off to record companies or anything like that—there was no ambition. Everyone was just quite happy doing what they were doing really. And at one point—it's a bit sad really because you could—towards the end you could see that it had a shelf life and that it wasn't going to last forever and that was really sad from a personal perspective 'cause you could see it going, but while it was actually happening and while it was on a crest it was absolute dynamite, you know? Everyone .... In TJs like, 2-300 people who went there most nights, you know? Everyone had a plan, you know? Everyone had a scheme or a dream or something they were going to do next week you know? People were.... Bill Bloggs would either be setting up his own fanzine next week or he'd be setting a rehearsal studio, pirate radio stations was talked about a lot, um... everyone had a plan to do something—it became a right community, the like of which I've never seen since really.

From these interviews, it is evident that these participants remember a feeling of community amongst bands from Newport at this time. There are expressions here of isolationism and independence, and an implicit stressing of authenticity, demonstrated in Chapter 1 to be of particular significance within pop. The above excerpts illustrate how a musical community, a 'scene', can exist on a more real basis than that of an 'imagined community'.

[7] Interview with Iestyn George, 10 August 2005

Outside of Newport, things are harder to assess. Those interviewed who were living in Cardiff during this period describe lots going on, but without the partisan feelings of the comments above from people in Newport. Dave Owens is from Cardiff and was working as a journalist during the early 1990s, and producing a fanzine. He recalls that there were two scenes in Cardiff—a Welsh language and an English language one.

> **Dave Owens:** [...] there was the English speaking arm, which was really diverse and then there was the Welsh speaking arm in Cardiff, yes,—that, you know, was responsible for so much of the great music that then came out during the birth of 'Cool Cymru' or whatever. So I tried to get all of that into the magazine.
> [...] So I was getting into these English speaking bands, [...] I think there were three or four great bands, that I was really into, that were doing stuff that was wilfully different from a lot of bands that were around in the late eighties.
> ***Researcher:*** **Like who?**
> Well, there was The Third Uncles, [...] they were like psychedelic pop, if you like, which probably sounds like all the other bands that were around at the time, but they were a little bit different because they peppered their set with a bit of folk and country, [...] And then there was a band called Papa's New Faith, [...] And those were the two bands that always used to sell out at Chapter on a Saturday night. And everybody, sort of, knew each other—so you were ensconced in a little scene if you like, and I think, you know, what identified this whole movement was how they blossomed, how lots of people knew each other and then it grew into, you know, a, sort of, germination point, if you like,—if you want a hackneyed cliché about how it worked.[8]

The idea of a musical community, and of shared drummers, was apparently another feature of the music scene in Cardiff at this time. Greg Haver, who went on to work with the Manics, said 'I got in a lot of local bands—at one point I was in like sort of fifteen bands or something because there wasn't a lot of drummers around. And I was quite like into electronics and stuff so I had a lot of equipment.'[9] A strong music scene in Cardiff was also described by Paul Clarke who had run the Meltdown night in Cardiff since 1985, mainly from the Chapter Arts centre, later moving to

[8] Interview with Dave Owens, 6th October 2005
[9] Interview with Greg Haver, 14th September 2005.

Clwb Ifor Bach in the centre of Cardiff. Meltdown invited bands from different backgrounds, playing in different styles, to play, and according to Ceri Morgan who was the general manager of Clwb Ifor Bach at this time, Meltdown was the start of moving the venue away from solely Welsh language events and music.[10]

The experience of bands feeling that they had to move to London to find success, mentioned above, was one repeated in interviews in the press, and by most of the interviewees spoken to in the course of this research. Greg Haver's recollection is that A&R visits were indeed rare, but that by the time Stereophonics had begun looking for a deal, this had started to change,

> Yes, I remember once when some lonely A&R guy came down to a gig in Sam's Bar or something and they probably hung the bunting out, you know, because A&R guys would never come across the Severn Bridge. But after that... I remember I went to the Stereophonics gig in the Welsh Club before they got signed and, honestly, it was, like, every MD and every garage or every major label, it was unbelievable, it was like a sea of people, a sea of industry, you know. And it did start to change and people would actually come down and see bands and they still do, I mean, you know, there are still bands getting signed. It's made Wales at least a place where, you know, it's acceptable to come and see bands.[11]

Echoing Andrea Lewis' comments above, Dave Owens (who was later to write a book about Catatonia) said that this lack of interest extended to the press in Wales,

> No, nobody seemed to be interested in it, you know, The Darling Buds were, sort of, banging the drum for Welsh music. And, you know, you obviously had the, sort of, curate's egg that was The Alarm, you know, who stood alone as the, sort of, you know the mouthpiece for Welsh music – which, you know, at the time when the, sort of, eighties came along, they were on their way out. And even when they did make it, sadly, they were always seen as something of a second rate U2 - and I absolutely loved The Alarm.[12]

No one really offered an explanation as to why this might have been, why this apparent wealth of musical talent was not picked up on, other than south Wales being ignored by the A&R people. Owen Powell, formerly of Catatonia, challenged this view though.

[10] Interview with Ceri Morgan, 19 July 2005.
[11] Interview with Greg Haver, 14 September 2005.
[12] Interview with Dave Owens, 6 October 2005.

> I think A&R people did come to Wales. I think the perception that A&R people don't travel outside London is actually completely untrue. They'd be fools if they never travelled outside London because they'd never see any bands, they do travel. I think what happened was that because there hadn't been bands from Wales signed to the major record labels for so long is that the music scene, kind of, used that as an excuse 'Oh, A&R men never travel over the Severn bridge'. Well they did, it's just that when they arrive to see a band they don't arrive in a big van that says 'I'm an A&R man' or they don't wear a t-shirt that says it. They tend to come into a gig, stand by the back at the bar, watch the band and if they're no fucking good then they leave. And that was what was happening in Wales at the time. I mean, in all honesty, I think Wales had become, if not a laughing stock, then not taken particularly seriously. Basically the last big band that had been signed for Wales were The Alarm, who enjoyed, you know, a fair amount of success and a fair amount of success in America as well. But then there'd been this incredibly long gap until the Manic Street Preachers. And the Manic Street Preachers were never particularly treated seriously either—that's what I find extraordinary is that I was in bands at that time and nobody took them seriously, they were just seen as being really kind of dodgy Clash [...]It was only later that they, kind of, forged their niche and their shtick almost which was .... And they almost sold themselves on an anti-Welsh thing, you know. Nicky Wire used to go on about hating Wales and couldn't wait to get out and he hoped that as soon as he'd left that Wales would be bombed and things like that. So I think that 'no A&R men outside London', I think that's a myth, I just think that we'd not produced a band, a good band, for so long that we used it as an excuse.[13]

Huw Williams of The Pooh Sticks (and had been working with 60 Ft Dolls during this period) concurs with this view,

> No, I don't think ... I'm sure people [A&R] did [come to Wales] but I mean I never really saw them. And I think the thing is before around that period, you'd be lucky at any given time if there was like one Welsh band signed to like a major or even making any kind of noise. They seemed to come in ones, rather than twos or tens or whatever, so I think he's [Owen Powell] probably right. [...] it actually got to a level for whatever reason and the only reason was that Wales was left alone a bit. So actually when a few people did start knocking on the doors – and there two or three decent groups around – it happened quite quickly after that.[14]

[13] Interview with Owen Powell, 27 July 2005.
[14] Interview with Huw Williams, 24 August 2005.

What the articles cited in this thesis have shown is that if something is repeated often enough, it develops a sheen of truth and fact, almost regardless of 'reality'. Powell expanded on the claim that Wales was marginalised, saying that,

> The great story—I don't know it could be one of those apocryphal things—was that, I can't remember which record label it was, picked up an early Manics demo and said to somebody in the office, 'Oh, there's this band called the Manic Street Preachers, they're absolutely amazing, the singers got a great voice, look at the photo, look at them, look at the image and the songs are great and they're really provocative, they remind me of managing the Pistols, there's only one problem with them, they're Welsh.' Now I don't know if that's a true story and, even if it isn't, it kind of doesn't matter because the story has been so passed around that it's kind of gained a truth of its own. And that again is used as a 'Oh look they're against us.' They weren't against us; they were just waiting for a decent fucking band.[15]

4.2 Writing Cool Cymru

The identification of Cool Cymru, as argued throughout this thesis, came from the media, and specifically the press. Rhodri Owen was a journalist with the *Western Mail* during the late 1990s. He remembers clearly becoming aware of the idea of a 'cultural renaissance'.

> **Rhodri Owen:** Well, interestingly, it was when I went for an interview with Neil Fowler, who was the editor of the *Western Mail* at that stage – this would have been in, quite late on in 1997. He was trying to sell the paper to me and sell the move to the paper to me – and I didn't need much selling, to be honest, because I wanted to go back to writing but I didn't want him to know that, and he was building it up, as he did in those times, as, what he called, the 'triple crown'. He said that it was going to be a fantastic time to be a reporter in the front line in Wales because of everything that was going to be happening. And he constantly referred to the 'triple crown' which was the Assembly, inaugural Assembly elections - I think you can probably rope in the 1997 referendum in with that - then you had the Rugby World Cup, 1999, and the third part of the "triple crown", he saw, was - maybe people have lost focus about this now – but it was the European Summit, which was a massive chance for Wales to put itself in the window – and, of course that coincided with Nelson Mandela coming to Cardiff. So there was this great sense that things were happening in Wales and that it would be a good time to be in on that, on the ground floor. So that's when I first heard about it, I suppose, when I first heard about it being spoken of in terms of, you know, lumping the whole thing together in some sort of a movement. And they were incredible years to be involved with, you know, great fun.

