WELSH MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE IN THE NOVELS OF ARTHUR MACHEN, JOHN COWPER POWYS & ALAN GARNER

Felix Taylor
St Hugh's College
University of Oxford

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This thesis traces a line of engagement with Welsh mythology and folklore in British fiction from the *fin de siècle* Celtic Revival through to the 1960s and beyond. It argues that the three writers Arthur Machen, John Cowper Powys and Alan Garner, each attuned to the importance of local place and region, turn to Wales – or in various senses *back* to Wales – as a country whose traditions could be used to revive or reinvent aspects of life in Britain which they considered lost or in the process of disappearing. To varying extents, all three writers negotiate a relationship with Wales and 'Welshness' in their fiction and within this explore questions of ancestry, personal identity and what they view as the wider spiritual crises of an increasingly rational and industrialised society. Their conceptions of Wales as an alternative imaginative space in which their individual spiritualities and philosophies could more easily take shape than in England suggests that for these writers Wales exists as a place of transformation, liminality and magic, intimately connected to its mythological past. Their collected works of fiction are unique in this way; informed by, and at times working against, modern constructions of a romantic Celtic mysticism, this thesis demonstrates how the mythology and folktales of Wales are developing influences across Machen, Powys and Garner's work, and provide the narratives and symbols necessary for exploring questions of spirituality, inherited tradition and the immaterial in the rationalised world of late nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain.

List of abbreviations

AGR	John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance* (London: Pan, 1975)
B	Alan Garner, *Boneland* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013)
C	Arthur Machen, *The Collected Arthur Machen*, ed. Christopher Palmer (London: Duckworth, 1988)
M	John Cowper Powys, *Morwyn, or the Vengeance of God* (London: Cassell, 1937)
MC	John Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle* (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 2001)
MG	Alan Garner, *The Moon of Gomrath* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)
OC	John Cowper Powys, *Obstinate Cymric* (London: Village Press, 1973)
OG	John Cowper Powys, *Owen Glendower* (London: Pan, 1978)
OS	Alan Garner, *The Owl Service* (London: Collins, 1987)
P	John Cowper Powys, *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* (New York: Overlook Ducksworth, 2007)
S	Alan Garner, *Strandloper* (London: Harvill Press, 1997)
SG	Arthur Machen, *The Secret Glory* (London: Aziloth, 2014)
THS	Arthur Machen, *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural Volume 1* (St Albans: Panther, 1975)
VT	Alan Garner, *The Voice That Thunders: Essays and Lectures* (London: Harvill Press, 1997)
WB	Alan Garner, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (London: Collins, 1971)
WP	Arthur Machen, *The White People and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (London: Penguin, 2011)
WS	John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000)

Introduction: Wales, Welshness, and Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century England

The history of the reception of medieval Welsh literature is a history of invention, romanticising and reimagining. Since the literary revival of the eighteenth century when the canon of Welsh literature was being shaped, writers, translators and politicians have sought to construct a picture of Wales and its accompanying 'Welshness' to various ends, a trend which has continued to the present day. Matthew Arnold's fabulation in the 1860s of the 'Celt' (see below for wider discussion of the term) as inherently more sentimental and more attuned to the natural world than the English gave rise to an image of the Welsh people and their literature which, while repeatedly discredited in the academic world, has never truly left the popular imagination; its influence can still be identified in modern literary culture. It is with this idea of the romantic reinvention of Wales and its traditions in mind that this thesis will explore the use of Welsh mythology and folklore in modern British fiction, tracing a line of engagement in the novels of Arthur Machen (1863 – 1947), John Cowper Powys (1872 – 1963) and Alan Garner (*b*. 1934).[1] It will argue that their individual responses, informed by, and at times working against modern constructions of a romantic Celtic mysticism· are attempts to negotiate a personal identity caught between England and Wales. Machen, Powys and Garner, each attuned to the importance of place and region, turn to Wales – or in various senses *back* to Wales – as a country whose traditions could provide an alternative spirituality to the orthodox theological and philosophical systems of their historical moments. All three are writers who responded to contemporary revivals of

[1] The term 'Welsh mythology' is repeatedly used in this thesis to reflect how these three authors – particularly Powys and Garner – understand and respond to medieval Welsh literature as a collection of narratives and characters found in such 'mythological' texts as the *Mabinogion* and *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* ('the Triads of the Island of Britain'). 'Welsh mythology' is, however, a problematic term in modern Celtic scholarship due to its implication that there exists a clearly defined body of myth; rather these works are considered literary texts and products of a specific literary culture with its own conventions and aesthetics. Powys especially appears wilfully unaware of this fact and treats many characters, often obscure or misinterpreted by nineteenth-century scholars, as gods and goddesses to be employed in his theories about the Welsh imagination. In this introduction I shall give a brief account of the history of the reception of Welsh material and in Chapter Four I will contextualise how Powys was thinking about the *Mabinogi* by looking at contemporary interpretations of the Four Branches as 'myth'.

interest in Celtic tradition in the wider culture: Machen's early work coincided with the emergence of the 1890s Celtic Revival, while Powys was influenced by late-nineteenth-century comparative mythology as it began to reconfigure scholarly approaches to Welsh and Irish myth; Garner's first fantasy novels were written during the rise in counter-cultural and New Age thinking in the 1960s. Welsh tradition thus provides the narratives, archetypes and symbols necessary for exploring questions of inherited tradition, ancestry, identity and spirituality in the increasingly industrialised and materialistic world of late nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain. Below I shall contextualise each author with a short biographical sketch and a summary of their critical reception before moving into a broader discussion of Welshness and Welsh medievalism.

Arthur Machen passed a solitary childhood in Monmouthshire, the only child of the Revd John Edward Jones and Janet Machen (the family adopted 'Machen' to please Janet's Scottish relatives).[2] Machen contended that due to being 'three-parts Celt' he was 'by nature inclined to the work of words' and from a young age began to compose his own verse, most notably the self-published poem *Eleusinia* on the Eleusinian Mysteries.[3] Unable to provide the funds to send him to Jesus College, Oxford, Machen's father convinced his son to travel to London in 1880 to train as a surgeon, but by 1884 Machen had secured employment as a cataloguer of unlisted occult literature for the antiquarian publisher George Redway. By the beginning of the 1890s he had published several translations of French works and at least two of his own original creations – a pastiche of seventeenth-century English philosophy, *The Anatomy of Tobacco* (1884), and the frame tale *The Chronicle of Clemendy* (1888). During the decade that followed he achieved 'notoriety if not fame' as a broadsheet journalist and a writer of the supernatural with 'The Great God Pan' (1894) and *The Three Impostors* (1895).[4] For several years Machen was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the London-based secret society whose initiates included W. B. Yeats, Aleister Crowley and Machen's lifelong

[2] Roger Dobson, 'Machen, Arthur Llewelyn Jones (1863-1947), writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37711> [accessed 31 March 2021].
[3] Arthur Machen, *Far Off Things* (London: Martin Secker, 1922), p. 87.
[4] *Ibid*., 218.

friend A. E. Waite. In 1901 he left the Order and joined the Benson theatre company, marrying the actress Dorothie Purefoy Hudleston, with whom he had two children. During the following years his theories concerning the Celtic origins of the Holy Grail became interwoven with his renewed devotion to the Anglican Church in his two novels *The Secret Glory* (1922) and *The Great Return* (1915). Machen died in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire in 1947, his work little appreciated in England, although enthusiasm had been growing in America since the 1920s.[5]

Possibly due to the unclassifiable nature of his writing, critical interest in Machen has fluctuated since his death, rarely reaching beyond academic circles. He has primarily been considered a writer of Gothic or 'weird' fiction; his early tales of the supernatural, which fuse elements of Western occultism with Welsh fairy lore, are often treated alongside short story writers of the early twentieth century such as Algernon Blackwood, M. R. James and H. P. Lovecraft, as in S. T. Joshi's *The Weird Tale* (1990).[6] Recent monographs by Kelly Hurley (1996), Lawrence Phillips (2010) and Sam Wiseman (2019) examine Machen's fiction as part of the Gothic mode, arguing that his work expresses fears surrounding evolutionary degeneration and emerging reconfigurations of 'Gothic London' as a transitional space in the *fin de siècle*.[7] Although Machen's biographers claim that the author 'followed no fashion and clung to no coterie', his early fiction has also been analysed in relation to the Decadent movement of the 1890s.[8] Within this, his use of occultism and a particularly

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[5] Machen is probably best remembered for his short story 'The Bowmen' (1914), in which a host of spectral Agincourt archers appear to aid British troops on the battlefield. This was widely accepted as fact and gave rise to the 'Angel of Mons' legend the following year. See David Clarke, *The Angel of Mons: Phantom Soldiers and Ghostly Guardians* (Chichester: Wiley, 2005)

[6] 'Weird fiction' is a mode of speculative fiction whose subject is a 'fascination for the outside, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience'. Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), p. 8. The term was popularised by the American writer H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), who named Machen as one of the masters of supernatural fiction. See also James Machin, *Weird Fiction in Britain 1880-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 93-162; and Emily Alder, *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle* (Cham: Palgrave, 2020), pp. 45-113.

[7] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Lawrence Phillips, *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination* (London: Continuum, 2010); Sam Wiseman, *Locating the Gothic in British Modernity* (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2019).

[8] Aidan Reynolds and William Charlton, *Arthur Machen: A Short Account of his Life and Work* (London: The Richards Press, 1963), p. 42; for studies of Decadence in Machen's fiction, see Jill Tedford Owens, 'Arthur Machen's Supernaturalism: The Decadent Variety', *University of Mississippi Studies in English*, 8 (1990), 117-126; and Stefania Forlini, 'Modern Narratives and Decadent Things in Arthur Machen's *The Three Impostors*', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 55.iv (2012), 479-498.

'Celtic' form of Symbolism has been separately treated by Sondeep Kandola (2013) and Alex Murray (2016).[9] More broadly D. P. Michael (1971) and Karl Petersen (1973) provide a general overview of Celtic themes in Machen's work, although subsequent studies are noticeably lacking.[10]

John Cowper Powys was born in Shirley, Derbyshire, the eldest of eleven children and related on his mother's side to the poets John Donne and William Cowper.[11] After graduating from Cambridge he married Margaret Lyon in 1896 with whom he had a son, Littleton Alfred, in 1902. From 1898 to 1934 Powys spent large parts of each year lecturing across America, only returning to his family in England for the summer; during this period he met Phyllis Plater, who became his romantic partner and whose editorial and critical advice is generally held to have helped shape Powys's writing. His major works – *Autobiography* (1934) and the series of four books known as his 'Wessex' novels, which began with *Wolf Solent* (1929) – were mostly written in rural New York State. Following the couple's move to Dorchester in 1934 and Corwen, North Wales, in 1935, Powys wrote three novels which developed his theories concerning Welsh mythology and the 'aboriginal' Welsh people, discussed in Chapter Four, and compiled *Obstinate Cymric* (1947), a book of essays on Welsh themes. In 1954 Powys finally moved to the slate-mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog where he continued to write novels until his death a decade later – including *Atlantis* (1954) and *The Brazen Head* (1956) – although none would address Welsh themes to the same extent as in his final major work *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* (1951).

Described as a 'monumental "minor" writer' whose work develops the sprawling Victorian novel and changing attitudes to rural England via the influence of Thomas Hardy, Powys is often viewed as an

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[9] Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 137-156; Sondeep Kandola, 'Celtic Occultism and the Symbolist Mode in the Fin-de-Siècle Writings of Arthur Machen and W. B. Yeats', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 56.iv (2013), 497-518.
[10] D. P. M. Michael, *Writers of Wales: Arthur Machen* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1971); Karl Petersen, 'Arthur Machen and the Celtic Renaissance in Wales' (unpublished PhD thesis: Louisiana State University, 1973).
[11] Belinda Humphrey, 'Powys, John Cowper (1872-1963), novelist and writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-35598> [accessed 31 March 2021]

overlooked novelist.[12] Beyond his fiction and works of philosophy he was a prolific diarist and wrote at estimated 40,000 letters during his lifetime.[13] Early critical studies of his fiction such as those by H. P. Collins (1966) and Richard Breckon (1969), as well as surveys of his novels such as those by Glen Cavaliero (1973) and G. Wilson Knight (1964), rightly treat him as an eccentric and idiosyncratic figure but rarely attempt to place Powys in any wider literary or cultural context beyond the author's own self-image.[14] Recent monographs, however, have considered Powys as a figure within English modernism during the interwar period and argue that Powys's treatment of rural landscape and folk tradition represent a re-examining of place and Empire after the First World War.[15] Studies of Powys's use of Welsh material began with Jeremy Hooker (1973) in his contribution to the *Writers of Wales* series, but further surveys have been limited to journal articles, notably by Jean Markale (1973) and Robin L. Wood (1988).[16] Hooker also devotes a chapter to Powys in *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (2001) alongside writers such as R. S. Thomas, David Jones and Gillian Clarke.[17]

As a living author, Alan Garner has received far less critical attention compared to Machen and Powys; this is partly due to best being known for his writing in the genre of children's fantasy and the fact that he is still publishing work.[18] Born in Congleton, Cheshire, in 1934 to a family of craftsmen, Garner was raised in the village of Alderley Edge. He suffered several life-threatening illnesses in childhood and an inability to work with his hands meant that he was able to focus on his education.

