

sister Heledd, the poem describes Pengwern as 'dark tonight, / with no fire, no candle', and asks, 'Save for God, who'll keep me sane?' ('*Stafell Gynddyfan ys tywyll heno, / Heb dân, heb gannwyll; / Namyn Duw pwy a'm dyry pwyll?*')²

It is no coincidence that early Welsh texts like these were re-discovered, published and translated into English for the first time during that epoch which also saw the birth of the Gothic as a literary genre. After the era of Enlightenment with its emphasis on rationality and its valorization of classically influenced literature, writers and scholars of the turbulent second half of the eighteenth century, rebelling against what was perceived as the emotional aridity and repressiveness of the 'age of reason', actively sought to re-engage with, and create, a literature capable of arousing strong affect, be it sentimental, sublime or terror-ridden. In 1765, Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*, hailed as the founding text of the Gothic genre. A year earlier when Evan Evans (Ieuan Prydydd Hir) published *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards Translated into English* (1764) he was participating in a parallel new movement popularized by the immense success of Thomas Gray's 'The Bard' (1757), an ode supposedly sung by the last poet to survive Edward I's alleged extermination of the Welsh bards in 1282 after Llywelyn's fall. Within this Celtic revival movement, early Gaelic and Welsh poetry was seen as illustrative of the unrepressed vitality of pre-Enlightenment culture and as evidence that the Isle of Britain too had once been inhabited by 'noble savages', free of the artificial constraints of modern civilization. In Gray's ode, the Plantagenet conquerors are roundly cursed: the bards slaughtered by Edward rise again, 'a grisly band', to 'weave with bloody hands . . . / The winding sheet of Edward's race'; even the very landscape of Wales, its 'giant oak and desert cave', swear eternal revenge against the king.³ From the last decades of the eighteenth century on, the undead voices of the pre-conquest past are frequently to be heard in Welsh and Anglophone writing from Wales, castigating not only Wales's conquerors but also their own descendants, the modern-day Welsh, found wanting in the appropriate spirit of resistance to foreign rule. The 'long terror' of ethnic annihilation persists in such texts, which constitute the core materials of Welsh Gothic as a specific branch of the Gothic genre – or so, at any rate, this book argues.

In recent years Gothic literature referring to the history of imperial conquests and resistance to such conquests has been categorized as participating in the expanding oeuvre of what has been termed 'postcolonial' or 'imperial' Gothic, first labelled as such in Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830–1914* (1988).⁴ To what extent it is appropriate to categorize Welsh culture in general as 'postcolonial' is a question which has by now been debated at some length, and the outcome is still undecided, particularly amongst historians.⁵ Within literary circles, however, it has been accepted that the literatures of all countries which have been invaded, but have resisted absorption into the dominant imperial culture, are appropriate subjects for interpretations based on postcolonial theory. As William Hughes and Andrew Smith put it in their introduction to a special issue on 'Postcolonial Gothic' of the journal *Gothic Studies*,

The rather simplistic and restrictive notion of what it is to be post-colonial that is still occasionally encountered in some circles – namely a blinkered consideration of nations and cultures only after the departure of the invasive power source – has thankfully been eclipsed for the most part by a broader reading that situates the onset of the postcolonial at the point in which the indigenous culture, with its power structures, has its integrity violated by external (cultural or physical) interference.⁶

When that primary experience of violation remains alive as a central trauma in the cultural memory of a people, postcolonial theory is considered a suitable tool with which to assess its impact and its cultural affects. Within a British Isles context, it is nowadays customary to analyse the rich wealth of Irish Gothic materials in terms of the long conflict between Ireland and England,⁷ and by now Kirsti Bohata, Darryl Jones and others have already embarked upon the process of extending such interpretations to Welsh Gothic writing.⁸ Such an approach also frequently draws on psycho-analytic theory, and in particular on Freud's analysis of 'the return of the repressed', to explore the way in which the past colonial trauma, never fully surmounted, emerges in the text to 'uncanny' effect.⁹

While the insights afforded by postcolonial and psychoanalytic theory underpin this book throughout, the dominant methodology employed in the pages which follow is, however, more historical than theoretical. In mapping out the terrain of Welsh Gothic over two centuries in an introductory study of this type, maintaining a historicist perspective helps to keep in view the specificity of the Welsh experience and thus of the literature to which it gave rise. Recent criticism has argued for the importance of a historical approach in assessing Gothic literature. In *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, Robert Mighall defines the Gothic as 'a rhetoric', 'an attitude to the past and the present'. 'Epochs, institutions, places and people are Gothicized, have the Gothic thrust upon them', he argues; 'That which is Gothicized depends on history and the stories it needs to tell itself.'¹⁰ The history that an imperialist, colonizing culture needs to tell itself often involves representing the indigenous people of a conquered domain as darkly 'other' and barbaric in order to rationalize their domination. The colonized can, however, retaliate by themselves making use of the Gothic mode to protest against the barbarities of their subordination. Alternatively, rather than resisting the powerful invading culture they can identify with it, interiorizing its representations and portraying their own people as primitive and demonic. But in a reverse swing, writers of the imperial culture can also rebel against its dominant values and 'go native', changing sides ideologically and identifying with the colonized. As we will see, all four of these fundamentally opposed but often unstable perspectives, which can shift within a text as well as from author to author, find representation within that body of literature which uses Gothic materials and is located in Wales.

