Attributes of Welshness in the Short Stories of Dylan Thomas

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Pro Gradu Thesis
Spring 2003
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Walesilaisuus Dylan Thomasin novelleissa – tiivistelmä

Walesilaisen kulttuurin olennainen osa on kielellisen kaksijakoisuuden ongelma. Tämä karu maa on siitä lähtien, kun se 1500-luvulla liitettiin Englantiin, ollut kahden huomattavasti erilaisen kielen ja kulttuurin törmäyspaikka. Englannin ja Walesin yhteentörmäyksen seurauksena on myös kirjallisuudessa etenkin englannin kielen alettua yleistyä 1800-luvun lopulla ilmennyt kaksijakoisuutta. Kirjallisuuden tutkimuksessa onkin otettu käyttöön käsite “anglo-walesilainen” merkitsemään walesilaisten kirjailijoiden englanniksi kirjoittamia teoksia. Eräänä esimerkkinä anglo-walesilaisesta kirjallisuudesta on käytetty ehkä tunnetuinta walesilaista kirjailijaa ja runoilijaa, Dylan Thomasia (1914 – 1953). Anglo-walesilaisuuden käsitteen liittäminen Thomasiin on kuitenkin ongelmallista monesta syystä. Tämän pro gradu –tutkielman aiheena onkin tutkia, miten Dylan Thomasin novelleista käy ilmi hänen walesilaisuutensa – tai walesilaisuuden muuntumisen joksikin muuksi.

Thomas itse kiisti kiintymyksensä tai henkisen yhteytensä Walesiin useaan otteeseen; hän katsoi olevansa miltei kaikkien kansakuntien ulkopuolella. Tämä väite on erityisen mielenkiintoinen, kun sitä tarkastellaan eräiden katsantokantojen, uuden historisismin (New Historicism), kulttuurimaterialismin (Cultural Materialism) ja postkoloniaalisen teorian (Post-colonial theory) valossa. Nämä kaikki näkökannat korostavat monimuotoista lähestymistapaa kulttuurin ja kirjallisuuden välisen suhteen tarkastelussa. Postkoloniaaliteoreetikko Homi K. Bhabha esittääkin, että kahden eri kulttuurin yhteentörmäyksessä niiden rajaseudulla toimivat ihmiset luovat uusia kulttuureita, jotka ovat kahden aiemman kulttuurin “hybridejä” ja sijaitsevat niiden ulkopuolella ja välissä. Tällaisessa tilassa voidaan katsoa myös Dylan Thomasin olevan: ei täysin walesilainen eikä englantilainen, vaan jotakin kummastakin, luoden uuden välitilan.

Tämä käy ilmi, kun tarkastellaan Thomasin novelleja hybridimallin valossa. Novelleissa on havaittavissa elementtejä walesilaisesta, englantilaisesta sekä kansainvälisestä kirjallisesta perinteestä. Walesilaisuus näkyy toisaalta aiheiden ja tapahtumapaikkojen valinnassa, kuten Thomasin lapsuuden kotikaupunkiin Swanseaan ja sen ympäristöön sijoittuvassa omaelämänkerrallisessa novellikokoelmassa *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (suom. *Taiteilijan omakuva penikkavuosilta*). Toisaalta se näkyy myös perinteisten walesilaisten tyylikeinojen käyttämisenä myös novelleissa: erilaiset sanojen ääntämykseen liittyvät valinnat, jotka muistuttavat walesilaista *cynghanedd*-runotyylistöä näkyvät Thomasin kirjoituksissa. Mitään todisteita ei kuitenkaan ole havaittavissa siitä, että Thomas olisi suoraan käyttänyt hyväkseen *cynghaneddia*.

Thomas ei ole yksinomaan walesilainen kirjailija, sillä monia elementtejä hänen tuotannossaan ei voida selittää walesilaisuudella. Se, että hän kirjoitti englanniksi on vain yksi huomionarvoinen kohta. Hänen tyylinsä poikkeaa muista anglo-walesilaisista kirjailijoista, kuten häneen suuresti vaikuttaneesta Caradoc Evansista enimmäkseen siinä, että hänen novelleissaan on sellaista yleismaailmallisuutta, joka on vedonnut lukijoihin ja kriitikoihin muualla Britanniassa ja myös Yhdysvalloissa erityisen hyvin.

Tämän pro gradu –tutkielman anti Dylan Thomasin ympärillä käytävään keskusteluun onkin se huomio, että Thomasin kansallisuutta tai kansattomuutta pohdittaessa on myös kolmas vaihtoehto walesilaisuuden ja ei-walesilaisuuden lisäksi: hybridinen, sekä walesilaisuutta että englantilaisuutta yhdistelevä anglo-walesilaisuus. Thomasin omista väitteistä huolimatta voitaneen sanoa, että painon on oltava enemmän walesilaisuudella – tai universaaliudella.

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1.Introduction

When people think of the literature of Wales, for most there are two things that come to mind, and two things only, at the most. On the one hand, there are the remnants of mediaeval legends and culture, such as the *Mabinogion* and the *eisteddfod* festival. On the other hand we have Dylan Thomas. Most other Welsh writers have been forced into obscurity by the country's long history of English occupation, and also by the Welsh themselves, who are somewhat less inclined towards literary culture than the English, the Welsh people's neighbours across Offa's Dyke and the Severn river.

This certainly does not mean that there is nothing else in the literature of Wales other than Dylan Thomas and the legends – far from it. Even today, many aspiring poets and novelists are emerging all over Wales. Among these spring to mind such names as R.S. Thomas, Harri Webb, Gwyn Thomas and Saunders Lewis (Thomas is a very common name in Wales, and neither of the Thomases is related to Dylan Thomas). The relative obscurity that these writers have been faced with only means that they have not received wide notice outside Wales – and sadly, not too much notice inside Wales, either. An interesting recent development is the advent of Niall Griffiths, born in Liverpool in 1966 to Welsh parents but living in Wales and writing about life on the west coast of Wales in dialectal English[1].

Griffiths and many others, including Dylan Thomas, have discussed at length a distinctive feature of the Welsh society: the difficult division between those who speak the Welsh language and those who do not. The division is observable especially well in

[1] Gareth Evans, "Niall Griffiths: Between the Rocks and Hard Places", 2 March 2002, The Independent website, <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/books/interviews/story.jsp?story=250388>.

sociology and politics, but it is nonetheless clearer in the field of literature[2]. Witness the introduction of the term “Anglo-Welsh” to denote “Welsh writing in English”, as opposed to Welsh writing originally in Welsh[3]. In other words, an Anglo-Welsh writer is someone who writes in English but whose roots and influences lie somewhere in Wales, be that root or influence the landscape, the populace, the bardic tradition or whatever has influenced the author in question. In addition, it is interesting to note that most Anglo-Welsh writers, at least in Dylan Thomas’ heyday during the 1930s and 1940s, were almost invariably published by an English publisher, as Welsh publishers were few and preferred to publish only Welsh-language books.

Dylan Thomas and most of the other writers from Wales who have crossed from obscurity into acknowledgement have been labelled Anglo-Welsh – and not only for the English nature of their works. The Welsh part of Thomas’ Anglo-Welshness can be discerned particularly well in his prose. A fairly large portion of his short stories take place in a distinctly Welsh setting: a seaside town or a remote village or valley populated by a number of pub-going Thomases, sea-faring Evanses and sheep, all going about their business as they are wont to. The stories are also often more or less autobiographical, and especially when they are less so, they make incisive descriptions of life in that mountainous province hemmed in between England and the Irish Sea.

From a theoretical point of view it may be asserted that books, whether fiction or nonfiction, are social creations by virtue of their being interactive and a product of many social interactions[4]. The reader relates through the book to the author and to the characters. The arc of social interaction may even reach back to the reader. However, a

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[2] See the title of Katie Gramich’s article “Cymru or Wales?: Explorations in a Divided Sensibility,” Susan Bassnett, ed., *Studying British Cultures: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[3] Meic Stephens in *Writing on the Edge: Interviews with Writers and Editors of Wales*, ed. David T. Lloyd, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997) 39.

problem of theory arises when considering the implications of culture on writing. The field of literature-culture studies has been approached from widely differing perspectives. Sociologists and sociological philosophers have preferred to look at the issue from the perspective of literature's impact on society[5]. On the other hand, cultural studies has been more interested in the place literature takes in forming and predicting culture. Literary theory has attempted to integrate elements of both approaches. On the subject of cultural and literary theory, John Frow describes cultural studies as "a way of contextualizing [any] texts" with a view to analysing the "social relations of textuality"[6].

This will be a good place to start, as one of my main aims in the following study will be to contextualise Dylan Thomas' short stories. I will therefore first attempt to sketch out some theories of reading culture in literature. This will be the realm of chapter two. As the personality and oeuvre of Dylan Thomas as well as Welsh culture are both key to my argument, some aspects and features of both will be put forward in the third and fourth chapters, respectively. I will ultimately apply the cultural theories and features of Welsh culture to selected pieces of Dylan Thomas' prose. My attempt will be thus to see the extent to which Thomas' Welsh background on the one hand and English influence on the other are apparent in his writings.

This sort of study is in no way unique. Many scholars have focused on Dylan Thomas' Welshness exclusively, and have come to different conclusions. Ackerman, for example, has sought to show that features of Welsh culture are prevalent in his poetry[7]. Holbrook, on the other hand, has denied that the Wales Dylan Thomas represents in his

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[4] Michael Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures – Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 127.

[5] See, for example, Robert Escarpit, *Sociology of Literature*, trans. Ernest Pick, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1971).

[6] John Frow, "Literature, Culture, Mirrors", Australian Humanities Review website, undated, <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/emuse/culture/frow.html>.

[7] John Ackerman, *Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

poetry and prose is Welsh in any meaningful way[8]. However, a lot of the work on Dylan Thomas is already quite old and lacking in new theoretical perspectives. Also, most of the criticism has focused on Thomas' poetry instead of his equally interesting prose works. What this study aims to illuminate in the light of some of Thomas' short stories is the possibility of seeing him in terms of a hybrid nationality. Hybrid nationality is a concept which Homi K. Bhabha has explored in depth in his seminal work on post-colonial literature, *The Location of Culture*[9]. I will in the following chapters thus explore how far this useful concept can be applied to the prose works of Dylan Thomas.

2.How to Read Culture in Literature

The relationship between society and culture needs to be established before we proceed any further. After all, society and culture are two terms with slightly different meanings, and they cannot be automatically interchanged. Indeed, a single culture, such as that designated "Western" may stretch over a vast geographical area with various sociological structures[10]. By society is meant all forms of human association and the structure of their association, be they based on ethnic, national, linguistic, sexual or other common characteristics. Culture, on the other hand, is a specialised case of a group with similar traits, customarily shared attitudes, and common values, such as the Welsh. It is important to note that the word "culture" includes also all the various forms of art traditionally produced by such a group. This, however, is a profound oversimplification of a very complex issue. For the purposes of this study, the concept of "society" will be used to imply "culture" as well.

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[8] David Holbrook, *Dylan Thomas and Poetic Dissociation* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964).
[9] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
[10] Howard Lee Nostrand, "Describing a Literate Culture," *The Sociology of Art & Literature – A Reader*, eds. Milton C. Albrecht, James H. Barnett and Mason Griff (New York: Praeger, 1970).

It would seem to be a well-established, though not uncontested, truism that there is an element of culture every step of the way in literature. Robert Escarpit, among numerous other writers, has maintained that various aspects and features of the author's and reader's society, culture and nationality enter into the forming, writing, reading, and interpretation of literature[11]. Except in the theoretical tradition of the New Critics, agreement is also quite widespread on the general point that a writer's sociological background bears upon his or her writing, especially in the broad category of fiction. However, beyond this point, agreement is far from universal.

A great number of theoretical traditions ranging from Marxism to hermeneutics have since the early years of the 19th century attempted to explain more closely the interrelations of society and literature in their own respective ways[12]. The following chapters will look into some of those various theories which can broadly be subsumed under the label "sociology of literature". The point will be to see how these theories can be used to analyse the way in which an author's nationality or culture leaves its mark on his or her writings.

2.1.Sociology of Literature – Background and Introduction

Because the study of society is a vitally important part of understanding culture, we now need to focus on sociology, or more accurately, the sociology of literature. This area of studies, whose varied methodology derives mainly from the social sciences, can be succinctly described as investigating the relationship between literature and society. Investigations in the field of sociology of literature are numerous, on varying themes and they follow an extensive range of theories, which sometimes differ widely from each other. The main thrust is nonetheless clear: particular societies may be studied with the

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[11] Escarpit 1.

help of literature, and sociological phenomena can be used to exemplify particular features of literature.

Modern-day theorists could not have come this far so easily, had they not been preceded by two centuries of writing on the interrelations between literature and society. The history of the sociology of literature goes back to the earliest years of the nineteenth century, when the area under study was predominantly the whole wide spectrum of "art", and not only literature[13]. It should be noted, however, that especially during the second half of the 20th century, sociologists of art have concentrated on more or less all forms of cultural activity, ranging from TV commercials to art installations to popular novels, and not just on so-called high literature.