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[12] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 62.
[13] Robert Blackmore, ed., *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to G. R. Wilson Knight* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1983), pp. 10-11.
[14] H. P. Collins, *John Cowper Powys: Old Earth Man* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1966); Richard Breckon, *John Cowper Powys: The Solitary Giant* (Loughton: K. A. Ward, 1969); Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest* (London: Methuen, 1964).
[15] Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, pp. 62-70; Sam Wiseman, *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism* (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2015), pp. 43-72.
[16] Jeremy Hooker, *Writers of Wales: John Cowper Powys* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1973); Jean Markale, 'Powys et le celtisme', *Granit* 1-2 (1973), 246-62; Robin L. Wood, 'John Cowper Powys's Welsh Mythology: Gods and Manias', *Powys Review* 22.vi (1988), 3-13.
[17] Jeremy Hooker, *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 91-110.
[18] Although Garner's last work of fiction, *Boneland*, was published in 2012, he has since written a childhood memoir *Where Shall We Run To?* (2019) and the short novel *Treacle Walker*, due to be released later in 2021.

After winning a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School and then to Magdalen College, Oxford, Garner first dreamed of occupying the Chair of Greek, but he moved back to Alderley Edge without taking a degree with the intent to become a writer. His first three novels, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963) and *Elidor* (1965) are children's fantasy literature, but with *The Owl Service* (1967) and *Red Shift* (1973) Garner developed his exploration of the complex relationship between inherited tradition, time and local landscape for adult readers. These themes continued to occupy his work in the following decades as the gaps between the writing of his novels increased. Neil Philip provides a survey of Garner's first six books, various radio plays, and collections of folktales in *A Fine Anger* (1981), and Catherine Butler (2006) considers Garner alongside three other fantasy authors of the 'Oxford school' (authors who attended in Oxford in the 1950s and 60s and went on to produce works of fantasy fiction).[19] Garner's early work is often assessed as part of studies of children's fantasy, such as those by Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn (2016) and Maria Sachiko Cecire (2019), but far less has been written about his later novels.[20] His extended relationship with Wales has not been considered except in relation to his fifth novel *The Owl Service*.

In analysing the work of Machen, Powys and Garner as writers whose novels and short stories form part of a wider pattern of the reception of medieval Welsh literature, this thesis brings together three bodies of work which have rarely been considered collectively together. Although each author differs considerably in their use of form, genre and content, the mythology, folklore and folktales of Wales are consistent and developing presences across their work. They share complex and unusual conceptions of Welshness, largely imagined or romanticised, which are informed by the perceived nationality and geographic relationship to Wales described above. Significantly, part of these writers'

[19] Neil Philip, *A Fine Anger: A Critical Introduction to the Work of Alan Garner* (London: Collins, 1981); Catherine Butler, *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children's Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper* (Oxford: Children's Literature Association and Scarecrow Press, 2006).
[20] Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn, *Children's Fantasy Literature: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Maria Sachiko Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

engagement with Welsh identity is through rural landscape, specifically a localised and often (though not exclusively) Welsh landscape, its geology, and cultural and historical associations. Machen's ideal of a Celtic Church is communicated through visions of a pastoral South Wales in his later fiction, while the Iron Age hillforts of Dorset and Somerset in Powys's 'Wessex' novels are settings for the development of his Welsh-inspired philosophy; and for Garner the wooded escarpment known as the Edge is a psychologically transformative presence in his novels and connects him to his ancestors. The natural environment is thus the stage on which much of the recycling and reviving of Welsh mythology and folklore take place, allowing for the exploration and interplay of ideas of nationality, spirituality and inherited tradition.

What does Welshness mean?

Although Machen, Powys and Garner rarely address political Welsh nationalism in their work, through their individual negotiations with various questions surrounding what it means to be Welsh or 'Celtic' they are nevertheless participating in a broader discourse around the fostering of 'Welshness' as an identity recognisably separate from 'Englishness'. To understand this further it is worth considering some of the major changes in the social history of Wales and the concept of Welshness, as well as accompanying literary revivals. Wales has a traceable national heritage cultivated in isolation from its statehood, which, writes Kenneth O. Morgan, 'is as old as the Welsh themselves', and as Charlotte Aull Davis notes, the Welsh nationalist movement of the late nineteenth century was based primarily on cultural distinctiveness.[21] The study of the reception of medieval Welsh literature therefore cannot disregard the history of Welsh nationalism. A sense of ethnic and cultural distinctiveness has been a constant feature of the country's history: emphasis on the differences

[21] Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales: Rebirth of a Nation 1880-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 90; Charlotte Aull Davis, *Welsh Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: The Ethnic Option and the Modern State* (London: Praeger, 1989), p. 10.

between the Welsh and the English was for example given expression by Giraldus Cambrensis in the twelfth century and the revolt of Owain Glyndŵr in the fifteenth (a figure Powys would later fictionalise in the novel *Owen Glendower* (1941)).[22] Following centuries of ineffectual uprisings against English rule, Wales was officially absorbed into the English state by the 1536 Act of Union which removed any legal distinction between the two countries.[23] Since then various developments in Welsh economic and religious structures brought about by the Industrial Revolution have led to surges of nationalist sentiment, although, as John Davies notes, a recognisable political nationalism was not evident until the second half of the nineteenth century.[24]

Industrialisation had advanced in the eighteenth century, increasing and diversifying the Welsh economy; overseas conflicts demanded munitions in the forms of iron, copper and tinplate, and coal had begun to be mined in what are now Merthyr Tydfil, Ebbw Vale and the Rhondda Valleys.[25] Population growth in South Wales was as much of an issue there as it was in the rest of the country, but due to the poverty in rural communities the standards of living fell at a sharper rate during the early nineteenth century than in any other region; poor road conditions and turnpike toll gates contributed to an isolated existence in which labourers and smaller farmers experienced extreme financial difficulties.[26] The Rebecca Riots which took place between 1839 and 1843 – so called for the women's clothing worn by the rioters – were an expression of these hardships.[27] The introduction of the railways in the 1850s provided some relief, if only temporarily, and certain industrial towns expanded into large-scale centres of mining and metal production; the surplus population migrated from the countryside to these areas *en masse* and began to work in slum conditions.[28] Merthyr Tydfil is notable in this regard; situated in the county of Glamorgan thirty miles from Machen's father's

[22] Euryn Rhys Roberts, 'Britain, Wales, England, *c*. 600-1450', *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, eds. Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 13-25, p. 15; Thomas Charles-Edwards provides a detailed account of the early formation of the area of Britain now known as Wales in *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[23] John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 233.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 415.
[25] J. Graham Jones, *The History of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p. 116.
[26] John Davies, p. 378.
[27] *Ibid*, p. 379.
[28] Jones, p. 14.

parish of Llanddewi, at one point in the years following the Industrial Revolution Merthyr housed several of the world's largest ironworks, and by the time Machen was born in 1863 it was renowned for its large production of coal.[29] Unplanned towns sprang up to cater to the growing population of workers, destroying vegetation and wildlife and replacing the countryside with chimneys and rows of houses.[30] Indeed, landscape degradation is crucial to how Machen, Powys and Garner represent their antipathy to modern industrialised society in their fiction. Machen is most distinctive: his supernatural tales of the 'Little People' are set on barren grey hillsides in South Wales.

Industrial growth developed hand in hand with religious dissent. The Church of England in Wales in the eighteenth century had been represented largely by a non-residential aristocracy – land-owning, non-Welsh-speaking bishops who would often live outside of their constituencies and rarely visited parishioners.[31] The large-scale migration of rural Welsh families into newly-industrialised areas of the south, however, exposed the Church's ineffectualness and its inability to deal with the sudden population increase. Moreover, the new mining communities were Welsh in stock, often Welsh-speaking and, notes E. T. Davies, Welsh in sentiment.[32] In newly formed industrial towns chapels were erected, pamphlets distributed, and social issues hitherto ignored by Anglican landowners were finally addressed. By the mid-nineteenth century nonconformist churches – Protestant denominations which had split from the established Anglican church – came to represent a significant organisational component of the growing sense of national identity.[33] This religious opposition resulted in a kind of shared resistance of all nonconformist factions to what they regarded as the feudal or 'foreign' nature of the Church of England. Since disestablishment would not occur until 1920, a tenth of all earnings still had to be paid to the local parson.[34] Indeed, after the elections of 1868 the next twenty years in Wales would see a transformation from radicalism to a new form of nationalism, coloured by the

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[29] Merthyr Teachers' Association, *The Story of Merthyr Tydfil* (Cardiff: M. T. A., 1932), p. 190.
[30] Jones, p. 122.
[31] E. T. Davies, 'The Church in the Industrial Revolution', *A History of the Church in Wales*, ed. David Walker (Penarth: Church in Wales, 1976), 121-143, p. 122.
[32] E. T. Davies, p. 125.
[33] Charlotte Aull Davis, p. 11.
[34] John Davies, p. 593.

demand for disestablishment.[35] Nonconformism was closely associated with Welshness, and the community-based approaches of its various denominations helped to foster a renewed interest in Welsh culture.[36]

By the 1880s the concept of Welshness, and the idea of Wales as a nation distinct from England, was beginning to take a more coherent shape. Up until that point Wales had been neglected and isolated from the rest of Britain, viewed by many of the English ruling class as belonging to an earlier time, and so the subsequent period of Welsh history, notes Morgan, can be characterised as 'an attempt to dispel the primordial Celtic twilight with the contemporary Welsh reality'.[37] A sustained English rule had prevented any collective, politically-driven national feeling; there were no universities, no native middle-class or intelligentsia – the main ingredients required for a movement of this kind – and any kind of national emotion had so far been 'vague and unfocused'.[38] Change came about in part due to the rising nonconformist communities, as well as the increased economic prosperity in many areas, but perhaps the most substantial catalyst for this revitalisation was a renewed celebration of the Welsh language.[39] Language was a mark of distinction which for the Welsh set them apart from the internal forces of the English, and indeed Scotland and Ireland, whose own forms of Celtic speech were in sharp decline by the end of the nineteenth century.[40] Although in 1867 Matthew Arnold was calling for this 'badge of the beaten race' to effectively disappear from the political and social lives of the Welsh people, the Welsh language's continued survival was a point of pride, and thrived in the concentrated communities of Welsh migrants in industrial towns.[41] When the 1891 population census reported that only 54% of adults knew the language, a cultural and academic programme of revival and prioritisation began.[42] Major proponents of the study of the language and medieval literature of

[35] Owain W. Jones, 'The Welsh church in the nineteenth century', *A History of the Church in Wales*, 144-163, p. 160.
[36] E. T. Davies, p. 136.
[37] Morgan, p. 4.
[38] Morgan, p. 91.
[39] *Ibid*., p. 95.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 92.
[41] Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1867), p. 6; Walker, *A History of the Church in Wales*, p. 160; John Davies, p. 423.
[42] Morgan, p. 95.

Wales included John Morris-Jones and Sir John Rhŷs, who became the first Jesus Professor of Celtic at Oxford in 1886.[43]

A period of optimism followed in the years leading up to the First World War. Industrial expansion in coal and steel brought employment opportunities and economic prosperity; this in turn led to a growing middle class.[44] Following the end of the war, however, industries which had relied on steam and rail power were becoming outdated; newer amenities such as electricity and the motor car were taking their place in England.[45] While the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, was a Welshman, wartime patriotism in Wales began to decline and widespread disillusion with the Liberal government increased, resulting in its defeat by the Labour Party in 1922. The economic situation worsened throughout the 1920s and those in unemployment were encouraged to move away to more populous areas in England in a strategy known as 'transference'; indeed, areas in the north-east and the south quickly became the primary example in the British press for industrial stagnation.[46] Whatever form Welsh nationalism existed in before the early 1920s, it was now in a stage of significant decline; this may have been due in part, reasons Davies, to a lack of a unified political party 'able to speak for Wales as a whole'.[47] *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* (The National Party of Wales) was formed in 1925 with the purpose of establishing a Welsh government, but during its early years it made little impact in British politics; in fact, writes Davies, over the following three decades there was practically no increase in nationalist sentiment.[48] Not until the 1960s when the Welsh language experienced a further revival and *Plaid Cymru* was able to offer an attractive alternative to a failing Labour government did Welsh nationalism begin to gain a more prominent voice.[49]

[43] *Ibid*., p. 100; Rachel Bromwich, *Matthew Arnold and Celtic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 4.
[44] Morgan, p. 126.
[45] John Davies, p. 578.
[46] Stephanie Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: The Means Test and Protest in 1930s South Wales and North-East England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 46.
[47] John Davies, p. 544.
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] Morgan, p. 386.