In the first part of this book, four chapters explore Welsh Gothic writing from its beginnings in the last decades of the eighteenth century to the date of the second Welsh devolution referendum in 1997, with two chapters devoted to the nineteenth century and two to the twentieth. The first chapter focuses on the Romantic period, during which a shared preoccupation with history, whether it be in the form of national or familial history, or the story of ruined castles, abbeys and ancient remains, characterizes texts located in Wales. In particular, the focus is on past and present relations between the Welsh and the English, though the manner in which that history

is Gothicized varies according to the national perspective of the author. Welsh novelists tend to present their Welsh heroes and heroines as vulnerable innocents whose native virtue and integrity are threatened either by invading English gentry or by their enforced residence across the border in the 'devil's parlour', that is, London. But Welsh locations during this period also frequently provided the settings of so-called 'first-contact' Gothic novels,¹¹ written from the perspectives of travellers who on their first encounter with Wales were startled and sometimes alienated by its threatening landscapes, ruined castles and abbeys, and the perceived barbarities of its inhabitants whose very language spoke of a more primitive world.

That shock of otherness, particularly in relation to the language difference, was sharply felt in the middle years of the nineteenth century when the growth of industrialization brought to the attention of the entrepreneur and capitalist the fact that their potential workforce in Wales spoke little English. Education regulations which banned the speaking of Welsh in schools, along with the flood of incomers coming into Wales to labour in the new coal mines and iron and steel works, resulted in a 20 per cent drop, from 70 to 50 per cent of the population, in the number of Welsh speakers during the second half of the century. Many took it for granted that the Celt had entered the twilight zone, that the Welsh language would die and that Welsh culture would become merely a plaintive echo within English culture. The second chapter of this book argues that such assumptions incited the publication of a number of Gothic fictions prophesying the doom of the Welsh. But the threat to Welsh survival, along with the activating influence of the mid-nineteenth-century national independence movements in Europe and in Ireland in particular, challenged some of the Liberal leaders of Welsh life, who came to ascendance after the Liberal landslide of 1868, to establish in the 1880s a Welsh Home Rule movement, *Cymru Fydd* or Young Wales. Though it proved short-lived, the political movement was accompanied by a Welsh literary renaissance, some of whose members also evinced in their fictions an interest in clairvoyance and the occult movement, then burgeoning in Britain and the United States. Within that movement, certain aspects of traditional Welsh culture, such as Druidism and the association of the Grail legends with the early Celtic Christian church

in Wales, acquired new lustre. A culture previously presented as primitive and barbaric now featured as a source of transcendent light, particularly in the later fictions of Arthur Machen, to date the only generally acknowledged Welsh Gothic writer, whose work is also discussed in chapter two.

The popularity of the occult movement at the *fin de siècle* was related, of course, to the decline in Christianity following from the long-term effects of the revolution in ideas incited by the theories of Darwin and Marx. In the Welsh context the most striking changes of the first decades of the twentieth century included the rapid rise of socialism and the concomitant attacks on Welsh chapel culture. Both developments found expression in the literature of the period, some of it employing the Gothic mode. In the case of the chapels, the use of Gothic tropes for their disparagement was not a new development. During the second half of the eighteenth century, in the same period as that which saw the birth of the Gothic genre and of the Celtic revival, a series of Methodist religious revivals transformed Welsh communities, but faced Anglican disparagement, as a superstitiously primitive and barbaric form of worship which encouraged in its congregations over-enthusiastic and even licentious behaviour. In part as a consequence of this persecution, the preachers and deacons who led the chapel communities, which by the 1850s included 75 per cent of the Welsh population, defensively tightened their control on their congregations, initiating a system which began to be experienced as so oppressive by some of their members that, in the struggle to free themselves from the chapel's grip, they found it necessary to demonize Dissent. The third chapter of this book, on 'Haunted communities', examines early twentieth-century 'chapel' Gothic.

The second half of the eighteenth century also witnessed the dawn of the industrial era in Wales, with the development of the iron, slate, coal and, later, steel industries. The flare of the furnaces, the blackened landscapes, the miners descending in cages down the deep pit and the omnipresent possibility of sudden death became part of the image of Wales and lent themselves very readily to Gothicization. In the south Wales coalfield in particular the lack of opportunity to find employment as anything other than a coalminer (or his wife) created the sense of a doomed or haunted community,

sacrificed to the needs of Westminster and the British Empire. Chapter three also investigates those texts of the 1930s and 1940s in which the conditions of labour in the coal industry, and the very pits themselves, are represented as daemonic powers that drain the lifeblood of the workers and their families.

At the same time, as the census figures decade by decade inexorably registered the decline in Welsh-language speakers, the fate of the Welsh language and its culture remained a dominant concern. The horror of living through one's own cultural death is imaged in texts whose protagonists are represented as haunted by the princes and warriors of pre-conquest Wales risen from the dead to castigate the modern Welsh for their heedlessness and neglect of their language and culture. The fourth chapter of this book, 'Land of the living dead', explores the development of this postcolonial theme in an array of exemplary twentieth-century and contemporary Welsh- and English-language Gothic fictions. There is a grim vitality to these texts' use of the Gothic, a vitality in part drawn from and contributing to modern, global developments in the genre. But they had a specific political message for their first readers in twentieth-century pre-devolution Wales, warning them to heed their heritage and respect their distinctive ethnicity, lest the spirits of their forefathers return to haunt them.

In texts located in Wales but not necessarily written with Welsh readers in mind, such preoccupations with the past are often represented as but part and parcel of the characteristic superstition and backwardness of the indigenous population. Stressing the primitiveness of the Welsh in this manner allows Wales to feature as a suitable site for an array of Gothic extravaganzas, and it would be a failure of inclusion in a book on Welsh Gothic not to make some attempt to trace the literary history of at least a few of the figures drawn from Welsh folklore and superstition which are omnipresent in the genre. Accordingly, in the second part of this book, on 'Things that go bump in the Celtic twilight', the focus switches from Welsh history and the concerns to which it has given rise in Gothic writing to the evolution in literature of four such figures: the druid, the Welsh witch, the hounds of Annwn and the sin-eater. Witches are of course an ubiquitous and international feature of folklore, but their close association in Celtic myth with ancient mother goddess

wiser neighbours went so far as to say, she understood the black art, and astrology.' Vigilance, however, rather than witchcraft, is the main instrument of her rule:

No young man who was not fixed in his intentions of honourable courtship, would carry a damsel's milk-pail, or even give her an arm in coming from the fair, if within a mile of her house . . . through a dread of Madame Llewellyn, who heard and saw every thing, and who, to give her her due . . . was a woman of a very active and vigorous mind.³⁷

And it is that vigilance she wields by remote control over Marmaduke in England until he finally returns to Wales, tested and found true, and she claims him as her own, a worthy heir of those dominions which through her insistence have managed to retain their Welsh character in the face of encroaching anglicization.