The most cited of the early sociologists of art is the French-Swiss Madame de Staël (1766-1817)[14]. Her *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, published in 1800, discusses the relation of race and climate to literature, and the effects of women and religion on art in general. Her stance would at first glance seem prescriptive in that she calls for the harmonisation of the literature of a society with its prevailing political beliefs. She states that an artist must be of his own time, expressing the moral and historical reality of the nation. She does this in particular with reference to France and the rise of republican politics, claiming that writers should move to portray citizens other than aristocrats. To assume that this is simply a nationalistic statement is a fallacy, however. In *De la littérature,* she describes and explains the ways in which classical Homeric literature is different from and even

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[12] John Hall, *The Sociology of Literature* (London: Longman, 1979) 1 – 23. See the last portion of this chapter for a closer examination of modern theoretical traditions in the sociology of literature.
[13] The following history is based on James H. Barnett, "The Sociology of Art," *The Sociology of Art & Literature – A Reader*, eds. Milton C. Albrecht, James H. Barnett and Mason Griff (New York: Praeger, 1970) 621 – 634.
[14] Petri Liukkonen, "Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, Baroness de Staël-Holstein (1766-1817)", undated, <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/stael.htm>.

opposed to German folk tales. She relates these literatures to the “Zeitgeist” of classical Greece and medieval Germany, respectively, with a view to disproving the universality of classical art. In doing this, she does not go so far as to disprove the universality of “nationhood”, something that could only be done much later, when the concept of “the nation” as an entity of culture began to be problematised. Madame de Staël’s *De la littérature* thus leaves quite a lot to be hoped for from a modern perspective on the sociology of literature.

Karl Marx was more specific in his thoughts in 1845 concerning the relation of society and the arts, although he, too, can be considered to resort to oversimplification. He argues that both the content and the style of art in a given society depend on the system of production prevalent in that society. Thus, the views of an author and, indeed, any person within society, depend on the economic base of that society and the class they are born into. Although Marx goes a long way towards explaining the relationship between art and society, he is trapped in his all-encompassing theory of the system of production holding sway over all aspects of society. Thus, his theory needed a great deal of elaboration and specification. A great number of 20th century theorists did just this. Their views will be looked at somewhat later.

A much more advanced and still influential precursor of contemporary sociology of art was the French positivist Hippolyte Taine. In his *History of English Literature* of 1871, Taine proposed that “a work of art is determined by an aggregate which is the general state of mind and surrounding circumstances”. He attached special importance to the “social medium or milieu” which produces the “state of mind” which in turn gives rise to the work of art. In true positivist fashion, he used the data of experience to solve the scientific formula of “race – environment – time” in connection with artists in particular societies. For him, the loaded term “race” was no more than a set of ideas

concerning heredity, land and climate; “environment” referred to social, economic and cultural factors; “time” brought into play aspects of stability and change in a civilisation. Even though modern reviewers may prefer to tone down Taine’s definitions of race, his influence on the sociology of art is indisputable. He established with force that works of art are dependent on the social basis in which they are created, and not objects born in a vacuum to an unsuspecting public.

Less than a century later, the so-called Frankfurt School came to prominence. One of the major exponents of the Frankfurt School, Leo Löwenthal, studied selected novels and dramas by certain prominent European authors between 1600 and 1900 from Shakespeare to Hamsun in his *Literature and the Image of Man*[15]. He maintained that in the often unconscious process of selecting and emphasising certain types of plots, characters, milieus and values, creative writers provide one kind of documentation of social structure and cultural change. They are, Löwenthal claims, sensitive to “incipient change in man’s relation to his society” and thus especially interesting to students of social change.

Literature and the Image of Man could be criticised for its selection of material, which, though spread over many centuries and cultures, leaves one wanting a wider array of authors. In addition, the thesis presents a rather one-sided view of literature as holding a mirror to society, as it were. What is thus lacking in Löwenthal’s theories is a fuller appraisal of the method of transfer from society to literature. Although Löwenthal also studied the popular and critical reception of literature, he largely confines himself to literature as a source of sociological data. The interesting thing about Löwenthal’s thesis is, however, just this. Where Taine emphasises the consequences of sociological reality

[15] Leo Löwenthal, *Literature and the Image of Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

upon a work of literature, Löwenthal takes a different perspective and considers the way in which society is reflected in literature.

Löwenthal's work in popular and critical reception led in time to more studies of the artist's place in society. Barnett, in 1970, calls for a conception of the art as "a process in which the artist, the work of art and the art public are interacting elements"[16]. The society the artist inhabits affects his or her personality in such a way that it leaves its mark upon a finished work of art. In addition, artists in a modern society need to achieve a public for their work in order to be able to continue being creative artists. These particular developments of theory in the 1970s, though interesting, are not really relevant to this study, and they will be ignored.

In conclusion, a brief introduction to present-day theories about the sociology of literature is in order. This introduction will use parts of Hall's introduction to the various schools of thought, leaving out three which are irrelevant to the study at hand, and introducing one other influential theory which has come to the fore after Hall's *Sociology of Literature* appeared[17]. The theories to be introduced here include Marxism, the New Critics, structuralism, hermeneutics, and New Historicism along with its British counterpart, Cultural Materialism.

Even though Karl Marx was chiefly a political economist, his writings have spawned whole libraries of books based on his thoughts in fields of study other than politics and economics. The study of literature is one of the more prevalent fields, perhaps partly because Marx himself attached special importance to it. As was pointed out earlier, Marx maintained that an understanding of literature is only possible in its social context. That is, an external referent (the world in which the author lives) is needed in addition to an internal referent (the world of the text).

As per Marx's own views, Marxists often look at sociological phenomena in the light of class differences. Thus, especially early Marxist critics tended to choose only certain works of literature, mainly from the realist narrative mode, which fit clearly into their analytical framework. This is problematic if one wishes to take into account more layers of society than mere class differences. Replacing the author with the critic and choosing "the tellers" all too carefully are two of the greatest problems of traditional Marxist theory. A more open mind – something Marx called for himself at times – is needed to provide a completely plausible theory of sociology of literature.

The so-called "New Critics'" approach was in diametric opposition to Marxism. This approach was developed by a group of American critics in the 1920s who attempted to make the study of literature more systematic[18]. The systematic nature of New Criticism actively worked to exclude external evidence from literary analysis, thus also denying the author of a literary work the ability to present any evidence as regards the literary work itself. This is as close as can get to D.H. Lawrence's dictum that the critic's duty is to save the tale from the artist[19]. What naturally followed was also the exclusion of society and the author's place within it. New Critics go so far as to claim a fallacy in trusting "the teller rather than the tale"[20]. The main point of interest for New Critics is what sort of *internal* qualities literature may have, and how they can be discovered with scientific rather than "impressionistic" methdos. New Critics may even go so far as to say that literature has nothing to say about society on a larger scale.

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[16] Barnett 629.
[17] Hall 2 – 22.
[18] Chris Abele, et al., "New Criticism," English Department, Lawrence University, 1993, <http://www.lawrence.edu/dept/english/courses/60A/newcrit.html>.
[19] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Mercury Books, 1965, originally published 1924) 2.
[20] Hall 2.

Closely connected to the search for the internal qualities of literature is the claim of a principal proponent of structuralism, Roland Barthes, that the author is dead. Structuralism maintains that it is not the author who controls the language, it is the language that is put into operation by the author. More emphasis is rather put on the reader and his or her understanding of the text. What retains the greatest interest for structuralists, however, is the text itself. Kristeva's concept of intertextuality goes a long way in explaining how structuralists perceive the relationship of literature to its surroundings: texts comment on other texts rather than on society.

The beginnings of structuralism lie with the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. He fixed the point of interest of linguistics in the underlying rules of language that enable communication to take place, rather than in the surface level of expressions. Following de Saussure, structuralists think that the internal qualities of literature can be discovered mainly through linguistics. Culler names two points as fundamental insights to why linguistics is useful in understanding cultural phenomena. Firstly, works of art, for example literature, are "objects or events with meaning, and hence signs", and secondly, they do not have an essence in and of themselves, but are defined by a network of relations both internal and external to the cultural phenomenon in question[21]. Peter Burke has suggested that studying literary history allows us to learn about the appropriateness of certain literary codes, or modes of writing such as the realist novel, to certain social conditions precisely because cultural phenomena possess significance in relation to external referents.

Hermeneutics, on the other hand, expands on structuralism by rejecting the latter's search for an objective truth. Hermeneutic tradition insists on elucidating the "circles of meaning" in which sociological knowledge can be discovered. From a literary

perspective this would mean accepting the authority of both the author and the reader in giving meaning to a literary work. Therefore, acceptance of the opinions of varying groups of people from various cultural backgrounds is important because they are all concerned with the recurrent questions of existence. Thus hermeneutics skirts the problems of both historicism and relativism. The challenge of conducting hermeneutic studies in the sociology of literature is rather to avoid idealism.

All of the above bodies of theory reached their apex before the 1980s. New Historicism, on the other hand, is a more modern innovation in the field of cultural theory. Also, unlike these previous cultural theories, the predominantly American movement of New Historicism alleges that there is no "singular and monolithic" relation between a text and its context[22]. It is indeed highly problematical to talk about a "theory" of New Historicism, since one of its main proponents, Stephen Greenblatt, vocally denies the possibility of any general theory of relation between art and history. Rather, New Historicism is a general argument in favour of a hybrid and dynamic approach to social formations and cultural works. A work's context is, according to New Historicists, "productive of the [work's] very meaning", and is definitely not to be considered or made somehow "extraneous"[23].

These thoughts are extremely useful in that whereas previous theories sought to explain the relation of art and culture by means of a "grand unified theory", so to speak, New Historicism allows multiple explanations to emerge from a single text. New Historicists argue that there is no single theory which could explain a work in all possible contexts. It would thus be unnecessary to explain away discrepancies which are

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[21] Jonathan Culler, quoted in Hall 14.

[22] Claire Colebrook, *New Literary Histories: New historicism and Contemporary Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 25.

[23] Colebrook 27 – 28.

mutually exclusive: both can be correct in their own right, when the context is considered correctly.

The British version of New Historicism is Cultural Materialism, and it is more akin to Marxism. The principal Cultural Materialist, Raymond Williams, however, diverges from traditional Marxism in that he, not unlike New Historicists, refuses to see economics as a "single or consistent explanation"[24]. A work of art can rather at the same time reflect, contest, effect, disrupt *and* reinforce prevailing economic conditions.

Williams and Cultural Materialists are thus calling for an open mind on the question of the social force of literature[25]. Their charge is not to define things in such a way that precludes all conclusions but one. Thus, where classical Marxism, structuralism and especially the New Critics consider there to be only one interpretation of a given literary text, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism see that a number of interpretations may be valid. This view will be useful below at various stages and in different contexts, but it will be put to use especially when individual works by Dylan Thomas are analysed.

2.2.The Curious Concept of Total Context

Clausen asserts with some force that it is more useful to study literature in English as an entity with fluid and ambiguous differences as to a writer's nationality, rather than a corpus of texts strictly divided along national lines[26]. Not to be scared by this assertion, it needs to be borne mind that the thesis of his article has not so much to do with an author's nationality, as it does with criticising the division of literature in English into national literatures studied separately. His point is definitely not to deny the

[24] Colebrook 143.
[25] Hall 21.
[26] Christopher Clausen, "'National Literatures' in English: Toward a New Paradigm," *New Literary History* 25 (Winter 1994), <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/clausen.txt>.

importance of examining an author's nationality in connection with certain types of literary study – one could venture the present study as an example – as he explicitly allows for an examination of "authorial nationality as a context".

The context here, then, is the nationality of Dylan Thomas, the Welsh author. To understand that context, an understanding of Welsh culture is vital. Welsh culture will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 3. For now, however, we still need to come to terms with how "authorial nationality" or, indeed, all of the author's background and not just nationality, can come to bear upon works of fiction.

In order to analyse the cultural traits of a given text, in this case traits of Welsh culture in Dylan Thomas' prose, we must first know the context in which the text was written. The eminent literary sociologist Lucien Goldmann bases his assertion on a host of thinkers from Hegel to Freud when he claims that we shall discover the fragment of meaning embedded in a sentence or linguistic expression as soon as we "succeed in integrating it into its total context"[27].

To put this in another way, it could be argued that there is on the one hand a certain type of structure inherent in an object of cultural creation, but on the other, there is also another kind of structure which surrounds the object in question. This surrounding structure needs to be accounted for when explaining the structure of the object under study. This is, of course, different from an *understanding* of the cultural creation, which is autonomous of explanation and more subjective. Rather, explanation of the surrounding structure seeks to answer the question, among others, of what is the relation of this cultural creation to others around it and to the the "transindividual" or

[27] Lucien Goldmann, *Method in the Sociology of Literature*, trans. and ed. William Q. Boelhower (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) 92.

"collective subject", as Goldmann calls it[28]. The collective subject is thus expressed in cultural texts at a level where the individual can be abstracted.

Although this is very well for the sociological study of literature, I would contend that the individual – the author – does not need to be abstracted. This is especially true in this case of Dylan Thomas and his Welshness, when the author needs to be seen as an individual somehow removed from the transindividual subject. He is not, and cannot be, totally cut off from the transindividual level, but an understanding of the author as an individual may aid in understanding the nature of the transindividual, just as the collective level may aid in understanding the individual.

However, this is somewhat problematic due to the unavoidably large number of factors the concepts of "total context" and "surrounding structure" entail. One could argue very convincingly, even without the aid of chaos theory and quantum mechanics, that the "total context" of, say, a work of fiction is far too complicated and far-reaching to warrant the use of a phrase as loaded as this. This view is promoted highest by the deconstructionists, whose theory rests on the notion that even though meaning is "context-bound", total context is "unmasterable" and context "boundless"[29]. Nevertheless, if we placed specific boundaries on the context and did not go into the endless depths of totality, we would have a much easier task of specification. We therefore need to specify the meaning of the word "total" in much narrower terms, or if need be, even ignore it altogether.

