

**Katie Gramich, Cardiff University**

**‘Grounds of comparison: property, gender, and nation in Welsh and Irish women’s novels of the nineteenth century.’**

The nineteenth-century novel in Ireland and Wales, particularly in the hands of female novelists, frequently takes the form of a ‘national tale’ in which a central marriage plot allegorizes the relationship between England and his ‘Celtic’ partner. Such texts often tacitly espouse a British imperialist ideology in which the Celtic ‘Other’ is tamed, civilized, and seamlessly incorporated through what has been termed a ‘national seduction’ into a happy, enduring political Union. Novels such as Anna Maria Bennett’s *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howell* (1794) and *Anna, or Memoirs of a Welch Heiress* (1785), Maria Edgeworth’s *The Absentee* (1812), Sydney Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Anne Beale’s *Rose Mervyn of Whitelake* (1879) may be taken to exemplify this genre. Although tensions remain in these texts, ultimately they are politically conservative colonial works which endorse the legitimacy of British claims to Irish and Welsh land, respectively. However, there are examples of female-authored novels of the period which eschew the marriage plot in favour of a more daring and transgressive exercise in male ventriloquism.

The two novels which I will analyse and compare as examples of this sub-genre are Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800) and Amy Dillwyn’s *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880). Despite being separated by eighty years, these two novels bear striking similarities: both novelists were unmarried women of the Anglicised landed gentry class who were themselves involved in running the family estate. Both assume the voice of a Welsh or Irish male of the lower class as narrator of their texts, experimenting with showing the distinctive otherness of that voice. Both novels centre on the issue of the legitimacy of land ownership, posing the implicit question of who owns the nation. Dillwyn’s novel, being published towards the end of the century, bears the mark of the historical novel as developed by Scott and others, while Edgeworth’s novel stands at the beginning of, and arguably as the Ur-text, of that generic tradition. I argue that Dillwyn is not only ventriloquizing the lower class Welsh male in her novel but is also explicitly emulating the practice of her Irish forerunner, Edgeworth. Edgeworth, as an Anglo-Irish novelist, clearly offered Dillwyn, an Anglo-Welsh novelist, a generic and stylistic model in which she could explore the complexities and contradictions of national identity in the so-called Celtic periphery. And yet, as always, it is the differences between the Irish and Welsh examples which are at least as revelatory as the manifold similarities. Edgeworth’s largely comic and satiric mode is reproduced by Dillwyn only up to a point; the plot structure of the Welsh novel is essentially a tragic one, suggesting the exile, dispossession and death of the native Welsh, rather than the more positive denouement of the Irish novel, which sees the son of the ‘native informant’ inherit the estate. Nevertheless, both novels, partly as a result of the instability and gender ambiguity of the narrative voice, are much more unsettling and politically open than the national tales posited on allegorical conjugal unions.

**Anna Maria Harland, University of Sydney**

**The Hawthorn and the Rose: The 1926 General Strike in Idris Davies’s *The Angry Summer* and Hugh MacDiarmid’s *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle***

The 1926 General Strike only lasted nine days, from 3 May to 12 May, yet it had a lasting influence on both Davies and MacDiarmid in terms of their personal and poetic lives. Both men were involved in the strike, albeit in different ways – Davies was a coal miner and MacDiarmid was a town councillor who was an active labour organiser – and both men wrote poetic responses to the strike.

This paper will examine the ways in Davies and MacDiarmid (re)construct the General Strike. The point of comparison will begin with the use of the pastoral imagery of the hawthorn (Davies) and the rose (MacDiarmid). It will then move towards a broader thematic approach in order to question whether these texts should be treated as works of regional interest or whether they operate on a wider, transnational level.