No such happy ending befalls Henry Mortimer, the adopted son of Sir Owain Llewellyn in *Cambrian Pictures*, the author of which, Ann of Swansea (Ann Julia Hatton, 1764–1838), herself endured a life beset by vicissitudes. Born in Worcester to the theatrical family of Roger and Sarah Kemble (Sarah Siddons was her older sister), Ann spent some of her childhood years in Wales when her parents starred in John Ward's travelling theatrical company.³⁸ At nineteen, in London, she made an unfortunate marriage to a bigamist, and subsequently was employed for a period as a model in Dr James Graham's notorious Temple of Health and Hymen in Pall Mall, an institution which professed to offer help with sexual potency and fertility problems. After a very public suicide attempt, in which she attempted to take poison in Westminster Abbey, her exasperated family granted her an allowance of ninety pounds per annum on condition that she reside at least one hundred and fifty miles from London. In later life, she settled in Swansea, and after the death of her second husband William Hatton, maintained herself by publishing popular fictions in which her adopted country, Wales, is represented with strong partisanship.³⁹ In *Cambrian Pictures*, her hero Henry Mortimer is also an adopted Welshman, reared in happy seclusion in Dolegelly Castle in north Wales, but when he becomes a student at Cambridge his good looks have the misfortune of

attracting the eye of Dowager Dutchess [sic] of Inglesfield, now in her fiftieth year but still predatory. Undeterred by Henry's refusal of her offer of marriage she arranges for his capture and transport by sea to 'the dark towers of Raven-hill Castle' in Cumberland, 'a grand specimen of Gothic architecture' on whose 'high and ponderous walls . . . were placed ravens sculptured in black marble'.⁴⁰ The Dutchess's two daughters are already incarcerated in the castle, as their mother, in the grip of her 'diabolical passions', is plagued by jealousy of their suitors and cannot endure the possibility of having her age exposed by a grandchild. Julia, the eldest of the two, had secretly wed her tutor but once their marriage was discovered, he was imprisoned and died of grief in the same cell as that in which Henry is now confined; his young widow has become a maniac who haunts Henry, mistaking him for her dead Nevil. She is also a thwarted poet, against the wishes of her parents, who thought a 'female of rank sufficiently learned, if she can read and write a visiting-ticket'.⁴¹ Her Gothic verse, hidden in a secret recess in his cell, entertains Henry's prison hours; he is particularly affected by her 'Eda, or the Bridal Night' in which the spurned Eda speaks from the grave to warn her unfaithful lover,

When deep the midnight bell doth toll,
Expect thy buried bride.

.....
And thou shalt see the grave worm draw
Across my neck its trail
And thou shalt see the black toad gnaw
My cheek so sunk and pale.⁴²

Henry himself is later on the verge of expiring after the failure of his thwarted attempt to escape Raven-hill Castle; his illness provokes the Dutchess's remorse but such is her 'burning passion' for his person that it is only her death that eventually brings about Henry's release and return to Wales.

In both *The Stranger* and *Cambrian Pictures*, young men brought up in Wales are represented as blushing innocents abroad. '[Y]ou blush like a miss just led forth from the nunnery, and exposed for the first time to the rude gaze of man,' says the Dutchess to Henry

at the commencement of her assault on his virtue, to which he responds by explaining 'that he had but just escaped from the mountains of Wales, and that as yet he had not got his feelings in subjection'.⁴³ To be Welsh in these texts entails artlessness in comparison to the more mannered English; such lack of sophistication is represented as a virtue in a young man as in a young woman, but it leaves its innocents vulnerable and open to abuse. The inability to control one's feelings, or at any rate their display, suggests that one may all the more easily be controlled by others. The fact that both of these ingénues are male is unusual; generally in early Gothic fictions, particularly in the so-called 'female Gothic' texts which characteristically concern young women besieged by threatening assailants of their virtue, such vulnerability is the province of females only. But Jim Hansen in *Terror and Irish Modernism: The Gothic Tradition from Burke to Beckett* notes the occurrence of such unexpected gender patterns in Irish Gothic writing too and suggests that they represent 'the feminization of a colonized people' as a 'standard component of imperial and capitalist assimilation strategy'. Whatever their gender, the Irish are the less powerful and therefore female partners in an unhappy act of union in which England is the dominant groom. In cartoons published in Dublin periodicals in 1800, the Act of Union between England and Ireland 'took on the character of a Gothic marriage' suggests Hansen; he argues that the Irish Gothic genre as a whole sought to symbolize the destructive nature of that 'marriage' from the Irish, or female, partner's point of view.⁴⁴ Similar arguments can be made with regard to Welsh Gothic writing too; in the next section of this chapter a number of attempted acts of union between dominant English predators and vulnerable Welsh victims are assessed, as they feature in texts written by Welsh-identified authors, where the 'happy marriage' of England and Wales which provides closure in many of the English tourist fictions is re-imagined. More often than not, though, in these texts the Welsh victim who has the misfortune of attracting the predator's gaze is, as one would expect, female.