[15] Interview with Owen Powell, 27 July 2005.

> ***Researcher: Can you remember when you first heard the phrase 'Cool Cymru'?***
> **Rhodri Owen:** No, not exactly, but, from my point of view, I was aware that it was .... I wouldn't be surprised if the *Western Mail* hadn't had a lot to do with it. We're constantly looking for, you know, the media is constantly looking to bracket things, [...] put things in various pigeon holes and I think, because there were a lot of things going on in Wales at the time, I think everybody did want to try and make sense of it and make it into one movement, if you like, something that was happening. And again, what would suggest it was the *Western Mail* to me, was that it's a very anglicised way of doing things. I mean the Western Mail, even by it's name, has always had a lot of criticism for being west of London, London-centric in other words, Anglo-centric in terms of Wales. [...] I know Neil Fowler, as an editor of the *Western Mail*, wanted Wales to be the sort of main thrust of the paper, but he did want to put Wales in the context of Britain all the time. So I think the 'Cool Cymru' phrase was jumped on by the *Western Mail* because, you know, it did have relevance to what was going on in the rest of the country but with a specific Welsh flavour. So I was aware of it, I was almost aware of, you know, two or three of my colleagues, you know, using the phrase – almost ironically, sometimes – using the phrase whenever possible to .... and being encouraged to use the phrase almost, to try and build up some sort of hype about what was going on. I mean there was a great sense in the *Western Mail* at that time that the paper was going to be in the forefront of this and support it and push it and keep it rolling. I mean in this article I noticed I used this idea of this description of 'Cool Cymru' as being a snowball thundering down the mountain side – and I think you could probably see that there were people like Neil Fowler and the people who worked for him at the top, pushing it. Politicians, again, around about the same time, pushing it as well – maybe other people trying to avoid it or getting just bowled over by it. But definitely there was a sense of creating some sort of aura about Wales, a feel-good factor in Wales, which we could report upon, which would make people want to read the *Western Mail* and buy the *Western Mail* – and that sort of thing. But yes, I was well aware of it being used in almost like a business plan sense.

This was confirmed by Neil Fowler, who said that, 'When I was editor I saw one of The Western Mail's roles was to be an active supporter of Wales plc - without being unnecessarily sycophantic - or without distorting the truth, but to say "hey, yes, something interesting is happening, let's (i.e. the readers) be part of it." We wanted Wales to be successful - and if a cultural movement was gaining momentum, we wanted to reflect that and support it.'[16]

[16] Correspondence with Neil Fowler, 18 August 2005.

Steve Johnson, a DJ on Red Dragon Radio during this period, was not aware of any attempt to 'push' Cool Cymru on the part of the station management, but describes how, to him, they have sought to exploit Cool Cymru while contributing very little to Welsh music,

> Red Dragon did jack for the Welsh music scene to the extent that the people who were in charge of that radio station, because they were part of a group – they were initially part of Red Rose which was based in Yorkshire and these days part of Capital – they were always part of a group mentality. They didn't give a tinkers where these bands were from. [...] their philosophy was – well, if it's in the charts, we'll play it, we don't care where they come from. They really did nothing, nothing for the Welsh music scene. And it's quite laughable really, looking back on it now, when I hear them playing these 'idents' and saying we're this that and the other. The only thing that's Welsh about Red Dragon is that they're named after a dragon, you know, that's about it – and it happens to be a red one. You know, there's nothing, they've done nothing for the Welsh music scene.[17]

Former *Melody Maker* journalist Simon Price was unaware of the label until being interviewed himself by the *Western Mail* while promoting his book on Manic Street Preachers. This suggests that an equivalent editorial policy did not exist in the music press (one would assume as a staff writer that Price would have been aware of it if it had). It did have an impact on Price's work though. He said that, 'from my point of view it was quite nice to have some Welsh bands that I could write about without people – without my editors laughing at me saying "What the hell are you doing?"—they were suddenly "Oh yeah, let's have some more". So, the door was ajar so it was good to be able to barge in a little bit.'[18]

And while coverage in the music press was to be expected if you are in a band the extent of the coverage of music in the Welsh press came as a surprise to Owen Powell,

> The kind of weird thing about is was that while all this was going on I wasn't actually living in Wales, [...] I was always surprised when I came

[17] Interview with Steve Johnson, 19 July 2005.
[18] Interview with Simon Price, 5 May 2005.

> back because the *Wales on Sunday* had always been writing about Welsh bands, so I was living in London where, obviously, you know, you might see yourself in *NME* or *Q* or something like that, we come back here and the *Wales on Sunday* had a story about us like every week, every week-end. I'd be like, god, you know, you'd think haven't you got anything better to write about, and then you suddenly realisd that this was a big deal to them, you know, that they did have in us, the Stereophonics and the Manics, they had three bands who were actually selling newspapers. And because I wasn't living here at the time I didn't realise what a big deal it is.[19]

From Powell's perspective, the increased exposure of Catatonia did not necessarily bring a better understanding of Wales to articles from journalists outside Wales,

> I tell you what is strange is that although British journalists may have chosen to open articles with that, they seem to have been the ones who were the most dismissive of Welsh-ness and the most ignorant of the language and cultural implications of being Welsh…
> ***Reseacher: Do you mean English language journalists outside …?***
> **Owen Powell:** **…**mainly outside Wales, yes—I mean I don't want to tar everybody with the same brush, I mean we did do […] I mean what it boils down to is that English language journalists outside Wales, in other words English journalists, tend to see music as being music and there is no, you know, to them there is no difference between Scotland and England, Northern Ireland and England and Wales and England because of their Anglo-centric view of things they don't really get that people from Glasgow may feel different and people from Cardiff may feel different. In fact, it was unusual that internationally, journalists seemed to be more clued up about Wales. […] But at the same time, again, we were trying to steer people away from too much emphasis on that because we were trying to portray ourselves as an international band, we were trying to get away from Britpop and Cool Cymru.[20]

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The lack of understanding on the part of the media felt by those involved in music expressed by Powell above and Barding earlier in this chapter was expressed by Greg Haver too. He recalled being unhappy with the stories appearing in press, feeling that the media was cashing in on the work of others.

> […] we all thought it was shit at the time – oh, fucking media again! Because it was our thing, you know, everyone was out there in the trenches making the records and doing the gigs – we weren't sitting in the Cameo Club with a bottle of Stella, you know, saying how wonderful it all was, we were out there playing some stinking dives, you know, changing in the

[19] Interview with Owen Powell, 27 July 2005
[20] Interview with Owen Powell, 27 July 2005.

> toilets, you know. So it is two very separate things and it was 'our' thing, you know, the music was 'ours', it wasn't about, you know, how many copies of the *Western Mail* you could sell.[21]

4.3 Questioning the origin and the legacy of Cool Cymru

The *Western Mail* was often cited as the source of the label, and certainly, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it had been printing stories on a positive change in Welsh pop from the early 1990s onwards, and as Rhodri Owen and Neil Fowler noted, there was a conscious decision to promote the label.

The origin of the label was a subject raised with all the interviewees, questioning whether it should be placed in a wider, British, context. I also questioned whether it could be said to have left any legacy. Both questions elicited a variety of responses, with Owen Powell's below,

> ***Researcher: Some people talk about Cool Cymru as a complete media fabrication, some people talk of it as a reflection of Wales and new confidence—look we've got the Assembly and we've got the Millennium Stadium—do you think it's one or the other or somewhere in between?***
> **Owen Powell:** I suppose if you're willing to accept that it probably was a media fabrication in the same way as Cool Britannia and Britpop, maybe the knock-on effect was giving people a certain pride. There was a sense that music in Wales had been stagnant a while and a lot of other things in Wales had been stagnant for a long time and that the Assembly—and probably more than the Assembly, the campaign around the Assembly—gave people a chance to think about Welsh-ness and what being Welsh was [...]The Cool Cymru aspect of it was, I suppose, was just for people to lump series of events and bands and people together. Also you look at it, it was a time when people like Rhys Ifans was getting his first major film roles and Ioan Gruffudd as well. There was, kind of, lots of people, of around the same age, who had all suddenly found success in their various fields and I think that's what had been stagnant for years before as well, that we hadn't had any actors who had gone on to the international stage for years—and that kind of happened at the same time. Actually, the more I think about it, the more I think maybe that Cool Cymru was quite a good thing—I've never thought about that before. To try and answer your question, yes, it was just lots of things happened at the same time, didn't it, and maybe the *Wales on Sunday*, however hideous a newspaper it is—which it is—was kind of part of that, it was like—oh, we've got our own Sunday newspaper, it's writing

[21] Interview with Greg Haver, 14 September 2005.