What, then, would be an ideal "total context"? As has been argued before, it is highly unreasonable to look for a "total" context, encompassing all the world. For example, in the case of Dylan Thomas' prose works, some of his personal characteristics

[28] Goldmann 103.
[29] Greig E. Henderson and Christopher Brown, "Glossary of Literary Theory," University of Toronto English Library, 31 March 1997, <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Deconstruction.html>.

may enter into play when looking at his prose, and those of his close family perhaps marginally, but those of his more distant relatives are hardly relevant. I think it would be safe, then, to include only that which in one way or another directly abuts the perceived meaning at hand. We could thus ignore all that which is deemed irrelevant to the analysis as well as that which is related to the object only indirectly or very weakly. Since the relevance of factors to the analysis may or may not depend on their proximity to the object of analysis, in this case Dylan Thomas, an estimation of their relative importance needs to be carried out nonetheless on a case by case basis.

In spite of the problems related to the concept of "total context", I see no reason why the approach of extracting fragments of meaning from sentences or other linguistic expressions by integrating them into their contexts could not work here. If the approach is applied also to units of communication larger than a sentence, especially literary prose, we may begin to see the interaction and relationship of the text and its surroundings. After all, sentences are the building blocks of a larger entity, a text, as words are the building blocks of a sentence. In other words, the text is the context of the sentence.

In addition, Terry Eagleton notes that what is said and cannot be said are far from alone in constituting the meaning and identity of a given text. Rather, he sees the "ideological necessity" of what is left unsaid as the principle of a text's identity[30]. He claims that the literary text is a production and not merely a reflection of an "ideological solution", and as such, contains gaps and absences which point to the text's ideological identity. The problem here is not only revealing what is left unsaid, and whether that has any bearing on the text's identity or meaning, but on what those silences have to say about the text's identity – and, we might suppose, also that of the author.

It should be borne in mind, however, that Hegel, Freud and others are, through Goldmann, talking about the meaning inherent in every piece of communication. In other words, their point of departure is that human action (whether actual or communicative) is always meaningful, even if it at first seems to lack any meaning. However, as Goldmann himself is keen to point out, psychoanalysis tends to find this meaning – or meanings, in great numbers – by cutting the work of art into small pieces and leaving aside its total structure[31]. This may not always be desirable, especially if the totality of the work constitutes a meaning of its own. This is particularly true of many of Dylan Thomas' prose works, as their totalities often deal with cultural issues themselves. It is therefore advisable always to keep track of the whole even while surveying the details. In other words, one should be careful not to lose sight of the forest while inspecting a single leaf on a tree.

It is worth noting, however, that this conceptualisation is still rather single-minded and simple. The concept of "total context" would seem to deny that there is any evidence of nationality in the text itself. Gerry Smyth explains the theories of the American Marxist critic Fredric Jameson as he looks into the relationship between novel and nation[32]. The short story as a genre is, I would venture to suggest, related closely enough to the novel as to allow Jameson's theories to hold true.

Jameson theorises that the novel is not exclusively either a product of the nation or an allegory thereof. He holds that the "real" meaning of the text, or some kind of historical national truth, is not even particularly useful in understanding the relationship of text and nation. The novel as a simple allegory of history, or an echo of historical reality is too shallow a description. The novel would rather "*contain* the nation within its

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[30] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1976) 89.
[31] Goldmann 104.

form, its structure, its silences”[33]. It is, therefore, paradoxically, at once an effect and an articulation of the nation, of the “national unconscious”.

Jameson’s ideas are in no way contrary to Goldmann’s, rather they supplement each other usefully. On the one hand, the concept of total context is useful in finding reasons for certain textual details in the realm of reality, outside the text. On the other, considering that the nation is contained within the text is a useful reminder of how the text is also a good source for understanding an author’s nationality or culture. This needs to be done while minding Eagleton’s caveat that a text will only reflect its author’s ideology and not any social reality directly[34].

We shall now have to assume that the thesis outlined above is correct: that a text can be integrated into its total context while keeping in mind the nationality contained within the text. The problem here is that Goldmann and others were approaching the issue from the opposite direction: from the standpoint of sociology and not of literature. However, we can rather safely assert that the approach will quite surely work also in this way, since this is what a large part of literary criticism associated with problems of culture are doing in one way or another. We can then, therefore, go on to seek the Welsh cultural aspects and the meaning of Dylan Thomas’ texts by seeing how they fit into the Welsh context. After all, if we were to find convergence between what the text seems to be saying together with how it is being said, and what the text’s context is, we would quite certainly find also the cultural meaning – intended or unintended – embedded in the prose.

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[32] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation – Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997) 20.
[33] Smyth 20.
[34] Eagleton 90.

2.3. Reading Culture in Literature

In view of the issue of nationality, the following question needs to be asked: what about differences *within* the boundaries of a single nationality? Is not talking about "Welshness" or "un-Welshness" too reductive? Are there no divisions to be made *within* "Welshness" as well? My answer to this is: certainly there are differences within nationalities. As Wigginton suggests, overemphasising national difference risks ignoring internal difference[35]. Thus, what I am not attempting here is to define "ideal Welshness" as regards literature, and trying to see if Dylan Thomas' works fit into that definition. My purpose is rather to see if Thomas exhibits *any* attributes which might be deemed part of Welshness. As I am hoping to prove, Thomas was an example of an internal difference within a nationality. As he put it himself, he was almost wholly "un-national"[36].

Homi K. Bhabha, the eminent post-colonial theorist, has looked at this internal difference within a nationality from quite another perspective[37]. In places and times where cultural intermingling and / or collision take place, certain hybrid forms of culture emerge. He calls these "differential identities" and states that they are what maintains the processes of remaking boundaries between cultures and of questioning the singularity and autonomy of signs of cultural and social difference. Differential identities may be of race, gender, or class, but in this case, "difference" cannot be defined as simply One or the Other – here as either Welsh or English. It is rather something else beside either of these, an "in-between". Bhabha goes on to claim that the "in-between" or differential identity finds agency as "a form of the 'future' where the past is not originary, where the

[35] Chris Wigginton, "'Birth and copulation and death': Gothic Modernism and Surrealism in the Poetry of Dylan Thomas," *Dylan Thomas*, eds. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 92.

[36] Dylan Thomas, quoted in R.B. Kershner, jr., *Dylan Thomas: The Poet and His Critics* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1976) 173.

present is not simply transitory". The differential identities are thus, by making the future an open question, in a position to stand *within* and not outside or beyond the reinscription of the future.

This complex and almost metaphysical theory needs to be put in more concrete terms and tied in with the question at hand of Anglo-Welshness. Almost purely by virtue of their standing in the interstitial space of Welshness and Englishness, Anglo-Welsh writers are taking part in the formation and negotiation of the "third space", of the position between Wales and England which is of neither one or the other. They are renewing the past in ways that neither Welshness or Englishness would have allowed and thus interrupting the present. They are engaging in an encounter with a "newness" that neither the past nor the present has seen[38].

What Bhabha – knowingly and purposefully – leaves as an open question is what happens to the differential identity when they have formed and negotiated the interstices of Englishness and Welshness for themselves. Do they form new boundaries to be moved and questioned, or is the whole concept of cultural borderlines and diversity a moot point where no definition is final? He is not content with the concepts of One and Other, because their most basic assumption of otherness denies the Other access to being an "active agent of articulation" in the space of the One[39]. Rather, instead of taking certain cultural or ethnic traits as given and etched in stone because of their status as traditional, cultural difference should be considered from the standpoint of hybridity. This is done with a view to bringing to question the fixity of cultural borders and of considering the fundamental intertextuality of cultures. In other words, Bhabha maintains that cultures are not a fixed set of traditions which a certain group has the sole

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[37] Bhabha 219.
[38] Bhabha 7.
[39] Bhabha 31.

authority of defining, but a changing and mobile environment where cultures constantly influence and affect one another.

Thus, Anglo-Welsh writers such as Dylan Thomas are taking the Other – England to Wales and vice versa – and being an "active agent of articulation" to both the One and the Other as well as to the differential identity at the same time. Of course, this does not account for Anglo-Welsh writers being, in a way, the Other to both Wales and England. Bhabha's emphasis on the fundamental instability and interconnectedness of culture, however, unburdens the analysis of hybrid culture. It presents an alternative to a fixed cultural space, eradicates the problematic of binary opposition, and provides for an ambivalent interpretation of what is said by adding a spatial dimension to the equation: where it is said.

The interrelation between sociology and literature has been established above as a matter of considerable agreement. Nonetheless, Hall is hesitant about the consistency of the relationship between literary works and society. He calls for an investigation into how representative of society a particular text really is, and how its being "true" or "wrong" can in and of itself provide evidence about the society in question[40]. He uses the example of Thomas Hardy's relationship with Wessex to point out the necessity of examining more closely an author's approach to what he is describing, rather than to assume outright historical accuracy.

In addition, it is important to remember that influential authors may sometimes have a hand in forming the nation and not just reflecting it. As was pointed out earlier, it was one of Madame de Staël's maxims that an author should be of his own time and nation. Being "of one's time and nation" necessarily also entails taking part in the formation of that nation's consciousness, if by nothing else then by showing readers in a

nation what that nation is like, from a certain point of view. This could then work to influence the opinions of readers in the direction of change.

Hall also looks at the published diaries of Richard Crossman while considering ways of reading texts from a sociological perspective[41]. Crossman was a Labour party intellectual who held several cabinet posts in Harold Wilson's Labour government in the 1960s[42]. It should be noted here, of course, that since these texts are personal diaries and not completely fictional, their analysis in connection with analysing the fiction of a Welsh author needs to be justified carefully. I would argue that they are relevant here for the following reason.

It could be argued that some elements of fiction may also be present in personal diaries. The author of a diary chooses – wittingly or unwittingly – to include or disregard certain occurences which have taken place, perhaps even remembering things selectively, according to the author's personal preferences. A work of fiction in its most basic form can be seen as an account of an imagined set of facts presented according to the author's personal preferences. Equally, diaries are a personal, subjective representation of the set of facts we tend to call reality. As will be shown later, a fairly large part of Dylan Thomas' short stories are autobiographical in one way or another. In other words, they, too, are personal, subjective representations of the facts of reality as it occurred to Thomas.

Hall is keen to point out that the Crossman diaries tell the truth (sic) about the Labour Party "as it seemed to a gifted, journalistically-minded intellectual of a rather

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[40] Hall 25.
[41] Hall 25.
[42] Philip N. Cronenwett, "Thesis Topics: Ready-Made," November 1996, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/Library_Bulletin/Nov1996/LB-N96-TTRM.html>. The diaries are given in footnote 5 as Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 3 vols. (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1975-1977) and *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, ed. Janet Morgan (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1981).

particular social background". Based on the parallel between diary entries and Thomas' autobiographical short stories established above, the description of whose "truth" diaries or short stories tell might also be applied to Dylan Thomas, at least to a certain extent. He, too, was a gifted, journalistically-minded person with his own particular social background. There is thus no doubt that his short stories can offer insights into the social dimension of life in Swansea in the interwar period.

Whether there is reason to consider the opposite as well, that is, whether Dylan Thomas' writings of Swansea can tell us anything useful about himself is quite another matter. They might afford us some insights into his mindset if we analyse the way in which he deals with subjects of Welshness, perhaps comparing this with a more objective "truth" such as that found in historical accounts of Wales and sociological studies of life in Wales.

On the other hand, Michael Carrithers talks about strategies which achieve a level of involvement from the audience[43]. By inserting aspects of familiarity into a text, the author can establish a relationship where the audience can not only understand certain aspects of text – for example, familiar place names – but also know the understanding is shared. Thus, by using his own life as a familiar aspect, Thomas could be playing with this familiarity in an egotistical way, sharing an understanding of familiar aspects of the stories only with himself and perhaps some very close friends and relatives. He would not be looking for involvement from a Welsh audience were he not affected by that very same audience in some way.

Finally, let us still call on Joan Rockwell to establish the interrelation of society and literature once again[44]. She points out how there is a "consistent relationship" between "the fantasies of fiction" as well as the forms these fantasies take, and the type

of society which produces them. Here the word “fiction” is used in its broad sense to mean any kind of written work which is neither in the genre of poetry (problems of classification notwithstanding), nor in the broad class of nonfiction such as academic writings and dictionaries. Rockwell names various sociological phenomena which have given rise to differing forms of fiction, such as the drama appearing in Greek city-states where they could easily attract an audience, and the rise of the novel with the advent of bourgeois capitalism and philosophical individualism.

The task of analysing attributes of Welshness in the prose of Dylan Thomas is therefore, theoretically, a rather simple one. We first need to define the context in which the texts are situated. This is done in the two following chapters, first from the viewpoint of Dylan Thomas himself, and then by picturing the Welsh cultural and literary contexts. Then we can go on to analyse the prose more closely for hints of Welsh characteristics, whether explicit or implicit, at the same time keeping in mind the close relationship between the text and the context. Nevertheless, we should not in our search for individual meaning forget also the totality of the text and its structure.

3.Dylan Thomas and His Works

This chapter will focus on the two sides of Dylan Thomas: Thomas the person and Dylan the author. There is a reason for choosing this division by names. In his personal life, especially when he had dealings with people he did not know intimately, he often remained aloof and distanced himself from the trivialities of common life by writing and drink. On the other hand, his writings open up a closer view of himself than one might attain by looking at nothing but his day-to-day activities. It is also interesting,

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[43] Carrithers 127.
[44] Joan Rockwell, “A Theory of Literature and Society,” *Sociological Review Monograph* 25 (1977): 38.

even if irrelevant to a factual analysis, that his first name comes from a character in the Welsh classic, *Mabinogion*.