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Acts of union

The so-called Act of Union between England and Wales of 1536 was more the ratification of conquest than the 'marriage' of two independent if not equal partners, for all its use of the language of love. By its means Henry VIII,

of a singular zeal, love and favour that he beareth his subjects of . . . Wales, minding and intending to reduce them to perfect order, notice and knowledge of his laws . . . and utterly to extirpate all the singular sinister uses and customs differing from the same . . . established that this said country . . . of Wales shall be . . . incorporated, united and annexed to and with this realm of England . . . [F]rom henceforth no person or persons that use Welsh speech or language shall have or enjoy any manner of office or fees . . . unless he or they use and exercise the speech or language of English.⁴⁵

His Majesty's Welsh subjects will be forgiven their 'sinister' difference as long as they give it up forthwith and submit to full incorporation within England, leaving their difference as a repressed ghost haunting the realm's fringe. The language of conquest, with seduction rather than marriage as its goal, also characterizes many of the attempted acts of union that feature in early Welsh Gothic texts. Both of Anna Maria Bennett's novels include British imperial soldiers who turn from pillage abroad to attempted seductions in Wales. In *Anna: or Memoirs of a Welch Heiress: interspersed with anecdotes of a Nabob* (1785), Colonel Gorget, the nabob of the subtitle, just returned from the making of his fortune in India, tries to rape Anna when she refuses to respond to his advances. According to Bennett, his years of imperial service had accustomed Gorget to such behaviour for, amongst the British colonialists, 'cruelty and carnage were called bravery and justice, and an unbounded greediness . . . bore the respectable name of prudence'.⁴⁶ Similarly, in the first chapters of *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howel*, Lord Claverton, also just returned from the colonies, announces to his servant 'I'll have that girl' as soon as he sets eyes on Ellen. But marriage is not his goal either:

his Lordship very deliberately began to play the plan of his future establishment, in which, however, he considered it as *too* great an honour for a little country rustic to be included, and therefore intended to keep her for his hours of relaxation, in a small box, near the metropolis.⁴

M To speak of 'boxing' or annexing Welsh country rustics, as a supplementary property adjoining one's main establishment, effectively parallels the language and purposes of the 1536 Act of Union, though it is unlikely that Anna Maria Bennett herself made any such connection.

Another English lord who enters Wales with the manifest purpose of buying it up for 'his hours of relaxation' is the chief villain of Ann of Swansea's *Cambrian Pictures*, Lord Clavering. Having announced that 'if any estate within a few miles of Canarvon [*sic*] was to be disposed of he should like to become a purchaser,' he is asked 'has your lordship any notion of residing in Wales?' He replies, 'not absolutely of residing . . . but there is plenty of game in the country, and as I am a sportsman, I should like to have a hunting-lodge'.⁴⁸ However, the game Lord Clavering is hunting seems to be human as much as animal: he leaves a trail of ruined rustic maidens behind him before finally coming up against a passion for Rosa Percival. Rosa is not as 'comeatable' (to use a slang term of the period) as his former victims, because she is the legitimate daughter of his English friend Sir Edward Percival: Sir Edward was persuaded to marry her Welsh mother, whom he had initially seduced, by the dowry offered by her rich tradesman brother Gabriel Jenkins. Although Sir Edward abandoned both mother and daughter immediately after the marriage, leaving Rosa to be reared in Wales by her uncle, his interest in her is renewed by Lord Clavering's offer of a substantial sum of money for her hand in marriage. But Rosa resists her titled suitor, much to her uncle's satisfaction: she says, 'Lord Clavering is my aversion.'

'Tol der lol,' sung Gabriel Jenkins, capering about the room, and kicking his wig before him, 'gad, but this is nuts for me to crack; a mountaineer, as your father calls you, to have spirit enough to refuse a lord; but come along, Rosa, I long to let them see a bit of Cambrian

blood, pure and honest, neither ashamed nor afraid to refuse the gingerbread gilding of title . . . your father would have sold you without pity, just as if you had been timber on his estate, to this Lord Clavering, and this noble would have bought you: very decent proceedings truly, just as bad to the full as if you had been a negro slave in a West-India plantation.'⁴⁹

In 1807, three years before *Cambrian Pictures* was published, the abolitionists finally succeeded in their aim of putting a stop to Britain's involvement in the slave trade, after two decades of well-publicized campaigning. To equate the situation of Welsh women, and by implication of Wales generally, with the slave question was therefore strongly to emphasize the moral rightness of saying no to the buying up of people and lands by English wealth and influence. Her refusal does not save Rosa, however, from another scene of kidnap and claustrophobic incarceration, in which Lord Clavering, with the connivance of her father, arranges for her imprisonment in an isolated farmhouse. The episode includes an archetypal nightmare sequence in which Rosa, having struggled to escape but still in ignorance as to why she was imprisoned, unwittingly hails with relief Lord Clavering's carriage on the lonely road, and pours out to him her tale of woe, with which he appears to sympathize as he takes her inexorably back to the very farmhouse from which she had just escaped. Only very gradually does she recognize that 'she was entangled in the net wove for her by Lord Clavering'.⁵⁰

Another visitor to Wales achieves his aims of union with considerably greater ease in 'The Prediction', one of the four novellas collected in Thomas Richards's anonymously published *Tales of Welsh Society and Scenery* (1827). Born in Dolgellau in 1800, the son of a local solicitor, Thomas Richards (1800–77) was educated at Christ's Hospital in London and qualified as a surgeon, before going out to Tasmania in 1831 as a surgeon on the convict ships; there he pursued two careers as a journalist and doctor, and won fame before his death in 1877 as 'one of the first and the most substantial of early colonial short story writers'.⁵¹ Because of internal connections and repetitions between *Tales of Welsh Society and Scenery* and a later volume, *Tales of Welshland and Welsherie* (1831), published under the name Edward Trevor Anwyl, recent biographers have suggested

