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CONSTRUCTIONS OF COSMOPOLITANISM IN THE MAKING OF WELSH WRITING IN ENGLISH

Hywel Rowland Dix

Abstract

This paper argues that the politics of Brexit has created a particular challenge for intellectuals in Wales because although for the most part they have been interested in forging cultural connections with Europe and the rest of the world, they were forced to accept in June 2016 that not only a majority of British voters decided to leave the European Union, but also that a majority of Welsh voters had done so, so that there was a disconnect between Wales's intellectuals and its population as a whole. Going on from here the paper argues that establishing diversity, cosmopolitanism and interculturalism as typical aspects of Welsh culture, which has long been practised by Welsh intellectuals and writers, has more recently been taken up as part of the process by which Brexit was symbolically challenged within Wales. A key component of this commitment to a form of cultural politics that is both nationalist and also politically progressive in Wales has been its literature, which through various material means has been constructed and framed along these lines. Focusing first on specialist book series, then on literary festivals, thirdly on sites of literary tourism in Wales and finally on literary prizes, the paper explores ways in which qualities of cosmopolitanism and interculturalism have been embedded in that literature and hence in the wider culture. In turn, it suggests that establishing these characteristics as intrinsic features of the national culture has provided Welsh intellectuals with some means of overcoming the gap between the intelligentsia and the wider population created by Brexit and so enabling a reconnection between them.

Keywords: book series, literary festivals, literary tourism, literary prizes, Welsh writing in English, cosmopolitanism, interculturalism, Brexit

In one of the televised party leader debates in the run-up to the 2015 general election, Leanne Wood of *Plaid Cymru* stated that her party would not scapegoat eastern Europeans in Britain for the recent economic downturn, and were not in favour of holding a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. In the same debate, when the United Kingdom Independence Party leader Nigel Farage claimed that immigrants place a burden on the National Health Service because many of them have HIV/AIDS, she replied: you should be ashamed.

In fact, the politics of Brexit and its anti-immigration rhetoric has created a particular challenge for intellectuals in Wales because although for the most part they have been interested in forging cultural connections with Europe, and despite Danny Dorling's suggestion that 'Wales was made to look like a Brexit-supporting nation by its English settlers',[1] they were forced to accept in June 2016 that not only a majority of British voters voted to leave the European Union, but a majority of Welsh voters also did so. This paper will argue that establishing diversity, cosmopolitanism and interculturalism as typical aspects of Welsh culture, which has long been practised by Welsh intellectuals and writers, has more recently been taken up as part of the process by which Brexit was symbolically challenged within Wales. In other words, the response by Welsh intellectuals to Brexit can be seen as the latest instance of their commitment to constructing the culture of Wales as rich, varied and diverse, which had been much longer in the making.

A key component of this commitment to a form of cultural politics that is both nationalist and also politically progressive in Wales has been its literature, which through various material means has been constructed and framed along these lines. Focusing first on specialist book series, then on literary festivals, thirdly on sites of literary tourism in Wales and finally on book prizes the paper will explore ways in which qualities of cosmopolitanism and interculturalism have been embedded in that literature and hence in the wider culture. In turn, it will suggest that establishing these characteristics as intrinsic features of the national culture has provided Welsh intellectuals with some means of overcoming the gap between the intelligentsia and the wider population created by Brexit, and so enabling an organic reconnection between them.

Book Series

In his 1996 book *Welsh Europeans*, John Osmond argued that European citizenship offered the Welsh people out of what he took to be the contradiction between Welshness and Britishness. Its title was a deliberate allusion to Raymond Williams, who had declared himself a 'Welsh European' in 1979 both to distinguish his outlook from the suspicion of European affairs that existed in left-wing politics in Britain prior to that time, and as a way of affirming Wales's intellectual tradition of relating to Europe.[2] This tradition had already been established by the time of the founding of the periodical *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist* by Ned Thomas in 1970, which provided a means for expressing the connections between Wales and global affairs (especially in other small nations) that already existed. Indeed, M. Wynn Thomas has recently traced it back to the mid-nineteenth century.[3]

Tracing this tradition shows not only that literary production has played a central role in the construction of Welsh culture as a national culture for the past century and a half; but also that taking an interest in forging relationships with other cultures has been articulated as a core component of Welsh culture itself over the same period. These twin processes – of associating literature with nation; and positioning the nation in conjunction with other nations – can be discerned in two major book series in Wales in the early twenty-first century: the *Library of Wales* and the Seren Books series *New Stories from the Mabinogion*. Considering their objectives not merely at the level of analysing content of published titles but at the wider level of how they have been collectively curated and presented therefore makes it possible to explore some of the means by which these processes have been pursued, and with what consequences.