3.1.Thomas the Person

Dylan Marlais Thomas spent the first nineteen years of his life, from 1914 to 1933, in Swansea, an industrial town in South Wales[45]. This period of his life proved to be momentously influential to his later writings. His father, David John Thomas, was schoolmaster in the local grammar school, “a clever, disappointed man”, eluded by greatness in either the poetic or the academic circles[46]. D.J. Thomas had great hopes for his son, and the learned atmosphere of their home gave young Dylan more than a nudge in the literary direction.

The position of the Welsh language is very worthy of notice when considering the person of Dylan Thomas. After all, he was born at a time when a greater percentage than today spoke the Welsh language as their first language, but were also increasingly giving it up in favour of English. Nowadays Welsh is taught in schools, but many Welsh people whose first language is English rather than Welsh, especially those in their teens, consider Welsh more a burden than an asset. Not a few young inhabitants of Wales forget a large portion of the Welsh language as soon as they stop learning it and rarely use it in actual communication. This is not to say, however, that interest in the Welsh language is fading fast – on the contrary. University courses in Welsh are as popular as ever among native Welsh inhabitants and English immigrants alike.

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[45] Kershner Appendix B.

[46] Paul Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, revised ed., (London: Phoenix, 1999) 27.

According to Walford Davies, both D.J. Thomas and Dylan's mother, Florence, could speak Welsh, and the father even taught it sometimes[47]. Nevertheless, the father was anxious to let go of the "ballast" of the Welsh language and refused to pass it on to his son. Thus Dylan never learned the language beyond what anyone would pick up on the streets and in the pubs. This is evident on the one hand in how he on numerous occasions denies any affinity with the Welsh language, and on the other in how he misspelled Welsh place names such as Llangyfellach (pro Llangyfelach) and Pwllddu (pro Pwlldu)[48].

Already as a schoolboy Thomas wrote some notebook poetry which was published in the South Wales Daily Post. He went to work for the newspaper at the age of seventeen, and continued in the journalism profession also later, when he kept moving in and out of Wales, between London, Carmarthenshire, and other places[49]. He finally settled in what he called "the strangest town in Wales", Laugharne (pronounced to rhyme with "yarn"), in a small place called the Boat House. He died on a tour of the United States on 3 November 1953.

Elemental in understanding Dylan Thomas as an Anglo-Welsh writer and, indeed, in understanding what Anglo-Welsh means here, is his ambivalent attitude towards the country and his countrymen and women. In a letter to Pamela Hansford Jones, an early muse, he derides all of Wales and complains how he yearns to "get out of it all," the "narrowness and dirtiness … the eternal ugliness of the Welsh…". He is keen to

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[47] Walford Davies, "The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Welsh Contexts, Narrative and the Language of Modernism", *Dylan Thomas*, eds. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 108.

[48] Dylan Thomas, *The Collected Letters*, ed. Paul Ferris (London: Grafton Books, 1987) 24. Hereinafter *Letters*.

[49] Ackerman 29.

emphasise that he "will get out", because he is "sick, and this bloody country's killing me"[50].

Thomas was certainly not happy with Wales, as is evident from these brief quotations of his. But the dissatisfaction does not stem from the Welsh countryside purely, which he much prefers elsewhere in the quoted letter to the grubby industrial towns, "festering sore[s] on the body of a dead country". Still, he feels ill at ease even with the countryside – perhaps because he grew up as a town boy and only sometimes visited the countryside. His profound exasperation with Wales is perhaps more to do with the – perhaps adolescent – need for more space around him than simply disliking the country as such. It seems he could scarcely find anything new to arouse his interest in the undeniably small and narrow circles of Wales.

The smallness and narrowness was apparent, for example, in how Nonconformity, the preponderant religious persuasion of Wales, tried to keep a watchful eye and a restrictive hand over Welsh life. "The drink" was considered a vice, and those who wanted to partake in it, needed to do so in secret[51]. It would seem, however, that a great many did actually drink profusely, and even if they resented the Nonconformist stranglehold, their conscience was troubled by their apparent weakness in resisting the temptations of alcohol.

Because the Nonconformist restriction on the lively life he wanted to lead persisted, Thomas began finding more and more things wrong with Wales. In a letter, Thomas quotes a friend of his describing the country as "Wales my country, Wales my cow", agreeing to this description wholeheartedly[52]. Furthermore, he wrote in a letter regarding a proposed journal of Anglo-Welsh writing, something of a pet project of his,

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[50] *Letters* 30. Emphasis by Thomas.
[51] Ackerman 32.
[52] *Letters* 30.

how he despised the “warped apathy of his countrymen”[53]. The journal was to be called *Prose & Verse*, and it never got off the ground. It was this very apathy that he considers to have sabotaged the project, subsequently making him so unhappy, rather than any physical feature of the country itself. Then again, a country as an entity exists not only as the geography, meteorology, architecture or even demographics of a given region, but also as a sum of its inhabitants, and more.

Thomas has stated the purpose of his poetry in clear yet eloquent terms: he is recording his journey from darkness into light[54]. What are the darkness he is fleeing from and the light he is striving for? From the point of view of his detestation of Wales and the Welsh, this is a very interesting comment. Moynihan describes Thomas’ journey as an endeavour to find “beauty, love, and purpose”, all of which are lacking in Thomas’ picture of Wales, especially so in his early view of the 1930s.

Let us look more closely at why Thomas sees no “beauty, love, and purpose” in Wales. As I hope to have shown with the above quotes from Thomas’ letters, he saw none of that in the ugliness of Wales and the Welsh. Love for Thomas can be likened to beauty: what he thought ugly, he could not love. Purpose, for its part, he found in the realm of poetry, which need not include – or exclude Wales. But this is only half the picture: he also found moments of beauty in Wales, especially in the Boat House, Laugharne, where he wrote some of his most successful nature-inspired poetry, and in the childhood and adolescent memories of Swansea, no matter how ugly the town may have seemed.

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[53] *Letters* 91.
[54] William T. Moynihan, *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966) 157.

3.2.Dylan the Poet

During Thomas' youth, Swansea was – but is not anymore to as great an extent – an "ugly, lovely town" of industry and fishing, hemmed in between the country on the one side and the sea on the other[55]. Thomas adored the various locations around his home on Cwmdonkin Drive and incorporated them into his stories as locations for the "Young Dylan" to live in. They were places to enjoy the discoveries of childhood and to be a "young dog", as in his collection of short stories entitled *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940). His early stories, written between 1934 and 1939, are primarily concerned with internal thoughts and observations of the darker side of human emotion, however, and not with autobiography like the distinct and very different *Portrait* stories.

These early stories are in many ways similar to his poetry of this time, both in theme and in technique, which will be looked at later in more detail[56]. Like Thomas' early poems, they often call on the religious in one way or the other – be it in the form of Biblical mythology as in "The Tree", or as the druidic, mystical elements of "The Burning Baby". Also, the themes are often treated in a rather surrealist manner, sometimes to the point of being fantastic in the sense of not just peering into but taking a panoramic snapshot of the supernatural. The style of writing is very poetic and as such reminiscent of his early poems. Ackerman notes how Thomas had at this point no sense of the dividing line between prose and poetry. This is seen when one considers that the stories are as introspective and subjective as any of his poetry, and lack a true dramatic form. Ackerman describes Thomas' early prose as "a poet's prose – eloquent, sensuous, strongly rhythmic, and rich in metaphor"[57].

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[55] Dylan Thomas, quoted in Ackerman 24.
[56] Ackerman 91.
[57] Ackerman 90.

Worth noting is how there is a clear affinity in Welsh criticism and language between music and poetry. The Welsh-language phrase *cerdd dafod* stands for poetry and *cerdd dant* for music, but both are *cerdd*, song[58]. Although this poetic, and musical, element can be felt in all of his later prose writings as well, it is especially vivid in these early stories. These musical and poetic elements of Thomas' prose will be considered later, but the point is that his prose writings exhibit an unusually high level of poetic qualities. Worth noting, however, is how no direct influence of Welsh poetry can be traced – at least in his prose. In a letter dated in 1934, he does, strangely enough, admit to one of his poems, "I dreamed my genesis", being "more or less based on" the rhythms of Welsh poetry. This is interesting especially in the light of his later ardent denials of being influenced by Welsh poetry.

Thomas' following stories, published as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, see him departing from the surreal and religious elements in favour of more personal and down-to-earth themes. Many critics have noted the connection between this, Dylan Thomas' collection of adolescent self-portraits, and James Joyce's similarly-named *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The relation between Thomas' *Young Dog* and Joyce's *Young Man* is not to be overemphasised, however. The similarity is largely confined to the name and very few stylistic connections can be made. If any connection between *Young Dog* and Joyce exists, it is to *Dubliners*, a sort of autobiography in its own way. They are both "shaped experiences" of each author's life[59]. But even this would be too stretched a connection, as Thomas claims not to have read a word of Joyce by the time of writing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*. The title, he thought, was

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[58] Ackerman 8.

[59] Kenneth Seib, "*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog:* Dylan's *Dubliners*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 24 (1978): 241.

simply “flippant”, and retained it as the title of the collection only for “moneymaking reasons”[60].

During and after the writing of *Portrait*, around his twenty-fourth birthday, he left introspection for observing “unjudging[ly]” other people’s lives[61]. In “Just Like Little Dogs”, we find young Dylan huddled together with two young men slightly older than him under the arch of a railway bridge. The men go on to relate their experiences with two young women, keeping a less than watchful eye on the world outside the shelter of the bridge arch. All this time young Dylan, as the narrator of the story, is estimating his new companions together with the reader. His writing is here at times somewhat immature and it lacks the depth found in some other stories in *Portrait*. Nonetheless, the story and the writing are very suggestive of the men’s lives. At times the narrator is only repeating what the two men have said, but their experiences can well be seen to unfold, and the experience of the reader can be compared to a flea riding on the “young dog’s” back.

In fact, many of Dylan Thomas’ short stories relate incidents apparently of his own life. Thus the word “semi-autobiographical” is appropriate here. This aids in placing the stories in context, but only if we can sufficiently establish to what extent the stories are, in fact, autobiographical and not fiction. Indeed, the connection between the Dylan Thomas in the stories and the real Dylan Thomas is an interesting point of speculation, because we cannot establish with absolute certainty that the fictional Dylan is unambiguously also the real Dylan. I would suggest, nonetheless, that the connection is closer than just the name.

Evidence of this is twofold: on the one hand, the stories present characters and places which were known to the real Dylan, such as Uncle Jim and Aunt Annie in “The

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[60] Ackerman 105.

Peaches". These connections have been established by biographers such as Paul Ferris as well as by Thomas himself. Thomas wrote in late 1939 to a friend of his that the magazine *Life & Letters* had published a story of his, "The Fight", saying that the story is "about me and Dan", Dan being a particular childhood friend of Dylan Thomas[62].

The other piece of evidence is how Thomas himself talked about a "provincial autobiography" on numerous occasions. This latter statement requires some further comment, however, because even this does not prove that the fictional Dylan is exactly the real Dylan. Rather than suggest this, I would venture to add the word "ironic" or "self-ironic" to Thomas' description of the stories, thus making them an "ironic provincial autobiography".

In the stories about Dylan's (whichever we take him to be) childhood, this irony is manifest in how the narrator-Dylan notices certain things in his surroundings and disregards others. For example, in "A Visit to Grandpa's", the young narrator does little more than relate like a boy who does not understand what is happening the events of the search for grandpa who has walked off to be buried. In the stories where he is older, such as "Old Garbo", a delightful story of yet another night out on the tiles, he ironises his own – and the Welsh – inclination to drink: "two small men, Mr Farr and his twin brother, led me on an ice-rink to the door … A wall slumped over and knocked off my trilby"[63]. The people he drinks with drink even more than he does and at one point disparage the woman who was earlier the centre of their merrymaking. This excessive use of irony leads me to believe that a story such as this never took place exactly as it is related, but that Thomas combined certain recollections of his years in and around Swansea to form the stories in the "provincial autobiography" which forms such a large

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[61] Ackerman 104.
[62] *Letters* 434.
[63] *Stories* 220.

part of his collected works, beginning with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* and finally ending, though prematurely, in *Under Milk Wood*.

Observation and description of Welsh small-town life proved to be a lasting feature of Thomas' prose. The element of observation was continued in his unfinished novel *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, although the story mostly takes place in London. This was coupled with a partial, but never total move to ironising his longing for a sort of ideal of childhood and adolescence. Later stories, such as "Quite Early One Morning", returned to and enhanced the earlier observations made of the Welsh people. "Quite Early One Morning" is, in fact, rather like an early version of what proved to be his last work: the "play for voices", *Under Milk Wood*. There the observations he makes of the imagined, but distinctly coastal-Welsh life of Llareggub (or Llaregyb, as it was politically corrected by sensitive editors at J.M. Dent to remove the implication of reversed "bugger all") seem to bring together a lot of what he had done previously in his other prose works.

Ackerman makes careful note of three very important features in Dylan Thomas' poetry, which apply to his prose as well, since it is in many places very much like the poetry. These are his affinity, if uncertain, with Wales, the Welsh language, other Welsh writers, and the Welsh bardic tradition[64]. He seems to be at least aware of, as well as informed and influenced by the Welsh environment where a belief in the "more primitive, mystical, and romantic conception of the poet" was prevalent[65]. His outward temperament was that of a self-acknowledged Welsh bard (which is what many thought he actually was): a person endowed with spiritual as well as poetic abilities. The role he

[64] Ackerman 3.
[65] Ackerman 5.

seems to have taken upon himself was that of a mediator between the profane and the spiritual planes, or "between man and God"[66].