2

An Underworld of One's Own (1830s–1900s)



In *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, Robert Mighall suggests that locations and people 'perceived to harbour unreasonable, uncivilised and unprogressive customs or tendencies' become characterized as Gothic by those who wish to distance their own supposedly more enlightened point of view.¹ In situations where one group has power over another, representing the more vulnerable group as Gothic also provides a quasi-humane rationale for their continuing domination. What interests Mighall is the way in which who and what is Gothicized changes according to the changing historical needs of the dominant culture. Before the Catholic Emancipation Act, when Roman Catholics still lived on sufferance in Protestant Britain without full civil rights or access to higher education, they were heavily Gothicized in the early Gothic novels as if to justify their subordination. As the nineteenth century advanced, an 'Imperial Gothic', as Patrick Brantlinger categorized it,² sought to label as Gothic the indigenous cultures of Britain's imperial colonies, thus justifying British intervention in their territories. Portraying might as right, the totalitarian tyrant as benevolent leader, exploitation as enlightenment, has in all epochs been the expected task of artists working within the status quo. The satirist Thomas Love Peacock mocks such manoeuvres in the opening pages of *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829) when describing the formation of Cantre'r Gwaelod, a mythic location in Cardigan Bay said to have been drowned by a

An Underworld of One's Own (1830s–1900s)

tidal wave during the pre-Christian era. According to Peacock, its main port, the Port of Gwydion,

had not been unknown to the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, when they visited the island for metal, accommodating the inhabitants, in return, with luxuries which they would not otherwise have dreamed of, and which they could very well have done without . . . imposing on their simplicity, and taking advantage of their ignorance, according to the approved practice of civilized nations; which they called imparting the blessings of Phoenician and Carthaginian light.³

Similarly, in the 'first-contact' fictions discussed in the last chapter, the English tourist visiting Wales participates in a process designed to encourage the Celt to shed his 'sinister' darkness and accept the blessings of anglicized light. It is one thing, however, to be Gothicized in fiction, particularly when one has the literacy tools with which to retaliate, as Welsh writers did; it is quite another to be Gothicized by official government report, a trauma to which the Welsh became subject in 1847, with long-lasting repercussions.

In the late 1830s and the first half of the 1840s, governing Wales was proving a problem for the English authorities; not only had there been a Chartist uprising in Newport in 1839, but from 1839 to 1843 'Rebecca' disturbances were widespread throughout south-west Wales.⁴ The language of the Rebecca rioters was Welsh, and this factor had impeded the efforts of the English forces sent in to quell the riots;⁵ a call for 'an Inquiry to be made into the state of Education in the Principality of Wales, especially into the means afforded to the labouring classes of acquiring a knowledge of the English language' provided the Government with an opportunity for intervention.⁶ Monoglot English commissioners were duly sent into Wales to inquire into the levels of education attained by a largely Welsh-speaking population still in many parts monoglot. Not surprisingly, the *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* when it appeared in December 1847 found that standards of education in Wales were in general deplorably low. It then went way beyond its brief to connect this lack of educational access to the English language and English civilization with what it claimed to be the barbarity and immorality of the population, and

reported that 'petty thefts, lying, cozening, every species of chicanery, drunkenness . . . idleness' and 'want of chastity' were rife in Wales. The English media took up this news with enthusiasm, reporting of the Welsh that 'their habits are those of animals and will not bear description'; according to the *Morning Chronicle*, 'Wales is fast settling down into the most savage barbarism'.⁷ The unwillingness of the Welsh to dispense with a language and culture that should have died with their loss of independence in the medieval period left them trapped in the dark ages, according to this reasoning. The report insisted that

The Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people . . . [The Welshman's] language keeps him under the hatches . . . He is left to live in an underworld of his own and the march of society goes completely over his head.⁸

The march of British society and the development of its widely flung empire were of course proceeding apace during the mid-nineteenth century; in contrast, Welsh culture, in so far as it sought to stand apart from such developments, was seen as doomed to attrition, buried alive by its loyalty to a zombie language that had outlived its allotted span. It must have seemed all too appropriate that in the 1840s, when these reports were being drawn up, the south Wales coalfield was revealed to be the most extensive in Britain; labouring underground, in 'an underworld' of their own, was clearly the fate of the Welsh. On the surface, the coal the Welsh produced was being used to empower the growth of an empire 'on which the sun never set', but the British state in the 1847 reports in effect relegates to its 'Ancient Britons', the Welsh, the burden of embodying the dark side of its own past history, when colonized Britain, under the Romans, was also, as Joseph Conrad's Marlow put it, 'one of the dark places of the earth'.⁹ Because they adhered to the language of that barbaric past which England saw itself as having long ago surmounted, the 'Ancient Britons' had opted to remain in the zone of the repressed underworld. In his essay 'The "Uncanny"', Freud speaks of the fantasy of being buried alive, 'the most uncanny thing of all' to many people, as 'only a transformation

of another phantasy . . . the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence'.¹⁰ The Welsh were entombed in the womb of Britain's past, according to the 1847 reports, and there they must perish down the dark shaft, 'under the hatches'.

