

TRAVELLING TO NEW WORLDS: IMMIGRATION, EMIGRATION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WALES



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Colebrook, Martyn (Hull),
'CULTURAL AND FAMILIAL DISINHERITANCE: A STUDY OF REVENGE IN NIALL GRIFFITHS' *SHEEPSHAGGER*'

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the study of Welsh writing, colonialism and the postcolonial, in particular Niall Griffiths' *Sheepshagger* (2002). Regarded as a disturbingly lyrical 'hymn to the ancient and the modern' (*Independent*) that is 'haunting and intensely imagined, layered with chilling humour and charged with linguistic energy' (A.L. Kennedy), *Sheepshagger* is a startling examination of the feral savagery, liminal geography and retributive violence that combines to inspire an individual's desire for revenge against the English middle-class he perceives as being responsible for his cultural and familial disinheritance.

In the figure of Ianto, Niall Griffiths has created a necessary anti-hero who, in Griffith's words, 'is a skeletal, rawboned force of nature shaped by the deprivations of his childhood.' (Higgit 2004: 2) His exploration of the familiar tropes of childhood emasculation, violation and alienation creates 'a timeless parable of violent revenge' which is as much a meditation as it is an outraged scream, imbued with the hallucinatory invective that characterises his characters' lurid visions and expletive-ridden dialect. This paper will further explore the instability of Ianto's identity and position within his own social groups and its relation to the atrocities he commits, as well as considering the position of *Sheepshagger* within Griffiths' expanding sequence of novels.

Having deservedly achieved a reputation for brilliantly articulating the transgressive and the controversial, Niall Griffiths' oeuvre represents an important part of contemporary Welsh writing and his work is signified by 'prose of extraordinary strength and depth [...] that seeks out the charged glories of unfettered experience.' He is writing about a society that exists fundamentally on a history of broken promises, betrayals, cultural invasion and disillusionment. However, despite the demotic, firebrand style, Griffiths' novels remain a valuable tool for the analysis and critique of the frustrations of a young Welsh underclass whose heritage and identity is threatened through invasion and oppression.

Brief biographical details

Martyn Colebrook is a second-year part time postgraduate student at the University of Hull, researching the novels of Iain Banks.

Davidson, Ian (Bangor)

'THE TIP OF THE TONGUE: SPACE, POETRY AND IDENTITY'

Abstract

In an increasingly globalised world with an increasingly mobile population, relationships between identity, nationality, language and geography begin have become blurred. As a consequence the link between geographical place and language is often broken.

Wales has two official languages, Welsh and English. English is rapidly becoming, for much of the world, a "lingua franca", and the rapidly growing number of second language speakers probably far outnumber the 380 million first language speakers. As a consequence the English language is not necessarily related to England. Welsh is spoken fluently by around 20 per cent of the population of Wales (about 600,000 people) and as a second language by many more. In parts of Wales both languages are used in everyday conversation, and are often combined in interesting and innovative ways. This could include code-switching, the process of changing language in part of a sentence, and using grammatical structures from one language and vocabulary in another.

Poetry should be the art form at the forefront of reflecting and developing changing language usage. Of all the verbal arts, it is the one which most involves a self-conscious use of language and the use of rhyme, rhythm and the arrangement of language into set forms all emphasise the linguistic "surface" of the poem, a surface that is also part of the "meaning". Contradictorily it will probably be the most resistant, lagging behind popular music and theatre. This paper will

draw on a range of ideas and examples from contemporary poetry and poetics to explore the ways in which poetry in Wales might relate to a bilingual culture and global changes to relationships between language and geography.

Brief biographical details

Ian Davidson teaches literature and writing at the University of Wales, Bangor. Recent publications include *At A Stretch* (Shearsman 2004), *Harsh* (Spectacular Diseases 2003) and *Human Remains and Sudden Movements and No Way Back* (both West House Books 2003 and 2005). *As if Only* is forthcoming from Shearsman. A critical book, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, is in preparation for Palgrave /MacMillan.

He has an interest in interdisciplinary work across different art forms, and recent collaborative writing and film making with Zoe Skoulding (with whom he also co-edits *Skald* magazine) has resulted in a number of publications and performances in the UK, and abroad. Ian also performs his own work regularly.