**Claire Flay, University of Glamorgan**

**‘Your silence gives you away’: articulations of the female experience in the work of Margiad Evans and Dorothy Edwards**

In her novels *Country Dance* (1932) and *The Wooden Doctor* (1933) border writer Margiad Evans gives an insight into the consciousness of two young women; the fictional country maid Ann Goodman and Arabella Warden, a thinly veiled semi-autobiographical construction of Evans herself. In contrast, the female characters featured in Evans’ contemporary Dorothy Edwards’ short story collection *Rhapsody* (1927) are consistently denied a voice. Four of *Rhapsody*’s ten stories make use of a male narrator and, even when the speaker is unspecified, they are on the whole implicitly male. In this paper, I will discuss the ways in which both Evans and Edwards, through a series of structural and narrative techniques, expose the accepted patriarchal standards that serve to silence women. I suggest that through her first-person female narrative Evans reveals the oppressive nature of male dominance and the relegated position of the female. In Edwards’ work, the very silence of her female characters speaks volumes: through the *lack* of a female voice, she questions the validity of hegemonic standards and engages with feminist issues in a way that has previously been ignored.

**Louise Parker, Swansea University**

**Strange friends: Glyn Jones and Dylan Thomas**

There are certain startling parallels between the work of Dylan Thomas and Glyn Jones which beg to be fully addressed. Whilst the long standing relationship between Thomas and Vernon Watkins has aroused considerable academic interest, the friendship between Thomas and Jones has tempted fewer critical voices into the realms of speculation. Fertile antagonisms, false perceptions, and romanticised projections all contribute to the understanding and misunderstanding of each other and each other’s work. How this manifests itself textually, however obliquely in the creative work, stridently in the letters (themselves unreliable and often fictional texts) and disingenuously in the prose work, reveals two figures constantly held in a shifting poise and counterpoise that is strangely compelling. This short paper will claim a space in which a comparative exploration of these two writers can be unfolded.

**Rhian Bubear, Swansea University**

**‘And I am dumb to tell’: Presenting the Unpresentable in Dylan Thomas’s Early Poetry.**

This paper takes Dylan Thomas’ early poem ‘The force that through the green fuse’ and the slightly later ‘How shall my animal?’ as the main focus of its attention but its ideas will also comment upon the body of Thomas’ poetic production as references to his verse are woven in. Placing Thomas in dialogue with both Lyotard, the philosopher pre-eminently responsible for the wide currency of the postmodern sublime, and Lacan, whose topological category of the real informs many recent versions of the sublime, this paper will comment on, and engage critically

with, issues concerning the nature of the text as ‘event’, the limitations of language as a mode of artistic expression and, correspondingly, of course the problems posed by verbalisation. Extending beyond discussions of the imaginative excess and into a radical questioning of both the internal limits and status language itself, it argues that Thomas’s poetic of excess, with its playful materiality and valorisation of plurality, not only invites a contemporary re-assessment but actually appears to participate in a postmodern awareness of difference and heterogeneity. And, as such, will inevitably critique and destabilise the closures of modernity, exploring the “un-sayable”, the “invisible” and the “incommunicable.”

**Felicity Wagstaff, Swansea University**

***Tide-race: Myth, Romance and Wales***

Brenda Chamberlain’s duality as both an artist and a writer offers an interesting opportunity to explore a multimodal representation of Wales in one text. In her 1969 prose work, *Tide-race*, Chamberlain offers both a visual and textual representation, albeit a fairly obscure microcosmic one, of Welsh life in the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Set on Ynys Enlli/Bardsey Island off the coast of North Wales Chamberlain’s depiction of Welsh island living in *Tide-race* was not very favourably received by its real inhabitants who felt they had been portrayed as backward and peasant like. The intention of this paper is to argue that in *Tide-race* Chamberlain offers a heavily romanticized and mythical view of Wales, which echoes earlier anglicized depictions of Welsh and Celtic peoples.

**Claire Connolly, Cardiff University**

**Four Nations Feminism: Una Troy and Menna Gallie**

This paper offers a consideration of the relevance and meaning of the four nations context for Irish and Welsh women’s writing in the years round 1960. In the paper I identify archipelagic relationships that are being reinvented and reimagined by two writers in particular: the Munster novelist and dramatist Una Troy in her *Esmond* (1962) and the South Wales writer Menna Gallie, in *You’re Welcome to Ulster* (1970). Both wrote novels that deploy plots of female friendship to interrogate the relationship between gender and national affiliation in a four nations context. The novels I discuss are unusual in their refusal and interrogation of the endogamous forms of family-oriented realist fictions, the dominant mode of women’s writing in both Ireland and Wales. Troy and Gallie imagine forms of national relationality that are based in individual, even isolated, bodily experiences; specifically the experiences of sexually or socially vulnerable women in their forties. The paper proposes a comparative approach that focuses on bodily vulnerability and its potential to reimagine forms of political community.