But the enlightened British state would save them from such a fate, if it could. 'It must always be the desire of a Government to render its dominions, as far as possible, homogenous . . . Sooner or later, the difference of language between Wales and England will probably be effaced . . . an event which is socially and politically so desirable,' wrote Matthew Arnold in a further 1852 report on Welsh education.¹¹ As part of a systematic government attempt to bring about this effacement, the 'Welsh Not' regime was established in Welsh schools and children caught speaking Welsh within the school gates were punished. These measures took their toll on the numbers of Welsh speakers, which also declined as a result of the migration of a large number of incomers into the industrialized areas of south Wales during the second half of the nineteenth century. While about 70 per cent of the Welsh population spoke Welsh in the 1840s, with the more westerly counties such as Cardiganshire, Meirionethshire and Anglesey 100 per cent Welsh-speaking, only 49.9 per cent spoke the language by 1901.¹² Faced with such statistics, some observers from within Wales too viewed the demise of the language, and with it the end of the Welsh as a distinct ethnicity, as imminent and inevitable. It is not surprising in this context that much of the Welsh Gothic material published during the mid-Victorian years, whether by Welsh writers or others, incorporates portrayals of the Welsh as a doomed people and describes their obliteration from the annals of history; the first section of this chapter explores some such representations.

The doom of the Cymry

In 1836, Joseph Downes, a Londoner who had established himself as a surgeon in Builth Wells, Breconshire and adopted the Welsh patriot's cause as his own, was already protesting bitterly that the increasingly anglicized and, as he saw it, de-cultured Welsh gentry had as a group renounced any interest in their own literary

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Haunted Communities (1900s–1940s)



In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery F. Gordon argues that a haunting experience is one in which 'a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known'. '[H]aunting', she says, 'is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance), or when the oppressive nature is denied.' The awareness of injustice abides in the subject's unconscious and flares into consciousness at the haunting moment 'when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done'.¹ In terms of social development towards the eradication of injustices, the experience of being haunted is thus presented by Gordon as potentially progressive, in that it raises into consciousness past wrongs and creates a restlessness to learn from them and amend them. In a gender context, it is a process akin to that which in feminist terms used to be known as 'consciousness raising', when the personal is recognized as the political. In a class context, it could also be compared to the moment in Brechtian epic theatre when the ordinary day-to-day conditions of habituated life are suddenly interrupted, and thus 'uncovered' and exposed to the audience's gaze as strange and alienating; 'instead of identifying itself with the hero', the

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audience of epic theatre, as Walter Benjamin explained, 'is called upon to learn to be astonished at the circumstances within which he has his being'.² The haunting moment similarly exposes previously accepted conditions to the individual as unjust, inhumane and benighted – in a word, as Gothic.

Much of this book argues that the conquest of Wales, its ethnic subjugation and subsequent attempts to subordinate or eradicate its cultural difference haunt the Welsh imagination, and find expression in Welsh Gothic literature. But other instances of social injustice have also, of course, affected Welsh communities and been represented in their literature. In this chapter the focus is on two such instances, both in a sense related to Wales's colonial experience in that it is unlikely that they would have taken the extreme forms they did had the country enjoyed more autonomy and had a greater control of its own resources, but both also endured by similarly afflicted communities in Britain and elsewhere.

The 1870s and 1880s were years of acute agricultural depression in Wales, which left the communities of the rural counties much impoverished; in Cardiganshire, for example, the average income per head was so low that whereas the mean tax collected for income per head in England in 1875–6 stood at £15.7, in Cardiganshire it was nearly half that, at £8.4 per head, compared with £12 in Wales generally.³ Many agricultural workers emigrated, many more moved down to the south-east counties of the country to find employment in iron, steel and tin works, and in the Welsh coalfields which were at this time becoming amongst the most productive globally. While the population of Wales was distributed more or less evenly throughout its counties at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by its close the south-easterly valleys were densely inhabited while much of the rest of Wales had become what the poet Harri Webb referred to as an under-populated 'green desert'.⁴ In the 1881 Census, industrial Glamorganshire's population was recorded as 518,383; by 1911 its numbers had more than doubled, to 1,130,668, nearly half of the total population of Wales, but in Cardiganshire the figures fell from 95,137 to 80,769 during the same period. Towns like Pontypridd at the mouth of the Rhondda more than trebled in size, from 93,493 in 1881 to 288,564 in 1911, while small rural centres like Tregaron in Cardiganshire shrank to two-thirds of their former

size.⁵ Within the industrial townships and pit villages there were, however, very few opportunities for employment, for men or women, other than in the production of raw materials; the sociologist Graham Day points out that 'while Wales was virtually the only producer of tinplate and sheet steel in Britain, only 11% of the former and 4% of the latter were processed for finished products within Wales'. Consequently, 'no self-sustaining industrial base' was developed in a country in which the mines and furnaces were usually controlled by external investment, with the profits 'creamed off and realized elsewhere'.⁶ For those who left the land to cram into the packed terraces which mushroomed under the shadow of the pits, there were therefore few prospects of escape for themselves or their children from dependence on underground labour, with its concomitant threat of sudden death from rock fall, explosion, coal-gas or flooding, or of slower death from silicosis. 'We were more or less living with death every day,' testified a Llwynypia inhabitant, remembering her childhood in that coal-mining village in the 1900s: 'Because there wasn't a week passing by, there wasn't someone being injured, someone being killed. There was always that tragedy hanging over . . . I felt that as a child. That there was something hanging over us all the time.'⁷ These are the communities which haunt the imaginations of such writers as Rhys Davies (1901–78), Glyn Jones (1905–95), Gwyn Jones (1907–99) and Gwyn Thomas (1913–81), all born and brought up in the south Wales valleys. Industrial fiction tends to be categorized as realist in terms of genre but in many instances, as the second half of this chapter aims to illustrate, the work of these writers borrows darker tones from the Gothic mode in calling upon readers to recognize what was alien and unjust about the ordinary, everyday conditions of life in the coalfield townships.