A problem with attributing to Dylan Thomas an influence from, an interest in, or an understanding of Welsh bardic poetry is his surprisingly unambiguous statement in a private letter: "I'm not influenced by Welsh bardic poetry. I can't read Welsh"[67]. Even if the dictum of D.H. Lawrence's mentioned earlier of trusting the teller rather than the tale is not taken absolutely literally, Thomas has himself, in fact, shown that the Welsh literary environment is not without its influence on him. This is so for two reasons, even though it is true that he neither spoke, read or wrote Welsh. First, there is simply so much more to Welsh literature than medieval bardic poetry in Welsh. Second, there are undeniable elements of Welsh poetry in his writings, which will be looked at later.

On the one hand, we have "Welsh literature proper" and Anglo-Welsh literature written in English[68]. It is not clear from where he derives the similarity of his prose and verse to the older Welsh writing, although the powerful oratory of the Welsh pulpit may have had some effect – on this, see below for the part the Nonconformists played and play in Welsh religious life. It seems he had some knowledge of the old Welsh legends such as the *Mabinogion*, as he used ideas similar to them in his poetry and prose[69].

Influences from Anglo-Welsh writers are easier to trace, as he was personally acquainted with a number of them. Another Swansea writer, Vernon Watkins, he befriended just before leaving for London in 1923, and they remained friends until Thomas' death. Watkins even wrote the introduction to the American edition of *Adventures in the Skin Trade*[70]. Caradoc Evans (1878 – 1945), said to be the first of the

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[66] Ackerman 4.
[67] *Letters* 855.
[68] Kershner 177.
[69] Ackerman 94 – 95.
[70] Kershner 9.

modern Anglo-Welsh writers, if not the first ever, was a great influence to Thomas. His "bitter, satirical novels", such as his 1915 debut, "My People", went against the grain of what Welsh writers were doing and what the Welsh approved of at the time.This is what Thomas did later on in his own way as well[71].

Not all critics applaud Thomas for his Welsh critique, however. David Holbrook, for instance, discredits Thomas as not much more than a pretentious egoist who would seem to do little more than take Wales as his stage and exploit it towards his own, egotistical ends. The Wales that is "truly suffering", be it Swansea suburbia or the countryside bedecked with coaltips and sheep, escapes him, Holbrook asserts with vigour[72].

When one looks at Thomas' short stories, this lack of sensitivity for the actual, suffering Wales is actually quite true in the sense that the stories go little beyond presenting some of the decrepit parts of Wales, urban and rural. Instead, their focus is on the individual, mostly an autobiographical child or the closest relatives. Other facts, human, geographical or economic, receive little more than a mention or serve as little more than mere backdrops or stage props.

This lack of interest in the "truly suffering" Wales of Holbrook, presenting "toy-town Wales" and not true Wales[73], is rooted in Thomas' preference for working and thinking on the level of either the individual or the metaphysical. He never was interested in the world of politics, economics and sociology beyond feeling appalled at the state of the world and longing for a revolution to set things right – without much being done on his part. The revolution he longed for was not a communist one, but one

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[71] Kershner 181.
[72] Holbrook 118.
[73] Holbrook 118.

"above communism" by virtue of holding the individual above all else[74]. From this one could indeed infer that for Thomas, the individual comes first and what other individual could be closer to home than the poet himself – hence the egotistical view. But whether this egotism justifies Holbrook's assault is a question unto itself.

Thomas himself never understood why "the Welsh-ness" of his poetry was so often being mentioned in reviews and criticisms – he never understood "this racial talk"[75]. His lack of understanding may be based on not acknowledging the fact that critics and reviewers have always been very keen on simple categorisations. Thus, enclosing an author in, say, the "Welsh" box frees the critic from giving any further thought to the more profound underpinnings of someone's "Welsh-ness". This is all bound to confuse an unnationalistic author like Dylan Thomas.

Thomas was technically quite close to the Welsh poets of the past in that they also used sound and rhythm to create a great part of the aesthetic effect of poetry and prose-poetry. His prose, especially in the early stories is very disciplined in its composition and at times creates a poetry-like pattern of sounds. This is not to say, however, that he was copying any of the early – or later – Welsh poets, rather that the general techniques he uses are similar to theirs.

Furthermore, Gwyn Jones believes Thomas is firmly Welsh not only in the "chime of consonants and pealing vowels", but also the "relentless discipline" he shows in processing his ideas into poetry and prose[76]. His method of writing poetry and, most probably, also prose was methodical and meticulous. This is shown in how in writing his poems, Thomas went through a great number of revisions of image and wording to suit his taste. To this end, he would use numerous worksheets and scrawl lists of words in the

[74] *Letters* 56.
[75] *Letters* 301.
[76] Gwyn Jones, "Welsh Dylan," *Adelphi* 30.2 (Spring 1954) 115.

margins of his worksheets as aids to his thinking. The word lists were mostly based on either their rhyme or on the images they evoked[77]. A few of the original worksheets were, at one point, available to public perusal at the Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea. Also, he used to read aloud variations on a passage to find one that exactly suited his preferences, so that the sound of the line would be exactly right. His prose, however, poses another problem, because there is evidence of his using such a scrupulous working method only with his early stories up to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*.

The early stories were composed in a way similar to all his poetry, using large worksheets to follow the structure of the whole and to choose between alternative phrases. This would seem to suggest that Thomas considered, especially around that time, his prose and poetry to be more or less two sides of the same coin. Although he abandoned this labourious reworking on multitudes of worksheets in later narratives, the later stories did engage the poet's imagination in much the same way as poetry[78]. He employed similar techniques, such as altering common phrases slightly to pique the reader's interest, and to modify the image to his liking.

Moynihan reasserts the traditional view of Thomas being planted in the Welsh bardic tradition. However, he not only acknowledges that for Thomas, as in traditional Welsh poetry, rhythm, metre and sound are at least as important as the thoughts conveyed by the words, they may often be even more important[79]. Stewart Crehan claims that Thomas' poetic language undermines the apparent fixity of the ideal (in the Platonic sense of the word) image and recognises how, even if words as sounds are extremely short-lived, if they die as sounds, then equally they live as sounds[80]. What this

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[77] Ackerman 154.
[78] Kershner 15.
[79] Moynihan 121.
[80] Stewart Crehan, "'The Lips of Time'" *Dylan Thomas*, eds. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 57.

seems to suggest is that the idea is less fixed than the sound of words, thus making sound the primary object of interest to a poet, especially Welsh, especially Dylan Thomas.

The claim that Thomas' prose exhibits sound structures similar to his poetry needs to be clarified and justified somewhat. This is mostly true for his early works prior to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, but it is not wholly untrue for the later works. Throughout his life, he seems to have considered the prose and the poetry to come from the same source, making no clear distinction between them[81]. The sounds that words make are produced as carefully and as methodically in prose as in poetry to achieve a certain effect, as I hope to have shown above.

Let us compare, as way of example, a poem and a story from the same era. They are "On no work of words" and "A Prospect of the Sea", both of which were first published in 1937[82]. They both provide ample opportunity for analysing sound structures. The two first stanzas of "On no work of words" run thus:

> On no work of words now for three lean months in the bloody
> Belly of the rich year and the big purse of my body
> I bitterly take to task my poverty and craft:
>
> To take to give is all, return what is hungrily given
> Puffing the pounds of manna up through the dew to heaven,
> The lovely gift of the gab bangs back on a blind shaft.[83]

The point in these two stanzas is not the obvious alliteration of "work" and "words", of "big purse of my body". It is rather what is embedded in longer sequences, in the whole of one stanza as well as that stanza's relation to the poem as a whole. The first stanza sets the speed and rhythm: heavy and with a lot of primary stresses. The stresses most often coincide with words which share similar sounds. This is especially

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[81] Introduction by Leslie Norris in Dylan Thomas, *Collected Stories*, ed. Walford Davies (London: Phoenix, 2000) ix. *Collected Stories* will be referred to hereinafter as *Stories*.
[82] *Stories* 369.
[83] Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934 – 1953*, eds. Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (London: Phoenix, 2000) 78.

apparent in the last line of both stanzas: there is a rise in stress to "take to task" and "gift of the gab", both of which are cases of initial rhyme, although admittedly quite simple and prosaic ones.

It should be noted that there is no kind of recognisable Welsh rhythmic pattern here. Classic Welsh verse – in Welsh and in translation – predominantly relies on its twenty-four slightly varying official verse forms, the *cynghanedd*[84]. The pattern here is looser, though none the less complicated. Also, some of the rhymes are only near-rhymes – something which would be unpardonable to a bard taking part in the *gorsedd* of bards at the national *eisteddfod*.

"A Prospect of the Sea" shows signs of another kind of rhythm and sound, but the music is still there. Let us consider "The afternoon was dying … down the tide of the sun on to the grey and chanting shore where the birds from Noah's ark glide by with bushes in their mouths and tomorrow and tomorrow tower over the cracked sand-castles"[85]. The ellipsis omits some other descriptions of the afternoon's dying interlaced with semicolons. From "down the tide" to "glide by", the rhythm is high, on the move and almost unstoppable. The move is only briefly released by "bushes in their mouths". The final release – or downfall – comes with "cracked sand-castles" and the full stop. Additionally, the sound of the words must have influenced Thomas in writing "tomorrow and tomorrow tower over…", because reduplicating the word "tomorrow" would seem to be without meaning if we only look for imagery inherent in the semantics of these words, and not the sounds.

It is hard to say what these rhythms and sounds are meant to represent, if it is possible at all. However, this is not what I am trying to prove here. My point is rather to show that Thomas' use of sound and rhythm in both prose and poetry is a departure from

both Welsh and English literary tradition. He departs from the English in that sound is a relevant part of the prose, and from the Welsh in that the sounds and rhythms are not rigorously regulated, and that the language is not Welsh.

His Welsh background provided a keen counterpoint to the outward influences he picked up in London and elsewhere outside Wales in more ways than this: he approached both the surrealist school of thought as well as psychoanalysis. It must be noted carefully, however, that Thomas' connection to either surrealism or psychoanalysis was not that of a sworn practitioner, or even that of someone who has taken a mild interest in the style. In answer to an American student's question regarding the seemingly surrealist moments in his poetry, he sketches the surrealist artistic sentiment. The surrealists advocated going to the sea of the subconscious to dig up words and images which had no rational relationship, and their aim was to create something more real than what could be conceived by rational means. After this, he simply states that he disagrees with the surrealist credo profoundly. According to his view, the images which go into the making of a poem – or, as has been noted, a work of prose – may well come from whatever part of the mind, be it conscious, unconscious, or subconscious, but "before they reach paper, they must go through ... the intellect"[86]. There may be a certain similarity between surrealism and Welsh poetry in what Ackerman calls "a paradoxical conception of existence", and this may be where some of the confusion as to Thomas' alleged surrealism stems from[87].

In conclusion, it would seem that the elements of surrealism in his work were more of an adjoining quality or a supporting feature than the overriding aim. He is using surrealism as a method of producing images rather than adopting surrealism as the total

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[84] Gwyn Williams, *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953).
[85] *Stories* 92 – 93.
[86] Dylan Thomas, quoted in FitzGibbon 372.

objective of writing[88]. All the time he retains firm control over which images are allowed to come through and how they interact.

4.Wales and the Welsh or Cymru a'r Cymry?

One of the key features to understand about Wales is the fact that it is not England. Nor can it be said with any stretch of the imagination that the Welsh national identity is that of England. However, coming to terms with what such concepts as Wales, Welsh national identity and Welshness are is problematic. The following chapter will attempt to elaborate on what the words "Wales" and "Welsh" entail, both in a literary context and in a wider sense.

4.1.Englandandwales (sic!)

The title of this subchapter is a take on the curious British meteorological (though not exclusively meteorological) convention of grouping together England and Wales in a nearly indivisible pair. Thus, when a similar condition affects or will affect both Wales and England, weather forecasts are pronounced so that there will be, for example, heavy rainfall in "Englandandwales". The disregard for Wales that this convention promotes is aggravated by the fact that no matter which part of Britain the rain will hit first, the pronunciation is always "Englandandwales". It is never "Walesandengland".

Weather reporters notwithstanding, although Wales was conquered between 1282 and 1284 by Edward I and joined to England through the Acts of Union of 1536 – 1543 which denied the Welsh language official status, the country and its inhabitants have remained distinct from England all through the centuries[89]. It is well worth noting, however, that this has not been the case politically until very recently. Unlike Scotland,

[87] Ackerman 6.
[88] Kershner 147.

the legal system of Wales was unified with that of England by the Acts of Union, making Wales virtually a part of England like any other. Indeed, even now the introduction of the Welsh National Assembly in Cardiff has changed little, as the Assembly has little real political clout – all major decisions regarding Wales are still taken in Whitehall.

Nevertheless, as Jones is careful to emphasise, lack of political independence has not diminished a conception of Welsh nationhood to any great extent[90]. Welsh society has remained manifestly dissimilar to its English counterpart. A sense of being Welsh on the part of those who live in Wales, though combined with other allegiances to global movements such as religion or feminism, is largely deemed sufficient to claim Welshness over Britishness, and even more so over Englishness.