**Michelle Smith, Cardiff University**

**Climates, Locations, and Communities: Representing the Rural in the Short Fiction of Margiad Evans and Eudora Welty**

In her introduction to Margiad Evans’s *The Old and the Young*, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan emphasises the variety of Evans’s tastes in fiction, listing Austen, the Brontës, Tolstoy, Thomas Mann, Flaubert and Le Fanu. Yet it is arguably not in these canonical British and European writers that Evans’s short fiction finds its closest resemblance, but in the work of another of her favourite authors – that of the American short-story writer and novelist, Eudora Welty. Beyond the

coincidence of sharing the same year of birth, both Evans and Welty share a talent for constructing fictions which persistently demonstrate an intense bond with the natural environment. A precise sense of place is, for both writers, a hugely important aspect of their work – for Evans, the Welsh borderlands of Herefordshire, and, for Welty, the area surrounding the Natchez Trace in the American South. At the same time, they have a concomitant interest in the relationship between place and a sense of community and are, moreover, especially concerned with exploring the lives of those who are isolated or marginalised from the dominant community, such as in Evans's 'The Old Woman and the Wind', or Welty's 'The Worn Path'. Lloyd-Morgan suggests that Welty 'may perhaps have had some influence on Margiad Evans's stories', and points towards some 'stylistic affinities here and there'. This paper aims to examine in more detail the similarities between the two writers' use of rural settings in their short fiction, especially with regard to the way in which natural phenomena, such as the weather, are exploited and deployed in their narratives. Parallels between the literatures of Wales and the American South have previously been made by writers such as Jon Dressel, who has underlined the shared experience and legacy of defeat. However, this paper is particularly concerned with questioning what it means for a Welsh woman writer to reject more obvious literary predecessors, such as Virginia Woolf, and to look beyond England, even beyond Europe, for a more suitable literary model.

**Steve Hendon, Cardiff University**

### **'Shame or Pride?: Welsh and Jewish Cultural Distinctiveness in Alun Lewis's "Almost a Gentleman" and Lily Tobias's "Glasshouses"'**

In 1940, Alun Lewis enlisted in the ranks of the British Army. A year later he undertook a posting as a trainee officer, a status also held by the narrator of his story 'Almost a Gentleman' (1942). The narrator makes it clear that 'developing the officer mentality' is an integral part of the training course to which he and his fellow cadets have been assigned: this 'development' entails compliance with the organizing discourse of Englishness. The narrative focuses on a Jewish cadet, Burton. Despite being a 'good soldier,' Burton is marginalized by anti-Semitic behaviour, and he is expelled from the course. The narrator is ambivalent about Burton: in public he laughs at jokes made at Burton's expense, but privately feels 'ashamed' at his involvement with a dominant racial position.

In 'Almost a Gentleman,' the narrator's origins are not revealed: it might be supposed that he is English, but he displays the tensions of someone who has undergone a process of assimilation. In Bakhtinian terms, his narrative is 'double-voiced.' In 'Glasshouses' (1921), by the Welsh-born Jewish writer Lily Tobias, characters' national origins are evident and deployed polemically within a Welsh setting. Nevertheless, as in Lewis's story, there are no convenient solutions to problems of marginalization. Tobias's narrative is focalized through a young Jewish woman, Sheba Newman. Her contemporaries, both Welsh and Jewish, see Anglicization as the way forward; but Sheba must also contend with, in Jasmine Donahaye's words, the 'contrary draw of Zionism, which provides an opportunity for pride rather than shame in cultural distinctiveness.' The story values Jewish *and* Welsh identities, but it also comments on the way in which both races are subject to the demands of social 'norms.' Material advantages are shown to exist for those who 'act similar' to Anglicized characters.