> about our bands, bands which are actually from Wales, some of whom actually speak Welsh, wow! And oh, there's an actor who has got a role in a really big film, that more than twenty people are going to see, and he speaks Welsh, he's from Wales and look there's another one, wow! People still talk about Richard Burton and stuff, twenty, thirty years on—if we're good at nothing else in Wales, we're very, very good relishing our successes. I mean how many years have we been talking about the Grand Slam—if we don't do anything in sport for another hundred years we'd still talk about it. We're very good at that and the reason is that we need to be because we don't have that many ... small victories are very important to us, you know.[22]

Greg Haver was less sure of there being a link with Cool Britannia and Britpop,

> It was just a co-incidence, it was just a co-incidence, I mean I worry that we'll look back at the mid-nineties and think it was a Golden Age. How many times are we going to have in one small area—because, you know, it was right up there with the Manchester and maybe the movement that's happening in London at the moment. You know, it really was you know, to have like the Manics, Stereophonics, Catatonia and the Super Furry's, Gorky's, all out there touring and selling loads of records, Sixty Foot Dolls, it was kind of like .... And then several bands underneath that level—Flyscreen are a good example—bands signed to major record labels, all out there touring and selling records. You know, you go to Glastonbury and it was like some sort of Welsh convention, it was an amazing time. Now it's slightly different, it's got a little bit more fractured, there's a real good strong rock scene, you know—obviously The Prophets. I mean they, kind of, started during that period, I first worked with The Lost Prophets at Big Noise, which is what Soundspace became—that would have been like '96, '97, you know, that was when the in singer was the drummer. So they started in that period as well. I mean now they're seen as a new young Welsh band—well they're not that young and they're not very new, you know, they've been around for a long time, but built on the back of that you have Funeral For A Friend and Bullet For My Valentine and a lot of really good young bands. So it's not to the same extent as far as the public eye is concerned but it's still pretty healthy compared to what it was. I mean there's a load of labels here now which is good.[23]

These two responses were typical of the interviewees, an ambivalence towards Cool Cymru, coupled with a tentative hope that Wales will continue to have a productive and successful musical life—one that is recognised outside of its immediate locality. Steve Johnson voiced some concern that the success would not continue.

[22] Interview with Owen Powell, 27 July 2005.
[23] Interview with Greg Haver, 14 September 2005

> ***Researcher: Do you think overall it has had a positive, negative or a mixture of effects on music in Wales and on popular culture generally in Wales?***
> **Steve Johnson:** It's certainly had a positive effect, yes. You can't pluck them out of thin air but more bands need to be coming through with the good stuff and more bands need to be being signed. You know, Wales is a pretty small country; pretty small population and great bands don't grow on trees. There are interesting things coming through but new bands need to come through because great as the Manics are, the Stereophonics and Catatonia, of course, being gone, Super Furry's still knocking around—they're not playing to venues these days—I don't really see the feeders to some extent, I suppose with Welsh connections, I don't really see the next grouping of Welsh talent coming through. If you take Charlotte Church out of the equation, on the sort of band scene, I don't see much going on. There's a band from West Wales, I think, called, "Songdog", they're relatively obscure at the moment, they're doing some really interesting stuff. There are some odd bits of stuff going on but I'm not particularly excited about the Welsh music scene as in what's coming through at the moment. I know I'm an old git now but even so I don't really see there's that much great stuff coming through.[24]

These concerns were echoed by Owen Powell

> ***Researcher: Do you think that Cool Cymru and all the hype has left any sort of legacy, positive or negative?***
> **Owen Powell:** I suppose it depends if what you mean is the wider implications. I suppose on the plus side you could say well, we've now got an Assembly, we've now got actors being taken seriously and getting major roles in films and TV dramas and stage dramas, we've got a few bands who have still got record deals, not many—I suppose that's the up side of it. Speaking specifically about the music industry, my one disappointment is the fact that it doesn't seem to have left behind any kind of infrastructure, in that when the Manchester scene happened. You know, you had a few studios popped up around that and management companies in the north and promoters in the north, people like SJM, who then went on to manage a lot of bands as well—and created a musical infrastructure in those areas for future bands coming through, who'd be able to use that instead of feeling that they had to move straight to London. I'm afraid a similar thing hasn't really happened in Wales. I mean there are a few —there's maybe one management company, which would be Ankst, who still manage the Furries and Zabrinski and Brave Captain and there are a couple of labels as well, Boobytrap, um—see I'm struggling already. [...] FF Vinyl yes, they also do management things—but, in general, I don't think—it's kind of the big three Welsh bands , being the Furries, the Manics and ourselves, I don't think there's been much legacy left behind in terms of infrastructure. I mean I'm managing bands now but, as far as I know, I'm the only person out of all of those things who is still involved in it.

[24] Interview with Steve Johnson, 19 July 2005.

> ***Researcher: Do you think that the Welsh Music Foundation isn't living up to its brief then because that's what it's supposed to be doing, isn't it?***
> **Owen Powell:** It is quite hard for me because I do bits of work involved with them. I mean the Welsh Music Foundation, to be fair to them, they've helped me in a couple of things I've been trying to do. I'm currently working on an initiative to improve the quality of song-writing in Wales, which the WMF are helping me with and they've got the British Academy of Song Writers, the guys who do the Ivor Novello Awards. So they've managed to introduce me to prestigious organisations who are going to fund and give me help to do these song-writing courses and things. So from that point of view it's good. I suppose the reality is that if any band are good enough they'll make it whether or not there's a government institution there to help them or not. I mean the bands who get helped by labels, yes, it's a help, but WMF or Community Music Wales or Welsh Music, whatever name you put on these blanket organisations, they're never going to be able to take a band and get them signed to a label and make them successful—the band has got to do that for themselves. What is being put there is a kind of government enabled infrastructure to help bands. What Manchester has got is a private infrastructure, people like Tony Wilson, places like the Hacienda, people like Simon Moran of SJM, [...] people who don't do it because the government is paying them to do it, they do it because they want to make a couple of bob out of it. And the truth is that the people who want to make a couple of bob out of it will always win.[25]

Again, Powell's response was typical of many given, a combination of positive changes, coupled with a need to ensure that these are taken further.

4.4 Conclusions

This chapter has explored some of the elements of the story of Cool Cymru, and offered an alternative perspective to that gleaned from media reports. Through speaking with various people who were involved in the music scene in Wales during this period, three of the central elements to the creation of Cool Cymru (of Wales being ignored, then discovered and finally re-imagined) can be questioned more soberly. It casts light on the motives of journalists who were to writing in the press, the experiences of bands, and as many of these people are still involved in music, to begin the assessment of whether Cool Cymru has left any legacy. These interviews

[25] Interview with Owen Powell, 27 July 2005.

further demonstrate that the complex connections and events which go together to form a scene require further research to enable a more complete understanding of this period.

5 Cool Cymru Bands and Welsh Identity

The previous chapters have explored how bands from Wales were reported on within the media, how the regular use of general characterizations about Wales, such as 'the Valleys', were employed by writers, and how the subcultural collateral of bands was employed by others in the media, arts and politics. This chapter examines how bands themselves referenced Wales in their songs, on their record sleeves, in their performances, on the merchandise that was sold, and in interviews with the press. It considers the extent to which these contributed to the creation and telling of Cool Cymru. It further looks at how representations of Welsh identities constructed by the bands themselves, including the images and symbols used by groups (both the immediately obvious and those that needed to be interpreted and understood), themes within songs and key events held during this time. These factors are crucial in understanding how Cool Cymru represented something tangible, something more than merely a fabrication by the media. Large outdoor events (Margam Park and Catatonia, Manic Millennium, Morfa Stadium and the Stereophonics) were widely reported within the press as discussed in depth in Chapter 3. Although some media commentators, and indeed my interviewees, have described Cool Cymru as a media fabrication, the media did not imagine the significant events that formed the Cool Cymru story. These events, by their very nature, required the participation of both the bands themselves and thousands of spectators. The chapter will explore the link between these huge musical events and that other focus for expressions of national sentiment—sport. Rather than looking broadly at all bands from Wales who were popular at this time, it will focus largely on the three biggest selling bands from this time — Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia and Stereophonics — as these had the largest audiences both in Wales and further afield. The purpose of

this chapter is not just to document examples of bands flagging Wales, but also to examine how and consider why they did this.