In 2006, the Welsh historian Dai Smith became the founding series editor of the *Library of Wales*, which according to his blurb is:

> a Welsh Assembly Government project designed to ensure that all of the rich and extensive literature of Wales which has been written in English will now be available to readers in and beyond Wales. Sustaining this wider literary heritage is understood by the Welsh Assembly Government to be a key component in creating and disseminating an ongoing sense of modern Welsh culture and history for the future Wales which is now emerging from contemporary

> society. Through these texts, until now unavailable or out-of-print or merely forgotten, the Library of Wales will bring back into play the voices and actions of the human experience that has made us all, in all our complexity, a Welsh people.[4]

In other words, the *Library of Wales* has an explicitly nation-building agenda which through the dissemination of Wales's Anglophone literary culture seeks to carry out some of the work which *Planet* also aimed to achieve. Its project of interpellating the Welsh people as such through the rediscovery of its English literary voices complements *Planet's* project of putting Welsh culture on a European footing. Though this Europeanisation is not the explicit aim of the book series to the same degree as the magazine, it can be discerned there too since Dai Smith's description of the series continues:

> No boundaries will limit the ambition of the *Library of Wales* to open up the borders that have denied some of our best writers a presence in a future Wales. The *Library of Wales* has been created with that Wales in mind: a young country not afraid to remember what it might yet become.[5]

When read with a sensitive eye this official summary of the series may also yield an echo of the description commonly made in the 1990s and early 2000s of Cardiff, and especially of Cardiff Bay, as Europe's youngest capital city. Such a description in itself of course looks both ways: in at the nation and out at Europe and the world. The metaphor of boundaries being traversed perhaps creates the impression of a society that is outward-looking as a tacit accompaniment to the declared aim of articulating Welsh experience to the Welsh people. The allusion to writers who have been denied a presence in the literary history of Wales helps account for the fact that Bernice Rubens had her 1975 novel *I Sent a Letter to My Love* re-issued as number sixteen in the series in 2008. Despite being the only Welsh winner of the most prominent literary prize in Britain (the Booker Prize), Rubens had not figured prominently in accounts of Welsh literature; her Booker-prize winning work *The Elected Member* (1969) deals with themes of incest and betrayal among impoverished Jewish immigrant communities in London and she has much more commonly been discussed as a British Jewish writer. Adding her to the *Library of Wales* is thus an act of cultural reclamation;

and one that places a positive premium on work which creates spaces from which a diversity of voices can be imagined and heard.

It is not, however, an unproblematic process or an uncontested one. For example, D-M Withers has shown that forty-two of the first forty-five titles published by the *Library of Wales* were by men, prompting the 2017 Independent Review of Support for Publishing and Literature in Wales to call for 'monetary support and wider recognition' of the separate *Welsh Women's Classics* series published by Honno.[6] In terms of cultural diversity too, the selection of work to include in a series of representative national works can present particular challenges. Too narrow a cultural range and there is a danger of seeming un-diverse, or even unrepresentative. But attempts to claim or re-claim ostensibly non-Welsh writers as Welsh can strike a discordant note. When the Indian poet and novelist Tishani Doshi was invited to contribute a retelling of the story 'The Lady of the Fountain' to the *New Stories from the Mabinogion* series published by Seren (formerly Poetry Wales Press) in 2013, Doshi expressed misgivings. Although her mother was born in Wales in 1947 and moved to India in 1968, and although Doshi had published an imaginative biographical novel of her life, *The Pleasure Seekers*, in 2010, she admitted that she 'did not grow up reading the stories of the *Mabinogion*',[7] and considered herself something of an 'outsider' with only tenuous connections to Wales.[8] In her 'Afterword' to the story she eventually contributed, *Fountainville*, she goes on:

> Myths, like memories, are often collective. It means that no matter how close we hold to them, they themselves don't accept boundaries. They are forever open, ready to be transformed and reinterpreted. For this reason, and perhaps to tap into my latent Welshness, I agreed to enter the world of the *Mabinogion,* ready to take on all those, for me, unpronounceable Welsh names and fantastical Celtic happenings.[9]

One of the notable features of this commentary is Doshi's recourse to the same metaphor – that of boundaries being crossed – that characterised Dai Smith's summary of the objectives of the *Library of Wales*. There is also an increasing scale of reference from memory to myth and from myths to attachments. In the process, this scale implicitly posits a distinction between 'memories' (held by individuals) and the overall category of 'memory', which is something that can at least potentially

be held in common. However, if memory is to become active on this collective scale it has to be actively fostered and created. Yet the act of creating collective memory also enables its content to be re-interpreted and changed so that in the last instance Doshi sees her role in the series to be one of supplementing the culture and history of Wales with her Indian heritage to their mutual expansion.

Overall, the series *New Stories from the Mabinogion* engages in practices of cultural reclamation in indirect ways. Other volumes in the series include *White Ravens* (2009) by Owen Sheers, a Fiji-born writer whose amenability to inclusion in a project of literary nation building is underlined by the fact that he became in 2011 poet in residence to that other great organ of Welsh national culture, the Welsh Rugby Union; and *The Meat Tree* (2009) by Gwyneth Lewis, whose poetic words 'Creu Gwir fel Gwydr o Ffwrnais Awen' were written in the six-feet tall glass in the windows of Wales Millennium Centre, which has since opening in 2004 positioned itself as the home of the performing arts in Wales. Thus, an implicit relationship between the series, its writers and institutions of nationhood emerges.