The aim of my paper is to examine the degree to which the two stories are comparably 'double-voiced' in terms of a desire for assimilation and an acknowledgement of responsibility for 'original' cultures.

**Esther Whitfield, Brown University**

**“Patagonia and Nationalism in the novels of R. Bryn Williams and Carlos Dante Ferrari”**

In July 1865, 153 Welsh emigrants, many of them young families, landed at Puerto Madryn, Patagonia, hoping to establish in this unsettled territory a Welsh-speaking, religiously conservative community. Their emigration coincided, on one side of the Atlantic, with the systematic elimination of the Welsh language from schools and public places and the increasing hold of nonconformist chapels over everyday life; and, on the other, with the consolidation of the Argentine nation and concomitant attempts to civilize the barbaric hinterlands at whose outer edges lay Patagonia. The pioneers' experience stands in the Welsh historical context as a utopian project that occurred at the margins of British imperialist designs and as an unprecedented attempt to preserve the language and cultural practices of Wales by leaving the homeland far behind. Although these immigrants' experience remains a more minor episode in Argentine history, geographically confined and dwarfed by more influential immigrations from other European countries, the Welsh have nevertheless been credited with resolving border disputes with Chile in Argentina's favor, and thereby with expanding the limits of the Argentine nation westwards

Of national significance in its own time, to both Wales and Argentina, the nineteenth-century emigration to Patagonia has recently been revived in fiction, coinciding with the increased visibility of Patagonia in the Welsh media, new Argentine translations of Welsh settlers' memoirs, and a formalization of cultural relations between Welsh and Patagonian regional governments. This paper explores the significance in contemporary Welsh and Argentine literature of revisiting the Patagonian experience, through novels by the Welsh author R. Bryn Williams and the Argentine writer Carlos Dante Ferrari. Despite publishing in different countries, languages and historical periods, these authors, I suggest, share broad concerns with the endurance of Welsh language and traditions. Together, they reveal important continuities in what we can now consider to be the transnational and multi-lingual genre of Welsh-Patagonian fiction. They afford a particularly clear insight into how fictional renderings of episodes in the Patagonian settlement's history respond to initiatives to reinvigorate and preserve the Welsh language and nationalist politics in Wales; and, in Argentina, to instate a new, ethnically-marked figure on the roster of the nation's founding myths.

**Malcolm Ballin, Cardiff University**

**Spaces of Comparison in the Periodicals**

Welsh periodicals in English have discussed relations between Wales and the non-Welsh, non-English world from their beginnings in the nineteenth century. The second issue of *Wales*, edited by Owen M. Edwards, published in June 1894, has an article 'Wales to English Eyes', which cites the triad, 'Three things attack the weak, - the cat, the sea-crow, and the Englishman'. It also has a poem from the diaspora, written from the graveyard of Mobile in Alabama shortly before the premature death of its writer, Thomas Lloyd Jones (*Gwenffryd*) in 1834. The most recent issue of *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist* (October/November 2008) has an editorial by Helle Michelsen which deals with the deadlock in South Ossetia and Abkhazia but which also reflects on the future prospects for a Welsh-language newspaper.

The paper will consider multiple examples of ways in which Welsh periodicals in English have dealt with issues concerning different aspects of the international, turning from the native ground to farther horizons. Examples can be found of diasporic writing, travel memoirs, interest in Celtic

issues, translation, cosmopolitan stances, postnationalism, globalisation. Analysis of a series of Subject Indexes for Welsh Periodicals, extending from 1931 to 1980, suggests that throughout that period there has been a relatively small but consistent interest in other countries, comprising more than sixty articles a year by the end of the period. In May 1951, *Dock Leaves* ('The Voice of Pembrokeshire Speaking to Wales') treats of world issues such as the death of Stalin and the Mau Mau rebellion. *Poetry Wales* shifts from its 1970s discussions of Gaelic, Breton or Irish culture in fortifying Welsh identity to a recently extended international agenda - launching its Autumn 2008 issue in Bangor, Wrexham, Swansea and Bratislava. Preoccupations with local questions become less pathological and the impact of the global becomes more palpable.