Literary revivals and Welsh medievalism

While Machen, Powys and Garner were neither directly involved nor even interested in political Welsh nationalism, their fiction forms part of the broader reception of medieval Welsh literature that was essential to the new formulation of Welsh cultural history. Central to this history are several literary and arts-based revivals in Britain, which were often the result of, or emerged alongside, nationalist movements centred around Home Rule.[50] During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the 'othering' of the Celtic nations by English ethnologists, philologists and literary critics alike resulted in a kind of romantic primitivism: the colonial English in early nineteenth-century Ireland, for example, viewed the Irish as brutal savages to be contained, and yet a Romantic interest in Celtic literature and folk-customs sought ancient wisdom in a race who might claim to be the oldest in Britain.[51] Wales, too, was viewed as place more directly connected to its mythological past: the nation, declared Arnold in 1867, 'still knows this past … and clings to it'.[52] A growing interest in the Celtic nations was often dismissed by critics as an obsessive 'Celtomania', yet new theories surrounding Indo-European languages added 'scientific' validation to a new study of the Celt.[53] Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes have detailed how the 'Celtic' has variously been constructed as a 'site of renewal' for English culture; the Victorians looked back to medieval Irish, Scottish and Welsh literature to construct an Anglo-Celtic identity, and yet while Celtic nations were being reinvented and 'revitalised', they continued to remain politically excluded.[54]

Interest in Welsh material, both in Wales and England, reached a particular height towards the end of

[50] Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 13.
[51] Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 23-4.
[52] Arnold, p. 2.
[53] Mattar, p. 23; Powys's theories about the Welsh were informed by Max Müller's contributions to Indo-European scholarship, discussed further in Chapter Four.
[54] Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes, 'Introduction: Romancing the Celt', *English romanticism and the Celtic world*, eds. Carruthers and Rawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-19, p. 3.

the eighteenth century as part of the first Celtic Revival. It was led in part by the antiquarian Edward Williams (or Iolo Morganwg, his bardic name), who considered Welsh traditions to be the oldest in Europe and re-established the *gorsedd* ('mound', 'high seat'), meetings supposedly based on druidic ritual, as part of the *eisteddfodau*.[55] Likely inspired by the *Ossian* forgeries of James Macpherson in the 1760s, Williams also fabricated a large number of supposedly ancient Welsh manuscripts, and contemporary scholarship was unable to tell the difference.[56] Together with William Owen Pughe and Owen Jones (Owain Myfyr), Williams edited and published the *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, a three-volume compendium of poetry, triads, genealogies and hagiographies which established a canon for medieval Welsh literature and was seen to provide evidence for the superior creativity and poetic genius of the Welsh people.[57] As Rachel Bromwich notes, however, little attention was paid in Wales, or indeed in England, to the unauthored prose tales which made up the *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi* ('The Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*') until after the release of *Myvyrian Archaiology*.[58] These tales exist in complete form in only two manuscripts, *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* ('The White Book of Rhydderch') and *Llyfr Coch Hergest* ('The Red Book of Hergest'), while the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* are distributed over thirty extant manuscripts and, alongside the poetry attributed to the sixth-century bards Taliesin, Aneirin and Llywarch Hen, were perceived to demonstrate 'great historical value' and held up as examples of the Welsh imagination.[59] Pughe published English translations of the greater part of the Four Branches beginning in 1795, with an aim to publishing a full edition, but he died before the project's completion in 1835. A seven-part translation was then released between 1838 and

[55] Since its revival by Williams in the late eighteenth century, the *eisteddfod* festival has become a national institution in itself. Although the standard of verse was at times questionable, and its 'bogus, folksy pageantry' has been heavily criticised, it is very much a symbol of cultural nationalism (Morgan, 98).
[56] John Davies, pp. 344-5; Geraint H. Jenkins casts Williams as no longer the 'figure of embarrassment' that he once was seen to be, and argues, in a volume of essays on Iolo, that his work requires reassessment as someone who 'changed the climate of opinion in Wales' and brought medieval Welsh literature into the public eye. Geraint H. Jenkins, 'On the Trail of A "Rattleskull Genius": Introduction', *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, ed. Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 1-26, pp. 4-6; see also Cathryn Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles: National, Regional and Personal Identity in the Bardic Vision of Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).
[57] Helen Fulton, 'Matthew Arnold and the Canon of Medieval Welsh Literature', *Review of English Studies* New Series, vol. 63, no. 259 (April 2012), 204-224, p. 209.
[58] Rachel Bromwich, '"The Mabinogion" and Lady Charlotte Guest', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1986), 127-141, pp. 130-131.
[59] Glyn E. Jones, 'Early Prose: The Mabinogi', *A Guide to Welsh Literature: Volume 1*, eds. A. O. H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 189-202, p. 190; Bromwich, '"The Mabinogion" and Lady Charlotte Guest', p. 131.

1845 by Lady Charlotte Guest (1812-1895), followed by a collected three-volume edition in 1849. Guest was an English noblewoman who married the industrialist John Guest and moved to the Dowlais ironworks at Methyr Tydfil, South Wales. She was a talented, mostly self-taught linguist, and her first intention after learning Welsh was to translate the three Arthurian romances *Peredur*, *Owain* and *Geraint ac Enid*, but by 1845 she had translated twelve of the prose tales altogether, including the Four Branches, from which she took the title the *Mabinogion*.[60] Bromwich describes the publication as an 'epoch-making event' in Welsh studies, prompting further scholarship and a renewed scrutiny of the original texts in Wales.[61]

The reception of medieval Irish literature during the Victorian period progressed at a similar pace to the situation in Wales, although the contrasting historical and social changes in each country following the early modern period influenced how this literature was subsequently used. Huw Pryce has detailed how, although Ireland and Wales share a history of English conquest and both produced extensive bodies of work in their own Celtic languages, the reception of their respective medieval texts in the nineteenth century to cultivate national identity nevertheless reveals stark differences.[62] Ireland's relationship with England has been one of oppression and discrimination, notes Price, resulting in uprisings and violent protest, whereas colonisation in Wales has generally been 'viewed with equanimity' and made palatable to the Welsh through their assimilation into the English political system.[63] Consequently, while both Irish and Welsh material was used by many politicians and writers to romanticise pre-Christian golden eras, their individual assessments of their own medieval histories were noticeably different in character.

The reappraisal of Welsh medieval literature that began at the end of the eighteenth century also coincided with a medieval revival in England, which at its height in the nineteenth century became

[60] *Ibid*., p. 135; throughout this thesis I make the distinction between the *Mabinogi* (referring to *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi*) and the *Mabinogion* (the collection of twelve prose tales first translated by Guest, which includes the *Mabinogi*).
[61] *Ibid*., p. 140.
[62] Huw Pryce, 'The Irish and Welsh Middle Ages in the Victorian Period', *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 215-234, p. 215.
[63] *Ibid*., pp. 220-21.

widespread throughout English society. Emerging from earlier medieval scholarship and often indistinguishable from the Romantic movement, the new wave of medievalism saw architects, artists and political thinkers turn to an idea of the Middle Ages that represented 'a desirable simplicity' and a corrective to contemporary ills.[64] The Gothic revival in architecture and the development of the Gothic novel by writers such as Ann Radcliffe and Clara Reeve in the 1780s and 90s formed part of this quest to reclaim the liberties and sensibilities of the past.[65] Medievalism in English literature continued into the nineteenth century in the work of poets such as John Keats and Alfred Tennyson, and Sir Walter Scott's historical novels, and in art the Pre-Raphaelites looked back to medieval culture and a Romantic view of the natural world for its perceived creative and spiritual integrity.[66] Thomas Carlyle would praise the medieval workman for the genuine satisfaction which he derived from his craft, thereby condemning the industrialists of the 1830s whose workers were forced to work long hours behind factory walls.[67] Towards the end of the century the writer and textile designer William Morris, influenced heavily by Carlyle and the art criticism of John Ruskin, took Arthurian literature and the golden age of fourteenth-century craft guilds as a basis for an anti-industrial form of socialism, an ideology which in turn inspired the Arts and Crafts movement in the 1880s.[68]

Celtic literature and the idea of the 'Celt' continued to be revitalised and reinvented in the mid-nineteenth century as Lady Guest's translation of the *Mabinogion* and its subsequent popularity prompted two influential works of cultural criticism by the French scholar Ernest Renan and the English poet and critic Matthew Arnold. It was during this period that the idea of an unbroken 'Celtic' race whose history can be traced to well over 2000 years ago was instilled in the public imagination, an invented tradition which has only recently begun to be questioned in academia. The misconception

[64] Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 17; *ibid*., p. 1.
[65] Chandler, p. 23.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 193.
[67] Michael Alexander, *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 86-7.
[68] *Ibid*., pp. 222-3.

about the ‘Celt’ whose social characteristics have been passed down through genetic or cultural inheritance has led, as Malcolm Chapman notes, to the continued assignation of these characteristics to inhabitants of the modern-day Celtic nations.[69] The abiding image of the Celts as being more receptive to the supernatural and more attuned to the imagination is due in part to Renan’s essay ‘La Poésie des races celtique’ (1854); they possess ‘[un infinie] délicatesse de sentiment’ (‘an infinite delicacy of feeling’), writes Renan, and the songs of their bards are ‘une longue complainte’ (‘one long lament’).[70] Renan viewed the Celtic peoples as racially ‘pure’, unaffected by Christian or Classical influence, and characterised their sentimentality and love of beauty in nature as essentially feminine. In a series of four lectures as Professor of Poetry at Oxford (published in 1867 as *On the Study of Celtic Literature*), Arnold echoed many of Renan’s claims, except, as Sinéad Garrigan Mattar argues, his object was more politically motivated.[71] His central thesis was that the fusion of all nations of the British Isles ‘into one, homogenous, English-speaking whole’ was an inevitable and desirable effect of modern civilisation, but that the ‘genius’ and innate spirituality of the Celtic character demonstrated in medieval literature might be employed to temper the ‘brute force’ of the hard-hearted Saxon.[72] While Arnold was neither a scholar of the history or the languages of Wales and Ireland the work nevertheless made a deep impression on the popular conception of the ‘Celt’ and what is now termed ‘Celticism’.[73]

Arnold’s Celticism became influential in the following decades, not only, as John V. Kelleher notes, in shaping the popular view of Celtic literature, but also in influencing the literature of the 1890s

[69] Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 2; see also Patrick Sims-Williams, ‘Celtomania and Celtoscepticism’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 36 (1998), 1-36. The only meaningful definition of the term ‘Celtic’ is now accepted to be a linguistic one, employed to refer to a group of languages descended from Proto-Celtic. Philologists have divided the group into *P-Celtic* (Brittonic or Brythonic) and *Q-Celtic* (Irish or Goidelic), although these terms are now not generally used. ‘Celtic Languages’, *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, eds. T. McArthur, J. Lam-McArthur and L. Fontaine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780199661282.001.0001/acref-9780199661282-e-239> [accessed 28th April 2021].
[70] Ernest Renan, ‘La Poésie des Races Celtique’, *Revue des Deux Mondes (1829-1971*), p. 477.
[71] Mattar, p. 26.
[72] Arnold, p. 14.
[73] See Daniel G. Williams, ‘Celticism’, *Late Victorian into Modern*, eds. Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 69-82; and Joep Leerssen, ‘Celticism’, *Celticism*, ed., Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 1-20.