Some sort of definition of what "nation" entails for an analysis of cultural literature and Welsh literature particularly is needed at this stage. Gerry Smyth discusses nationhood in his introduction to the fiction of Ireland, another Celtic culture still present in the British Isles[91]. He describes as key to understanding the concept of nation the grasping of the nation being "a model of a geographical community a) exercising power b) by dint of its organic links with the land", as well as "a) a form of social organisation, b) a form of political order, and c) a narrative of historical identity".

He also usefully describes cultural nationalism (in emerging nations particularly) as the paradox of "anticipating the virtual nation, while remaining answerable to the historically postponed [past-oriented] nation"[92]. Cultural nationalism holds that cultural artefacts, produced by the individuals of a nation will be related to that nation's social,

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[89] Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Modern Wales: A Concise History c. 1285 – 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 3.
[90] Jones 304.
[91] Smyth 11.
[92] Smyth 15.

political and historical formations. Thus we would find in English, French or German culture cultural artefacts with traits peculiar to England, France or Germany.

The 19th century saw a mostly past-oriented view of cultural nationalism, and history was very much in vogue, regardless of the political situation in a given territory. What came to distinguish modern nation-states from those territories and peoples who perhaps were a nation of some sort, but remained so without making the leap to statehood, was the former moving to future-oriented political nationalism. This means that nationalism is oriented towards the future, towards forming a nation-state. There was already in the 19th century, and still is a political movement in Wales which emphasises this kind of future-oriented political nationalism, formed as Plaid Cymru (The Party of Wales) in 1925. However, this movement has been rather weak in comparison with the more succesful movements of political nationalism – those which have achieved statehood.

Interestingly, and somewhat ironically, an important aspect of Welshness commented upon by a number of writers is the dualism inherent in the country. Katie Gramich quotes an illustrative study by the sociologist Denis Bolsom[93]. Bolsom has divided Wales into three areas according to the perception of identity: “British Wales”, “Welsh Wales” and “Y Fro Gymraeg”, that is, Welsh-speaking Wales. This tripartite division would seem to imply that there are three wildly differing types of Wales with invisible sociological and linguistic chasms running between each of these factions, whether perceived or real. Indeed, Dylan Thomas’ namesake and contender for the title of most influential Welsh author of the twentieth century, R.S. Thomas has gone so far as to dismiss the English language as unfitting for Wales[94]. According to him, the “only truly Welsh identity” is that of the Welsh-speaker, whether their Welsh is native or

learned. It is interesting to note, however, that R.S. Thomas himself is English-speaking and knows Welsh only as a second language. In addition, the greater part of his own poetry and prose is in English.

This brings up another notable feature where Wales differs from the rest of Britain: the position of the Welsh language. Up to the early nineteenth century, the great majority of the population spoke Welsh as their first, often only language, but throughout the latter stages of industrialisation, the language was beginning to be marginalised. Church ministers and education officials increasingly saw fluency in English as essential, a "hallmark of respectability"[95]. At the same time, the proportion of Welsh speakers started to diminish, and by the end of the nineteenth century, a little over half the population spoke Welsh[96]. This might be one of the reasons behind D.J. Thomas, Dylan's father, refusing to teach his son Welsh. Indeed, it seems that D.J. had great ambitions for his son, hoping that Dylan would embark on an illustrious academic career in one of the more prestigious English universities, and the Welsh language would in his view have proved too great a burden on this path[97].

The twentieth century saw the position of Wales and the Welsh language within the United Kingdom being increasingly problematised. The number of Welsh speakers had declined throughout the century, but Plaid Cymru, Urdd Gobaith Cymru (The Welsh League of Youth) and others began efforts after the First World War to change this. These efforts began to bear fruit in the 1960s and 1970s with the added force of the Cymdeithias Yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society), founded in 1962. Bilingual policies were instituted, and in 1967, the Welsh Language Act gave Welsh an

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[93] Gramich 97.
[94] Quoted in Gramich 100.
[95] Jones 212.
[96] Jones 211.
[97] Ferris 27.

equal official footing with English[98]. One result of this is the Welsh-language TV channel S4C, partly funded by the BBC, which was founded in 1982.

At the forefront of the movement to promote the use and legal status of the Welsh language were nationally-minded Welsh political and literary activists who promoted Welsh identity and clearly demarcated it from the English and British identities. Although political results were not apparent until later, this gave a boost to Welsh identity. The aims of Urdd Gobaith Cymru were finally beginning to materialise, at least to some extent: "...to create an undefiled Welsh Wales – not for its own sake, but in order that Wales can play its part.... It must cherish ... its literature, its tradition, its religion and its language"[99]. Whether Welsh Wales was actually being achieved is, of course, open to question in the light of the study by Bolsom referred to above.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Welsh Wales and Y Fro Gymraeg are in the main not as prevalent today as they are in the writings of R.S. Thomas and Urdd Gobaith Cymru. Indeed, Bolsom's different designations of Welshness – British Wales, Welsh Wales and Y Fro Gymraeg – are all still particularly Welsh. Even those inhabiting the regions closest to England and without any knowledge of the Welsh language beyond a few simple phrases will tend to identify themselves as Welsh instead of British. To call any Welsh person English is a capital social offence, comparable to a former *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry for Wales: "See England"[100].

It is worth emphasising yet again that Wales is a country colonised by its neighbour, England. This needs to be kept firmly in mind while exploring the Welsh identity, because it has had and continues to have drastic effects on the Welsh people – and country. But although the colonisation process has been going on for centuries and

[98] Jones 268.
[99] Jones 301.
[100] Gramich 109.

is still continuing in the form of increased in-migration, the Welsh have retained an identity distinct from the English. No doubt there are very notable differences of identity within England as well, as in any country that size – South England and North England, Essex and West Country, to name but a few dichotomies. Nonetheless the distinction between England and Wales is far more than rhetorical – it is profoundly both cultural and political.

4.2.Wales and colonialism

What does it mean when we say that Wales has been colonised by England? The Merriam-Webster online dictionary offers two useful definitions of the verb “to colonise”: “1a: to establish a colony” and “3: to infiltrate with usually subversive militants for propaganda and strategy reasons”[101]. The first definition requires a further definition of the word “colony”: “1 a: a body of people living in a new territory but retaining ties with the parent state” and “b : the territory inhabited by such a body”[102]. Note how the latter two definitions fail to acknowledge that there may already be a body of people living in the colonised territory. In this case the action may be viewed as something more close to definition 3 of the verb, or as “colonialism”: “3 a: control by one power over a dependent area or people” or “b: a policy advocating or based on such control”[103].

The word “dependent” is key here, and very pertinent to our understanding of Wales as a colony of England, because Wales has been and is in a dependent position within Britain. This is due on one hand to Wales’ difficult, mountainous geography and the problems this creates in relation to attaining self-sufficiency. On the other hand,

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[101] Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, hereinafter Webster, <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=colonize>.
[102] Webster <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=colony>.
[103] Webster <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=colonialism>.

Wales' failure to reach independence of England is partly due to a political history seven centuries long of subversion. Some examples of colonialism on the part of England towards Wales include the violent suppression of the Owain Glyndwr uprising in the years 1400 –1416, the hanging of 5,000 people in Wales by Bishop Rowland Lee between 1524 and 1534 to put down drawn-out disorder, and food being exported from famine-stricken Wales before and after the turn of the 19th century, leading to rioting and troops being sent in[104]. Finally, the Education Act of 1870 – proposed by a Commission of Enquiry composed of three Englishmen who spoke only English – brought general education to all of Wales, but also greatly diminished the prominence of the Welsh language by forbidding its use in the classroom[105]. The prohibition on the use of the Welsh language in classrooms was revoked in stages, though, starting with the introduction of Welsh as a subject in 1888.

The Act of 1870 had a many-sided impact on Wales. The most direct effect was the start of a slow decline in the proportion of Welsh speakers in Wales[106]. Although the use of census data is highly problematical, figures show that in 1891, 54 per cent of the population could still speak Welsh. This fell to just under 50 per cent in 1901, and the decline continued after 1921, both in relative and in absolute terms. By 1981 only half a million people could speak Welsh, 19 per cent of the Welsh population. These figures turned around for the first time in the 2001 census, showing that a percentage of 23.5 % in the whole of Wales could at least speak Welsh[107].

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[104] Brian Daugherty, "Welsh History", Home page, <http://bdaugherty.tripod.com/cymru/history.html>.

[105] Taigh Arainn Celtic Heritage Trust, "The Welsh Language – A Brief History", <http://www.dalriada.co.uk/Taighindex/Gaelic_Learners/wales/wales.htm>.

[106] All figures from Germán Basterra, *The Sociolinguistics of Iron and Coal – Capitalist Industrialization and Language Reproduction in the Basque Country and Wales (1850-1920)*, diss., 1996, <http://archiv.ub.uni-marburg.de/diss/z1999/0113> 182.

[107] "Knowledge of Welsh, 2001 – people aged 3 and over", National Statistics Online, <http://tables.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/tables/eng/TableViewer/Wdsview/dispviewp.asp?ReportId=3576&area=noload&tim=1051434012020>.

4.3.Religion in Wales

A very notable feature of Welsh culture in the first half of the 20th century, and therefore also in the life of Dylan Thomas is the role religion plays in the everyday lives of all Welsh people. Like the Anglican Church in England, the Nonconformist chapel was a place frequented by the Welsh in great numbers. That number fell throughout the 20th century, and by the end of that century less than one in ten Welsh inhabitants attended a place of worship regularly[108].

Welsh Nonconformity thus needs to be explained a little further to understand fully the meaning religion has in relation to Welsh life. It is in fact a group of various denominations such as Methodism and Baptism. What they hold in common is a detachment from and – in the early days of Nonconformity – resentment received from and directed at both the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church. An Anglican Church of Wales with its own archbishop persisted until the end of the First World War, when it was finally disestablished. Brown claims that anti-Anglican nationalism was a major driving force of Nonconformity in, but fails to show any evidence for this[109]. Welsh congregations were also usually quite independent in all the various nonconformist denominations. They were often expected to see to the upkeep of their chapel and minister on their own – a great burden in poorer parts of the country – although the truth was not necessarily this bleak.

Nonconformism was the religious persuasion of choice for many of the new middle class in the 19th century. Brown explains this by saying that the wealthy shunned many of the civil and legal handicaps still imposed on them by laws against

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[108] John Davies, "Church and Chapel", part of "Wales, Building a Nation – The Roots of Devolution," British Broadcasting Company, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/davies/chapter14/index2.shtml>.

[109] Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales 1800 – 1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988) 2.

Nonconformity, and the poor were not attracted by a system where each congregation was responsible for its own chapel and minister[110]. Nonetheless, Nonconformists attracted a great attendance for their chapels and churches in both England and Wales. The Religious Census of 1851 – the only one of its kind in Britain – showed not only that far less people attended church services than was expected, but also that half that attendance was in Nonconformist chapels, especially those in Wales, where the middle class was not as numerous as the working class. This problematises the information contained in official documents such as the Religious Census that Nonconformity was a middle-class thing. The information is countered by oral evidence which shows that Nonconformity was actually quite influential on and popular with the working class[111]. This is especially true of Wales, where attendance and active membership were considerably higher than in England. Indeed, it was claimed that Nonconformist ministers in South Wales had more influence than any living man[112].

The Thomases were actually not as religious as other people in Wales were at the time. His father was agnostic, and they did not go to chapel too often, unless on the insistence of Thomas' paternal grandmother[113]. Nonetheless, Thomas himself was attracted to the Bible and its stories from a young age, and its influence on him is unmistakable. He was also both the grandson and the nephew of a Welsh preacher, and as such, susceptible to the charms of the Welsh pulpit. Preachers were – and still are, among the chapel-going few – considered men of powerful oratory, men of "eloquence, filled with the rapture of words"[114].

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[110] Brown 7.
[111] Brown 2.
[112] Brown 201.
[113] Ferris 28.
[114] Cecil Price, untitled essay in *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet – A Collection of Biographical and Critical Essays*, ed. E.W. Tedlock (London: William Heinemann, 1960) 19.

The writer of the foregoing, Cecil Price, describes Thomas' relation to his grandfather and religious matters as an ambiguous and difficult affair: the puritanical outlook was a code Thomas both "mocked and feared", it was what he "revolted against and what he loved". He may thus, like so many of his contemporary compatriots have been estranged from the Chapel and religion where spiritual matters are concerned, but still had a bond of affection to its tradition and power. Furthermore, it is not difficult to imagine where the power in Dylan Thomas' voice and his mastery of speech came from: his preacher grandfather. One need only hear him reciting one of his poems and be convinced that this is not just a poet reciting his poetry, this is as musical a Welsh *hwyl* preacher as any[115]. We are thus provided with a background against which we can see how his writing, though religious only by a stretch, is influenced by the religious context of Wales.

4.4.Wales as a home to Thomas

What has not up till now been recognised here is the nature of Dylan Thomas' home town of Swansea. By nature is not meant the environment, of which little can be said in connection with this industrial seaside town. However, as Price so keenly illustrates, there is a distinction between the rest of Wales and Swansea which is curiously Anglo-Welsh[116]. First of all, the town lies on the borderland of English and Welsh-speaking South Wales. In Thomas' time, Swansea was the westernmost town of any considerable size in the county of Glamorgan, bordering on the old, rural Welsh county of Carmarthen. Wigginton points to the nature of Swansea in the 1920s as a town with a mainly English-speaking population surrounded to the North and the West by the

[115] On *hwyl*, see below. To listen to Dylan Thomas reading some of his poetry, visit http://www.dylanthomas.com/.