**Rosalyn Marron, University of Glamorgan**

### **Devolved Nations and New Directions in the writing of Scottish novelist Zoe Strachan and Welsh writer Erica Wooff**

It is now a decade since devolution was granted to both Wales and Scotland. In those intervening years many events and incidents have changed the world in which we live. As two small nations that have perpetually lived in the shadow of the larger, more powerful neighbour, the transference from the central with its promise of some political autonomy has meant that both nations have started to come to the attention of a wider audience. However, the question remains – how are Wales and Scotland perceived imaginatively? Bearing this in mind, this paper will consider Welsh writer Erica Wooff's novel *Mud Puppy* and Scottish novelist Zoe Strachan's *Negative Space*. The paper will consider the ways in which Wooff and Strachan use the themes of space and movement throughout their texts to foreground and amplify issues of nationhood, gendered identity and subjectivity in the new political milieu. The comparative reading will discuss the ways each writer considers the cultural and geographical claustrophobia their respective countries have endured. The paper will also consider Wooff and Strachan as resisting writers – both look at change and conflict; both consider the politics of identity and how women in Scotland and Wales have been almost, until fairly recently, obliterated historically, their culture eclipsed doubly (internally and externally). Wooff and Strachan also normalise lesbianism – both writers illustrate through their narratives that to be gay and Scottish/Welsh are not 'mutually exclusive conditions'. Finally, the paper will examine the ways in which Wooff and Strachan illustrate Wales and Scotland as devolved nations which are now able to evolve in energizing and inspiring directions.

**Laura Wainwright, Cardiff University**

### **'There is the source from which all cultures rise': Re-inscribing national identity in Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* and Idris Davies's *Gwalia Deserta***

Patrick Kavanagh's long poem *The Great Hunger* (1942) has been viewed in a Welsh comparative context by Patrick Crotty in his essay, 'Lean Parishes: Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* and R. S. Thomas's *The Minister*'. As Crotty points out, both of these texts are 'set among materially and culturally impoverished rural communities' and 'chart the spiritual extinction of a [central] protagonist who is more sensitive than others in his milieu'.<sup>1</sup> This paper will suggest that although

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Crotty, 'Lean Parishes: Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* and R. S. Thomas's *The Minister*', in Katie Gramich and Andrew Hiscock (eds), *Dangerous Diversity: The Changing Faces of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 131-149 (p. 133).

Idris Davies's *Gwalia Deserta* (1938) – a poetic sequence that articulates the diverse experience of communities in the industrialised South Wales valleys – does not accord with *The Great Hunger* in this obvious, thematic way, the two poems are, nevertheless, essentially comparable. More specifically, I will propose that in voicing the experience of neglected and 'materially [. . .] impoverished communities', Davies and Kavanagh reassess and destabilize the romanticised images of the rural Nonconformist *gwerin* (promoted in the work of Welsh-language writers such as O. M. Edwards) and the 'noble peasant'<sup>2</sup> (fostered by the Irish Literary Revivalists) respectively, as models of Welshness and Irishness. In essence, I will argue that in *The Great Hunger* and *Gwalia Deserta*, Kavanagh and Davies are engaged in a comparable quasi-allegorical re-evaluation and re-inscription of national identity.

**Elidir Jones, Cardiff University**

**'No Half-Way House'? Class and Nation in the Work of Harri Webb and Hugh MacDiarmid**

My paper will focus on the ways in which nation and class-centric ideologies intersect in the work of Hugh MacDiarmid, and in the poetry and journalism of Harri Webb, whom he greatly influenced. It will question whether Nationalism and Communism / Socialism are ever truly reconciled in their work, given the history of hostility shown towards Nationalism in class-conscious doctrine, perhaps most notably in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). This debate will inform an attempt to determine whether one particular ideology was more important than another in the life and work of both men.