Celtic Revival.[74] Many of his arguments were re-asserted by the Anglo-Irish poet W. B. Yeats during the period in the 1890s known as the Irish Literary Revival, and more broadly as the second Celtic Revival or the Celtic Twilight. While Arnold had viewed the 'Celtic' as a strain contributing to an overarching 'British' character, later writers were beginning to consider it a distinct identity in its own right. Around the time Machen was finding success in his writing in London, Celtic literature on Irish themes was becoming fashionable, notably invigorated, argues Stephen Regan, by the death of Irish nationalist politician Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891.[75] Just as figures such as Parnell had rallied national spirit through political means, Yeats and other Irish poets and dramatists were now so doing so through acts of cultural mythologising (discussed in detail in Chapter One).[76] Celticness had become both an artistic and political identity distinct from Englishness, to the extent that a Pan-Celtic movement began to emerge, based on an awareness of 'similar objectives and shared obstacles' across Wales, Ireland and Scotland.[77] The Welsh contribution to the cultural revival during the 1890s was slight in comparison to the Irish and Scots, yet there were several notable exceptions among Anglo-Welsh writers, including Machen himself, though, as Chapter One, argues he was critical of the movement's aims. Ernest Rhys, for example, founded the Rhymers Club with Yeats and published several collections of poetry featuring Welsh mythological themes during the period, including *A London Rose and Other Poems* (1896) and *Welsh Ballads* (1898). Independent of the London-based revival was a literary revival in Wales which developed into the early twentieth century, although this was realist in subject and rarely addressed medieval tradition; novelists such as Allen Raine (pseudonym of Anne Puddicombe) and Joseph Keating portrayed life in rural Wales and industrial mining towns. A notable exception was the poet T. Gwynn Jones, whose 'Ymadawiad Arthur' ('The Passing of Arthur') won the chair at the National Eisteddfod in 1902 and could be regarded as

[74] John V. Kelleher, 'Matthew Arnold and the Celtic Revival', *Perspectives of Criticism*, eds. Harry Levin and Walter Jackson Bate (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 197-221, p. 197.
[75] Stephen Regan, 'W. B. Yeats and Irish Cultural Politics in the 1890s', *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, eds., Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 66-84, p. 68.
[76] Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, pp. 33-34; indeed, Irish political nationalism continued throughout the 1890s despite Parnell's death, notes Regan, most prominently through the campaigning of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the United Irish League (Regan, p. 68).
[77] Daniel Williams, 'Pan-Celticism and the Limits of Post-Colonialism: W. B. Yeats, Ernest Rhys and William Sharp in the 1890s', *Nations and Relations: Writing Across the British Isles*, eds. Tony Brown and Russell Stephens (Cardiff: New Welsh Review, 2000), 1-29, p. 14.

inaugurating a renaissance of Welsh-language literature.[78]

Welshness in Modern British Literature

As Helen Fulton has argued, those individuals such as Williams, Guest and Arnold who constructed the canon of medieval Welsh literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries claimed for it an antiquity which predated English and other European traditions.[79] Accompanying this claim was the idea that the canon would help to shape Wales as a nation, and that the history of Welsh literature is 'a unified whole from start to finish', an argument echoed by Saunders Lewis and early twentieth-century critic Thomas Parry.[80] Authors who use Welsh mythology in their work are thus responding not simply to the stories and motifs set down in post-conquest Britain, but to the larger construct of what the ideas of Wales and 'Welshness' have come to mean. In this way the reception of Welsh mythology and folklore in modern literature cannot escape from the Romantic, medievalist invention of Wales and the Celtic as fantastical and otherworldly because, as Susan Aronstein notes, it has always *been* a fantasy.[81]

With an understanding of this powerful strain of fantasy as shaping how Wales has been regarded in both the English and Welsh imaginations, British writers have produced a range of responses and interpretations of medieval Welsh tradition from the late nineteenth century to the present day, many of which explore themes of national identity through use of Welsh mythology and folklore. This is especially true of children's literature, particularly in the work of Garner, Susan Cooper and Jenny Nimmo, whose contemporary settings enable an engagement between interpretations of Celtic tradition and modern Welshness. In the broader fantasy genre, novels such as Kenneth Morris's *The*

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[78] M. Wynn Thomas, 'From Nonconformist Nation to Proletarian Nation: Writing Wales, 1885-1930', *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, 405-427, p. 420.
[79] Fulton, p. 211.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 213.
[81] Susan Aronstein, '"Beyond the Fields We Know": Wales and Fantasy Literature', *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, 619-636, p. 619.

Fates of the Princes of Dyfed (1914) and Evangeline Walton's *Mabinogion Tetralogy* (1936-1974) expand and reimagine the tales in the Four Branches to book-length narratives, the latter presented by Walton as 'a return to the "real" tale behind the Welsh text'.[82] In poetry Vernon Watkins, Charles Williams and the modernist David Jones, and in drama Saunders Lewis, have all at one point taken Welsh mythology as their subject, often as part of complex networks of symbolism. Lewis (1893-1985), a prominent Welsh literary critic, writer and politician, helped to found *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* in 1925 and furthered the nationalist cause by promoting bilingualism and setting up the Welsh Language Society in 1962.[83] His Welsh-language plays such as *Buchedd Garmon* (1937), set in the fifth century, and *Blodeuwedd* (1948), an adaptation of *Math fab Mathonwy*, reinforced his view that literature was important for the future of the nation because they were reminders that there was once a Wales which resisted English tyranny.[84]

The three writers I will consider in this thesis, however, do not use Welsh themes in their fiction to adapt individual narratives or as a means to promote national sentiment; rather mythology and folklore are tools which Machen, Powys and Garner employ in order to come to terms with their own complex personal identities and wider critical responses to modern life. In this way, romantic notions of Welshness and Welsh tradition are present to various extents throughout these writers' work, and form part of their quests for alternative systems of thought. I will assess the range of Welsh tradition in their fiction and seek to answer to what degree it shapes these authors' individual spiritual and philosophical thinking.[85] Chapter One considers some of Machen's supernatural tales of the 1890s and

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[82] Aronstein, p. 625; for surveys of Welsh mythology in children's literature, see Donna R. White, *A Century of Welsh Myth in Children's Literature* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), and Dimitra Fimi, *Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children's Fantasy: Idealization, Identity, Ideology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); for the modern fantasy genre, see C. W. Sullivan, *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), and Kath Filmer-Davies, *Fantasy Fiction and Welsh Myth: Tales of Belonging* (London: Macmillan, 1996).
[83] H. Pritchard-Jones, 'Lewis, (John) Saunders (1893-1985), writer and a founder of the Welsh Nationalist Party', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-55454> [accessed 15 April 2021].
[84] Tudor Hallam, 'The Legacy of Saunders Lewis', *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, 507-528, pp. 515-522.
[85] Contributing to Machen, Powys and Garner's individual understandings of Welshness and Celticness was the evolving Celtic scholarship being undertaken at the time that these authors were writing. All three writers shaped their own readings of Welsh material using the theories of various academics and enthusiasts, many of which are now considered out of date or in some cases wildly inaccurate; it is therefore important to

his first novel *The Hill of Dreams* (completed 1897) as a response to the Celtic Revival and the redefinition of the 'Celt' in modern society. Chapter Two examines the symbol of the grail in Machen's later writing, following his rediscovery of Anglicanism and the Celtic Church, and suggests that the grail represents an ideal form of spirituality for the author. In Chapter Three I explore the ways in which Powys introduces elements of Welsh mythology into his early philosophy and develops ideas of pluralism and magical thinking in his 'Wessex' novels of the 1930s. Chapter Four considers this development further in Powys's later novels set in a romanticised Welsh past; these incorporate a systematised reading of the *Mabinogi* to confirm Powys's theory about an 'aboriginal' Welsh. In the final chapter I examine the Welsh and Celtic themes in Garner's fantasy novels and trace how these eventually expand into a universalist approach to mythology informed by Garner's reading of Carl Jung.

acknowledge that throughout this thesis many works of scholarship are cited which, while accepted in their day, have since been revised and do not reflect the modern field. Sir John Rhŷs (1840-1915), for example, though an accomplished and respected scholar of Celtic languages and folklore in his day, has had many of his theories discredited (particularly those influenced by Max Müller, discussed in Chapters Three and Four), yet his writings on the *Mabinogi* and the inhabitants of 'aboriginal' Wales became the backbone of Powys's own strange theories about the Welsh people.

Chapter One: 'Who Were the Fairies?': Arthur Machen and the All-Pervading Celt

Introduction: Machen, Wales, and the Celtic Revival

> It is absurd to pretend that the Celt is everything, but we would not contend that he has done absolutely nothing.[1]

Arthur Machen's relationship to the artistic movement known as the Celtic Revival, whose political origins have been discussed in the Introduction, has often been overlooked by critics and biographers. As Tomos Owen argues, it is difficult to place Machen in any Welsh nationalist movement active in the 1890s – he moved in and out of various London literary circles and was not noticeably vocal about the political situation in Wales.[2] His relationship with Wales was restricted to the area referred to by him as the ancient kingdom of Gwent, modern day Monmouthshire, specifically the 'swelling hills', 'hanging woods' and the remains of Roman occupation near his birthplace, Caerleon-upon-Usk – the site of King Arthur's court according to *Historia Regnum Britanniae* – and his father's parish of Llanddewi Fach. His memories of this childhood landscape reflect his intense awe and delight, and came to influence much of his later writing about Wales: 'anything I have achieved in literature', he writes in 1922, 'is due to the fact that when my eyes were first opened in earliest childhood they had before them the vision of an enchanted land'.[3] He remembers the 'mystic esses of the Usk' and the tumulus Twyn Barlwm, and on clear days he recalls being able to make out the peak of Ysgyryd Fawr, the 'Holy Mountain', near Abergavenny, which was to the young Machen like 'a mountain peak in a fairy tale' (the sight of a distant Welsh mountain will also be significant in Alan Garner's creative development, discussed in Chapter Five).

[1] Arthur Machen, 'The All-Pervading Celt', *Faunus* 14 (2006), 18-22, p. 21.
[2] Tomos Owen, 'London-Welsh writing 1890-1915: Ernest Rhys, Arthur Machen, W. H. Davies, and Caradoc Evans' (unpublished PhD thesis: Cardiff University, 2011), pp. 111-112.
[3] Machen, *Far Off Things*, p. 8.

Aiden Reynolds and William Charlton characterise Machen's attachment to Gwent as a sort of local patriotism, 'a passionate love for a very small place', rather than a general nationalism relating to Wales as a whole.[4] In this sense, Machen's view of himself as a 'Celt' and the political affiliations this generally entailed during the late nineteenth century is not as clear a delineation as previous critical studies of Machen have claimed. Monmouthshire was one of the more Anglicised of the border counties and Machen could neither speak, read nor write in the Welsh language with any proficiency until later in life. His interest in Welsh literature was limited, having read the *Mabinogion* in translation as a schoolboy (presumably Charlotte Guest's), but found that his attention was held more by English novelists such as Dickens and De Quincey.[5] London, too, fascinated the adolescent Machen, who developed an 'appetite for London papers' – the *Standard* and the *Telegraph* were 'mystic documents' – and he walked the four miles to Pontypool Road Station to get them.[6] As a man who was only 'three-parts Celt' and who immersed himself in English culture, the young Machen may therefore have questioned his essential connection to Wales as a nation.[7] Gwent and its local traditions, however, remained a profound part of Machen's imaginative life and, as this chapter argues, came to shape his response to the 1890s Celtic Revival. What Machen saw as the revival's commercialism and its reduction of the 'Celtic' landscape to clichéd romanticism threatened his memories of the 'indefinable sense of awe and mystery' of his own corner of Monmouthshire.[8]

As discussed in the introduction, the Celtic literary revival of the 1890s emerged alongside a resurgence in Pan-Celtic nationalism, and it became a popular trend in British society for artists and writers to write on Celtic themes. The 'Celt' was being newly appraised and poetry by writers with demonstrable Celtic ancestry appeared to be lauded over the 'Saxon' counterpart. '[The] touch of fancy, of beauty, of melancholy,' writes Grant Allen in his 1891 article 'The Celt in English Art', 'of the marvellous, the vague, the obscure in all our literary work descends to us as an heirloom from the elder and less successful race in these islands'.[9] Assigning certain qualities to particular races was

[4] Aiden and Charlton, *Arthur Machen*, p. 3.
[5] Machen, *Far Off Things*, p. 87.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 62; p. 64.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 87.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 20.
[9] Grant Allen, 'The Celt in English Art', *Fortnightly Review* 49 (February 1891), 267-277, p. 268.

certainly not unique to the revival, but rarely before had nationalist politics and literature intersected in such a way. For W. B. Yeats, whose collections *The Wanderings of Ossian* (1889) and *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) are considered the initial works of the nascent movement, the gathering of folktales from his native County Sligo as material for his poetry served as his assertion of 'the distinctiveness of "Irishness" as a cultural identity'.[10] He was at pains to present himself as a specifically Irish poet, and was even known to adopt a performative 'Celtic mode' at literary meetings.[11] As traditional forms of storytelling the folklore and legends of Ireland represented a contrast to the conventions of Victorian society, but they also allowed Yeats, in his view, to speak to and for Ireland as a nation.[12] The idea of a Celtic race and its inherited traditions therefore became for Irish writers a means to inspire a sense of national unity, which they sought to consolidate through literary means.