In this there is an implication that what is most representative of Welsh culture is at least partly defined by being at the same time most global in outlook. In her Introduction to the series, its editor Penny Thomas notes:

> The *Mabinogion* brings us Celtic mythology, Arthurian romance, and a history of the Island of Britain seen through the eyes of medieval Wales – but tells tales that stretch way beyond the boundaries of contemporary Wales, just as the "Welsh" part of this island once did: Welsh was once spoken as far north as Edinburgh.'[10]

This suggestion of a Wales that is somehow bigger than its geographic borders resonates not only with the physical size and shape of Wales in its historic (pre-conquest) past, but also with the contemporary idea of Wales as fundamentally open-ended and outward-looking toward the world. Two further volumes in the series are *The Tip of My Tongue* (2013) by Trezza Azzopardi, author of a novel, *The Hiding Place* (2000) set among Cardiff's Maltese community and *The Dreams of Max and Ronnie* (2010) by Niall Griffiths, a Liverpool-born writer of Irish ancestry writing about Wales. What emerges is a feeling that 'Wales' and 'Welsh' are not terms bounded by geography, ethnicity or race and can

instead be constructed as intrinsically dialogic and continually open to modification and renewal.

New Stories from the Mabinogion is organised in a slightly different way than the *Library of Wales*. The *Library of Wales* reclaims authors whose work or even Welsh identity may have been neglected, and positions them in a canon of national work behind which the structuring category of the nation supports the idea of a young, emerging country about to take its place as one among many in the world. By contrast, *New Stories from the Mabinogion* takes ancient Welsh myths and makes them newly vivid in the process of expanding and enlarging our understanding of Welsh culture. The two series can thus be said to take complementary approaches to the inculcation of Welsh values, and the establishment of interculturalism as a typical Welsh value, that we find in each.

Festivals

In a study of the evolution of the book in France, Gisèle Sapiro has suggested that the last third of the twentieth century saw the proliferation of mechanisms for marketing and selling French literature internationally, such as international book prizes, forms of literary tourism and literary festivals. Although Sapiro's examples are all French, the fact that such mechanisms are inherently international causes her to point out that 'the Edinburgh International Book Festival (1983) and the Hay-on-Wye Festival of Literature and the Arts (1988)' were both also 'created at this time'.[11]

Arpita Das suggests that a large-scale book festival 'represents a microcosm' of the whole literary field in a given country.[12] By contrast, Jeff Wallace frames a discussion of D. H. Lawrence's travel writing with an anecdote about how Rowan Williams used his keynote address at the launch of Literature Wales's 2012 programme of activities to raise questions about how far such activities can be considered representative of the places in which they are located, or their people or writers. 'What, then,' Wallace asks, 'if writers are *not* "inspired" by the places they belong to, reside in, or visit? What if the experience of those places does not shape up? What does it mean, in fact, to be somewhere, or elsewhere?'[13]

Implicit in the difference between Das's festival as microcosm of a nation and Wallace's sense of literary activity being out of step with its place is a theoretical debate that can usefully be applied to a discussion

of the Hay-on-Wye (now simply 'Hay') festival in the context of constructions of Welsh literature and national culture. Hay's website reveals VisitWales as the principal partner, the Welsh Government as a global partner and the Arts Council of Wales as a project partner of the festival. Ian Jenkins found that 'VisitWales also recognizes the Hay Festival as important to the Welsh economy'.[14] Moreover, since 2011 the Hay Festival and Creative Wales have appointed an annual international fellowship 'providing a unique opportunity for career development, while increasing Wales's artistic profile internationally'.[15]

But these things were not always so. The town of Hay has been remarkably successful in converting itself into a specialist Book Town since Richard Booth developed the concept in 1961, and the Hay Festival has become one of the most important in the English-speaking world since it was first held in 1988. Yet in a 1996 report advising on how this success might be emulated in Scotland, A. V. Seaton found that it was achieved in Hay without the support of any Welsh government or non-governmental agency. On the contrary, he found that the Tourist Information Centre in Hay was 'one of only four not on the main Wales Tourist Board TIC network which includes over 511 others'; that 'the WTB's main brochure in 1996 ("A View of Wales") has nothing on Hay' and that 'The 1995 attractions and accommodation guide to Mid-Wales ("Escape to our Beautiful Landscapes"), did not list Hay as having *any attractions*'.[16] It is as though nobody had noticed that Hay was a Welsh town or that its festival was a Welsh festival.

In other words, the Hay festival has only gradually discovered its Welshness – and Wales only gradually discovered the Hay Festival – over a long and extended period of time. It is worth considering some of the factors in this subsequent development which could initially be ascribed to the fact that the Arts Council of Great Britain was devolved into separate Arts Councils in each nation in 1994 so that the Arts Council of Wales was able to start developing connections with the Festival. The 1999 programme included a conversation between Gillian Clarke and Gwyneth Lewis, which was explicitly billed as one between two writers nominated for that year's Wales Book of the Year, which was at that time run by the Arts Council of Wales. Perhaps more significant is the fact that the *Library of Wales* book series was launched at the 2005 festival, as if to reclaim the festival as a site for the production of Welsh culture.