Donahaye, Jasmine (Aberystwyth),

'ANOTHER ORIENTALISM: JEWRY IN THE WELSH IMAGINATION'

Abstract

I will be discussing the Rev. John Mills, the Welsh author of the proto-ethnographic account 'The British Jews' [1852] - in a high profile case he was expelled from the Calvinistic Methodists who had sponsored his mission, not only for failing to convert the Jews of London, but for courting conversion himself. The book is difficult to categorise, but Mills's later works - on the Samaritans and on the Jews in Palestine - fit within the genre of travelogue. The paper would include something of wider Welsh missionary activity and attitudes as a broad background for considering what are very bizarre and contradictory attitudes between conversionism and liberal humanism in Welsh social and literary history. The literary context would therefore include the Welsh literary treatment of conversionism (back to Morgan Llwyd) as well as Welsh engagement with Palestine/Israel (ongoing).

Brief biographical details

Jasmine Donahaye holds a BA from UC Berkeley and a PhD from UW Swansea. She has published widely on Welsh writing in English and on Jewish literature, and is currently a creative writing and literature tutor in the School of Lifelong Learning at UW Aberystwyth. Her debut collection of poetry (*Parthian*) is being launched at the conference.

Evans, Geraint (Swansea),

'DAVID JONES AND THE WELSHNESS OF WELSH WRITING IN LONDON'

Abstract

Throughout his career the Modernist writer and painter David Jones explored the idea that Celtic Britain should be read in the context of its Roman heritage. Through the transforming experience of Roman occupation and through the following centuries of allegiance to the Church of Rome, Jones argued that the Welsh were 'the heirs of Romanity' whose history and culture reached back to European and classical roots which remained more significant than the effects of the English interregnum. This fascination with Rome also affected his reading of London, the city where he spent nearly the whole of his life, and where the Roman presence was still visible in walls and streets and names. Many of these concerns come together in his long poem *The Anathémata* (1952), particularly in 'Mabinog's Liturgy' and 'The Lady of the Pool', which interweaves the topography of London with elements and motifs from sub-Roman Britain and the literature and history of medieval Wales.

This macaronic layering of languages and traditions is a milestone in the development of Welsh writing in English, and is the basis of a body of work which begins to realign an English-speaking readership with a view of history in which there is no Welsh identity, even in London, which is not based on the culture and tradition of Welsh Wales. London was the site of the first large Welsh diaspora community in the post-medieval world and this paper will explore some of the ways in which Jones's work uses Welsh traditions about the city of London as the capital of the Island of Britain to imply for the surviving Celticity of Wales a Livian grandeur which had been denied by centuries of English colonisation.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

AWAITING DETAILS

Gramich, Katie (Cardiff)

'TAKING TEA WITH THE NATIVES: ELUNED MORGAN AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HYPERREAL HOMELAND'

Abstract

This paper will examine the autobiographical travel writings of the Patagonian author Eluned Morgan (1870-1938), focusing primarily on *Dringo'r Andes* (Climbing the Andes, 1904) and *Gwymon y Mor* (Sea-wrack, 1909). It will offer an analysis of the construction of Patagonia as a new and better Welsh homeland in her writings, paying attention to Morgan's use of Romantic figurative language and Biblical quotation. Attention will also be given to the representation of the native American Indians and their relationship with the Welsh settlers, drawing attention to the ways in which Morgan refuses imperialist interpretations of the Welsh Patagonian project. Finally, it will be suggested that the Patagonia of Morgan's writings is a hyperreal space which goes beyond being a copy of the original and acquires its own, rather strange, autonomy.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Katie Gramich is a Senior Lecturer in the School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University. She has a long term interest in Welsh writing in English, nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's writing. Her fascination with postcolonial studies dates back to her undergraduate work with Ned Thomas at Aberystwyth and her PhD – written in Canada on Caribbean poetry – developed this interest. Over the past few years her work has focused on bringing neglected Welsh women writers back into the public domain and into the arena of academic debate. She has also worked on more 'mainstream' Welsh, English and South African writers, approaching their work from new feminist and postcolonial perspectives

Her current projects include a monograph on twentieth-century Welsh women's writing: *A Literature of Our Own* and an essay on 'Welsh women and war' She recently gave a plenary address for the Welsh Academi on extremes in Welsh women's writing. She is assistant editor of the refereed journal, *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*

Hughes, Tristan (indep),

'ENTANGLED PRESENTS AND USABLE PASTS: RE-THINKING THE LOCAL'

Abstract

I intend exploring the ways in which the notion of place, and connections to it, have been complicated and altered by the various effects of globalisation and population movement. I shall look at how writers whose backgrounds are, more often than not, hybrid - and whose perspectives are trans-national - attempt to read, and write, those backgrounds and perspectives into their localities; to see embedded in the landscape and history of a particular place a reflection of the multiplicity, discontinuity, change and mobility that have shaped their own lives; to seek usable pasts within their present surroundings. This, I think, has begun to erode some of stereotypes that have previously coloured the perception and practise of local and rural writing: settled idylls tend to give way to fractured communities, static histories unravel into restless toings and froings, the familiar is re-figured as the exotic. It has also complicated the vantage points from which such places are viewed. Categories such as insider-outsider and tourist-resident no longer hold, and one of the tasks of contemporary Welsh writers will be to attempt to transcend them and present instead a set of imbricated and interlocking visions, and to tease out the tensions and conflicts between and within them.