While Machen shared Yeats's antipathy toward the materialist values of modern society, it was never his intention to utilise his Welsh heritage for nationalist or political purposes. Machen made his opinion of the Celtic renaissance public in a lead article for the inaugural issue of *Literature*, a journal published by *The Times*, in January 1898. The opportunity had apparently come about when Machen was witnessed by a friend 'holding forth with some vehemence' on the subject of the fashionable 'Celtic spirit'; the friend secured Machen a position at the journal, and the result was 'The All-Pervading Celt', a three-page tirade which attacked the current 'craze' which attributed literary genius primarily to those writers with traceable Celtic ancestry.[13] While he praises the 'high imaginative power and true poetic gift' of the major writers of the revival such as Yeats and 'Miss' Fiona Macleod (a pseudonym of the Scotsman William Sharp), Machen contends that it has now become impossible to offer them this deserved praise without further encouraging the 'upholders of [this] preposterous doctrine'.[14] This was due in no small part to those whom Machen calls the 'race-theorists', men such as Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renan in the 1850s and 60s who had re-popularized the notion that the

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[10] Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York (State), 1922), p. 149.
[11] James Pethica, 'Yeats, Folklore and Irish Legend', *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*, eds. Marjorie Howes and John Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 129-143, p. 129.
[12] Edna Longley, *Yeats and Modern Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 2.
[13] Arthur Machen, 'The Ready Reporter', *The Book of Fleet Street*, ed. T. Michael Pope (London: Cassell, 1930), 143-153, p. 144.
[14] Machen, 'The All-Pervading Celt', pp. 18-19.

Celtic peoples were more attuned to the creative spirit and 'natural magic' than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts.[15] The article is a rare insight during this period into Machen's attitude towards the revival, and while it was written towards the end of the 1890s, this chapter argues that its criticism of the movement can be identified in the fiction he produced in the years leading up to its publication.

One feature of the revival which Machen's criticism does not explicitly address is that those individuals who most upheld the 'preposterous doctrine' of Celtic genius also included many of the Celtic writers themselves. William Sharp, along with his wife, for instance, had recently released the edited volume *Lyra Celtica: An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry* (1896) in which he presented a selection of verse ranging from medieval Irish and Welsh poems to work by modern writers such as George Russell (A.E.), Douglas Hyde and George Meredith. Sharp's objective was to suggest the 'distinguishing imaginative qualities' of the Celtic races and to chart an unbroken line of 'genius' from the Middle Ages to the present day.[16] He went further, however, claiming in his introduction that many major English writers owe their talents to a distant Celtic heritage: 'Milton was of Welsh blood through his maternal descent; and Keats is a Celtic name … [and] Byron of course … had a strong Celtic strain in his blood'.[17] It is clear that Machen's article was a reaction to this sort of genealogical detective work into the family trees of 'Saxon' or English writers which would then redefine them as pre-eminently 'Celtic'. Machen points out the absurdity of such claims and asks mordantly why, if the Celt really does possess innate poetic abilities, is he only able to produce great literature 'by Saxon proxy'?[18] 'Whatever the Celt may have done,' he concludes, 'he has not written the best books'.[19] It would seem that Machen's explicit opinions of the claims made by the revival were therefore not fueled by any anti-Celtic political affiliation or intention, but were focused almost exclusively on its effects on his own profession, the world of literature.

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[15] Arnold, p. 108.
[16] William Sharp, Elizabeth A. Sharp, eds., *Lyra Celtica: An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes & Co., 1896), p. xx.
[17] *Ibid*., p. xxiv; Yeats also attempted to co-opt the London-born poet William Blake into this new-found pantheon of Celtic writers: see Ken Monteith, *Yeats and Theosophy* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 117-8.
[18] Machen, 'The All-Pervading Celt', p. 19.
[19] *Ibid*., p. 20.

Sondeep Kandola identifies the same cynicism about the revival in Machen's writing in the 1890s, and even suggests that many of his tales were ripostes to what Machen viewed as Yeats's flamboyant use of the Celtic character. Machen's modern Celts, writes Kandola, who are confronted with primitive savagery and suffer psychological deterioration, were 'sterile rejoinders' to the mystical pretence that accompanied Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Scottish revivalists of the time, 'an anathema to the winsome vision of the Celtic supernatural'.[20] This chapter argues that while Machen may have viewed with suspicion many of the revivalists' activities, the fiction Machen produced was not simply the occasion for cheap jibes at Yeats and his crowd; rather it reveals a more complex rendering of his attitude to Wales and the politics of the revival. Machen combined the traditions of his country with existing spiritual systems, but instead of appropriating them for nationalistic ends he constructed narratives that were more cautionary than the redemptive or celebratory tales of the Irish writers; in particular his Symbolist novel *The Hill of Dreams* (completed in 1897) offers a more considered examination of what it means to be a Celt in modern society. Machen's work during this period ultimately suggests that he considered the popular romanticisation and politicisation of the 'Celtic' identity – its landscapes and inherited traditions – brought about by an emphasis on racial genius, to be a threat to his own relationship with Wales; it trivialised or cheapened what was to him a profound and multifaceted worldview.

'[On] the skirts of the Rosicrucians': The Celtic Revival and Occultism

A consistent feature of Machen's fiction in the 1890s, and which, this chapter agues, was key to his criticism of the Celtic Revival as mischaracterising or trivialising Celtic tradition, was the occult. Britain was experiencing a renewed fascination with a set of esoteric beliefs and practices loosely grouped under the term 'occultism', an appetite for 'spiritual paths that were decidedly non-Christian'.[21] Many of these spiritual systems were closely interconnected, either developing out of one another or else sharing similar core philosophies. Alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Kabbalah, and

[20] Kandola, p. 500; *ibid*., p. 502.
[21] Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 21.

Theosophy, for example, were united by the broadly Neoplatonist belief in the existence of a hidden spiritual reality beyond our physical world and the essential unity of the material and the immaterial.[22] While Machen was not a committed practitioner of the occult, at least not until he joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1899, it permeated his early life in London and overlapped with his literary ambitions. It was the antiquarian publisher George Redway who issued Machen's first book *The Anatomy of Tobacco* (1884), after being given Machen's name by Hargrave Jennings (with whom Machen had corresponded about Jennings's own work on Rosicrucianism).[23] An offer of employment followed, and Machen became the cataloguer of Redway's collection of unlisted occult literature, which culminated in *The Literature of Occultism and Archaeology*.[24] Before joining Redway Machen had read major works by alchemists Nicholas Flamel and Thomas Vaughan, but in Redway's collection he discovered the sheer breadth of occult and antiquarian studies. Machen describes the publisher's library at Catherine Street:

> It was as odd a library as any man could desire to see. Occultism in one sense or another was the subject of most of the books. There were the principal and the more obscure treatises on Alchemy, on Astrology, on Magic; old Latin volumes most of them. Here were books about Witchcraft, Diabolical Possession, "Fascination," or the Evil Eye; here comments on the Kabbala. Ghosts and Apparitions were a large family, Secret Societies of all sorts hung on the skirts of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons, and so found a place in the collection.[25]

It was also at George Redway where he first met his lifelong friend A. E. Waite (1857-1942), scholar of alchemy, Freemasonry, and Arthurian legend.[26] The occult, then, became integral to Machen's

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[22] Neoplatonism was a philosophy derived from the study of Plato which emerged in the Greco-Roman world in the 3rd century AD. Its followers viewed the universe as a derivation of 'the One', an abstract spiritual reality beyond the material world, a conception similar to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, and considered *nous* (consciousness, or the intellect) as having existed prior to the physical world. It became foundational in the philosophies of many later occult systems. See 'Neoplatonism', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford Reference online, 2003) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780192800947.001.0001/acref-9780192800947-e-5156> [accessed 27 May 2021].
[23] Reynolds and Charlton, *Arthur Machen*, p. 19.
[24] See *Arthur Machen's Occult Catalogues*, ed., R. A. Gilbert (Leyburn: The Friends of Arthur Machen, 2019).
[25] Arthur Machen, *Things Near and Far* (London: Martin Secker, 1926), pp. 16-17.
[26] The American-born Arthur Edward Waite produced many significant studies on occult themes throughout his life, many of which Machen read and often aided in their research, such as *Alchemists Through the Ages* (1888), *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal* (1909) and *The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry* (1911). Waite was also a member and founder of several London secret societies, such as the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* and the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross.

development as a writer; apart from certain factions, such as Theosophy (followers of which he referred to as 'Oriental Occult [Asses]' due to their adoption of Eastern Mysticism), he appears to have harboured great respect for those who studied it.[27]

It was not long before artists and writers interested in the occult began to co-opt Celtic material into this mixture of esoteric systems on the basis that its mythology and folklore had retained vestiges of an ancient wisdom. Mark Williams has detailed the extraordinary transformation that Celtic mythology – specifically the myths of Ireland – induced in the spiritual philosophies of Yeats and the mystic poet and artist George Russell (A.E.) during the 1880s and 90s.[28] For both men, notes Williams, their view of Ireland's native gods was above all redemptive, and for Russell in particular they were an idealistic representation of the phenomenal world 'as a veil impalpably penetrated by divine beauty'.[29] Indeed, Terence Brown identifies a clear analogy between occultism and cultural nationalism, both of which, he writes, involve a belief 'in hidden realities which must be made manifest'.[30] Yeats himself saw in Celtic mythology the opportunity to bring together his nationalist intentions and an abiding interest in magic, which he developed during his time as a member of the Golden Dawn, and in his attempts to found a uniquely Celtic occult order known as the 'Celtic Mysteries'.[31]

A devoted Theosophist, Russell's interest in Ireland's mythological past is perhaps the leading example of how Celtic material was appropriated into a kind of universal mysticism via the writings of Helena Blavatsky.[32] In 1900 he attempted to fashion a creation myth for Ireland, whose stories

[27] Machen, *Things Near and Far*, p. 142; Theosophy, ushered into the public sphere by Madame H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) in 1875 with the founding of the Theosophical Society, combined Eastern and Western mysticism to form what its founder called a 'secret doctrine', a core body of knowledge from which all religions supposedly originated. Colin Wilson, *The Occult* (London: Panther, 1984 [1971]), p. 433. Certain initiates, Blavatsky writes in *Isis Unveiled* (1877), equipped with the right knowledge may themselves become gods (*ibid*., p, 434).
[28] Mark Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 310-360.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 311.
[30] Terence Brown, 'Cultural Nationalism, Celticism and the Occult', *Celticism*, ed. Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 221-230, p. 222.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 229.
[32] Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man: A Biography of George William Russell, "A.E." 1867-1935* (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1975), p. 59. Russell first discovered this potential in Irish mythology in 1894 by reading Standish O'Grady's two-volume *History of Ireland*.

notably lack anything of the kind, using, from his studies of comparative mythology, a combination of Hinduism, Kabbalah and Neoplatonism.[33] In this myth he identifies Lir, a personage thought to represent a sea deity, with the primordial 'Absolute' of Hindu tradition, from which all things emanate. Writing in various nationalist newspapers such as the *United Irishman* and the *Irish Theosophist*, Russell laid out his formulae in a prolific and repetitive fashion.[34] His central thesis, however, presented a Celticised version of Blavatsky's doctrine of universal truth, and held that through a kind of 'psychic evolution' it was possible for man to ascend into the ancient Irish pantheon of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Ultimately, Russell's blending of Irish deities with Hindu cosmogony came from a belief that Theosophy was a fundamental 'ancient truth', and its doctrine must therefore be found somewhere in his native mythology.[35] In this way the occult can be seen as being co-opted to a political function throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century; its rituals and symbols were harnessed by several prominent revivalists as a means for revitalizing a national spirit. Machen's own reworking of his native Welsh folklore and contemporary ethnological theories about fairy belief (Machen's 'Little People'), as this chapter argues, represents an indirect critique of Russell and other revivalists' employment of Celtic tradition for spiritual and nationalistic purposes. His condemnation of Theosophical practices is evident in the portrayal of occult ritual and its often-perilous consequences, yet later in *The Hill of Dreams* a pattern of alchemical imagery becomes a means to articulate what Machen viewed as the true character of the Celtic landscape.

[33] Williams, p. 324.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 321.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 323.