[116] Price 21.

"Welsh-speaking hinterland" which was also where a large part of Thomas' relatives still lived[117].

Swansea does also have a Welsh name, Abertawe, meaning "mouth of the river Tawe". However, this does not imply any more Welshness than does the fact that, say, the Finnish inland city of Tampere also has a name in Swedish imply Swedishness on the part of Tampere. Price notes that Swansea is not a true Welsh industrial town like the smaller Llanelli, a short way west of Swansea: in the early 20th century, Llanelli had little more than its copper smelting works. Neither was Swansea a cosmopolitan, almost fully anglicised city like the Welsh capital, Cardiff (Welsh Caerdydd).

As was pointed out above, Swansea is a border town on the edge of English-speaking Glamorgan and Welsh-speaking Carmarthen, leaning perhaps more towards an English character. This ambivalence is manifested, among other things, in the town's lack of an upper-middle class, making it unlike most English towns of its size[118]. On the other hand, it does have a type of suburban middle class, one which Thomas' family belonged to. This is unlike much of the rest of Wales outside the predominantly English-speaking South. Most of Wales is still composed largely of farming communities and a few scattered areas of industry which have been saved from all the great depressions that have shaken Wales almost all through the age of industrialisation.

Nonetheless, Swansea was in the 1930s still small enough to form a more or less unitary community with classes intermingling freely, and all Swansea residents shared equally in the effects of industrial depression[119]. Thus Thomas could not have failed to come under the influence of the town's character, even if he did not recognise this himself. It is not immediately clear down to the smallest detail how this Anglo-

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[117] Wigginton 91.

[118] James A. Davies, "Questions of Identity: The Movement and 'Fern Hill'," *Dylan Thomas*, eds. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 165.

Welshness of his home town may have borne upon Dylan Thomas, but that Swansea was and is in outlook neither Welsh nor English exclusively, but something peculiar to itself, is relevant to how Dylan Thomas and his writings turned out.

In this context, it is rather easy to see how Dylan Thomas could at the same time love and detest Wales and the Welsh. When addressing a conference of Scottish writers, he noted himself how he was "regarded in England as a Welshman ... , and in Wales as an Englishman", and felt he was "too unnational to be [at the Scottish conference] at all"[120]. It is not hard to imagine how he might long to leave Wales for good and never return on his visits there in the 1930s, seeing how he had grown out of his childhood environment. Then again, back in London or abroad elsewhere, he might have felt torn away from his roots. After all, it was in Wales where he felt most comfortable and was able to work most productively. His early as well as later days were undeniably interwoven with the South Welsh coastal regions, no matter how he felt about the country himself.

Nonetheless, even though a predominant feature of Welshness is the counterpoint of England, Dylan Thomas should not be classed out of hand as essentially Welsh and nothing else besides. Questions of nationality should not be reduced to politicking with polarised questions of race and place[121]. This is too easy a way to disregard the complexities inherent in a writer such Thomas. Indeed, it would be all too easy to state that such and such are the features a Welsh writer possesses, Dylan Thomas presents these features there and there, hence Dylan Thomas is a Welsh writer. This would be almost like saying he is Welsh because he is a Welshman.

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[119] Kershner 54 – 55.
[120] Dylan Thomas, quoted in Kershner 173.
[121] John Goodby and Chris Wigginton, Introduction, *Dylan Thomas*, eds. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 4.

Thomas' own denials of Welsh – or English – nationality do not tell us as much about his authorial identity as does the evidence within his works. Repeated attempts to prove that Welsh meters or speech rhythms are to be found in his writing have failed simply because there is nothing more to be found than an influence, not straightforward use of *cynghanedd*[122]. Thomas consciously balances in his writing process the *hwyl* and the traditional English type of poetry to form an absence of nationality – or to recall Bhabha, a hybrid nationality. This absence or hybridity is able to address a wider range of issues than the existence of a purely Welsh or English nationality would allow. This is not to say that writers who are unambiguously of one certain nationality are restricted to a smaller selection of issues than those with mixed or non-nationality. This only seeks to provide for a wider interpretation of the word "nationality" than the more common, more restrictive interpretation.

5.Welshness in Dylan Thomas' Works

Dylan Thomas has provided a blessing to those who wish to study the degree to which his prose works portray his Welsh origins. This is that a lot of his prose, except for the few early stories and his "play for voices" *Under Milk Wood*, are unashamedly autobiographical. The collection of short stories *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, for example, illustrates events in and around Swansea featuring a young Dylan. The author himself has dubbed the *Portrait* stories a "provincial autobiography"[123]. Ackerman has duly noted the real-life origin of the discussions a late-teens Thomas has with his artistic friends in "Return Journey"[124]. Likewise in "The Peaches", young Dylan is seen visiting his Aunt Ann and Uncle Jim in Fernhill. Ferris confirms the relatives and

[122] Wigginton 89.
[123] *Letters* 375.
[124] Ackerman 29.

the place to be more or less real[125]. They were altered a trifle here and there, though not too much so as to keep the characters distinctly recognisable – and irritating to those who were not portrayed favourably[126].

This blessing, however, can also come to be a source of problems. It may be hard sometimes to see what in the stories stems purely from the fact that Thomas spent his childhood in Wales, the stories thus naturally taking place there, and what is the indirect influence of Wales upon his writing. It would seem that while Wales is the setting for most of his stories, the country is more than just a backdrop for the action. This is evident when one looks at his style of writing, and the way he writes about certain peculiarities in the Welsh character and the nature he felt so attached to. When reading through a collection of Dylan Thomas' stories, one cannot help noticing how certain geographic areas and themes occur and reoccur throughout. Of areas he uses again and again in his stories, Swansea and the Carmarthen countryside are obvious examples of places he liked. It is only in the early stories set in the imaginary Jarvis valley and *Under Milk Wood* with its Llareggub that he leaves the real South Wales, but even then he is using elements of this area. Of themes that reoccur, the Welsh propensity to drink – semi-controlled though reckless – is apparent, especially in the *Portrait* stories where Dylan has grown up. Above all, religion in one way or another is an ever-recurring theme in all of Thomas' prose works.

I will in the following look more closely at one example of each of Dylan Thomas' prose eras. I have chosen "A Prospect of the Sea" from the early stories, "The Peaches" from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, and "Holiday Memory" from the later stories. These analyses will be followed by a look at some other sources of interest, particularly Dylan Thomas' personal correspondence.

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[125] Ferris 30 – 31.

5.1.Welshness in "A Prospect of the Sea"

"A Prospect of the Sea" is fairly representative of the early writings of Dylan Thomas in its style, structure and subject-matter. The story relates the experiences of a boy lying in a Welsh corn field on a perfect summer's day[127]. In the field he meets a girl who appears to the boy alternately as a perfectly ordinary country girl and as the most strange and frightening creature the boy has ever set eyes upon. Together they proceed through a haze of dreamy sequences characteristic of Thomas' early stories. These dream sequences can be seen partly as psychoanalytic glimpses into the boy's dreams, but for the most part their tone is more religious than psychoanalytic. The story ends in a dreamy haze in which the girl walks into the sea, apparently becoming one with the waters, which is perhaps where she came from in the first place. The boy is grief-stricken at losing her and because he is unable to follow her. The last image of the story is of an old man – the boy at a later age or not – building a boat which all animals flock into, while "cool rain [begins] to fall" on the Ark. The imagery makes it rather clear that it is, indeed, the Ark being built here.

Whether or not the old man on the hill at the end of the story is Noah, the boy at a later age or possibly both is irrelevant. What is interesting about the last paragraph from a Welsh point of view is that the building of the Ark – an important biblical vessel supposedly built in the Middle East – takes place on the Welsh horizon. While it is true that biblical events had been placed in contexts more familiar to European readers than the Middle East for centuries before Dylan Thomas, even in Wales, this at least seems to provide yet more evidence of his affinity with the country. After all, were he to have placed the Ark on a hill outside Wales, perhaps on Mount Ararat or another Middle

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[126] Ferris 32.
[127] *Stories* 89 – 96.

Eastern mountain, the apparent Welshness of this particular story would have lessened a degree.

Even more cause to doubt the Welshness of "A Prospect of the Sea" would have been caused by a failure on Thomas' part to insert Welsh place-names in the story, and to oppose them with England. In his vision, the boy sees Cader peak off in the distance "to the edge of England", beyond the Jarvis valley[128]. Cader Idris, Welsh for "Seat of Idris", is a prominent feature in Snowdonia, in the North of Wales. Jarvis valley, on the other hand, is an imaginary valley somewhere in Wales which appears in a number of his early stories. It is not only a perfect setting for collecting Welsh rural stereotypes, as Wigginton suggests[129]. It is also a perfect setting for collecting themes from beyond the borders of Wales, such as from within the Bible, as is evident in "A Prospect of the Sea". Jarvis valley is thus at once in Wales, perhaps Carmarthen, perhaps Gower, and at the same time, everywhere else as well.

Using the names of Cader Idris and especially the name of the country as a whole, Wales, to provide a setting for events, however imaginary these events may be, is clear evidence of affinity with those places. Especially in a story such as this which could just as easily take place anywhere else in the world (allowing for some alterations), Thomas seems to be making the conscious choice of naming Cader Peak and Wales largely for the purpose of providing a backdrop to his story which he – and the supposed Welsh reader – is familiar with.

Fairly typical of Dylan Thomas, though less so of Welsh and Anglo-Welsh writing, is the seemingly arbitrary but purposeful and carefully crafted confusion of the imaginary and the real. This is evident when one looks at the passage in "A Prospect of the Sea" where, in the space of a single paragraph, the boy's thoughts and fears are fully

exposed in juxtaposition to a fairly normal piece of dialogue. The boy first sees the girl as very ordinary, "a country girl" up a tree, perhaps "after nests"[130]. But when his imagined terror seizes control of him, she is again terrible to behold with "the stain on her lips ... blood, not berries". She is a terrifying apparition with sharpened nails to snip off his tongue with and the ability to call up unimaginable monsters like "Carmarthen tigers" at a moment's notice to aid her in putting an end to him. This sense of fear is dissipated in the boy as well as in the text as soon as the girl kisses him.

It is rather apparent that all these terrifying things only take place in the boy's imagination; the sudden shifts in perspective that make ribs of the bark appear as "channels and rivers wide as a great ship" might appear so to an adolescent boy who is deeply confused and dizzy in the presence of a strange girl; "Carmarthen tigers" are strange monsters that excitement transports half the way around the globe or transforms from something as unhazardous as a domestic cat. The story, "like all stories, [is] killed as she kisse[s] him"[131].

The style in "A Prospect of the Sea" is poetic, evocative, and the language suggestive of some of his later writing, and even more so of his poetry. The style thus hints at the distinctly Welsh features of writing used extensively in these early stories. Let us take the following passage as an example: "...the Jarvis peaks and the Cader peak beyond them to the edge of England, were molehills and stones' shadows in the still single yard of the distance"[132]. The words "molehills" and "stones' shadows" on the one hand form a pair of balanced rhythm which continues with "still single", assonant with "stones' shadows". This is an example of how Thomas uses prosody also in his prose,

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[128] *Stories* 90.
[129] Wigginton 93.
[130] *Stories* 91.
[131] *Stories* 92.
[132] *Stories* 90.

although here in a form that is still not fully developed. As I have explained above, this style is comparable to his poetry, and it is distinctly Welsh in that it puts sound and music on an equal footing with elaboration of theme. Here, as in the Welsh legends such as the *Mabinogion* Thomas must have been fairly familiar with, elaboration of scenery and feeling are primary to action and a furthering of the storyline.

What does all this mean in relation to Thomas' assumed Welshness? He is using familiar – although convoluted – Welsh imagery, his own pattern of Welsh rhythm and sound, and all this in a style that is not clearly either Welsh or English. As Diane Davies implies, Thomas belongs to a literary tradition different from that of the English, no matter how he keeps denying this over and over again[133]. "A Prospect of the Sea" is, in its own way, an affirmation of Thomas' singular, definitely hyphenated Anglo-Welshness, of his hybridity.

5.2. Welshness in "The Peaches"

As I have pointed out earlier, the stories in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* are semi-autobiographical reminiscences from Dylan Thomas' childhood and adolescence. "The Peaches" is one of his more successful stories in terms both of its quality as a short story, and of its success among the critics: "The Peaches" has won considerable critical acclaim from a body of critics generally more interested in his poetry. The story relates what takes place when Dylan, aged less than ten, is visiting his Aunt and Uncle, Annie and Jim Jones (Annie being Dylan Thomas' maternal aunt and Jim her husband) at their "dirty and bedraggled" farm in rural South Wales[134].

The story starts with Uncle Jim selling a piglet to get drunk and subsequently getting a habitual scolding from Aunt Annie. The next day, Dylan's older cousin,

Gwilym, preaches to an empty barn turned chapel to a rapturous answer from young Dylan. Finally Mrs Williams, the considerably more wealthy mother of Dylan's friend, Jack, pays a visit to bring Jack for a fortnight's holiday at Gorsehill, Uncle Jim and Aunt Annie's farm. Upon being offered a specially saved tin of peaches, Mrs. Williams refuses the offer, breaking Aunt Annie's heart and later setting Uncle Jim on edge. Young Dylan goes around being his perceptive self, and does not fail to catch glimpses of some of the complexities of adult life, such as Gwilym sitting in a lavatory, "reading a book and moving his hands"[135]. Thomas the Author then records these perceptions with carefully mixed metaphors.