At least two of the above authors acknowledged as their immediate forefather within the field of anglophone Welsh writing another author not of the valleys himself, Caradoc Evans (1878–1945). In *The Dragon Has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing* (1968), Glyn Jones refers to him as 'the man who Professor Gwyn Jones has taught us to regard as the first of the modern Anglo-Welsh',⁸ and describes his and Dylan Thomas's pilgrimage to visit Caradoc, as he calls him, in 1934 in search of inspiration at the

outset of their careers as writers. Brought up in Cardiganshire, Caradoc Evans made his name on the strength of his series of linked short stories about the rural communities in which he spent an impoverished childhood in the 1880s, *My People* (1915) and its sequel *Capel Sion* (1917). His widowed mother had been disinherited by her Nonconformist farming family for marrying an Anglican, and according to her son was consequently barred from membership of her local Calvinist Methodist chapel because she could not contribute to its funds: 'lacking the money and having a heavy burden of young children, she would not pay, and was, according to the custom, treated as an outcast'.⁹ In his fictions her son wreaks vengeance on the ministers and deacons who thus further darkened lives stunted by rural poverty; the rulers of his Welsh chapels are monsters to a man. *My People* was greeted with horror in Wales, where an attempt was made to ban it.¹⁰ But its reception in England was much more favourable and its 'exuberant grotesqueries', in Tony Conran's words, also 'set the tone' for a new rebellious generation of Welsh writers in English who relished its 'anti-puritan, anti-pedagogue, anti-ruling class' stance.¹¹ Arthur Machen, for one, certainly appreciated a book that he categorized as unquestionably Gothic, saying of it,

Never have I come into so wild and dark a country as that shown in *My People*. Black savagery, black magic, black superstition, all pretending to be Methodism: Witch Doctors and Medicine Men more dread and powerful than any such to be discovered in Africa; and these calling themselves Respected Religious Teachers! . . . I had to shut up *My People* and take down the ABC Railway Guide: to assure myself that the Great Western would take one into the heart of the Black Desert in seven or eight hours.¹²

But *My People* was by no means the first or last text to Gothicize Welsh chapel culture. As well as assessing some of the darker aspects in Caradoc Evans's writings, the first section of this chapter also explores the manner in which Gothic tropes were employed to darken satirical attacks on what was seen as the Nonconformist sects' excesses both before and after the publication of *My People*. The chapter as a whole explores the fictional representation of fears

acceptance on the part of her fellow passengers of early death as inevitable, as part of the price of coal, embitters her more at that moment than the likely death itself. The women's passivity in the face of such injustice and their assumption that she too will have to resign herself to such a widowed fate as theirs is too much for her to bear. But she too quickly represses and covers up her recognition, telling herself instead that once they're married she will look after her collier.

The same doomed atmosphere of incipient and inevitable early death also envelops the pit villagers in another of Rhys Davies's tales 'The dark world' (1942), though here the key death is that of a young wife, not her collier husband. In fact, the lives of the miners' wives were also all too frequently cut short. Life expectancy was lower for women than men, for all the health hazards of the men's employment; women died earlier, worn to the bone by childbirth and the incessant effort to maintain standards of hygiene before the establishment of pit baths or domestic water supply. In *Our Mothers' Land*, Dot Jones provided statistical evidence demonstrating that the death rates for valleys' women of child-bearing age were from 1890 to 1910 'significantly higher than for men', in contrast with the figures for England and Wales as a whole where the mortality rates for women were lower than for men in every age group. 'Such a "traditional" mortality pattern is characteristic of pre-industrial communities,' she comments: 'Like living in an undeveloped economy, early marriage to miners was not good for a woman's health.'⁵⁸ In 'The dark world', Rhys Davies captures a young boy's dawning recognition of this characteristic coalfield mortality pattern, and what it means for the community as a whole. Two bored Rhondda boys, Thomas and Jim, indulge their macabre taste for visiting the homes of the newly dead, on the pretext of 'paying their respects'; 'they would search through the endless rows of houses for windows covered with white sheets, the sign that death was within', and find them readily enough.⁵⁹ But one evening, unexpectedly, they view the corpse of a young woman, with her dead baby at her side, who had in life been known to Thomas, and the scene changes his outlook, bringing home to him the reality of the grief and loss death entails, and the manner in which his community is peculiarly blighted. He feels terror, a sense of 'nightmare menace coming

nearer',⁶⁰ As he emerges afterwards out onto the terraced street, it seems to him that

all the night was weeping. The dark alley was an avenue of the dead, the close-shuttered houses were tombs . . . There was something horrible in the dark world. . . . At the top of the hill leading to his home he paused in anguish. The bare high place was open to the hostile heavens, a lump of earth open like a helpless face to the blows of the wind and the rain.⁶¹

It is the helplessness of these communities – trapped in suffering and dread – that emerges most strongly from these stories and gives them the power to evoke that haunting sense of profound social injustice, which the characters glimpse fleetingly, perhaps, but devastatingly before they resume everyday life again. For the most part they are habituated to the conditions of their labour: 'The cross of custom held us', says Ken Etheridge (1911–81) of the pit village communities in his 1940 poem 'Blades in the Slag'.⁶² It was during the early decades of the twentieth century, however, the period in which these stories are set, that the south Wales workers and their union leaders developed their understanding of the root cause of these injustices to such effect that they transformed the political face of Wales. In the 1900 general election, Keir Hardie in Merthyr won the first Westminster seat for what was then the Independent Labour Party; by the 1945 general election, twenty-seven of Wales's thirty-five parliamentary seats were held by Labour candidates. The analytic tool they relied upon to cut through the confounding sense of doomed helplessness was, of course, Marxism, which explained to them the economic and psychological ways by means of which capitalism prevailed, and the manner in which the apparently help-

less masses grow attached to their masters, like a herd of slaves or horses. The hereditary masters are the purpose of this whole society. This world belongs to them . . . and they stand where their feet have grown, on the necks of those political animals that know of no other destination than to be attached to the masters and subject to them, to be at their disposal.⁶³