<u>'[The] dark, dwarfish, pre-Celtic inhabitants of Britain': Machen and the theory of 'survivals'</u>

> [Of] recent years abundant proof has been given that a short, non-Aryan race once dwelt beneath the ground, in hillocks, throughout Europe, their raths have been explored, and the weird old tales of green hills all lighted up at night have received confirmation. Much in the old legends may be explained by a reference to this primitive race.[36]

Superseding theories in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which had posited religious or mythical origins for Celtic fairy belief, it became common in the proceeding decades for Victorian scholars to attempt to develop such theories into what Carole Silver terms the 'scientific view'.[37] Works such as E. B. Tyler's *Primitive Cultures* (1871) argued that fairies, or their antecedents, originated on earth, and it was likely Grant Allen who first reintroduced the idea that the Celtic fairies were actually 'survivals' who had descended from an ancient Neolithic race of people.[38] Allen's article 'Who were the fairies?' appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1881, partly as a response to David MacRitchie's articles in the *Celtic Review*; these took a euhemeristic view that claimed Scottish and Irish fairies as the original Picts.[39] Allen claimed that what he called 'Neoliths' once existed in Britain; they were swarthy, dark haired, and small in stature, and were overrun by the invading 'Aryan Celts' four thousand years ago.[40] The remains of their long barrows and tumuli, he continued, led to a Celtic superstition centred around Neolithic spirits and thus explain the fairies' association with mounds and caverns. Allen's article further suggested that this defeated race came to be thought of by the Celts as 'a little people who dwelt underground, [who] wrought curious utensils of stone and amber … [They] were dreaded rather than reverenced', an attitude which gave rise to the euphemistic labels 'fair folk' and 'good people'.[41] Machen kept up with the literary publications and journals of the

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[36] Arthur Machen, 'Folklore and Legends of the North', *Literature* (24 September 1898), p. 272.
[37] Carole Silver, 'On the Origins of Fairies: Victorians, Romantics, and Folk Belief', *Browning Institute Studies* 14, 141-156, p. 149.
[38] Allen was one of the group of 'race-theorists' condemned by Machen in 'The All-Pervading Celt'; Allen's influential article 'The Celt in English Art' heralded the re-emergence of the Celt and claimed that 'our national temperament' owes its 'tender and mystic side' to Celtic literature, but here his theory of survivals appears to have influenced Machen's own interpretation. See Allen, 'The Celt in English Art', p. 267.
[39] David MacRitchie, *The Testimony of Tradition* (London: Kegan Paul, 1890); J. A. Macculloch, 'Were Fairies an Earlier Race of Men?', *Folklore* 43.iv (December 1932), 326-375, p. 366.
[40] Grant Allen, 'Who Were The Fairies?', *Cornhill Magazine* (March 1881), 335-348.
[41] *Ibid*., p. 338.

day and would have come across the piece and other theories like it, many of which would gain traction over the following twenty years.

A review piece for *Literature* in September 1898, quoted above, suggests that Machen himself believed in Allen's theory, and others similar to it, though it is uncertain whether Machen considered this 'Pre-Celtic' race to still exist. In an explanation for his treatment of fairies in his fiction, Machen confirms that the 'hypothesis on which [my work] is based is, of course, not my own … But the supposition that these people still dwell under the hills, that they are horribly evil, and that they are something more or something less – than human: all this I must put down to my own account'.[42] In a volume of his autobiography, however, he briefly mentions 'my view … that the fairies may still be found under the hills'.[43] A belief in fairies, as Silver notes, was a necessity for the political ambitions of the Celtic revivalists.[44] Yeats himself expressed a 'literal' belief and claimed to communicate with fairies in his sleep, while Russell and Sharp would document their fairy hunts, similarly assured of the creatures' existence.[45] Yeats's use of Irish fairy lore in his early poetry was intended to connect Ireland with what he viewed as the country's ancient traditions, unbroken to the present day and safeguarded by the 'primitive' peasantry; by the 1890s his poems fused Romanticism with his own 'authentic' anthropological research into folk belief.[46] Machen's interpretation of the fairies of Welsh tradition, the *tylwyth teg*, was influenced by a genuine belief in Allen's theory, but, as this section argues, was also a measured reaction to the revival's racial politics.

The *tylwyth teg* appear in a number of Machen's tales of the supernatural in the 1890s, beginning with 'Novel of the Black Seal' featured in the episodic novel *The Three Impostors* (1895), and followed closely by 'The Shining Pyramid' and 'The Red Hand' in the same year. The tales do not claim authenticity – there are no prefaces, for example, that place 'the Little People' within the Welsh tradition – and yet their presence is revealed to the reader through a gradual accumulation of evidence

[42] Arthur Machen and Henry Danielson, *Arthur Machen: A Bibliography* (London: Henry Danielson, 1923), p. 27; the 'horribly evil' nature of the fairies is a further innovation in Machen's reimagining, an aspect of their terrifying (rather than redemptive or transcendent) magic, discussed in the following section.
[43] Machen, *Things Near and Far*, p. 111.
[44] Silver, 'On the Origins of Fairies: Victorians, Romantics, and Folk Belief', p. 143.
[45] Pethica, 'Yeats, Folklore and Irish Legend', p. 133; Silver, 'On the Origins of Fairies', p. 142.
[46] Pethica, 'Yeats, Folklore and Irish Legend', p. 134.

like the detective stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Louis Stevenson so admired by Machen. Several critics consider Machen's Little People an expression of contemporary fears surrounding 'degeneration' (a response to Darwin's theory of evolution), but rather Machen subverts the common depiction of the Celtic fairy by using the very argument put forward by one of the major theorists of the revival, thereby exposing the contradiction between the movement's literary faction and its accompanying ethnological theories – according to Machen's tales fairies do exist just as the literary revivalists claim, but as conceived of in terms of Allen's race theory they are horrible and repulsive creatures.[47] According to testimonies recorded, amongst others, by Sir John Rhŷs (on whose scholarship John Cowper Powys would later base his theory of Welsh mythology) and Walter Evans Wentz, the *tylwyth teg* are a cave-dwelling spirit race 'with human characteristics', or else they are invisible, or 'small, pretty people' dressed in white.[48] They dance and sing in the moonlight and enter households to borrow tools or to switch new-born babies with their own (an example of the 'changeling' legend). Their appearances in Machen's tales are, however, more in line with Allen's theory, as 'squat' creatures 'like children hideously deformed', with 'writhing … dusky limbs'.[49]

Machen's subversion of the traditional Celtic fairy is first enacted in his descriptions of the Welsh landscape in his early tales. Initially 'Novel of the Black Seal' and 'The Shining Pyramid' appear to align with the general stylistic sensibilities of the revival and the romanticisations of the race-theorists, but as the narratives develop the initially idyllic landscapes change to reflect the occult nature of Machen's *tylwyth teg*. As discussed in the introduction, Matthew Arnold had identified a 'natural magic' and a melancholic style unique to Celtic literature, the ability for 'catching and rendering the charm of nature in a wonderfully near and vivid way'.[50] The landscapes of Gwent and the border counties of England and Wales into which Machen's fairies emerge are rendered with a mystery and beauty in accordance with Arnold's description. In 'The Shining Pyramid' the border county is just such a place of natural magic: when Mr Dyson, a recurring Machen character in this

[47] See Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, for analysis of degeneration in Machen's work.
[48] W. Y. Evans Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), pp. 139-143.
[49] Arthur Machen, *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural Volume 1* (St Albans: Panther, 1975), p. 157. Hereafter *THS* in the text.
[50] Arnold, p. 108.

period, takes in the view from his friend Vaughan's cottage he is struck initially with the 'enchantment of the scene' (*THS*, 146), evoking not simply its picturesque qualities, but an atmosphere of the supernatural. The house lies in the shelter of an ancient woodland and beside it the land gives way to a valley where the 'dark and gleaming alders tracked the stream's course to the eye'.[51] It is a highly Romantic scene, bearing few markers that would tie it to any particular period; only the ruins of a vaulted bridge, 'a fragment of the Middle Ages', add the charm of medievalism. As characters move from their domestic bases of the cottage or the country house into the more uninhabited regions of the area, the terrain begins to reflect the uncivilised nature of the Little People. As Dyson sets off to investigate the appearance of several mysterious flints, heading north, he traverses 'bare' hillsides and realizes for the first time 'the desolate loneliness and strangeness of the land' (*THS,* 153), and Miss Lally, governess to Professor Gregg in 'Black Seal', glimpses to the north a wilder country, more 'barren', 'savage' and 'ragged' (*WP*, 40) than the fields near the house.

Through Machen's adaptation of the fairy 'changeling' legend, the Little People contradict the ethnically-charged veneration with which many revivalists were describing the Celtic peoples. Professor Gregg in 'Black Seal' employs a teenage boy named Jervase Cradock from a local family, ostensibly to aid with the housework. Gregg warns Miss Lally that the boy might not be 'too keen-witted' (*WP*, 44) and when he arrives Miss Lally observes that he is indeed 'mentally weak' (45). His voice, too, is 'queer' and 'harsh': 'it gave me the impression,' the governess notes, 'of some one speaking deep below the earth' (45). On questioning the gardener about the boy's family she discovers that Mr Cradock died before Jervase was born and that Mrs Cradock was so distraught that she was found 'all crouched up on the Grey Hills … crying and weeping like a lost soul. And Jervase, he was born about eight months afterwards' (45). The implication, which Miss Lally does not piece together until later, that Mrs Cradock was raped and impregnated by the *tylwyth teg* suggests an insidious reimagining of the standard changeling motif common to all Celtic-speaking countries (and

[51] Vaughan and Dyson both seem to be under the impression that they are in a 'quiet corner in England' (*THS*, 162), while a reference to the nearby hamlet of Croesyceiliog places them on the western border of Monmouthshire. Monmouthshire – which as of 1974 bears the name Gwent, though in Machen's time this was only its historical title – has always been part of Wales, although for a while it was under the jurisdiction of the Oxford Circuit, which no doubt added to the confusion. It is the most Anglicized of Welsh counties.

indeed to northern Europe).[52] Yeats noted the continued prevalence of the legend in Ireland in his *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888) which involves the fairies stealing a human infant and 'leaving instead some sickly fairy child', and his poem 'The Stolen Child', included in the same collection, shows that the motif formed an important part of his poetic and political aims.[53] What is merely implied in revivalists' retellings of the legend, that Irish ethnicity – particularly that of its peasantry, among whom the belief was strongest – was connected with the supernatural, is reinterpreted by Machen as an abject reality. Professor Gregg later reveals what he knew all along, that Jervase had 'something of the blood of the "Little People"' in him (64).

Incidents witnessed by Miss Lally confirm Jervase's relation to the *tylwyth teg* and reveal further elements to Machen's critique of the revival's emphasis on ancestry and inherited wisdom. One day when Jervase is weeding, Miss Lally hears a cry 'of a wild beast in anguish' and looks up to see the boy quivering and shaking, 'his teeth grinding, foam gathering on his lips, and his face all swollen and blackened to a hideous mask of humanity' (46). As Jervase writhes on the floor he hisses 'infamous jargon' made up of words 'which might have belonged to a tongue dead since untold ages' (46-7). Here Machen's aboriginal fairies serve to complicate one of the prevailing narratives of the revival, discussed in the introduction, that the Celtic languages were evidence for a racial distinctiveness and a basis for national identity. Irish revivalists looked for the day when the 'old tales are honoured again' and the hills '[echo] once more with the sweet music of the Gaelic tongue', but these Little People communicate in what Miss Lally calls 'the speech of hell' (47).[54] Later Professor Gregg discovers from a neighbour Mr Meyrick that the boy's language is not related to modern Welsh or any of its 'colloquial dialects', but to the language of 'the Tylwydd Têg, as we call them' (49). The Cradock family do not speak 'a word of Welsh', reveals Meyrick, and, as Machen's adaptation of the changeling legend implies, their language is gradually regressing to the bestial language of the fairies.

[52] Séamus Mac Philib, 'The Changeling (ML 5058): Irish Versions of a Migratory Legend in their International Context', *Béaloideas* 59 (1991), 121-131, p. 121.
[53] W. B. Yeats, ed., *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918), p. 50.
[54] Robert Mahony, 'Yeats and the Irish Language Revival: An Unpublished Lecture', *Irish University Review* 19.ii (Autumn 1989), 220-226, p. 222; 'hell' (*uffern*) is also a name for the otherworld Annwn in the Middle Welsh poem *Preideu Annwfyn*, which Marged Haycock views as an example of Christian syncretism. See Marged Haycock, ed., *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin* (Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications, 2007), p. 444.