The referencing of Wales in artwork was hardly a new practice in the 1990s. Several acts of the Sain (Sound) label had clearly worn their Welsh identity on their record sleeves from the 1960s onwards. As these acts performed solely in Welsh, at a time when the position of the Welsh language has become the focus of protest in Wales and the founding of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg (Welsh Language Society), there was no real need for extra signifiers—choosing to sing in Welsh was a clear statement of intent.[1] The output of the label was, broadly speaking, political; for example Dafydd Iwan's satirical jab at the newly invested Prince of Wales, 'Carlo', was political in its lyrics, but contained no manifesto or, for example, calls for republicanism, or Huw Jones' 'Dwr' about the drowning of Tryweryn. However, singing, performing, and releasing records in Welsh was in itself a political act, providing an alternative to the dominating Anglophone world. A retrospective collection of Sain recordings from the 1960s, *Welsh Rare Beat* (2005), featured several images from that period taken from Sain records, including a naked Cymdeithas yr Iaith supporter, and a map of Wales.[2]

Visual references to Wales were not confined to those who spoke and sang in the Welsh language. In 1972, Man, who hailed from Swansea, released *Be Good To Yourself At Least Once A Day'*.[3] The gatefold sleeve featured a large, fold-out map showing Wales being removed from its mooring with England, using a tug-boat and pushing away with oars. The illustration poked fun at Wales, showing a number of military bases and the oil refinery in Pembrokeshire along with the more usual

[1] Cymdeithas Yr Iaith (The Welsh Language Society) is a pressure group concerned with the promotion of the Welsh language. For more information go to: http://cymdeithas.org/

[2] Various Artists, *Welsh Rare Beat*, (2005, Finders Keeper, B000A6AB80)

[3] Man, *Be Good To Yourself At Least Once A Day*, (1972, United Artists, UAG29417)

landmarks of Aberystwyth, the Festiniog Railway and Snowdonia. The inner-sleeve was decorated with a chart linking various bands and musicians, including the individual band members.[4] Along with well-known groups from south Wales (Amen Corner, Badfinger), it included the most famous names in light entertainment (Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey) along with others from outside Wales (Screaming Lord Sutch and the Savages, Strawbs). After leaving Man, Clive John immortalized his home town of Swansea in song with 'Swansea Town' in 1975. Within the cannon of pop music, there are numerous songs about places – the ferry across the Mersey, Penny Lane, New York (New York), Mile End. The association between pop song and place (or more importantly, what that place represents in the imagination of the songwriter, performer or listener) is further found in music's style, in its sound; the delta blues, the brass band, the male voice choir.[5] Bands and singers from Wales are no exception to this, including 60 Ft Dolls with 'Maindee Run', Gorky's Zygotic Mynci's 'The Barafundle Bumbler', Gene Latter's 'Tiger Bay', Y Cyrff's 'Cymru, Lloegr a Llanwrst', and Idris Davies' 'Bells of Rhymney' (set to music by Pete Seeger, and later covered by, amongst others, The Byrds and The Alarm). This list is by no means exhaustive; the comment that the Welsh do not tend to 'spray place names' is not wholly true.[6]

Many sounds which are geographically located (e.g. Merseybeat or the 'Dunedin Sound') are focused around a specific urban space. Madchester and Baggy were concentrated in Manchester, Triphop in Bristol and Disco in New York to name just a few. They are cited as offering some insight into their place of origin. The

[4] Man had numerous line-ups over the years.
[5] See Pete Frame, *Rockin' Around Britain*, (London: Omnibus, 1999), pp.239-246. For further discussion of the significance of places within pop, see Connell and Gibson, Soundtracks: *Popular Music, Identity and Place*, (London: Routledge, 2003).
[6] Dai Griffiths and Sarah Hill, 'Postcolonial Music in Contemporary Wales: Hybrids and Weird Geographies', in J. Aaron and C Williams (eds) *Postcolonial Wales*, University of Wales Press (2005).

difference with the Cool Cymru and Britpop label is that while both had specific geographic locations, these were not restricted to a single conurbation. Perhaps more importantly, they were seen as both catalyst and proof of national resurgence. As with other national myths, there was an idea that the nation was woken from some kind of sleep, a Rip Van Winkle-type slumber that (so this retelling said) meant that in the case of Cool Cymru, Wales had been a cultural desert for decades and was now regaining some form of musical credibility. The Britpop presentation of contemporary Britain, and of Cool Britannia, used the waving of flags less, but symbols of national identity could be found nonetheless. The uniform was Fred Perry shirts, narrow trousers and Doc Martins—amalgamating mod and skinhead culture. Both used flags and the colours of their respective flags consciously. Articles on Britpop were almost invariably covered in red, white and blue illustrations. Articles on Cool Cymru (whether or not it was named) often used red, green and white. Britpop was closely linked to specific locations, namely London, Manchester and, to a lesser extent, Sheffield. London especially was mentioned frequently, with one music magazine printing a guide to Camden Town for the benefit of readers in the provinces who may have wanted to visit this hallowed piece of north London. As established in Chapter 3, Cool Cymru was often described in national terms, 'a national resurgence', and the descriptions of how 'we' had more confidence. However, to take this as wholly accurate would be misleading—all of Wales was resurging, but some areas were resurging more than others. Undoubtedly, Cardiff and the south received the most attention, not only because of the urban regeneration project taking place, including 'Europe's most exciting waterfront development' at Cardiff Bay, and the removal of the National Stadium to make way for the Millennium Stadium.[7] Most of

[7] This description is given by Waterfront Partnerships, and formerly by the Cardiff Bay Development

the bands that had caught the attention of the press were based in Cardiff, or too close by (in the case of the Stereophonics and the Newport bands) to make any real difference for many journalists.[8] The use of urban spaces made its way into the pop. With Britpop it had been most clearly seen with Blur and an idea of London as Britain, with the song 'Parklife' most clearly demonstrating this. Paradoxically, while Cardiff was receiving the attention, it was the idea of 'the valleys' that became the urban space of the two biggest-selling acts, the Manics and Stereophonics.[9]

What is notable is quite how regularly flaggings of identity appear within the bands' music, artwork and even merchandise of all of the groups examined here.[10] While a band might argue that mentioning their origin and identity early on in their career was not intended to contribute to the construction of a scene, when that scene is apparent to continue to discuss your origin will inevitably contribute towards it. This is because, as demonstrated in chapters 2 and 3, the bands' origins in Wales and their linguistic, political and class background were regularly identified and discussed within the press. Therefore, the groups (in the Manics' case, a member of which was often responsible for their artwork), and their managers must have been aware that their various flaggings of Wales would be likely to further this discussion. What follows is an examination of how Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia and Stereophonics flagged place and identity within their body of work. It demonstrates that the discussion of identity, politics and the naming of Cool Cymru within the press did not come solely from the imaginations of journalists and politicians, and that

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Corporation: http://www.visitcardiffbay.info/ accessed 22/02/08

[8] Members of Super Furry Animals, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, Catatonia and Manic Street Preachers lived in the capital during this period.

[9] Catatonia, Super Furry Animals and Gorky's all presented a different idea of Wales, but these first two in particular were still associated with Cardiff. Super Furries were well known to be Cardiff City fans especially after buying a tank and painting it in Cardiff City colours, while Catatonia formed in the city, this story being repeated in numerous interviews.

[10] Once again, I'm focussing on Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia and Stereophonics because they were the most commercially successful of all the bands from this period.

while the bands might have balked at the label of Cool Cymru they were at least in part responsible for its creation and the perpetuation of the idea. It further demonstrates that in staging huge concerts, the bands provided an arena for the unisonance that Anderson identifies as being important for the imagining of a national community.[11] These events were where music, references to sporting achievement, fan participation and media coverage came together as Cool Cymru incarnate.

5.1 Manic Street Preachers

As detailed in Chapter 3, many of the early Manics' interviews mentioned their upbringing in south Wales, their experience of growing up in a small town, and their desire to leave. The band had complex and contradictory attitudes to Wales, but nonetheless it was a recurrent theme in articles about them. Within their music, there were initially few references to Wales, let alone anything that could be equated with nationalism or national identity. Nicky Wire has since claimed that 'Motown Junk', with its lyric, 'Numbed out in piss towns', was about growing up in Wales.[12] Indeed, as noted elsewhere, they were more often to be accused of anti-Welshness.[13] Other lyrics from their debut album, *Generation Terrorists,* seemed to condemn nationalism more generally, with the words 'Repeat after me/fuck Queen and country' and 'Dumb flag scum',[14] while a later song apparently took a swipe at the Welsh language movement with the words 'Systemized atrocities ignored/as long as bi-lingual signs [sic] on view'.[15] It was after the disappearance of Richey James in 1995, and the group's subsequent hiatus before returning with *Everything Must Go,* that references to Wales became clear and unambiguous.

[11] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6
[12] 'This is my truth, tell me yours', BBC Radio Wales, 12th September 1998.
[13] Price, *Everything,* p. 22.
[14] Manic Street Preachers, 'Repeat', *Generation Terrorists*, (Columbia Records, 471060 (CD), 1992).
[15] Manic Street Preachers, 'PCP', *Holy Bible*, (Epic, 477421 2 (CD), 1994).

An article shortly after the release in the music press referred to the 'new patriotic Wire' and argued that 'they'd never acknowledged their Welshness on record [...] This year they've become the adopted godfathers of the the *Taffia* [sic], taking Catatonia, Super Furry Animals, Gorkys [sic] and Stereophonics on tour with them.'[16] It was in this interview that Wire also claimed that in their early days, Richey James had been 'paranoid' about coming across as Welsh, calling it 'the Kinnock factor'.[17] In comparison with early interviews, which were largely negative in tone when the subject of south Wales was broached, they were now more positive about their background, albeit in relative terms in places.[18] Singer James Dean Bradfield was quoted as saying 'Where I come from, I've seen violence, I've been in stomach-churning fights, bones broken and everything, but even that doesn't churn my stomach as much as some of the things I see in London.'[19] In the same piece, Wire waxed lyrical about the Miners' Institutes and libraries that had been part ofthe social fabric in industrial south Wales.[20] He would return to these themes regularly within interviews, and spoke of devolution as a positive change for Wales.[21]

These new references though were to a specific version of Wales, one that the music press had already constantly alluded to within the much-hated headlines, of 'Dai', 'boyo', of industrial south Wales. Entwined with this were the left-wing politics, the strong working class identity and sport. When Wire wore the Welsh flag onstage at the 1997 Brit awards, and dedicated the award to 'every comprehensive school in Britain [...]. They've produced everything—the best bands, the best art, the

[16] Simon Price, 'Street Life', *Melody Maker*, 4 January 1997, pp. 14-16.
[17] Ibid.
[18] A sample quote would include, 'If you built a museum to represent Blackwood, all you could put in it would be shit. Rubble and shit', Simon Price, *Everything*, p. 1
[19] Taylor Parkes, 'Escape from our history', *Melody Maker*, 1 June 1996, pp. 28-30.
[20] Ibid.
[21] 'This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours – An Interview With Nicky Wire', BBC Radio Wales (12/09/1998) – See last chapter

best everything. Oh, the best boxers too', he was placing himself and his band in this socialist tradition.[22] He was also inevitably placing himself within the burgeoning Cool Cymru imagining by wearing its most obvious symbol of the Welsh flag.