"The Peaches" includes some paradoxes and sharp contrasts peculiar to Welsh life, and to Thomas. There is of course the immediate contradiction of the poor Joneses, especially the hard-working Annie, and the more posh Mrs Williams who still sweats at the coffee-table "because she had walked all the way from the car"[136]. However, this sort of contradiction is not necessarily so much Welsh as it is social, and can be found in all societies. In addition, the contrast in wealth may be more apparent to Dylan as a boy than it is real, and he at times overemphasises this, especially in relation to Mrs. Williams. First, he lies about the Williamses having three motor cars and two houses[137]. Later, during the course of their fateful minutes at the coffee-table, he notes the many rings on Mrs Williams' fingers more times than would perhaps be necessary, or than is actually indicative of her status. The story is at this point nonetheless effective in pointing the reader's sympathies in the desired direction, at Aunt Annie.

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[133] Diane Davies, "Anglo-Welshness: the semantics of hyphenation," *Europa* 1.3 (1997), <http://www.intellectbooks.com/europa/number3/davies.htm>.
[134] Ferris 30.
[135] *Stories* 138.
[136] *Stories* 136.
[137] *Stories* 134.

The character of Uncle Jim seems at first glance plain and simple enough. He is a poor farmer who likes his drink and is, though perhaps not wholly content with his life, at peace with his inability to do anything about it. This is made clear, for example, when Uncle Jim and the narrator-Dylan return from a village pub and Aunt Annie starts scolding Uncle Jim "angry and timid" for keeping the boy out so long. Uncle Jim does not reply but sits down "in his special chair, which was the broken throne of a bankrupt bard, and lit his pipe and stretched his legs and puffed clouds at the ceiling"[138]. While she goes on reprimanding him, he wraps himself in a cloud of smoke, much as he seems to be doing with the rest of his life.

At the end of the story, though, he exhibits another side of his personality. The night after Mrs. Williams has visited the Jones' house and refused Aunt Annie's offer of tinned peaches, Uncle Jim comes back, drunk as usual, after selling their last pig for drink. After only softly scolding him for this, Aunt Annie sobbingly recounts what has happened that day. Uncle Jim gets furious at this, threatening to whip the boys and drive Mrs. Williams' son "back to his three bloody houses" – although Dylan lied even about them having two to begin with[139]. This shows Uncle Jim not being satisfied with their position after all.

Uncle Jim is furious at Mrs. Williams appearing to make them small, giving him an unpleasant reminder of their poor standing. However, their ruin – "the ruin of Gorsehill" – is not merely a fact of life thrust upon them by a malevolent environment or Mrs. Williams. It is, indeed, pointed out by the rich woman, but it is not of her doing. It is rather, as Aunt Annie has repeatedly tried to show Uncle Jim, due more to Uncle Jim's drinking.

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[138] *Stories* 130.
[139] *Stories* 141 and 134.

An acute description of Southern Welsh religious life is the character of Cousin Gwilym. His studies to become a preacher are still to take off in any other sense than in that his preaching is already like the symphony of thunder and drizzle that characterises *hwyl*, the eloquence of Welsh preaching[140]. Ackerman describes this passage as a parody of *hwyl*, but there may actually be more to it than mere parodying of a mode of sermon[141]. Indeed, Ackerman himself elsewhere points out the longing of the Welsh character towards solitariness and the "blood and thunder of Welsh hymns"[142]. This was something that Thomas almost certainly did not detest in the Welsh, and may have been something that profoundly influenced his personal character, and subsequently also the reception of Gwilym's sermons by young Dylan in "The Peaches".

In any case, Gwilym's devotion to God is still charmingly earthly, peculiarly Welsh Nonconformist. The chapel-in-a-barn sermons, his poetry where the names of girls are changed to God upon public viewing, and his moving hands in the lavatory portray him as more of a religiously self-conscious Welsh Nonconformist-Puritan than a professional priest in any sense of the phrase. He was the kind of character that Thomas heard roaring from the pulpit in his childhood, and this left an imprint on him, just as they did on any chapel-going child of 1920s Wales.

Ackerman names as one of the characteristics of a number of Anglo-Welsh writers a richness of metaphors which are often imprecise and inconsistent[143]. Not only metaphors, but also some clichéd phrases are turned around and mixed. This is especially clear in "The Peaches" with its "grandmother clock", "splintered jaws of bottles", and "chapel … shafted with sunlight"[144]. "Grandmother clock" refers to Aunt

[140] Ackerman 11.
[141] Ackerman 107.
[142] Ackerman 11.
[143] Ackerman 15.
[144] *Stories* 130, 132 and 134.

Annie who keeps the farm running in spite of her drunk husband. Using a word that elicits a different kind of idea in a metaphor, such as “jaws” in “splintered jaws of bottles” instead of “mouths”, is a favourite device of Thomas. Thus, if Anglo-Welsh writers delve richly into metaphor, Dylan Thomas does not only this but mixes it with his own, convoluted style.

5.3.Welshness in “Holiday Memory”

“Holiday Memory” is one of Thomas’ evocative later stories, and is more like a prose collection of snapshots than a story in the stricter sense of the word. Indeed, they are part of Thomas’ poetic reminiscences, or “semifictional narratives” prepared for the Welsh service of BBC radio during the late 1940s[145]. In a way, “Holiday Memory” can be seen as a sort of continuation to both Thomas’ earlier stories, such as “A Prospect of the Sea”, and to the *Portrait* stories. However, little is left either of the mystical and mythical elements so prevalent in the early stories, or of the straightforwardness of the storytelling evident throughout the *Portrait* stories.

In “Holiday Memory”, an unspecified narrator, perhaps Young Dylan again, not taking any part in the action, relates his or her memories of an August Bank Holiday by the sea. The beach in question is probably in Swansea, by the Bristol Channel. Judging only by what goes on in the story, the place could just as easily be anywhere in Britain – there is little particular evidence that this should be exactly Swansea and not, say, Brighton. Only by reference to taking trams back home, up a hill, can we assume that Thomas is once again writing from his personal experiences as a child[146].

Again, the action is considered only as important as the way the story is told. The style peculiar to Thomas and other Anglo-Welsh writers is still evident in the recurring,

[145] Kershner 15.

but powerful use of sound and rhythm to create certain types of effect, as I have sought to show before. The following passage is very close to "A Prospect of the Sea" in its effective use of the sound of words.

> There was no need, that holiday morning, for the sluggardly boys to be shouted down to breakfast; out of their jumbled beds they tumbled, scrambled into their rumpled clothes; quickly at the bath-room basin they catlicked their hands and faces, but never forgot to run the water loud and long as though they washed like colliers; in front of the cracked looking-glass bordered with cigarette-cards, in their treasure-trove bedrooms, they whisked a gap-tooth comb through their surly hair; and with shining cheeks and noses and tide-marked necks, they took the stairs three at a time[147].

In the light of the foregoing argument that the Welsh poet, and, indeed, Dylan Thomas, was well aware of the importance of sound to poetry, and to prose, there is no need to doubt that the choice of words in the above quotation is not haphazard. It seems clear that "…jumbled beds they tumbled, scrambled into their rumpled clothes", has been formed like this for the sound of "jumbled", "tumbled", "scrambled", and "rumpled", suggestive of how children getting up in the morning is a rather rumpled affair. Then, in "took the stairs three at a time", the rhythm suggests bounding down the stairs much better than, for example, "they hopped down the staircase, three stairs at a time". They have been chosen precisely for the suggestiveness of their sounds and rhythms, as in the skipping leaps down the stairs.

Evident, even in the passage quoted above, is also the mixture of seemingly discordant images, and the bending of clichés to the extent that they beg a second thinking but never lose their familiarity entirely[148]. As was pointed out in the analysis of "The Peaches", this is quite frequent in Anglo-Welsh writing and in the works of Dylan

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[146] The Thomases' home on Cwmdonkin Drive was situated on a hill, and could be reached by tram.
[147] *Stories* 313.
[148] Kershner 15.

Thomas especially, although Thomas is using his own mixed devices. Here, "treasure-trove bedrooms" and "surly hair" are examples of such mixing on the part of Thomas.

Punter has noted that any encounter with a text "challenges us to compare a textual experience with our own life experiences"[149]. This can be taken to mean that Thomas poses for readers images from his own experiences, and the readers are left the task of seeing how it is different from – or similar to – what they have come across in their own lives. "Holiday Memory" seems to be successful in this respect exactly because it is at once both Swansean and Welsh, as well as more universal.

5.4.Other indications

The writer's English Welshness is evident not only in his published fiction, but also in his private correspondence. In late 1933, Thomas was trying to start a literary periodical of Welsh writers, *Prose & Verse*. The periodical itself never came into being, apparently because Thomas and other parties to the project showed a lack of enthusiasm and an abundance of laziness towards its fruition, but Thomas' interest, if sporadic, is interesting in and of itself where his particular way of being Welsh is concerned. In a postcard (postmark 11 Oct 1933) to Trevor Hughes, a friend and party to the *Prose & Verse* idea, there are two notable pieces of evidence to suggest that Thomas is something short of being a complete Welsh Welshman, yet also far from being anything like an Englishman either[150].

The first thing to note is that he clearly demarcates the type of person who the periodical's editors are to receive submissions from: "Welshmen and women … those of dim Welsh ancestry and those born in Wales … who *write* in English"[151]. This he did

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[149] David Punter, "Fictional Maps of Britain," *Studying British Cultures: An Introduction*, ed. Susan Bassnett (London: Routledge, 1997) 66.
[150] *Letters* 23-24.
[151] *Letters* 23, original italics.

with a view to averting a “highbrow” profile for the periodical, which profile would have “doomed [the periodical] to hell from the beginning”. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to think that his reluctance to include writing in Welsh was not motivated only by his lack of knowledge of Welsh, but a true belief that highbrow nationalistic sentiment – something he was not at all keen on, especially in connection with Wales – is not suitable for a literary periodical. His famous and oft-quoted outbreak, “f*** Welsh nationalism”, shows in no uncertain terms how he resented the idea of nationalism, especially as it appeared in Wales. Nevertheless, recalling his ambivalent attitude towards the country, it is the political movement, connected as it is strongly to the Welsh language, that may have caused in part Thomas’ reluctance to accept submissions in Welsh.

The other piece of evidence in the postcard is barely recognisable as a significant addition to the card’s text, but blatant in its Anglo-Welshness, or rather “Anglo-Cymreictod”: the phrase “up Cymru!”[152]. This is as strange a two-language slogan as would be, for example, “Hyvä Rossija!”. Nevertheless, it provides us with hard evidence of the kind of Welshman Thomas was. Where a more “Cymraeg” perrson would perhaps have said “Cymru am byth” (Wales for ever) or similar, and a less Welsh person “go Wales”, he chose the witty – and suggestively derogative – halfway-house amalgamisation of English and Welsh, “up Cymru”.

6.Conclusion

A t-shirt on sale in an Aberystwyth, Ceredigion gift shop sports the text “You can take the boy out of Wales, but you can’t take Wales out of the boy”. This would seem to be a rather apt description of Dylan Thomas as well. He did have a measure of disliking

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[152] *Letters* 24.

for the country illustrated by his many jibes, among them: "The land of my fathers. My fathers can keep it"[153]. Nonetheless, his disapproval blended with a deep-rooted personal sense of belonging to this country rather than any other.

He also felt poetically closest to the Celtic world, both new and old, although he did read, analyse and like a number of English poets, and many others as well, regardless of their country of origin. There is in his writings a sensitivity to the sound and rhythm of words brought out in a manner dissimilar to the English poets of his time and previous eras. Rhythm, incantation, and the melody of the line are basic aids to his poetic expression[154]. Still, at the same time, there is also a universal appeal in his writings, which is evident in how successful and acclaimed he became in the United States even during his lifetime.

Whatever one thinks of the quality of Thomas' prose and poetry, he has left an unfading mark on the literature of Wales. His example has inspired fresh new generations of poets, though few have reached a level greater than imitation. Tony Curtis, a present-day Anglo-Welsh poet, has stated that Dylan Thomas in a way ruined ten years of Welsh poetry, "perhaps because he was a genius and not to be imitated", but imitations did abound nonetheless[155].

As was noted in the second chapter, Clausen sought to deny the division of literature in English along national lines. Clausen's assertion is rather useful also to back up the view that Dylan Thomas cannot be seen simply as a Welsh author, nor either as an English author exclusively. He is a bit of both and a bit of neither. That Dylan

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[153] Dylan Thomas, quoted in Ackerman 37.
[154] Ackerman 12.
[155] Tony Curtis in Lloyd 121.

Thomas is a Welshman is not to be doubted, however. After all, this is the cornerstone of how he describes himself, no matter what he might have thought about Wales[156].

In the end, the whole notion of a single nationality and of attributes of, say, Welshness exclusively, needs to give way to a more open interpretation of Dylan Thomas. Thomas' writing puts into question notions of not only Welshness, but of Englishness and Britishness. His success lies in a unique blend of the Welsh and the English elements. Indeed, it is his hybridity in terms of nationhood which allows him to move freely in both Welsh and English paradigms. He is like an illustrative artist who seems to look at the Welsh surroundings he has lived in from the outside. This image processing is done both through his imaginative mind exclusively, as in the early stories before he had ever left Swansea, and through the experience of living elsewhere in addition, as he does in the *Portrait* stories. Thomas is, in a way, painting a picture of a Welsh landscape with a Welsh brush dipped in English ink, but ends up depicting not only Wales and not not only Britain, but the world.

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[156] Ackerman 1.

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