Jervase's parentage in 'Black Seal', coupled with an incident in 'The Shining Pyramid' where a girl is rumoured to have been kidnapped in the hills, suggests a wider theme of degeneration of culture and heritage in these tales, and highlight what Machen viewed as an inconsistency between the poetic 'genius' supposedly inherent in Celtic ethnicity and the anthropological findings of prominent Celtic theorists. Responding to theorists such as Grant Allen and David MacRitchie, and artists of the literary revival, Machen's primitive Little People thus contaminate both the image of an unspoiled romantic landscape and the bloodline of the Celtic people themselves, a survival of a savage prehistory which breaks through into the nineteenth century and disrupts the idealised racial narrative of the revival.[55]

[55] Aaron Worth has suggested that Machen's tales subvert contemporary historiography: mid-century discoveries in evolutionary biology and geology were 'traumatic [events] for a generation of historians', but, argues Worth, Machen's fiction goes further, distorting the comforting 'buffer' between modernity and a much older time. In the story 'The Red Hand', for example, Dyson is examining a symbol on an ancient black tablet excavated in south Wales and he is overawed 'with an impression of vast and far-off ages, and of a living being that had touched the stone with enigmas before the hills were formed' (*WP*, 96). Aaron Worth, 'Arthur Machen and the Horrors of Deep History', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 49.i (2012), 217–227, p. 217.

'Powerful and sovereign medicines … virulent poisons also': fairies and occultism in *The Three Impostors*, 'The Shining Pyramid' and 'The White People'

As discussed above, Celtic nationalism in the 1880s and 90s was being expressed by revivalists in part through various occult philosophies, most prominently in the growing movement known as Theosophy. Theosophical doctrine asserted that an 'ancient wisdom' lay at the centre of all major religions and mythologies and promoted the idea already common to many occult systems that the 'microcosm' (the human being) corresponded with the 'macrocosm' (the universe).[56] Yeats's early collections and retellings of Irish folklore, argues Margaret Mills Harper, 'already showed the totalizing impulse' of Theosophy; Yeats considered the tales he had gathered from the Sligo peasantry to contain a universal truth beyond their local significance.[57] Theosophy provided certain revivalists – Yeats, Russell and Sharp among them (all of whom were at one time involved with the Theosophical Society) – with the tools they needed to bolster the spiritual significance of Celtic mythology, and, by extension, the political standing of the Celtic nations. Machen's use of occultism in the 1890s, particularly in his tales of the supernatural, was less obviously influenced by Theosophy than the contemporary Irish poets; it nevertheless informed his criticism of the revival's political methods, which, this section argues, were based on what Machen viewed as the misappropriation of Celtic material to express a universal wisdom, or as Williams writes, the idea that 'Irish mythology could and should be massaged into harmony' with Eastern mysticism.[58] Machen mentions his aversion to Theosophy when describing his time at George Redway in *Things Near and Far*, stating that he could 'bear better … [the] Occidental Idiot' than the 'Oriental' Theosophist, whose integration of Eastern mysticism into Western tradition he clearly disliked.[59] Elsewhere, in a letter to the French novelist

[56] James A. Santucci, 'Theosophy', *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 231-246, p. 235; this idea is neatly summarized in the phrase 'as above, so below'.
[57] Margaret Mills Harper, 'Yeats and the Occult', *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*, 144-166, p. 152.
[58] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, p. 327.
[59] Machen, *Things Near and Far*, p. 142.

Paul-Jean Touletin, Machen denies having anything to do with 'such impostures as spiritualism or theosophy', suggesting that he considered both to be fraudulent.[60]

As it appears in his fiction during this period Machen's occultism was never as systematic as that of Yeats or Russell. Although he professed to distrust its methods, we can identify elements of Theosophical thought in relation to Celtic mythology in 'The Great God Pan' (1894), in which the Greek figure of 'Pan' – symbolising for Machen the spiritual realm beyond the material world – is by the end of the story also associated with the worship of the Celtic deity 'Nodens'. Within this, however, there is a more distinct occult theme which appears across Machen's tales, especially those of the *tylwyth teg* and 'The White People' (completed in 1899). First introduced in 'The Great God Pan', an experience known by characters as 'seeing the god Pan' refers to the lifting of the veil between the material world and a spiritual 'beyond' (*THS*, p. 8). The penetration of the spiritual realm is a common theme throughout occultism, and more broadly, mysticism, and one which Machen would have encountered through his reading in Rosicrucianism, Neoplatonism and medieval alchemy. Indeed, frequent use of the alchemical term 'transmutation' throughout his tales of this period, one employed by Rosicrucian thinkers to describe the transformation of lower nature into spirit, demonstrates a familiarity with such occult systems.[61] The term features in 'Novel of the White Powder' (appearing in *The Three Impostors*) to describe the shocking change in a man's character after the ingestion of a mysterious white substance; the doctor who analyses the drug concludes that it provides access to a true reality, 'veiled by an outward form of matter' (80). Similarly, when Professor Gregg finally deciphers the mysterious script on the base of the titular 'black seal' he finds he is able to read 'the key of the awful transmutation of the hills' and glimpse for a moment the terrible secrets guarded by the *tylwyth teg* (*WP,* 63-4). The process of confronting an external 'beyond' in Machen's fiction in this way differs fundamentally from the kind of spiritual transformation and redemption central to Theosophical doctrine, and its expression by revivalists

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[60] Quoted in Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *The Morning of the Magicians* (London: Souvenir, 2001), pp. 212-213 (undated); Machen was also clear about his dislike for Blavatsky, whose learning he viewed as 'humbug … most impudent and arrant humbug'. Arthur Machen, 'The World to Come', *The Academy* (27 July 1907).

[61] Max Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-conception* (Oceanside: Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1911), p. 438.

through Celtic mythology and folklore; the intersection in Machen's tales of Celtic material and the occult results in terrifying and even mortal threat to his characters' lives, revealing Machen's criticism of the combining of the two modes for political reasons.[62]

One aspect of Machen's interpretation of Allen's Celtic fairy theory which clearly demonstrates his dislike for Theosophical methods is the Little People's ethnological connection to the East. In 'The Shining Pyramid', Dyson believes that the fairies represent a belief in 'a tradition of the prehistoric Turanian inhabitants of the country, who were cave dwellers'; he describes them also as having 'a Mongolian cast of features' (*THS*, 162).[63] Earlier in the story he and Vaughan also discover a symbol daubed onto a wall 'almost like the eye of a Chinaman' (148). It is not clear whether these additions are of Machen's own invention, or whether they appear in a separate account of the survival theory; whatever the case, Machen incorporated these stereotypically Eastern aspects into his depiction of the Little People's particular brand of occultism, one which bears distinctly non-Western characteristics. The stone seal which forms the basis for events in 'Black Seal' is sent to Professor Gregg 'by an agent in the East' where it had been found 'near the site of the ancient Babylon' (*WP*, 60). In a letter to Miss Lally, Gregg reveals that the inscription cut into the stone in 'arrow-headed' cuneiform, once translated, has provided him with 'knowledge' of the Little People's 'secrets' (65):

> Never since then have I written those words; never will I write the phrases which tell how man can be reduced to the slime from which he came, and be forced to put on the flesh of the reptile and the snake (64).

Originating in a mysterious 'East' of the past, the ancient wisdom of the Little People is interpreted as a destructive and degenerative force to those who encounter its effects. In her assessment of Machen's brief time as a member of the Golden Dawn, Susan Graf notes that the author appears to have been one of several initiates who considered 'Western magical methods [to be] the only ones

[62] Santucci, 'Theosophy', p. 235.
[63] References in Machen's tales to the little people's 'Turanian' and 'Mongolian' features suggest that the author was also aware of wider scholarship on comparative religion and ethnology, such as Friedrich Max Müller's theory that the prehistoric peoples of Europe and Asia were divided into three 'races': Aryans, Semites and Turanians (which included the Mongolians). As Chapters Three and Four will detail, Müller's writings influenced the myth criticism of Celtic scholar John Rhŷs, who in turn became an important source for John Cowper Powys in the late 1920s.

suited for Europeans'.[64] Machen's projection of these vague and Orientalist characteristics onto the Welsh fairies and the horrific nature of their occultism figures this dislike or scepticism towards the kind of Eastern spirituality imported by Theosophists and its application to native Celtic tradition.

The evil spiritual forces which the *tylwyth teg* represent in Machen's tales are further expressed in their rituals and symbols, both important aspects of occult practice in the late nineteenth century. In 'The Shining Pyramid' when Dyson and Vaughan finally witness the Little People's ceremony as they peer over the edge of a circular depression in the ground at night, the creatures' hissing makes it seem as if the pit 'boiled with fervent heat' and when the men look into the hollow it appears to 'seethe like an infernal cauldron' (156). A fire is kindled and a great pyramid of flames 'spired up like the bursting of a pent fountain, and threw a blaze of light upon the whole mountain' (157). Perhaps the most arresting image associated with the Little People in these tales is the pyramid itself, one of the many symbols for the numinous in Machen's work. It appears at the climax of the Little People's ritual, a ceremony witnessed by Vaughan and Dyson. Many societies of Western antiquity displayed the triangle as a representation for the name of God, or in Masonic idiom 'the Supreme Architect of the Universe'.[65] In 'Black Seal' and 'The Shining Pyramid' the Little People appear to have access to an undefined world referred to only in terms of the central symbol of the pyramid. While peering over the side of the hollow Vaughan and Dyson glimpse the shape of a girl, rumoured at the start of the narrative to have been 'taken by the fairies' (162), now an indistinct shape surrounded by writhing limbs: 'what lay bound in the midst of them was no longer fit for earth', remarks Dyson (163), '[so] she passed in the Pyramid of Fire'. The pyramid represents both esoteric knowledge attained through ritualistic means (of a kind far worse than the Theosophists' 'secret doctrine') and a gateway to a spiritual plane beyond the physical world, both of which serve to distort the traditional 'other world' of Celtic belief and the redemptive spirituality of contemporary revivalist occultism.

A later story in which Machen also experiments with using Celtic folklore and mythology as a means

[64] Susan Johnston Graf, *Talking to the Gods: Occultism in the Work of W. B. Yeats, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood and Dion Fortune* (Albany: State University of New York, 2015), p. 74.
[65] Albert G. Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry* (Luton: Andrews UK, 2010 [1882]), ch. xxiv.

for accessing an occult wisdom is the short novella ‘The White People’, which Machen completed in 1899.[66] Written in a curiously modernist stream-of-consciousness style of prose, the story presents a narrative of Welsh folk tales and occult experience framed by a philosophical conversation on the nature of evil. In its prologue a reclusive scholar, Ambrose, reveals a mysterious volume known only as ‘The Green Book’ to his visitor as a modern-day illustration of the true essence of sin. The book is the diary of an unnamed young girl, indoctrinated by her nanny’s ritual and song into the nature-cult of ‘the beautiful white people’ (*WP*, 125). The title of Machen’s ‘Green Book’ situates the tale within the Decadent allure of immorality, evoking Aubrey Beardsley’s infamous magazine *The Yellow Book*, and yet the change in colour complicates its effect; the cryptic ‘green pocket-book’, considered alongside its content, arouses images of the ‘wild, lonely country’ (146) of Wales and the woods and undergrowth into which the girl ventures, and alludes to an evil that is far more pagan, animist, and folkloric than the yellow dustsheets of licentious Parisian fiction. As discussed above, the gathering of folk tales from across the Celtic nations had become a political act throughout the nineteenth century as it provided a body of traditions and cultural practices distinct and better preserved from those of England.[67] The Welsh-inflected folklore at work in Machen’s ‘The White People’, the ‘processes … handed down by tradition from age to age’ (145), involvement in which leads to the girl’s eventual death, represent a criticism of this kind of blending of occult practice and Celtic folklore. The story’s concluding events, however, and Ambrose’s analysis of these processes, reveal Machen’s attitude to be more ambivalent than that displayed in his Little People tales, suggesting that appropriation of Celtic material might indeed be spiritually rewarding, but that its misuse entails more negative consequences.