Another clear reference to Wales at this time was their cover of 'Can't Take My Eyes Off You', later released as the b-side to the single, 'Australia'.[23] This song had become synonymous in Wales with the national football team, following its use in the BBC Wales advert in the early 1990s, and was received particularly well at gigs in Wales.[24]

With their second album after the disappearance of James, these flaggings of identity broadened somewhat to include images of Wales outside of their familiar landscape of south Wales. 'Ready For Drowning' was, according to Wire, inspired by the drowning of Tryweryn and by the alcoholism of a number of Welsh artists including Richard Burton and Rachel Roberts.[25] Incidentally, this was the first time that the group had promoted their records in Welsh, as well as English.[26] These acknowledgements of another Wales appeared alongside other references to south Wales and to left-wing politics. The single, 'If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next', was concerned with volunteer fighters for the republican cause in the Spanish civil war. The lyric included a quote from Welsh volunteer Tom Thomas, 'If I can shoot rabbits, I can shoot fascists', who came from Bedlinog near Merthyr Tydfil.[27] The cover for the single showed a group picture of Welsh volunteers for the war, and was used as part of the album artwork. The b-sides to this single included a

[22] Price, *Everything,* p. 234.
[23] Manic Street Preachers, 'Australia', (Epic, 664044 2 (CD), 1996).
[24] For example, Manic Street Preachers at Cardiff International Arena, December 1996 – author present.
[25] 'This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours – An Interview With Nicky Wire', BBC Radio Wales (12/09/1998)
[26] This attempt was unfortunately grammatically incorrect – Patrick Fletcher, 'Manics put on report from grammar slip', *Western Mail,* 19th September 1998, p. 3.
[27] See Hywel Francis, 'Miners Against Fascism', (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), p. 215.

song entitled 'Prologue To History', echoing the opening chapter of Gwyn A. Williams' *When Was Wales?*[28] This lyric mentioned again the dreaded 'Kinnock factor', and name checked one of Wire's favourite rugby players, Phil Bennett.[29] Sport is a passion of Wire and had been mentioned elsewhere in his lyrics.[30] Other b-sides were entitled 'Valley Boy' and 'Socialist Serenade', again nodding at the influence south Wales continued to hold on the group.[31] Another song on the album, 'Tsunami', was inspired by the story of Jennifer and June Gibbons, twin sisters who grew up in Haverfordwest and had entered a pact of silence to the outside world as a result of bullying. They were sent to Broadmoor at the age of 19 and released at the age of 30, Jennifer dying shortly after her release.[32]

The flagging of both Wales and of socialism is equally as apparent within the art work and merchandise which was available for sale during the band's UK tour to support this album. These flaggings though have to be identified and understood by the listener, and are not so obvious to be immediately clear.[33] Firstly, the title of the album, *This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours* was taken from a speech given by Aneurin Bevan, and played at a memorial to commemorate the centenary of his birth which was attended by Nicky Wire. The photograph on the cover of the album, showed the three remaining band members on a beach, with mountains clearly visible in the background. The photo was taken in north-west Wales, close to the Snowdonia national park. The inside cover included a poem by R. S. Thomas, a poet closely

[28] Gwyn. A. Williams, *When Was Wales?*, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 1-6.
[29] Manic Street Preachers, 'Prologue To History', b-side to, 'If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next', (Epic, 6662452 (CD) 1998).
[30] Manic Street Preachers, 'Mr. Carbohydrate', b-side to, 'A Design To Life', (Epic, 663070 2 (CD) 1996).
[31] Manic Street Preachers, 'Valley Boy', b-side to 'The Everlasting', (Epic, 666686 2, 1998) and 'Socialist Serenade', b-side to 'You Stole The Sun From My Heart', (Epic, 666953 2, 1999).
[32] Heather Mills, 'Silent twin's death "remains a mystery" ', *Independent*, 15 May 1993, p. 2.
[33] Given the band's habit of placing quote and pictures in their artwork which are both provocative and relative to the music, this was in keeping with their previous records. In addition, their fans had something of a reputation for being obsessive, and for using this material as a starting point for discovering more about the band.

associated with rural Wales and virulent Welsh nationalism. The poem, 'Reflections', contains the words 'No truce with my furies', paraphrased by Nicky Wire for the lyric of 'You Stole The Sun From My Heart' from the album. These links with Wales were raised in interviews with the band. Nicky Wire went so far as to describe it as the 'first ever Welsh folk album' in an interview on BBC Radio Wales.[34] Tour t-shirt designs included a print of the album cover, and another which included the three-pointed star emblem of the International Brigades, along with the Tom Thomas quote.

It was at the live concerts, particularly in Wales, that the band flagged their Welshness unequivocally. In some places this was literal, with the draping of a Welsh flag on the amp behind Nicky Wire at every gig from their return in December 1995. It was picked up and copied by their fans with Welsh flags becoming an increasingly common sight at large music events. As Price notes, 'At festivals and the Oasis mega-gigs, the red dragon was semaphore for "I am here for the Manics" (whether the bearer was Welsh or not).'[35] At concerts, the waving of flags was combined with other references to Welsh sport, musically, verbally and in the band's choice of clothing. James Dean Bradfield frequently wore a Cardiff Blues top, while Nicky Wire chose a Cardiff Devils shirt for their return gig in December 1995. They mentioned sport on stage, for example James Dean Bradfield expressed his dislike for the Romanian team after they had beaten Wales,[36] and had criticized Scott Quinnel for 'defecting' to Rugby League. They also called for the sacking of Wales' football manager Bobby Gould when performing in Cardiff in 1998, the show being broadcast live on BBC Radio 1, and changed the lyrics to their song 'Everything Must Go', to

[34] 'This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours – An Interview With Nicky Wire', BBC Radio Wales (12/09/1998)
[35] Price, *Everything*, (London: Virgin, 1999), p. 27.
[36] Ibid, p. 26

'Bobby Gould must go.'[37] All accompanied by the chants of 'Wales! Wales!'

Aside from the band playing songs associated with Welsh sport, they had gone further in performing the opening verse of the Welsh national anthem, *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, in December 1996,[38] which the band subsequently repeated at many gigs in Wales.[39] They played it in a style that sought to copy Hendrix's iconic reinterpretation of the *Stars and Stripes* at Woodstock in August 1969. Welsh guitarist Tich Gwilym had performed 'Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau' in this way for many years and was well known for his version,[40] and others have claimed that Hendrix himself recorded it, though this seems highly unlikely.[41] But in these two, the flag and the anthem, there is an unmistakable statement of Welsh identity which, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, the media was all too quick to pick up on, as were what was referred to as 'third parties' in Chapter 2 who used this in creating and defining Cool Cymru. Wire himself is well known to be a massive sports fan, and as mentioned in Chapter 3, believed sport and music have the influence to 'lift a nation'.[42]

The climax of the group's embracing and flagging of their Welsh identity came in December 1999, when they played at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium, albeit in a complex way. This was the first concert to be played at the newly-built stadium, and had the sub-heading 'After dark, in the Arms Park', and being on New Year's Eve, it was always going to have a celebratory feel about it. The choice of support

[37] This concert was broadcast live on 13th September 1998 on BBC Radio 1, and is mentioned by Simon Price, *Everything*, p. 252
[38] Price, '*Everything*, p. 26
[39] Author was present at one in April 2005, at Brangwyn Hall, Swansea, where the opening of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* was played in response to the audience chanting 'Wales! Wales!'.
[40] This can be found on: Various Artists, 'Welsh Rare Beat', (Finders Keepers, B000A6AB80 1995).
[41] At the beginning of 2007, there was some controversy within the media when it was claimed a tape had been found of Hendrix playing *Hen Wladfy Nhadau*. It seems improbable that it was Hendrix, more information can be found here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/2007/01/genuine_jimi.html (accessed 22 January 2007).
[42] 'This Is my Truth, Tell Me Yours – An Interview With Nicky Wire', BBC Radio Wales (12/09/1998)

bands was significant. Three of the four acts came from Wales, although the souvenir programme did not labour the point. Neither did much of the blurb inside the programme—there was no mention of any renaissance in Wales, or any proclamations of the band's role. Two significant inclusions sought to comment on contemporary Wales. The first was the centre pages, which had photos taken from an exhibition entitled 'Land Of My Fathers: The Photographs of David Hurn' which was opening at the National Museum of Wales. These images depicted people in clothing which reflected their jobs or interests (including dancers, cowboys, historical re-enactment). The only way to know that they were taken in Wales was because of the title of the exhibition. The other indicator was the opening piece by Patrick Jones, who also opened the evening. Taken from his play 'Everything Must Go', the piece is critical of contemporary, historical and imagined Wales,