Christian Lenemark has argued with regard to the Gothenburg Book Fair that the event 'recreates itself year after year in an almost ritualized

way',[17] becoming part of the annual calendar of cultural activities on both a national and international scale. However, the gradual process by which the Hay Festival has become more Welsh shows that it does not necessarily only repeat itself, but also goes through different iterations by which it evolves and its character changes. Millicent Weber acknowledges the potential for festivals to provide spaces for the exploration of different ideas and values rather than straightforwardly endorsing any singular political, cultural or national outlook when she says: 'Literature's capacity to influence political and societal opinions and developments, its shaping of public culture, its place as a commodity in the marketplace, and its educational value in developing creativity and intellectual dispositions are all part of its value and place in society and conceptions of nationhood.'[18]

The capacity for the Hay Festival to engage in each of those processes on behalf of the literature of Wales has become greater over time. Nevertheless, the picture remains complex. Although both VisitWales and the Arts Council of Wales now both regularly exhibit there, their stands are often not the easiest to find within a festival village that is crowded and labyrinthine so that people who visit them are more likely to do so as a result of actively seeking them out than of accidentally stumbling across them. The overall feeling created by this experience can feel at times as though it is a separate festival-within-a-festival. Along with the gradual process of reclaiming the festival as a Welsh event, there are therefore ongoing forms of marginalisation of Welsh culture which are repeated and enacted in the geographic distribution of stands and exhibitions on the festival site. This performative aspect of different ways of displaying one's affiliations is explored by Alexandra Dane, whose innovative semiotic analysis of the images on tote bags carried by Hay Festival goers in 2019 found that although there were 'a number proclaiming support for an independent Wales',[19] the most common emblems were those of other cultural institutions, especially the V&A Museum, the Hereford Museum Trust, the Royal Academy of Arts, MoMa and the *New Yorker* magazine.

These things are not necessarily incompatible with Welsh culture, but they do reveal a complex interplay, even a contest, between the expression of different cultural values. In fact, it is arguable that a distinctly international dimension has been cathected by the increasing Welsh presence at the Hay Festival as an element of the national culture. Peter Kandela identifies a discussion by former South African president F. W.

De Clerk of his role in 'maintaining and then dismantling apartheid' as one of the most important events at the 1999 festival,[20] and a 'panel discussion' on 'the role of the UN' as one of the major pieces in the 2000 programme.[21] Peter Florence, who co-founded the festival with his father in 1987 and is its director, told Graeme Harper in an interview in 2009 that a commitment to progressive politics and improving global understanding are core components of Hay's ethos.[22]

The international dimension is most evident in the festival's international partnerships which have run events in places including Columbia, Mexico and Spain (2006+), Beirut (2009), Bangladesh (2011+) and Peru (2015+). In Kenya in 2009, a series of writers' workshops called *Storymoja* started to be held 'during the annual Hay Festival, which is a literary event that brings to Nairobi different acclaimed writers and literary enthusiasts from all over the world'.[23] In Mexico, the festival was picked up by Amalia García the 'visionary' governor of Zacatecas State who was keen to do for the area what the Hay Festival had done for Cartagena in Columbia – that is, not only provide a visible focus point for literary activity, but also and more specifically to demonstrate and underline the importance of 'free speech'.[24] A Hay event dedicated to exploring the contribution of diverse women writers was held at Rijeka, Croatia in 2020 to coincide with that city's hosting of European Capital of Culture. Through the hosting of various international events dedicated not merely to literature in the abstract but to expressing solidarity with anti-authoritarian and anti-patriarchal movements the Hay Festivals reveal the extent to which Welsh culture has been endowed with an interest in progressive politics on a global scale. According to Liana Giorgi:

> Internationalization strengthens these trends by confirming and at the same time undermining cultural nationalism. It confirms cultural nationalism insofar as it presupposes the existence of national literatures; at the same time, it undermines cultural nationalism by promoting plurality – of language, style but also taste or quality. Literature festivals build on this pluralism and its newly-gained legitimacy.[25]

In other words, in and through the operations of international literary festivals there is the potential for a dynamic interplay between affirming the existence of national literatures while also positioning them within a pluralistic landscape that tacitly cultivates connections and

relationships with the cultures and literatures of other nations and in other languages. In a study of the *Quais de Polar* crime fiction festival in France, Maria Snyder draws on translation scholar Lawrence Venuti's idea of the minoritizing potential that translation can have on dominant languages to argue that the festival offers opportunities for the carnivalesque because it focuses on a subversive genre (urban noir) which is mainly written in (American) English and read in France in translation: 'This means that nonstandard language from what he [Venuti] calls a minor literature – that is, a non-canonical one – can, when it is translated, destabilize the standard and dominant language'.[26]

This in turn is why festivals which include translated work are likely to be of particular interest in Wales, where the culture is at least bi- (and probably multi-) lingual so that the politics of translation between dominant majority languages and minority or marginalised ones have been very important. Shortly after the first iteration of the Hay Festival in Dhakka, Bangladesh in 2012, David Shook argued that it had the effect of opening up the world to Bangladeshi writers, who had not been as prominent as Pakistani or Indian ones until that time. In an interview with the authors K. Anis Ahmed and Mahmud Rahman, Shook suggested that both writers 'are talking about a certain type of insularity that the Bangla language suffers from as a medium of literature, not being in dialogue with world literature. That seems like one of the most valuable aspects of the Dhaka Hay Festival'.[27] Here through comparative example can be glimpsed some of the appeal for progressive politics in the construction of Wales's literary culture – not only through the opportunity that festivals afford to articulate it as a *national* culture, but also and more specifically through the means by which they imbue it with the characteristic of being open to the world.