And yet, it seems to me, there remains a pronounced and important difference between writing about small places and writing from them. I hope to conclude my discussion by asking if there is a set of attributes, themes and preoccupations that shape this writing, a particular way of approaching and comprehending the world that distinguishes it.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Tristan Hughes was born in Atikokan, Canada, where he lived for two years before moving to Ynys Mon, an island off the coast of north Wales. He was educated at a bilingual school in Porthaethwy, north Wales, and went on to study literature at the universities of York and Edinburgh, and King's College, Cambridge. He has taught courses on American literature and culture in Cambridge, Taiwan and Bangor. Tristan's latest book, *Send My Cold Bones Home* (Parthian), is being launched at the conference.

Jarvis, Matthew (indep)

'CHRIS TORRANCE: THE DIVERSITY OF HABITATION'

The avant-garde poet Chris Torrance (born in Edinburgh and brought up in London) moved to Wales in 1970, since when he has lived in the Neath Valley. His experience of Wales has fed into his major ongoing project *The Magic Door*. Drawing on theorists of place such as Mircea Eliade and Yi-Fu Tuan, and on ecocritics such as Jonathan Bate and Lawrence Buell, this paper will argue that Torrance's approach to Welsh space is to pursue the representation of complexity. *The Magic Door* thus presents the process of habitation as an experience that is crucially defined by diversity.

Brief biographical details

Matthew Jarvis was a lecturer at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth until the summer of 2005. He is now a full-time father and part-time writer. He publishes on contemporary poetry, with a particular focus on environmental issues. He is currently working on two book projects – *Poetry and the Earth: Seven Radical Landscape Poets* (for Rodopi) and *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (for UWP's CREW series). He has recently been awarded an Academi Writers' Bursary to work on his first novel.

Langfield, Michele (Deakin, Australia),

'WELSH PATAGONIANS IN AUSTRALIA: WRITING MIGRATION STORIES'

Abstract

The background, history and folklore of the Welsh settlements in Patagonia are well known, especially in Wales. These settlements date from 1865 when the first group of 153 Welsh nationalists left their homelands to escape English persecution and threats to their cultural identity. They established colonies in Patagonia in the Chubut Valley and the Andes foothills and for many years maintained their distinctive heritage and spoke freely in Welsh. Towards the end of the century, however, a number of factors led some of the colonists, whose numbers by then had increased substantially, once again to seek new homes. These factors included government pressure for them to integrate, speak Spanish, educate their children in local Catholic schools and for their young men to undertake military training on Sundays. Unwilling to compromise their traditional lifestyles, several of the Welsh and their descendants decided, perhaps ironically, to return to Britain or migrate to a country under the British flag. South Africa was considered but generally not looked upon as a favourable destination. Ultimately, some 250 sailed to Canada in 1902, others returned to Wales and approximately 350 Patagonians, of whom 151 were Welsh, found their way to Australia between 1910 and 1916, before and during the First World War. The Welsh amongst the Australian immigrants were closely linked by family and community affiliations and constituted almost the same number that made up the original party of Welsh nationalists who set out for Patagonia from Liverpool on the *Mimosa* in 1865.

Comparatively little has been published on these secondary migrations and the resettlement experiences of Welsh Patagonians in Canada and Australia in the early decades of the twentieth century. A reunion to celebrate the centenary of the Welsh Patagonian migration to Canada was held in July 2002 in the small town of Bangor, Saskatchewan. A very substantial book and accompanying video were published to mark the occasion. Two similar Australian reunions were held in Cairns in August 2003 and Darwin in August 2005, each attracting a large number of descendants of those who arrived in the country almost a century earlier. The launch of the book *Welsh Patagonians: the Australian Connection* by Michele Langfield and Peta Roberts was timed to coincide with the latter. This paper traces the process of documenting these unique transnational migration experiences beginning with the oral history project on which *Welsh Patagonians: the Australian Connection* is based. Over sixty individual, family and group interviews from first, second and third generation immigrants were conducted, in order to compile a series of life stories and personal narratives set within the historical, literary and public policy contexts of four countries. The themes of the conference of shifting Welsh identities, community and place, and life writing have particular relevance for this study and will be highlighted in the presentation.