> [...] wales—lovely innit—oh aye—lovely—how green is my valley how grey is the sky—ooh lovely love—fucking daffodils dancing in the spring sun [...]—the fucking joy riders burning the hillsides—the temazes stuck on tongues [...]—welcome to your dreams welcome to the welsh [sic] tourist board's translation clinic [...] welcome welcome—to the psychiatric hospital we all live in—bore fucking da [43]

While the choice of support acts, the official literature, and also the DVD of the night released in 2000 did not overtly promote the idea of Cool Cymru (elements controlled by the organisers of the event), it proved nonetheless to be something of a celebration of Wales. A large number of the crowd were carrying flags, wearing Wales shirts and in possession of other paraphernalia associated with Welsh events (blow-up daffodils, etc.) lending the evening an unmistakably 'Welsh' air. The DVD shows fans arriving at Cardiff Central Station wearing flags, people selling flags

[43] Patrick Jones, 'Everything Must Go ', in *Fuse* (Cardiff: Parthian, 2001), pp. 140-141. Also printed on the third page of the 'Manic Millennium' programme, produced for the concert.

outside, and people wearing clothing that declared their Welsh identity.[44] Inside the stadium, between acts, clips from Welsh sporting history were shown, including Cardiff City beating Real Madrid in 1970, along with sporting figures with 'Happy New Year' messages, which brought reactions from the crowd, particularly the clips of the national rugby team from the 1970s. There was also chanting by the crowd throughout the warm-up, mainly of 'Wales! Wales!' although this is barely noticeable on the DVD released. The band's sartorial flag-waving this time only stretched to Wire's feather boas in red, white and green.

An interview recorded and released on the DVD of the Millennium concert returned to the familiar themes of national and class identity. Responding to the question, 'Do you think Wales is a musical nation', Nicky Wire said;

> I'm tempted to think it's more of a class thing, I've always thought our music has been borne out of class, rather than national identity. I have to admit that. That's what I meant about where we grew up. It's a specifically socialist, working class, fragmented, decaying culture. That's where I think we got it from. Then again, you know, the difference between most Welsh bands and everybody else is that every one of them can sing.[45]

This event in many ways presented Cool Cymru in miniature, albeit in a way largely unmediated by the media. The way the crowd dressed and behaved amounted to an endorsement of the idea of Cool Cymru, of national celebration with music leading the way and acting as the soundtrack, with flags and sport providing the visual signs. And the band provided not only the occasion, but shaped the feeling of national celebration by presenting the video clips and performing songs which had become markers of Welsh identity.

While the band did not explicitly verbally encourage Cool Cymru, they did provide a space for it. More generally, their attitude towards such labelling, and

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[44] Manic Street Preachers, *Leaving The 20th Century*, (2000, SMV Enterprises, 201126 9,DVD).
[45] Ibid.

whether they sought to be a part of it is a complex question. Certainly Manic Street Preachers, and particularly Nicky Wire, was supportive of other Welsh bands, and also of the changes (economic, political and cultural) that were happening in Wales. And whilst I have not found any examples of Wire using the label, I have not found any interviews in which he, or any other members of the group, question or criticise the idea of Cool Cymru.[46] As with the two other groups discussed in this chapter, Stereophonics and Catatonia, they at times expressed their unease at both the label and the concept. However, this does not mean that they did not contribute to it.

5.2 Catatonia

Catatonia's flagging of Wales was, in some ways, quite different from Manic Street Preachers. Within interviews, there was no demonstration of hostility to where they came from, nor was there the propagation of an imagined place, such as 'the valleys'. Instead Wales was mentioned within these interviews largely because of the band performing some songs in Welsh, and it being all of the members' first language.[47]

Originally, the group signed to the Crai label, a subsidiary of Sain, and it was while on this label that they first attracted the attention of the music press.[48] This section examines first the level of flaggings of Wales which can be found in the group's work (which, with one exception, are minor) and then go on to consider the extent to which they might have contributed to Cool Cymru in other ways, mainly through concerts and the celebrity value of Cerys Matthews.

[46] In comparison, Super Furry Animals were consistently critical of the label, and all that it implied.
[47] This was something they did far more at the beginning of their career, while signed to the Ankst label.
[48] The EP *Hooked*, was released on the Crai label in June 1994 (Crai, CD042B), and was reviewed by John Harris, 'Singles', *NME*, 9th July 1994, p. 36.

Aside from being signed to a label known for its Welsh-language output, and indeed, their own Welsh language songs (though these were usually to be found on the b-side of singles), the group made use of Welsh artists for their artwork, and for their breakthrough single, 'Mulder and Scully' used a picture of Cardiff at night. These are really incidental as are the other nods towards Wales in their music and videos.[49] The band's main musical contribution to Cool Cymru was in writing its anthem, 'International Velvet', with its heavily-played chorus of 'Everyday, when I wake up, I thank the Lord I'm Welsh.' While its writers claimed it was an ironic dig at Wales, this was generally lost, sometimes even to the band themselves. At their summer concerts in 1999, Matthews was described as being wrapped in a Welsh flag for the finale, and pounding her fist to her chest.[50] The *Melody Maker* conducted a vox-pops at one of their concerts in Wales, asking gig-goers whether it was 'a Welsh thing', and the responses printed are unquestioningly nationalist in tone including, 'Yeah, it's patriotic', 'Are you English? You shouldn't be here!' and 'It was really cool seeing all the flags'.[51] This is not to suggest that the tone of these answers was hostile towards people from outside Wales, or aggressive, but they are undoubtedly nationally aware.

There were two collaborations between Matthews and the band Space on their single 'The Ballad of Tom Jones', and then later with Jones himself. The Space single was their biggest hit, reaching number 4 in the singles chart in February 1998, while the collaboration with Jones (a cover of 'Baby it's cold outside') reached

[49] For example, the single 'Londinium' did not mention Wales, just the desire to leave London. And the video for 'Dead From The Waist Down' mentioned the low cost of cattle and the effect this was having on farmers in Wales.
[50] No author, 'Welsh Assembled!', *NME*, 29 May 1999, pp. 7-8. No author, 'This could be legendary', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 25. Of course, printing of vox-pops is highly subjective, but nonetheless, these comments reflect the rest of the review, and ties in with reports of other large concerts in Wales by Welsh bands.
[51] No author, 'This could be legendary', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 24.

number 17 and began life on the BBC 'Later, with Jools Holland' show for New Year's Eve – a programme which was one of the flagship shows for the BBC's festivities.

Chapter 3 focused on how the press reported on Welsh bands, but how the bands themselves responded to questions about Wales is also of importance in identifying their contribution towards the construction of Cool Cymru. The band, and Cerys Matthews in particular, usually gave positive quotes to journalists. Two band members, in response to being asked how they would promote pride in being Welsh, said that it was about 'showing what people in Wales are doing, showing that off to people', while another said it was showing '[...] what the Welsh are capable of... I think it should be a travelling thing too—not just based in Cardiff'.[52] A third band member, when asked about the presence of flags at gigs in Wales said,

> Sure, but it's not really a nationalist thing with us. It's more an all-embracing, have-a-bit-of-a-laugh-at-yourself thing. If it felt like a political rally, I'd worry—although I think I'd be more worried if *we* [emphasis in original] went onstage draped in them. When we play in Wales we do get a totally different audience though—they really want you to do well, they're willing you on. It's celebratory.[53]

While band members gave short shrift to their names and music being used by politicians,[54] they acknowledged on the positive side of widespread musical express and the press attention that accompanied this, and these positive statements amount to at least a partial endorsement of the creation of Cool Cymru. For example, Cerys Matthews said that,

> The Welsh thing is lovely, but it doesn't really feel like you're part of something big when you're in the middle of it. The exciting thing about it is, when I was growing up, there weren't any bands from around there. I mean, people call me the Most Famous Woman In Wales, but can you tell

[52] No author, 'Welsh Round Up', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 29.
[53] No author, 'This could be legendary', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 25.
[54] No author, 'Welsh Round Up', *Melody Maker*, 29 May 1999, p. 29.

> me five famous Welsh women under the age of 30? It's Catherine Zeta Jones, me and that's it.[55]

Matthews had an added dimension to the nature of her fame as the singer in a band—she became a staple in the national daily press, which was in stark contrast to the fame afforded to other bands, and indeed her own band-mates. Articles on her, much like those in the music press, made the comparisons between her and Shirley Bassey and Björk,[56] demonstrating how the music press was used by the mainstream press.[57] Another article from the same time stated that 'the embracing of Welshness is crucial to the band's identity'.[58] The band themselves contributed to this within the article, although they rejected the 'nationalist' label, preferring 'internationalist'.