Two Figures of Literary Tourism: Dylan Thomas and Hedd Wyn

The Hay Festival is an example of a wider category, that of Festival Tourism, with which Brian O'Connor (2011) supplemented R. W. Butler's (1986) identification of four different varieties of literary tourism.[28] In a 2020 review of the discipline since Butler, Jordi Arcos-Pumarola, Eugeni Osácar Marzal and Nayra Llonch-Molina found that both the practice of literary tourism and the field of research into it are

dominated by the UK – even compared to countries with comparably rich literary histories such as Germany, France, Russia and Italy.[29] They could have added Wales, which perhaps surprisingly has been slower to embrace the practice than other parts of the UK.

Arcos-Pumarola, Osácar Marzal and Llonch-Molina have drawn a strong connection between the UNESCO designation of Creative Cities of Literature, which was established in 2004, and an acceleration in literary tourism which they say has been 'propelled' by it.[30] However, as if to reinforce the dominance of the field by sites and practices in Britain, even the UNESCO designation has an important predecessor in the UK. In the eight years leading up to the turn of the Millennium, the (then) Arts Council of Great Britain designated eight different cities to host its UK Year of Literature and Writing as part of its Arts 2000 initiative. Arguing that at least one of these should be in Wales, Swansea made a successful bid to be one, and since events of this kind require a long lead-time it was announced in 1992 as the host city for 1995.

As the Hay Festival shows, Swansea 1995 was not the first manifestation of literary tourism in Wales.[31] But Swansea's hosting of UK Year of Literature and Writing did position the literary life of the city and the country within a much wider orbit than was the norm. H. Watkins and D. Herbert have recorded the fact that 'Writers and artists from 30 countries visited during the Festival, which involved 500 literature and arts events and around 100 community projects'.[32] Moreover, patrons for the festival included Margaret Atwood (from Canada), Björk (Iceland), Jane Campion (New Zealand), Günter Grass (Germany), Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru), Arthur Miller (USA), Salman Rushdie (India), Edward Said (Palestine), Ken Sara-Wiwa (Nigeria) and Paul Simon (America), thus endowing it with a transnational dimension.

According to Watkins and Herbert, the two most significant elements of Swansea's original bid to host the festival were its status as Dylan Thomas's hometown and above all, its 'innovative proposal to create a National Literature Centre for Wales'.[33] This was housed in the Old Guildhall, and opened in March 1995 under the new name of the Dylan Thomas Centre, with a programme of literary events and artistic activities more generally. However, it appears to have left Swansea Council with a dilemma about what to do with it once the year of activities was up, and the desire to exploit it economically rather than any coherent cultural strategy was the starting point for promoting Swansea as Dylan Thomas's city over the longer term.

In this, the council followed developments in both cultural policy and urban redevelopment around the UK, where a utilitarian approach to arts and culture in delivering economic outputs and social outcomes had already become common. Given its acquiescence in implementing the dominant ideological approach to cultural policy, what is especially interesting about Swansea's attempts to establish itself as a centre for Dylan Thomas tourism is its incompleteness and limitation in doing so – for which three reasons can be identified. First of these is the difficulty of accommodating the image of Dylan Thomas to forms of corporate branding that typified social regeneration and cultural policy during the 1990s and 2000s. Forms of gentrification might have been involved in the use of Dylan Thomas as a commodity for attracting investment in Swansea, but if so this could only be a highly unstable and ironic process since it would arguably involve downplaying those very aspects of Thomas's life and work that made him most complex and interesting. In an article that relates constructions of the heritage version of Dylan Thomas to expressions of Welsh culture and pride that became widespread in the 1990s following the 'yes' vote in the referendum on political devolution in 1997, Darryl Perrins points out that the Swansea-set film *Twin Town* opens with a negative quote from Thomas about the city as graveyard of ambition which 'at once distances the film from the triumphalism of the hour, and the heritage image of Thomas so meticulously nurtured by Swansea City Council'.[34] His reading therefore opens a disjunction between the man and the image.

A second reason for Swansea having succeeded only incompletely in establishing itself as the centre of the Dylan Thomas universe is that the Boat House in Laugharne, Carmarthenshire, is both 'a more visible and obvious attraction for literary tourists' and 'the most famous site associated with Thomas'.[35] The fact that Thomas only lived in Laugharne for the final five years of his life, whereas he lived in Swansea for twenty, does not appear to have detracted from the imaginative appeal of the Boat House and may in fact have positively helped to romanticise it. This example therefore shows that certain sites of literary pilgrimage can exercise a disproportionate degree of symbolic capital compared to others, and that rather than expressing aspects of culture and history in a merely neutral, objective way they are actively involved in the creation and circulation of collective, cultural memory. In the process of fashioning memory they are also involved in ideological practices, because

what a society elects to hand on indicates what kind of values it aims to establish in the present.

In the case of Laugharne, there is a particular irony involved in this ideological process. In 2014, it got caught up in a controversy when Carmarthenshire Council granted planning permission for a wind turbine at Mwche farm, directly opposite the Boat House. Since the turbine would permanently alter the landscape that Dylan Thomas had written about in the poems 'Over Sir John's Hill' and 'Poem on His Birthday,' this decision provoked a heated campaign of resistance, led by Hannah Ellis, the granddaughter of Dylan Thomas and President of the Dylan Thomas Society of Great Britain, on the grounds that the turbine would 'pierce the heart of the landscape and cause lasting distress to both locals and visitors alike'.[36] This conflict exactly parallels a situation described by Amber Pouliot and Joanna Taylor in their analysis of literary tourism on the moors that surround the Brontës' former home at Haworth in Yorkshire, in which she situates 'twentieth- and twenty-first-century campaigns to stop the erection of pylons and windfarms in this area as part of a long history of Brontë-inspired discourses about heritage and sustainability'[37].