The south Wales author who most effectively fictionalized Marx's Gothic metaphors, illustrating the manner in which the 'tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living' while capital still functions as 'dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour',⁶⁴ was, arguably, Gwyn Thomas, from Cymmer, near Porth in the Rhondda, the youngest of twelve children of an unemployed miner and exhausted mother, who died shortly after his birth. An oppressed community, suffering but unable to break free of its hereditary masters, is central to his 1946 novella 'Oscar', set in the industrial villages of south Wales during the Depression years. Oscar, like his father before him, is the local capitalist exploiter and landowner, the landlord of the village's lines of terraced houses, and also the owner of the mountain above them and the coal tip on which his tenants scramble for fuel. As unemployed miners they sustain themselves and pay his rents by picking coal off his tip for five pence a bag, which he sells on for one and seven pence; Oscar patrols the tip with his gun and shoots to kill if he finds any tenant absconding with a lump of coal for his own use. The whole community, according to Oscar's servant Lewis, the story's first-person narrator, is bitterly conscious of its subordination and dehumanization; like Lewis, it has 'become a kind of shadow to this Oscar',⁶⁵ and yet cannot will itself to take the ample opportunities Oscar's heavy drinking and womanizing habits afford to free itself of this monstrous and literally murderous incubus. Lewis's mother, who lives in one of Oscar's terraces, is widowed, her collier husband dead of lung disease; although she despises her son for accepting the post of the capitalist's personal servant, he can find no other paying occupation with which to support the two of them. Like the rest of the villagers, he knows of 'no other destination' than to be at Oscar's disposal. 'The poor hug to their heart all the yesterdays they know have not been lived and the burden is a heavy one,' says Lewis; 'only those whose poverty seems to have existed from the earth's beginning have to put up with being dragged below the surface by the dead chains of past years, past days. But Oscar was free.'⁶⁶

Lewis's friend Danny thinks similarly; though he knows 'somebody'd be doing the world a kindness to put [Oscar] out of the way' he also is paralysed by 'the tradition of all the dead generations'.

'You can't be afraid for years and years and then say: "To hell with fear,"' he tells Lewis. 'It's not as simple, boy. It stays, like blood and bone, part of what makes you live.'⁶⁷ All the villagers are 'going around with a rope on their necks jerking them to a halt every time they tried moving forward'.⁶⁸ At one point in the tale, however, Danny is suddenly provided with an opportunity to rid the village of its incubus. When Oscar attacks him with a whip for attempting to take coal from his tip, Danny succeeds in pulling Oscar from his horse to the ground, and stands above him with a stone. 'If I had any sense,' he said, 'I'd bring this down over your head and if I did that, I'd have the feeling I'd done one useful thing on earth. But I don't like giving pain. People of my sort don't as a rule. We just get it . . . and we pass over the feeling how the hell we stood it for so long.'⁶⁹ So he lets the moment pass, and Oscar promptly shoots at him and brings about his death. His distraught widow, Hannah, swears that she is 'going to kill that bastard of an Oscar . . . I'll do it just to get clean again',⁷⁰ but once more when the opportunity, engineered by Lewis, arrives she cannot bring herself to do so. Lewis realizes that

people who have lived in places like those Terraces and who have been kicked around for the sole benefit of others, have been afraid of things for so many years and for such good cause that they get into the habit of being afraid even when their brains are screaming at them that there is no sense in their fear.⁷¹

Finally, Oscar is destroyed, not in the end by any act of violence but simply by the withdrawal of labour, a one-man strike; Lewis is with him as, drunk and obese, he clambers home from the village across his mountain top and the alienated servant allows him, unassisted for once, to proceed on his own momentum and topple over the mountain edge into a deep quarry. But even this passive aggression, for all its success, is enough to fill the servant's mind with a profound negativity: all he desires after Oscar's fall is

to talk in the dark with that quiet, distant woman who was my mother, and who was no doubt wise about why there was so little

peace in the strange tormented area that separated me from Oscar and Danny, the shrinking ditch between the stirring and the resting.⁷¹

It feels like death to rid his world of Oscar, so much has servicing Oscar become his identity.

In 'Simeon' (1946), Gwyn Thomas creates another Oscar: Simeon is also a landowner, inhabiting a large house on the higher slopes of a mountain overlooking the pit village from which he draws his servants. One of those servants, Ben, is also the narrator of this tale and he too experiences himself as bound by the labour of generations to the role. 'There had been so many slaves in my family we got more pliable from father to son,' he says.⁷³

My father always said patience dampened the ground at your feet so that your foot trod on it without a sound, and people never heard you as you passed on your way to the grave, and you weren't bothered as much by people then as you would be if you went stamping on the hard ground like a self-important horse, drawing attention to yourself.⁷⁴

But even this taught patience is eroded when the narrator learns the dark secrets of Simeon's household: two of his cowed daughters, trapped in the house, have been raped by their father and have had a child each by him, living dead children who looked 'terribly like Simeon, and although they were kids their faces looked old . . . they sat, as silent as if they were dead nearly'.⁷⁵ So hungry for complete ownership is Simeon that he has drained the blood even of his own kith and kin, making them his dark shadow. Finally, when Eleanor, Simeon's third daughter who as yet knows nothing of her father's crimes, returns to the house from which her older sister had sent her away for safety, and Ben realizes that she too is now endangered, he determines to kill Simeon, but once again finds that he cannot do it: 'my limbs were frozen . . . I shouted to myself that now was the time and I couldn't wait any longer, but my voice just laughed at itself . . . and I still couldn't move'.⁷⁶ It is Eleanor herself, not as indoctrinated in the ways of subservience as the other members of the household, who in the end succeeds in killing her father, simply by holding in front of herself a knife onto which the momentum of his incestuous passion dashes him.

Jane Aaron, *Welsh Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013