The paper will also examine passages from the two poets' work in which their professed allegiances to Communism and Socialism are seemingly brought into question, with particular reference to MacDiarmid's distrust of Scottish populist entertainment, and Webb's occasional glorification of ancient Welsh royal tradition.

Central to this discussion will be the concept of the Caledonian antisyzygy, first popularized by G. Gregory Smith in 1919, which asserts that a meeting of extremes is a crucial part of the Scottish national character. I will explore the ways in which MacDiarmid uses this idea in his work, to what extent he influenced Webb in this respect, and whether, therefore, it could be claimed that Webb modified and expanded the Caledonian antisyzygy, creating, in essence, a Welsh or Celtic antisyzygy.

**Diana Wallace, University of Glamorgan**

**'Two nations at war within it': marriage as metaphor in Margiad Evans's historical novel *Country Dance* (1932)**

In Margiad Evans's *Country Dance* (1932), set in the 1850s, Ann Goodman, daughter of a Welsh mother and an English father, is courted by two men, one English, the other Welsh. Within this dual suitor plot, Ann's choice of prospective husband is presented, in a novel which is closely concerned with border conflicts, as a choice between nationalities. This paper will situate *Country Dance* in a tradition of historical fiction which can be traced back to the 'national tale' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in which the marriage plot was often used as an allegory of national union. In particular it will focus on comparisons with Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806), and Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) and *Ivanhoe* (1819), all of which use a marriage ending to figure national unity. Drawing on Georg Lukacs's (1962) dialectical theorisation

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<sup>2</sup> Antoinette Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2001), p. 181.

of the historical novel and Frances E. Dolan's (2008) recent exploration of the connections between marriage and violence, it will explore the implications of the tragic ending of Evans' novel with its emphasis on memory and historical trauma.

**Stephen Logan, Cambridge University**

### **Idris Davies Inside Out**

This paper will consider the difficulties of discussing Idris Davies (and by implication other Welsh writers) outside Wales. Since I grew up in a place and culture very near to Merthyr and now spend much time the other side of the ridge (in Powys), I am forcibly struck by the difficulty of conveying to readers with no experience of Wales how the distinctiveness of the local cultures inheres in the writing. This is generally a rather different tack from any that might be taken when addressing a Welsh audience, or an audience whose knowledge of, and sympathy for, Wales might be counted on. Perhaps I can illustrate the problem, which I encounter not only with Cambridge students, but with students from all over the world who attend a summer school course I've been giving for several years on 'Romanticism and Anglo-Welsh Poetry'. (As you will well know, even the difference in how that phrase 'Anglo-Welsh' is perceived either side of Offa's Dyke is taxing to explain).

I recently had the very cheering experience of supervising, for the first time in Cambridge, an undergraduate dissertation on Idris Davies. The very able student working writing it quoted Empson in what she thought was a sympathetic way about the impossibility of an art which contemplates working-class life from the inside: 'To produce pure proletarian art' says Empson, 'the artist must be at one with the worker; this is impossible...' I doubt Idris Davies ever used the epithet, 'proletarian' in this way, which seems the preserve of upper-middle class English and Marxist writers chiefly. It implies distance and separation and thus would feel strange to anyone truly at one with the group someone outside it might call 'the proletariat.' It struck me that because Empson is implicitly allied with the dominant national and critical ideology in Cambridge, the authority of his views on this matter was being more meekly accepted than perhaps even he would have liked. It may well be the case that, just as most English critics have never been to Wales, most are unaware that a country exists in which writers, rooted in a single specific locality, understand what it feels like to inhabit a culture without being able, or minded, to call it one. In thinking that Idris Davies, through a belated formal education learnt to see the plurality and contingency of local cultures (which Empson probably knew about from childhood) I was conscious of entering a field of discourse where critics in Wales would at once recognize a range of relevant issues which remain opaque in much modern criticism.