To Pouliot and Taylor, the most interesting feature of landscape tourism inspired by literary texts (such as visiting the Brontë moors) is its capacity to inspire critical conversations about environmentalism and sustainability so that the debates themselves are more significant than any of the ways in which they might be settled. Pointing out that although technological developments such as windfarms alter the landscape, they show that these things are also important means for 'responding to the global climate crisis',[38] and therefore adumbrate modes of response to literary landscapes that 'align the preservation of cultural traditions with environmental sustainability'.[39] This possibility has significant implications for the Welsh case since environmentalism has long been important to Welsh nationalist politics. The campaign against the turbine outside the Boat House in Laugharne was ultimately successful in the High Court, but since ecopolitics has been commonly practised by nationalist thinkers in Wales, to oppose the installation of a site for renewable energy arguably sits uneasily with attempts that have been made to establish Dylan Thomas as a poet of and for the whole of Wales. Attempts to claim him as a Swansea poet, a Carmarthenshire poet, an environmental poet and a Welsh poet thus intersect with and complicate each other in various ways.

In fact, the mediation that sometimes occurs in the positioning of sites of literary tourism between a mainly local register and a mainly national one bears on the third reason why Swansea did not establish itself as the centre of the Dylan Thomas industry: its lack of national institutions. Pointing out that following the 'yes' vote in the 1997 devolution referendum Swansea had lost out to Cardiff in its bid to be the home of the new National Assembly, Watkins and Herbert found that 'it is the "National" label that holds the key for Swansea's policy makers. In order to compete, Swansea feels that it needs national institutions'.[40] This would have felt all the more acute given that Wales's role as host nation for the 1999 rugby world cup would be centred on Cardiff, with the transformation of Cardiff Arms Park into the Millennium Stadium.

On the other hand, Swansea was successful in attracting a few other national institutions such as the new National Waterfront Museum which was developed there following the closure of the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum in Cardiff Bay; and the new national swimming pool which aimed to replace the Empire Pool in Cardiff, which was closed during the redevelopment of the adjacent Millennium Stadium. Establishing itself as the home of certain national bodies thus became a higher priority for Swansea Council than maintaining its efforts to position itself as the home of the Dylan Thomas industry precisely because the latter lacked this national dimension. The proposed role of the Dylan Thomas Centre as a National Literature Centre for Wales in the aftermath of the 1995 Year of Literature and Writing 'failed to materialise' and the interest in Thomas, which had always been more about investment opportunities than any innate qualities of the man or his work, shrunk into the background.[41]

The fact that the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea did not become positioned as a national institution can usefully be contrasted with that of a different site of literary pilgrimage in Wales, the poet Hedd Wyn (Ellis Humphrey Evans)'s house Yr Ysgwrn in Eryri. Hedd Wyn was killed at the Third Battle of Ypres during the First World War in July 1917 and was posthumously awarded the Chair at the 1917 National Eisteddfod for his poem 'Yr Arwr' (The Hero). For almost a century after his death, members of his family continued to receive interested visitors to the farmhouse Yr Ysgwrn where he grew up. However, this was on a purely informal basis in a practice they referred to as 'keeping the door open' and the house was not an established visitor attraction as such, since it remained the family home. It was only when the poet's

nephew retired from active farming and there was a danger of the house and land being broken up and sold that it was bought by the Snowdonia National Park Authority in 2012, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Welsh Government and the National Park Authority. It opened to the public in 2017 with the explicit aims of increasing visitor numbers and also promulgating wider knowledge and understanding of the man and his work (as well as of Welsh literature and culture more generally).

If the Welsh dimension is implicit rather than explicit, however, it is nevertheless a pervasive presence. For example, the operations at Yr Ysgwrn are grouped into five different themes as follows:

- The life and poetic legacy of Hedd Wyn
- The First World War and its context
- The bardic tradition and the Welsh language and culture
- The social history of rural Wales at the turn of the C20
- Agricultural heritage and sustainable land use.[42]

Although the website is at pains to point out that the cottage is not a typical Welsh farmhouse, its most famous resident is nevertheless treated as a representative exponent of Welsh culture. This applies both to his involvement in the Bardic tradition and in agricultural communities across Wales, with which his experiences are presented as commonly shared. Given that a commitment to green politics and environmentalism has long been part of the self-imagination of nationalist movements in Wales, an interest in sustainable land use here re-codified as a form of agricultural heritage can also be situated within that compass.