Brief biographical details

Dr Michele Langfield is a Senior Lecturer in the School of History, Heritage and Society, Faculty of Arts, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include migration, ethnicity, identity and cultural heritage and she has published widely in these areas. Much of her work utilises oral and video testimonies and she has edited a collection of essays entitled *A Question of Ethics, Personal Perspectives*, Melbourne, 1999. She is the author (with Peta Roberts) of *Welsh Patagonians: The Australian Connection*, Crossing Press, Sydney, 2005; *More People Imperative: Immigration to Australia, 1901-39*, Research Guide Number 7, National Archives of Australia, 1999; and *Espresso Bar to EMC: a thirty-year history of the Ecumenical Migration Centre*, Melbourne, 1996. Michele is currently

working on two Australian Research Council projects, 'Analysing Jewish Holocaust Survivor Testimonies', with Pam Maclean and Dr Peter Monteath, and 'UNESCO: Agency of Cultural Globalisation?' (with Professor William Logan, Dr Mark Askew and Jonathon Sweet).

Minhinnick, Robert (writer)

READING: TO BABEL AND BACK

Robert Minhinnick will be reading from his third collection of essays, *To Babel and Back* (Seren, 2005). Amongst other things it follows "a radioactive trail" from the uranium mines of the USA to the Iraq theatre of war. Whilst in Iraq, he visited a deserted Babylon and a site that his guides insist is the original 'Tower of Babel'.

Brief biographical details

Robert Minhinnick, poet, essayist and environmentalist, has published seven collections of poetry, the latest, *After the Hurricane: New Poems*, from Carcanet Press in 2002. His translations of six contemporary Welsh language poets, *The Adulterer's Tongue - Six Welsh Poets: a Facing-text Anthology* (Carcanet) was published last year. He is currently editor of the international quarterly, *Poetry Wales*, and edited a selected of work from the magazine in *Poetry Wales: Forty Years* (Seren, 2005)

He has received an Eric Gregory Award for his poetry, a John Morgan Award for his prose work. His book of essays on the Welsh environment, *Watching the Fire Eater*, was Welsh Book of the Year in 1993. In 1998 he received a Cholmondeley Award. He has won the Forward's Best Single Poem Prize twice (for 'Twenty-five Laments for Iraq' in 1999, 'The Fox in the National Museum of Wales' in 2003) and was shortlisted in 2004 with 'The Castaway'.

John Powell Ward (poet and critic)

READING

Brief biographical details

John Powell Ward is a major poet of Wales whose work has been compared to Eliot and Proust. He was a regular editor and presenter of BBC Radio 3's Poetry Now 1977-1984. Poetry and criticism in many major magazines; contributor to *TLS*, *Poetry Review*, *Poetry (Chicago)*, *Poetry Australia*, *Bete Noire*, *Acumen*, *Poetry Durham*, *PN Review*, *New Welsh Review*, *Poetry Wales*, BBC Radio 3 and 4 and elsewhere. He won Welsh Arts Council prizes in 1982 and 1985. He is a former editor of *Poetry Wales* and the current editor of the Seren Border Lines biography series, which examine the lives and works of composers, writers and artists who have lived on the English-Welsh Borders. He is the author of six collections of poetry, and his Selected and New Poems was published in 2004.

Schimanski, Johan (Tromsø, Norway)

"THE RETURN TO THE MATRIXIAL BORDERSPACE: DANNIE ABSE'S 'THE PENCIL BOX'"

Abstract

The short narrative 'The Pencil Box' is one of a number of texts by Dannie Abse in which he writes of his youth from the partly ironic perspective of the London diaspora. Like 'Return Ticket to Cardiff', it also deals with the child Dannie's exploration of the geographical and symbolic boundaries of his identity as part of a family of "wandering Welsh Jews" from Cardiff. In 'The Pencil Box', Dannie leaves his home on a journey out of the city in the search for a lost object, anticipating the author's emigration as the narrative ends at what the child thinks is the Welsh border to England. As for many bearers of migrant identity, the border becomes a place in which to speak from beyond cultures, a 'third space' in Homi K. Bhabha's term. As the title of the story suggests, this space is also the origin of writing, suggestively connected in the story to acts of transgression, of stealing, lying, fiction and illusion. Intriguingly, the narrative also very clearly delineates creative and diasporic origins through a series of mother figures (along with contrasting father figures), suggestive of psychoanalytical narratives of identity formation. This paper thus sets out to examine 'The Pencil Box' from the perspective of Bracha Lichtenberg's concept of the 'matrixial borderspace'. A comparison of Abse's partly autobiographical and partly fictional return to Cardiff to Lichtenberg's analytical return to the biblical Exodus provides the framework for a discussion of the function of originary and border-crossing narratives in a specific diasporic way of writing the Welsh nation.