Aside from the articles in the press, the context of these was important in endorsing Cool Cymru. Quotes may indeed have been taken out of context, but the bands contributed to the idea of a scene again. As with the Manics choosing Welsh bands as support acts, Catatonia and Stereophonics contributed to the construction of a scene. When individuals wear other group's t-shirts, they are undeniably lending their support. Examples included pictures of Matthews wearing a Manic Street Preachers t-shirt, photographed at a gig in Cardiff with members of Stereophonics,[59] Kelly Jones and Matthews giving a joint interview in a special addition of *Melody*

[55] No author, 'Review of the Year: August – Cerys Matthews', *Melody Maker*, 19-26 December 1998, pp. 44-45. Also, see Neil Mason, 'New Adventures in Sci Fi', *Melody Maker*, 24 January 1998, p. 24-25, where all members of Catatonia discuss Welsh bands as a group, and Robin Bresnark, 'When Kelly Met Cerys', *Melody Maker*, 27 October – 2 November 1999, pp. 20-24, for Cerys Matthews and Kelly Jones discussing (though not naming) Cool Cymru in positive terms.
[56] Tim Marsh, 'Who's that lady?', *Evening Standard*, 11 March 1999, 'Hot Tickets' magazine, pp. 4-5.
[57] The other article quoted here, by Katherine Viner in the *Guardian*, mentions descriptions by both *NME* and *Q* journalists.
[58] Katherine Viner, 'Alive outside the M25', *Guardian*, 6 March 1999, 'Weekend' supplement, pp. 10-19.
[59] Paul Mathur, 'Cardiff You Tolerate This…' – accompanying photograph, *Melody Maker*, 24 May 1998, pp. 24-5

Maker for its re-launch,[60] or Kelly Jones photographed on the front of another edition, wearing a Super Furry Animals t-shirt.[61] The joint interview with Jones and Matthews showed that these two did not know each other well—the reason for their being put together was their current popularity and both hailing from Wales, a decision that lends support to the claim that Cool Cymru was a media invention. However, by agreeing to take part in this (and neither Jones nor Matthews could claim to be so naïve as to be unaware that this would reinforce the idea of a scene), they, and by association their respective bands, were themselves contributing to Cool Cymru. Herein lies the paradox: links between groups are made by the bands themselves in interviews and photographs, and they are generally positive about music in Wales and about each other, partake in flag-waving at their concerts, yet they claim that Cool Cymru is a media fabrication.

5.3 Stereophonics

Stereophonics' depictions of Wales are rooted in their south Wales, post-industrial origin, and because of this drew frequent comparisons with Bruce Springsteen in early interviews and reviews. Rather than the more conscious naming of Wales with the Manics, the Stereophonics more often began by focusing on the minutiae of everyday life in their hometown. The songs on their first album are full of stories about local characters, events, scandals and tragedy. Their entourage of drivers, roadies and their photographer all came from their hometown too, reinforcing the idea of authenticity and firm roots frequently discussed by the *Western Mail* and other publications, and discussed in depth in chapter 3. This continued in the band's

[60] Front Cover & Robin Bresnark, 'Merthyr-ful Ending', *Melody Maker*, 27 October – 2 November 1999, pp. 20-24.
[61] Front Cover, *Melody Maker*, 20 June 1998.

biography *Just Enough Evidence To Print* (a take-off of the band's 2001 album, *Just Enough Education To Perform*). The book contains a number of transcribed interviews with the band and the book's author Danny O'Conner, whom the back cover claims has been interviewing the band 'since the beginning', and the Acknowledgments chapter of the book is full of thanks for those closest to the group, making it clear that the author is an 'insider'.[62] Indeed, the book is published by Virgin Books, a sister company of the band's record label, V2, keeping the telling of their story in the (corporate) family.

The Prologue includes the transcription of an interview between the author and Kelly Jones on 7 December 1999, from which the following extract is taken. Once again the familiar story, which had been told by countless journalists and bands before, is repeated. By repeating the narrative, they were endorsing and contributing towards the creation and perpetuation of Cool Cymru as the quote below demonstrates.

> Danny: So, ten years ago in Wales, there was the dying embers of the Alarm. Shaky and Bonnie had had their say and the Manics were just kicking off really. Their story straddles the nineties. They came in inspired by punk rock, Public Enemy and Guns n' Roses and are ending the decade in three weeks' time as one of the biggest bands in the land.
>
> Kelly: I think the thing is that there's always been talent here but there's always been a major misunderstanding that, as a nation, Wales was somehow backward. People in England forget that when you go abroad, they actually call Great Britain England, and unless you're Welsh you don't know how frustrating that is. The great thing about the Manics, Catatonia, the Superfurries [sic] and ourselves is that, hopefully, the image of Wales is changing. At the same time, local attitudes have changed. When we started playing here in Cardiff it was dire. Unless you were a tribute band, nobody would give you any decent gigs. We were going to become a Jimi Hendrix tribute band at one point. That's true. We were going to have two bands and then the money from the tribute band would pay for us to go to London

[62] Danny O'Connor, *Just Enough Evidence To Print*, (London: Virgin Books, 2001), back cover and pp. vii-ix.

> and play in front of people who allegedly knew about music—record companies, I think I'll call them.
>
> Things are changing here. There's more and more things out there, drama-wise, writing-wise and music-wise. Everybody seems to be doing something now whether it's new media magazines, whatever. Cardiff has got a buzz about it now. I've been to a lot of cities and I still think that Cardiff is one of the better cities in the world to be honest. It's quite small but it's got everything you want [...][63]

The references to Wales within the band's music needed to be understood, requiring prior knowledge on the part of the listener. Kelly Jones sings about small-town Wales, but does not *name* small-town Wales. The popularity of the band found with the release of their first album *Word Gets Around* is because the small-town experience is one shared by many, and in no way confined to post-industrial south Wales. In the physical manifestations of their music (the artwork for their singles and albums, the staging of their concerts, the merchandise, their promo-videos) *their* Wales is more visible. Theirs is south Wales after the pits, where English is the language of the Welsh, and where sporting loyalties and the lived experience are the prime markers of identity. One t-shirt bore the legend 'You can take the boy out of Wales' on the front, and on the back had 'But you can't take Wales out the boy'.

The event that had the single biggest impact, and crystallised Cool Cymru for the media (discussed in depth in Chapter 3), was the Morfa stadium concert. It is Morfa, and perhaps to a lesser extent, Catatonia at Margam Park, and Manic Street Preachers at Millennium Stadium, which demonstrate how popular the idea of Cool Cymru was. No matter what one might think of the label or all that it represented and implied, many thousands of people actively took part—they wore and waved the Welsh flag, chanted 'Wales! Wales!' and sang 'Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau'. It would be ridiculous to suggest that responses such as this were due to the influence of the press,

[63] Danny O'Connor, *Just Enough Evidence To Print*, (London: Virgin Books, 2001), pp. 8-9.

or that of politicians. The following extract is taken from a review of the Morfa concert, printed in *NME*, and powerfully demonstrates the mass spectacle of Cool Cymru.

> We're staring at the video screens at Morfa stadium, shortly before the Stereophonics encore. The crowd is in raptures, but not just about the music. Rather they're raving over the highlights of Welsh cultural history that are reeled around us. And in particular we're watching footage of the rugby lads on form. Which naturally involves the national team putting it up the English again and again.
> You can't *not* be moved by this. Such a noise, so much jubilation from 50,000 people. They're calling it the biggest public convergence in Swansea this century. People from every social and generational area have scrawled 'PROUD TO BE WELSH' on their flags to complement their Cool Cymru and valley chic t-shirts.
> In a few minutes they'll be letting rip with a glowering Welsh national anthem 'Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau' before the fireworks show and the ultimate all-thundering Welsh rugby standard 'Bread of Heaven'.[64]

Such demonstrations of nationalism do not fit with Billig's banal nationalism theory as these were not the everyday, but special events. They also do not fit with the idea of harking back to a glorious national period, unless we are to interpret the use of Welsh sporting glories from the seventies in this way. Instead, they show how national identity and popular culture can, and do, collide, and that such collisions occur in actuality, and not just in the imaginations of media commentators. Such displays by music fans is indivisible from the three factors which Roy Shuker identifies as underpinning musical consumption; namely cultural capital, establishing an identity and pleasure.[65] They further clearly demonstrate what Anderson refers to as 'unisonance'; 'At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance.'[66]

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[64] Stuart Bailie, 'Kelly Watch the Stardom', *NME,* 14th August 1999, pp. 28-29.
[65] Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music*, p. 193.
[66] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the relationship between bands and the discourse of Cool Cymru and their complex attitudes towards it. The bands noted their pride in their identity in the songs they sang, the covers of their records and singles, the clothes they wore, the flags they waved, and the events which they chose to stage—events that acted as a focal point for the discussion of Cool Cymru within the media. These groups may not have appreciated the hype, and may have viewed the idea of a 'scene' with disdain, but they nonetheless were active participants. All of the groups discussed above contributed in some way to the 'Yes' campaign, inevitably endorsing Peter Hain's statement that Wales was no longer mams in shawls in the rain. All of them chose to take part in national sporting events, especially supporting the Welsh rugby team. Such examples demonstrate how complex the relationship between musicians, the media and constructions such as Cool Cymru are. The musicians provide the kudos and credibility—the sub-cultural capital—and the media providing the publicity without which the bands would cease to exist, and somewhere in the middle is Cool Cymru, being tossed back and forth.