For these interlocking reasons, it is perhaps understandable that Sarah Hughes sees Yr Ysgwrn as 'a cultural symbol for Wales'.[43] But if it is, it is one of which the majority of Welsh people have been remarkably unaware until the recent past. That fewer people visited Yr Ysgwrn before it became a formally marketised visitor destination than after it re-opened as one is not surprising. It does reveal, however, that if the house was to function as a symbol of Welsh national culture it had to be constructed as such. In other words, it did not have this *a priori* status in the minds of many of the Welsh people, or of people outside Wales when they think about Wales, many of whom had never even heard of the poet. The need to build up this knowledge explains why when Yr Ysgwrn was included as a case study in a 2015 review of designated protected landscapes in Wales, the measures by which it proposed to

gauge its own success are not only the familiar ones such as increasing visitor numbers, conserving the buildings and improving wildlife habits and access routes, but also a number of aims more specifically geared towards matters of interpretation and dissemination such as the development of educational resources and the hosting of educational activities and events plus training opportunities.[44]

Similarly, out of seven different strategic aims at Yr Ysgwrn, the first two are 'to provide a world class experience to all who visit Yr Ysgwrn' and 'to protect Yr Ysgwrn's special sense of place.'[45] In articulating these specific aims, the place mediates between two very different geographical registers, that of the local and that of the global. In the process, it might seem that the idea of the nation is absent, but perhaps a better way of thinking about it is to note the instances in which the idea of the nation is submerged in and underpins these other two forms of identification. When looked at in this way, the specific locality of Yr Ysgwrn emerges as a typical place in Wales, where Wales itself is imaginatively conceived of as being made up of a wider network and collection of such places. At the same time, when it is conceived on the global level, Wales emerges as one nation among many with Yr Ysgwrn a representative site within it through which visitors might gain symbolic access to the wider culture.

This interplay between local and global in the constitution of the national component of literary tourism has a very specific effect in the case of Yr Ysgwrn where the place is presented first as a doorway into Welsh culture, which is itself presented secondly as closely related to the cultures of other nations so that thirdly through the specific place, the nation is constructed as having an intrinsically outward-looking dimension. This dimension can be seen, for example, in the introduction to the house on its website, which tells potential visitors:

> The home reflects a period of social, cultural and agricultural history at the turn of the twentieth century. Hedd Wyn's life and death are representative of an entire generation of young men from Wales, Britain and Europe, who gave the ultimate sacrifice during the First World War.[46]

Here, Hedd Wyn is presented as part of the same generation of war poets that included Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Yet for the most part, he is not as well-known as they are, certainly outside Wales and possibly also within. This is no doubt related to his status as

a Welsh-language poet and the wider fact that poetry in Welsh has long been excluded from the canon of British literature. Development of the site as an educational resource for activities promoting knowledge and interpretation of the poet and as a source for their potential dissemination is thus an opportunity to address this marginalisation in the canon. It is notable however that the rhetoric promoting the house is largely free from a sense of Welsh culture having been neglected with regard to the British whole, and instead emphasises the commonality of the experience of war across Wales, Britain and Europe.

In doing so, it positions Welsh culture in a wider European framework. Thus, although the exhibition materials are dedicated to situating the work of Hedd Wyn inside the Welsh bardic tradition, the single artefact that has most pride of place in the exhibition is his posthumously received Bardic chair – which was originally carved 'by a Belgian WWI refugee called Eugeen Vanfleteren'.[47] This means that Hedd Wyn as an icon of Wales is positioned alongside Vanfleteren as a typical representative of a different culture from which he is nevertheless de-estranged; and the two cultures are presented as fundamentally intertwined. Moreover, the captions and commentary that accompany the Chair elevate it to the status of a monument to transnational comradeship in the aftermath of war: 'Not only does it symbolise the poetic genius of Hedd Wyn, but it also honours all the young men of Wales, of Britain and of Europe that left their seats empty at home during the Great War.' Overall, therefore, European solidarity is constructed as an in-built element of Wales's own culture. Given that Yr Ysgwrn had formally opened in June 2017, less than a year after Britain's referendum on membership of the European Union, this emphasis on European solidarity as an intrinsic component of Welsh culture can be interpreted as a symbolic refusal of the anti-European rhetoric that was increasing at the time.

On Book Prizes

So far, this paper has argued that book series, literary festivals and literary tourism have contributed to the establishment of Wales's literature as a national literature, in which cosmopolitanism and interculturality have been positioned as central parts. This final section briefly discusses a fourth material driver of contemporary literary production – literary prizes – to explore the dilemma for Welsh artists and

intellectuals identified at the start of the paper: how could they rebuild an organic connection with the wider population while maintaining a global worldview based on transnational solidarity with other cultures that the 2016 EU referendum result appeared to contradict? Although Wales's national literature had already been constructed in such a way that diversity and interculturalism were major components well before 2016, it is argued here that the forms of literary production that have been highly prized since then have offered an opportunity to re-affirm that outlook on the one hand while also re-connecting with the people of Wales on the other.

For example, the Bardic Chair at the 2016 National Eisteddfod was awarded to Aneirin Karadog for 'Ffiniau' ('Borders'), a poetic portrayal of a young man entering an army barracks, that alludes to the increase in so-called populist politics around the world in the face of a perceived increase in migration, war and famine. In the light of the international solidarity of Welsh intellectuals identified above, the poem's warnings of political extremism, hostility, mutual misunderstanding and violence seem to have resonated with the Eisteddfod judges to a particularly strong degree. Coming just two months after the people of Britain – including, apparently, a majority of the people of Wales – had voted to leave the European Union, the conferral of the Chair on Aneirin Karadog thus gestures towards a form of cultural politics that is highly oppositional to the populist mood of the time.