**Justin D. Edwards, Bangor University**

### **'Between somewhere and elsewhere': Sugar, Slate and Postcolonial Travel Writing**

This paper does not seek to appropriate Denis Williams's novel *Other Leopards* (1963) as a work of postcolonial travel writing. However, I want to suggest that it is fruitful to read Denis Williams's text – a novel that meditates on migration, immigration, diaspora, exile, forced movement and displacement – alongside a highly influential work of postcolonial travel writing: *Sugar and Slate* (2002) by Charlotte Williams. Both texts, I suggest, share thematic and formal qualities, but they are also linked in a much more intimate way: Denis Williams was Charlotte Williams's father. In the autobiographical context of *Sugar and Slate*, then, this relationship plays a crucial role in the narrative of growth and development. But her father's writing also had a profound influence on the

ideas and conceptual paradigms that shape (what I want to call) her postcolonial travel narrative. In fact, in the opening section of *Sugar and Slate*, Charlotte Williams quotes long passages from *Other Leopards*, suggesting that her father's dilemma – the particular form of multiconsciousness he expressed as 'Sudanic mulatto' – was played out in the fact that he was 'never staying' but was always, in a sense, traveling (54). *Sugar and Slate* draws upon travel writing's potential for cultural critique by expressing a politicized voice that articulates postcolonial experiences from Guyana to Sudan to Wales. For Charlotte Williams, the traveling subject engages in various understandings of dwelling and displacement to engender narratives that simultaneously reflect and question a postcolonial politics of global contacts. What I am particularly interested in is how *Sugar and Slate* removes representations of travel from the dichotomous interplay between home and abroad, and how, in so doing, Charlotte Williams pushes the envelop of Denis Williams's theories of cross-cultural creativity and cultural syncretism. For she depicts postcolonial travel not as a 'progress' or an 'arrival' but as a process, a continuous activity of becoming.

**Alyce von Rothkirch, Swansea University**

**Ed Thomas, Howard Barker, Heiner Müller and the performance of audience**

The 2008 AWE conference is set to provide 'spaces of comparison' for Welsh writing in English and raise the question of the value of making comparisons. To me the main value in making comparisons is to prevent isolation and a certain reluctance to read texts outside their immediate context. As early as 1943, George Ewart Evans made a similar point in the journal *Wales* by arguing that "the main danger of writing in Wales at this stage [is] its isolation and its reliance on homemade standards" (Evans 51), which, he thought, prevented this national literature from being an actor on anything but its own stage. This is not an argument for a new 'new criticism', which elides social and cultural context. Instead, I would like to echo Tom Devine, who argued in a recent lecture inaugurating the newly established Scottish Centre for Diaspora Studies that international comparisons prevent "the intellectual sin of [claiming] exceptionalism" while allowing "what is distinctive" about a culture to emerge more clearly (Devine, lecture). In this paper, my aim is to show what was distinctive (and distinctively Welsh) about Ed Thomas' theatre of a certain period by comparing it to selected plays by Howard Barker and Heiner Müller. All three playwrights have written the majority of their plays in a distinctively postmodern, anti-realist style, which makes special demands on the audience. Instead of being shown one (if perhaps contentious) interpretation of social reality, audiences are invited to imagine their own versions of what they regard as the truth of what they perceive. In Howard Barker's words: "The theatre is not a disseminator of truth but a provider of versions. Its statements are provisional.

In a time when nothing is clear, the inflicting of clarity is a stale arrogance" (Barker, 45). What makes Ed Thomas' drama so distinctive is that he invites the audience to "imagine a new Wales. . . not just one new Wales but two million new Waleses!" (Thomas, n.p.). By contrast, Barker, who lives in Sussex, and Müller, who worked in East Berlin until his death in 1995, are almost intuitively suspicious of national narratives and use the audience's imagination to undermine national and other narratives. Thus, while similar in idiom and appearing to be far removed from a realistic depiction of national context, the comparison of the plays under discussion shows that they are not set in an unspecific postmodern non-place but cannot be understood without taking their specific contexts into account.

I will attempt to provide a comparison between Ed Thomas' *Flowers of the Red Dead Sea* (1991), Howard Barker's *House of Correction* (1998) and Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine* (*Hamletmachine*, 1977). Other plays, such as Müller's *Wolokolamsker Chaussee I-III* (1984-1986), may feature in outline.