This chapter has demonstrated how bands reference their identity, and so their role in this complex relationship. It confounds the statement that Cool Cymru was just a product of the over-active imagination of some bored journalists in Cardiff or London. While the journalists may well be actively seeking to break the 'next big thing', bands seek the publicity. They cannot argue that they have nothing to do with this, and are mere dupes.

6 Conclusion

This thesis takes ideas of identity (specifically, national identity), and the place where it crosses paths with popular culture and popular music. In Wales in the 1990s this was given the label of Cool Cymru The thesis explores three main themes: Firstly, how the reception of pop from Wales, 'the Land of Song' in the press, and how Cool Cymru came to be identified, with pop at its core. Secondly, it establishes how the idea of Cool Cymru broadened, and was utilised by all manner of players, including politicians and journalists, while many involved with music in Wales attempted to distance themselves from the label. It further uses oral history to explore changes and developments in the music scene in Wales during this period and the effect which increased press exposure had. Finally, it challenges the notion that Cool Cymru was *entirely* media hyperbole, demonstrating how bands and their fans, contributed to the story. This thesis argues that while the label of Cool Cymru may elicit different feelings from people, from dismissal, through to antipathy and reinforcement, it did represent the *zeitgeist* of this period. The thesis contributes towards a neglected area of study, namely the role of mass popular culture, and especially pop music, in the articulation of a national identity.

Chapter 1 documented the relationship between understandings and representations of identity and pop. It demonstrated how pop can be a prime signifier of identities, including national identity through the use of musical style, instrumentation, lyrics, performance, presentation and the discourse which is as much a part of pop as the music. It further demonstrated how the idea of authenticity is important in the presentation of an identity—Manic Street Preachers, Stereophonics and Catatonia continually stressed their identity through a combination of these different signifiers, creating an image in which their Welsh identity was of central

importance. Taking pop as the soundtrack to the 'everyday' for the majority of people, the lyric 'Everyday, when I wake up, I thank the Lord I'm Welsh' has an undeniable significance—it is as much a part of the banal nationalism proposed by Billig and the 'us' and 'they' of media discourse.

Chapter 2 demonstrated how pop may be used as both a focal point, and the soundtrack to, the idea of cultural change, examining firstly Cool Britannia, and then Cool Cymru. It showed how pop can be used by various actors, including sporting bodies, media and politicians to provide cultural capital and 'proof' of positive changes. It was used to add interest to speeches about national identity, providing useful, memorable sound-bites that suggest the speaker has an affinity with youth culture, and a resurgence in national pride. It was used to provide a soundtrack to television programmes, adverts, sporting events, plays and films, being both evocative of a sense of identity and place, which when juxtaposed with the past suggests change, progress and a positive future. These uses constituted everyday affirmations of a national identity, and the idea that pop represented positive change in Wales—music and Cool Cymru were used as signifiers of wider economic and social changes.

Chapter three closely examined how Cool Cymru, embodying the idea of change, emerged in the press through the identification of three main themes. These were firstly the repeating of stereotypical ideas in the imagining of Wales, with Wales as both an unlikely source of musical talent, and simultaneously an exotic other. The second is the idea of a 'new' Wales, of a cultural renaissance in which pop played a pivotal role and the repeated identification of these bands as being an authentic representation of contemporary Wales. Thirdly there is the self-conscious identification, and also the dismissal of, a scene in Wales.

The labelling of a group as 'Welsh' came (generally) not from any musical style, but from a band's geographical origin, and sometimes from the language in which they chose to perform.[1] This brought about a sense of frustration for some bands, who felt that they were being 'lumped' together with groups with whom they had little in common stylistically. The mentioning of Wales was a notable feature of articles on these bands throughout the different areas of the print media. In the Welsh press, origin was important in demonstrating how these groups were in some way representative of Wales, and that they had (despite finding fame and glory elsewhere) maintained their roots with Wales. For the music press, the identification of a number of groups from Wales was a useful tool in their reporting of this 'next big thing'—the idea of scenes is essential within the music press. Within the national mainstream press, it offered a useful starting point for other articles on cultural and political changes in Wales. Additionally, these stories were used as major features in 'Arts' sections of newspapers, contributing along with the music and local press to the hyperbole.

With the story came the inevitable backlash, beginning with the music press. Significantly, the backlash did not deny that major changes had been taking place in Wales (the actual construction of Cool Cymru), but was primarily critical of the hyperbole surrounding it, and the trite title. With the backlash came the assertion that the entire episode had been invented by the press.

Chapter 5 moved on to examine the ways and means by which national identity appears within pop, and its centrality to the discourse surrounding pop music within the media. Those bands that made up the focus of Cool Cymru, frequently

[1] Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and Super Furry Animals were often associated with each other for their 'psychedelic' style, and the much-hated adjective of 'wacky' being attached to their music.

tried to distance themselves from what they saw as hype, while simultaneously reinforcing the idea of change, possibility, and the sense that things were improving. In addition to the interviews in which this discourse was carried out, they *performed* Cool Cymru. They did this by noting pride in their identity in the songs they sang, the covers of their records and singles, the clothes they wore, the flags they waved, and the events they staged, which contributed to the idea of unisonance. Their support of the 'Yes' campaign for devolution, participation at national sporting events, and various other 'passive flaggings' further contributed to the idea of Cool Cymru.

These factors demonstrate just how complex the relationship between musicians, the media and constructions such as Cool Cymru are. The musicians provided the kudos and credibility—the sub-cultural capital—and the media provided the publicity without which the bands would cease to exist, and somewhere in the middle is Cool Cymru, being tossed back and forth. It confounds the statement that Cool Cymru was just a product of the over-active imagination of some bored journalists in Cardiff of London. The bands can not argue that they had nothing to do with this, and were the victims of a press and wider media acting separately from themselves.

The relationship between pop, national identity and the discussion of this within the media is hugely complex, as these chapters have shown. But it is clear that to discuss national identity in Wales during the 1990s without taking note of pop music and popular culture would give a very incomplete picture—especially of the national identity expressed by the younger generations in Wales. It was, after all, this younger group of voters who are credited with providing the decisive vote for devolution, and therefore the biggest change to the political landscape of Wales in 400

years. Although Cool Cymru was relatively short-lived, it has had some legacy, in the establishment of the Pop Factory at Porth, and of the Wales Music Foundation. Whether there has been any difference in how Welsh bands are received by the press now is more difficult to say. The music press has changed beyond all recognition from this period. *Melody Maker* no longer exists and the *NME* is a glossy magazine (rather than newspaper) with relatively short articles, rather than in-depth interviews spanning several pages that it used to run. The rise of the internet, of social networking sites, of file-sharing, and the ways in which music is bought and listened to has changed the pop landscape. Both S4C and ITV Wales broadcast shows featuring bands signed and unsigned from Wales showing that despite talk of a global culture, there is still a real interest in the local. That articles in the press (generally the broadsheets) still make continual reference to origin, and will still create scenes if given the chance suggests that fundamentally things have not changed. The following article, published in 2008, was written over ten years after the campaign for devolved government in Wales, Newport named as the 'new Seattle' and what came to be named Cool Cymru. Caroline Sullivan, author of several articles that contributed to the hype over bands from Newport and the 'new Seattle' tag, interviews Nicky Wire for an article in the *Guardian* discussing whether music has definable national traits.

> There's a lovely Welsh word, cynefin, which means 'habitat'. It's the idea that there are factors in your environment that have an influence on you even if you don't realise it—your art, your language, even your religion. The Manic Street Preachers have been very influenced by our environment. [...] Back before 1990 it was very hard for Welsh bands to get anywhere, because there wasn't a great history of success. We had great singers and great entertainers, but nothing was happening in rock. I don't know if we're responsible for this, but since us, there are a lot more bands coming out of Wales, and I'm happy about that. Since the Manics, Welsh bands are described outside Wales as Welsh, whereas before you weren't. When we first went to Japan and America, people would say, 'So, what's it like living in England?' That's changed now; people know where we're from. I'm not a nationalist, but I am from Wales, and I want people to get it right. [...] I feel a surge of pride now when a Welsh band breaks. It's healthy for the

> country, and it's an easy way of conveying to the rest of world—without ramming it down people's throats—that we're really good at making music. John Cale, who was one quarter of the Velvet Underground, one of the most influential bands of all time, never used to talk about being Welsh, but he does now.[2]

Cool Cymru may have been hyperbole, but it came to represent something of more substance to many people, even if this only lasted for the duration of a concert they attended. For all those who chanted 'Wales! Wales!' when Manic Street Preachers performed in Coopers Field in Cardiff, broadcast live on BBC Radio 1, were not just repeating something which they may (or may not) have read in newspapers and magazines. They were contributing to an idea of Welsh identity, rooted in music and performed en masse; using pop as a marker of identity 'to show from where I came.'

[2] Caroline Sullivan, 'Nicky Wire reflects on the musical tradition of his home country – Wales' – part of a larger piece entitled 'State of the Union', *Guardian*, 15 February 2008. Accessed 15 February 2008, http://music.guardian.co.uk/pop/story/0,,2256760,00.html.

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