The fact that the Chairing of the Bard at the National Eisteddfod has been running continuously since 1861 and has even longer roots in the middle ages might help explain why Wales did not have literary prizes until somewhat later than in other parts of the UK such as the Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year (first awarded in 1982); or the Booker Prize, open to British, Irish, Commonwealth (and latterly American) writers, first awarded in 1969. Already having the longest running literary prize in Britain might have made the need for a more formal national book award not to have become apparent until somewhat later, and Wales Book of the Year was not established until 1992, with various different categories from among the winners of which one book each in English and Welsh is named overall Book of the Year. It was taken over by Literature Wales in 2004, the year in which the overall prize in the English language section was awarded to Owen Sheers for *The Dust Diaries*, an imaginative travelogue in which Sheers recounts a journey to Zimbabwe following in the footsteps of a missionary ancestor.

One of the effects of the creation of Wales Book of the Year has been that the field of Welsh writing has become more prominent than it was, and this can be seen in the fact that Welsh writers have been short- or longlisted for other UK prizes more often than previously. Although there is no fixed definition of either Welsh writer or Welsh book, these categories could include Trezza Azzopardi who was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2000 for *The Hiding Place;* Stevie Davies, longlisted in 2001 for *The Element of Water*; Sarah Waters, shortlisted in 2002, 2006 and 2009 for *Fingersmith*, *The Night Watch* and *The Little Stranger*; Peter Ho Davies, longlisted in 2007 for *The Welsh Girl* as was Nikita Lalwani for *Gifted*; and Patrick McGuinness, longlisted in 2011 for *The Last Hundred Days*. Nadifa Mohamed was shortlisted in 2021 for *The Fortune Men*, a fictional account of the Somali seaman Mahmood Hussein Mattan who was wrongfully convicted and executed for the 1952 murder of Lily Volpert in Cardiff's Tiger Bay. Mohamed is not a Welsh writer but work shortlisted for the Booker has only infrequently featured locations in Wales and her bucking of this trend might be related to the fact that 2021 was one of the very few years in which there was a Welsh judge on the judging panel: Rowan Williams.

Like *The Fortune Men,* the shortlisting of Azzopardi's *Hiding Place*, set in the Maltese immigrant community in Cardiff Docks; Peter Ho Davies's portrayal of the relationship between a young Welsh woman, a Jewish refugee and a German prisoner during the Second World War; McGuinness's fictional depiction of the end of the Ceausescu regime in Romania and Lalwani's portrayal of a young Indian girl in Wales each reveal a subtle tendency towards valuing work that explores a diversity of cultures and experiences. Noting that such exploration has been especially often acknowledged by the Booker judges when it has been practised by postcolonial writers, Stephen Levin has referred to this tendency as the 'Booker Aesthetic'.[48] In the current discussion, the extent to which this aesthetic both mirrors and is mirrored by the construction of Welsh literature as fundamentally transnational and intercultural warrants observation. This situation makes it possible for a writer such as Tishani Doshi to feature in the Seren series *New Stories from the Mabinogion* and be shortlisted for India's Hindu Book of the Year in 2010 with no necessary contradiction.

Just as the Chairing of Aneirin Karadog as Bard in the 2016 National Eisteddfod can be seen as a means of reaffirming Welsh culture's trans-

national political outlook as a specific response to the EU referendum, so too the same tendency can be detected in Wales Book of the Year. Patrick McGuinness won the overall English prize in 2015 for *Other People's Countries*, a collection of prose portraits of Bouillon, a small town in Belgium where McGuinness spent some of his childhood. It might be the case that this work appealed to the judges because its portrayal of a national minority within Belgium speaks to the situation in Wales, where artists and thinkers have pursued a comparable interest in other small European nations and their languages for decades. The act of awarding it cannot be straightforwardly seen as a response to the outcome of the EU referendum which it in fact preceded by several months. However, coming between the election in 2015 of a Conservative government pledged to hold a referendum and its actual occurrence a year later, the expression of value signified by conferring the prize on *Other People's Countries* can be said to have entered into some of the debates about Britain's – and Wales's – relationships with the wider world that were then getting going. A comparable case is the Dylan Thomas prize at the University of Swansea, which is open to young writers from anywhere in the world and therefore has the effect of emphasising not only the legitimacy of Welsh literary society to confer a prize but also global solidarity as a typical component of Welsh culture.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that book series, literary festivals, literary tourism and book prizes are material practices that have contributed in Wales to an unfolding process whereby the work of diverse individual writers has increasingly been assimilated to the emerging category of a national literature; that each of these things intersects with the others in contributing to the formation of that national literature; and that a commitment to a socially progressive, cosmopolitan worldview has been constructed as an intrinsic part of that literature. As has been argued here, an interest in progressive politics in general and in interculturalism in particular have long been constructed as typical attributes of that culture. Since the 2016 EU referendum, they have been re-affirmed as ways of overcoming the division between Wales's intellectuals and its general population that the result of the referendum had threatened to

exacerbate. In turn this has enabled a symbolic (though not practical) contestation of Brexit politics by positioning Welsh culture instead as fundamentally global, cosmopolitan and open in outlook.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Notes

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[31] Another early example is the Brother Cadfael tour inspired by the locations in Ellis Peters's historical crime novels featuring that character, which has been run by Shropshire County Council since the early 1990s and incorporates places on both sides of the border between England and Wales. In fact, Visit England actively promotes Shrewsbury Abbey as Cadfael's fictional home, thereby not only claiming the character for England but also (since the character was Welsh) implicitly revealing how sites of literary tourism can be co-opted into acts of cultural reclamation and then positioned within and between different forms of public meaning making.

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