Brief biographical details

Johan Schimanski (Dr.art.) is Visiting Professor at the Centre for Border Studies at the University of Glamorgan until the end of April, and Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Tromsø*. His research interests include Welsh literature in Welsh and in English, national identity and literature, postcolonialism, arctic literature and the fantastic. Recent publications include "Genre Borders in a Border Novel

- Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* and "Drums of the Babongo and the Ironies of Celtic Postcolonialism". A book-length study of nation and genre in Islwyn Ffowc Elis' *Wythnos yng Nghymru Fydd* (*A Week in Wales to Be*, 1957) is in preparation for publication by Werhahn, as is a co-edited anthology, *Border Poetics De-Limited* (with Stephen Wolfe). He is at present writing a book on borders and literature, with readings of works from Wales, Norway, Austria, France, and Southern Africa. He is co-leader of the "Border Poetics" working group and the "Arktiske diskurser" research project.

Tyson Roberts, Gwyneth (Aberystwyth),
"MY WELSH BLOOD WAS UP": BETSY CADWALADYR, JANE WILLIAMS (YSGAFELL) AND THE PRACTICE OF WELSHNESS.

Abstract

The Autobiography of Elizabeth Davis A Balaclava Nurse edited by Jane Williams (Ysgafell) was published in 1857 and gives a unique and vivid account of the life and travels of a working-class Welshwoman in the first half of the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Davies (Betsy Cadwaladyr, as she was known when she was growing up in Bala) travelled widely & for example, to Australia, India, China, Egypt, South Africa and Brazil - as maid to the captain's wife on a variety of merchant ships; she later worked as a nurse in British military hospitals at Scutari and Balaclava during the Crimean War. Her *Autobiography* is only now beginning to attract the critical interest it deserves, and this paper considers an aspect which has not received serious attention: the way in which her experiences as a traveller modified her relation to Wales, Welsh people and her own Welshness.

The paper argues that because of its (frequently oblique) relation to strict veracity, her *Autobiography* is more appropriately regarded as "a text which presents itself as an autobiography" rather than as a repository of the historical facts of her life, and that its episodic structure invites comparison with a picaresque novel; self-conscious analysis of her relation to Wales is not to be expected from it. Through a detailed consideration of the nature and number of her references to the Welsh people she met and her comments on the Welsh landscape and Welsh social institutions, the paper explores the complexity of the changes her travels effected in her own relation to Welshness, arguing that by the time of the last episode recounted in her *Autobiography* - the months she spent as a nurse at Balaclava - she remained on the one hand fiercely proud of her identity as a member of the Welsh-speaking *gwerin* while on the other hand having internalised some of the stereotypes of the Welsh current among the members of the English middle and upper classes alongside whom she worked and lived. This is reinforced by a consideration of her portrait (which was used as the frontispiece to her *Autobiography*).

Betsy Cadwaladyr's *Autobiography* does not present the reader with the unmediated Betsy Cadwaladyr: it was the result of her collaboration with the professional author Jane Williams (Ysgafell), and the paper briefly considers Jane Williams's role in the book's composition and the contrasts between the two women, not only in the circumstances into which they were born (in regard to Wales and social class) but also in the ways they positioned themselves in relation to Welshness as adults and the degree to which this is reflected in the names they chose and were known by. The chief focus of the text of the *Autobiography*, but the importance of setting it in its national, social and historical context is stressed throughout.

Brief biographical details

After living in Sussex, London, Baghdad and Lisbon she did time as a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of East London before moving to Aberystwyth in 1994. Her publications include *THE LANGUAGE OF THE BLUE BOOKS* (University of Wales Press, 1998) and *EVEN THE RAIN IS DIFFERENT* (Honno, 2005), in which Welshwoman from the early 19th century to the beginning of the 21st describe their experiences of living and travelling abroad. She is currently working on a critical biography of Jane Williams (Ysgafell).