Machen claims to have constructed the ‘Green Book’ using ‘odds and ends of folk lore and witch lore’ alongside ‘pure inventions of [his] own’.[68] While the stories of village Sabbats and the nurse’s sympathetic magic taught to the girl reflect the author’s interest in witchcraft from his time at George Redway, much of the folklore in ‘The White People’ is of a kind associated with the darker versions

[66] It was eventually published in 1904 in *Horlick’s Magazine* by its editor, and Machen’s friend, A. E. Waite.
[67] Pethica, ‘Yeats, Folklore, and Irish Legend’, pp. 130-131.
[68] Arthur Machen, *The House of Souls* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1923), p. xv.

of Celtic fairy belief which Machen had previously used in his fiction. The nurse teaches the girl 'the old words from the fairy language' (129) and 'a very curious sign, which nurse showed me as well as she could, but she said she couldn't show me properly' (131). Many of the girl's experiences, for example, resemble encounters with traditional fairy lore: the girl remembers that when she was five or six she heard 'them' (120) talking about how she had been as an infant; she would speak the 'Xu language' which her mother could not understand, and little white faces would watch her and talk to her 'about some great white place where they lived' and where everything – the hills, the trees, the grass – was all white (120). Several tales are variants of the 'Other-world Bride' motif, a common feature of Welsh folklore.[69] One such tale recounts the adventures of a young man who 'once upon a time went hunting' with his hounds in the woods, but at the setting of the sun had not been able to catch anything (129). He spies a beautiful white stag which leads him to the bottom of a hill where it vanishes into a doorway. The young man enters after it and finds himself in a palace with the queen of the fairies, who had transformed herself into the stag to bring him there because 'she loved him so much'. He drinks from an enchanted cup and the queen becomes his bride. In another tale told by the nurse, a poor girl ventures into a hollow pit and returns carrying green grass, red stones, white stones and yellow flowers, and when she wears these items at the Court they appear as emerald earrings, a ruby pendant, a diamond necklace, and a splendid golden crown. A prince asks for her hand in marriage, but on the wedding night a 'tall, black man, with a dreadful face' appears at the door to the bedchamber and claims the girl as 'mine own wedded wife' (127). In both instances a mortal is tricked into marriage with a fairy, two of numerous instances of deception in 'The White People', and a theme which indicates Machen's distrust of fairy lore and a possible warning to those revivalists who sought spiritual redemption in such alluring material. The latter tale presents a malevolent inversion of the bride motif, the mysterious 'black man' perhaps resembling the Irish *fear dorcha* ('dark man') or Gwyn ap Nudd, a figure from Welsh tradition known as the 'king of *Annwn*', the otherworld.[70] Even the telling of the tale causes the girl alarm, and twice the nurse warns her that if

[69] Juliette Wood, 'The Fairy Bride Legend in Wales', *Folklore* 103.i (1992), 56-72, p. 56.
[70] John T. Koch, 'Nodens/Nuada/Nudd', *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 1360.

she tells anyone of their rituals she would be thrown into 'the black pit with the dead people' (133), further highlighting the threat which lies behind the enchantment of the story.

The conclusion to 'The White People' provides what can be interpreted as a moralistic assessment of the Celtic Revival's embracing of the occult. The explanation for the Green Book offered by Ambrose in the epilogue is one simply of heightened imagination on the girl's part, and yet the metaphor he employs is highly suggestive:

> Powerful and sovereign medicines, which are, of necessity, virulent poisons also, are kept in a locked cabinet. The child may find the key by chance, and drink herself dead; but in most cases the search is educational, and the phials contain precious elixirs for him who has patiently fashioned the key for himself (146).

The girl had indeed 'poisoned herself – in time' (147), Ambrose reveals, and was found dead in wild countryside. The fate of the girl reveals a central criticism of the revival, that to plunder and exhibit such repositories of inherited wisdom for the purpose of establishing a national identity is not to risk literal injury – or in the girl's case, death – but ultimately to cheapen, or debase, the spiritual value of Celtic material. Populating 'The White People' with versions of Welsh folk tales and legends alongside his own brand of occult, sinister fairy, Machen weaves a narrative alive with the magic which revivalists believe Celtic literature to express, while the girl's death transforms the story into a cautionary fable. That the phials of the cabinet contain 'precious elixirs' suggests that Machen might not have entirely dismissed the genuinely redemptive possibilities of Celtic folklore; the conclusion therefore reveals the ambivalence with which Machen considered the use of such material. As we have seen, while he viewed with suspicion the esoteric theories of the popular Theosophical movement and their co-option of Celtic material, he nevertheless admired certain forms of Western occultism and those who studied it.[71] In this way while the tales of the Little People represent a horrifying corruption of the Theosophical doctrine of a redemptive 'secret wisdom', the creative mixture of occult ritual and Welsh fairy lore in 'The White People' entails a more ambiguous

[71] Machen was to join the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1899 where, as Susan Graf argues, he appeared to have received some personal benefit from its practices – based primarily on a blend of Western occult systems. Graf, p. 74.

assessment of the Celtic occult. Genuine spiritual knowledge is accessible for those who ‘fashion the key for themselves’, but a naïve and superficial engagement of such material for political gain – by those who find the key ‘by chance’ – will lead to a mischaracterisation of Celtic tradition.

‘But I am with the Celts’: Celtic Symbolism and the figure of the Celt in *The Hill of Dreams*

> [The Welsh people] have their philosophy, always a close, vehemently definite thing, crying out for precise images, by which alone it can apprehend the unseen.[72]

As the 1890s drew on, Machen’s literary response to the Celtic Revival began to develop beyond his folklore-based tales of the *tylwyth teg* and ‘The White People’ and to engage with its emergent literary culture, his opinions of which were to be summarised in ‘The All-Pervading Celt’ in 1898. In *The Hill of Dreams*, a semi-autobiographical novel written between 1895 and 1897, Machen presents a far more contemplative and broader consideration of the Celt and his place in modern imagination and society – distinct from his tales of the supernatural.[73] The South Wales landscape remains a potent influence, but here its purpose is to inspire the creative awakening of the protagonist Lucian Taylor, allowing Machen to pass judgement on what he saw as the trite superficiality of many ‘Celtic’ authors, laudatory reviews of whose work had begun to flood literary journals. Machen’s turn to the artistic movement known as Symbolism, however, which allowed him to explore his own view of Celtic identity, marks a possible change, or rather a clarification, in his attitude towards the revival and the place of the Celt in modern metropolitan society. His use of alchemical imagery to describe literary inspiration evokes the fusion in Lucian’s mind of various layered influences, bringing together what Machen saw as the genuine Celtic character of the landscape and the imagined memories of a now-fallen Roman civilisation. In this way the intersection of Celtic themes and Symbolism in Machen’s writing is essential to understanding his development towards the end of the 1890s, and suggest that his grievances expressed in ‘The All-Pervading Celt’ were in fact linked to a conception of his own Welshness.

Symbolism, an artistic movement which evolved out of nineteenth-century Christian iconography, was to some extent an anti-scientific literary movement, ‘the reverse side of the coin’ from naturalism, and can be seen to accord with Machen’s emerging views on what great literature should seek to

[72] Arthur Symons, *Figures of Several Centuries* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1916), p. 393.
[73] The manuscript was first rejected as ‘poor and weak and dull’ (*C,* 173) and was finally published ten years later by Grant Richards to little critical recognition.

achieve.[74] In *Hieroglyphics*, a work of literary philosophy published in 1902, Machen would claim that 'fine literature' must demonstrate 'ecstasy', a quality he otherwise defines as 'rapture, beauty … awe, mystery, sense of the unknown'.[75] Symbolist art aimed to evoke similar emotions. In his introduction to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) the British poet Arthur Symons observes that 'the world has starved its soul long enough in the contemplation and the re-arrangement of material things'.[76] While naturalism required the novelist to become like a 'Baconian scientist', 'recording, reporting, listing', it was now the duty of the symbolist, in Symons's words, to render 'the unseen world no longer a dream'.[77] Indeed, the aesthetic values of Symbolism aligned in part with those of the wider Celtic Revival. Yeats, often considered a Symbolist poet himself, defined the symbol as a poetic device through which '[all] sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their pre-ordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions'.[78] It was for this quality that Yeats admired the French symbolists, whom he considered to be writing in the Celtic Breton tradition, articulating what Kandola characterises as the 'growing imbrication of the Celtic and French Symbolist modes'.[79] Yeats even saw this coupling as providing a further redemptive dimension to the political aims of the revival: humankind, he writes in 1898, is readying itself 'to be interested in many things which positive science … has denied us'.[80]

Machen's fiction up until the late 1890s had always used esoteric symbols to express a non-material realm – the pyramid of fire and the figure of Pan, for instance – but while these were intended to inspire terror, the symbolism of medieval alchemy and the Welsh landscape of *The Hill of Dreams* allowed Machen to explore the creative and spiritual transformation of his protagonist. The novel demonstrates an accordance with the fusion of 'Celtic, Occult and Symbolist modes' in Yeats's writing, yet while Kandola argues that this suggests 'a provocative, if hitherto overlooked, critique of Yeats's work', it rather suggests a more complex reading of Machen's changing attitude towards the

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[74] John Lucas, 'From Naturalism to Symbolism', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 21.i (1977), 124-139, p. 141.
[75] Arthur Machen, *Hieroglyphics* (London: Grant Richards, 1902), p. 11.
[76] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1919), p. 4.
[77] Lucas, p. 124; Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p. 4.
[78] W. B. Yeats, *Ideas of Good & Evil* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1903), p. 242; *ibid*., p. 243.
[79] Kandola, p. 504.
[80] Yeats, *Ideas of Good & Evil*, p. 301.

revival.[81] As we have seen, while Machen disagreed with Arnold and the later revivalists that 'the Celt' had made any significant contribution to the literary canon, Machen admitted to identifying a certain 'feeling' in Celtic literature 'which does not exist in Anglo-Saxondom'.[82] He appears also to have partly embraced the intersection of Symbolism and the revivalist view of the Celtic character: 'To the Celt, and to those who have the Celtic spirit,' Machen later wrote in a 1908 article for *T. P.'s Weekly*, 'the whole material universe appears as a vast symbol; and art is a great incantation which can restore … the paradise that has been lost'.[83] In the same article he describes what he calls 'Celtic Magic' as mysterious and wonderous in nature, both terms which would fit his previous definition of 'ecstasy' in literature. In *The Hill of Dreams*, Symbolism provided Machen with the methods to develop his own version of Celtic spirituality while also giving him the opportunity to strike a blow at the 'fanatical' literary print culture which had resulted from the popularity of the Celtic Revival.[84]

Alchemy, an early science whose spiritual applications became central to many modern occult systems, had fascinated Machen from a young age, but here he was able to apply its processes to describe the development of the imagination. Often mischaracterised as a precursor to modern chemistry which sought to turn base metals into gold and silver (although this was indeed one of its aims, the transmutation of 'ignoble' metals to 'noble' through a process of reducing a substance to its 'prime matter'), alchemy was rather a philosophical system designed to prove the fundamental unity of all things and the perfectibility of matter.[85] It was an art shrouded in cryptic imagery, which was no doubt due to the abstract and often imprecise nature of its theories, and one easily co-opted into many of the mystical and spiritual systems mentioned in this chapter due to its emphasis on the refinement

[81] Kandola., p. 505; *ibid*., p. 504.
[82] Machen, *Far Off Things*, p. 87.
[83] Arthur Machen, *The Secret of the Sangraal and Other Writings* (Carlton-in-Coverdale: Tartarus Press, 2007), p. 145.
[84] Machen's use of Symbolism has also led many critics to view *The Hill of Dreams* as a critical epitaph to the Decadent movement following Oscar Wilde's highly publicised arrest and imprisonment. Machen's career had been affected by the Wilde trials of 1895 due to publishers conspicuously distancing themselves from the kind of material which they associated with the Decadent movement. With the great aesthete's arrest, the literary and artistic renaissance that until then had been on the rise since the beginning of the decade 'suffered a sudden collapse'. Wilde's plays were suppressed, his books were left to go out of print, and Aubrey Beardsley (who illustrated the cover of Machen's *The Great God Pan*) was promptly fired from his position as art editor for *The Yellow Book*. See Holbrook Jackson, p. 62.
[85] Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 109; p. 129.

of man and his place in the universe.[86] Yeats would frequently turn to alchemy in his poetry as a way of conveying complex metaphysical ideas surrounding the transformation of the spirit, and symbolists beyond the Celtic movement such as Charles Baudelaire were employing the figure of the alchemist as an analogy for the poet himself, one who transmutes reality into a 'higher form of art'.[87] Machen employs the symbolism of alchemy in *The Hill of Dreams* to express the creative awakening of Lucian Taylor as he attempts to translate the South Wales landscape into a work of great literature. As Alex Murray has argued, Machen's ideas about alchemy were influenced by the seventeenth-century Welsh philosopher Thomas Vaughan, particularly Vaughan's approach to 'light and revelation' – the image of a red glow, the 'philosopher's fire', follows Lucian throughout the novel, symbolising his various creative transformations.[88] The opening sentence immediately sets the scene for this pattern of symbolism in the novel: 'There was a glow in the sky as if great furnace doors were opened'.[89] The furnace beckons from a distance, transforming the Welsh landscape surrounding Lucian's home into an alchemical potential: the clouds were 'touched with fiery spots and dapples of flame' and the bare hillsides 'crimsoned' (*C*, 176).

As part of this emerging pattern of alchemical imagery, what Lucian views as the Celtic character of the landscape quickly serves to fuel his literary ambitions. He returns from walking in the countryside, having found pleasure in 'little nameless brooks', 'hushed twilight woods', 'the breath of the great

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[86] Later commentators on Paracelsian alchemy, for example, developed this idea of the physical alchemical process as a metaphor for spiritual redemption: the human body rots in the grave when it dies (i.e. reduced to primal matter), but at the end of a time a new purified spiritual body will be 'raised up' through God's glory. Principe, p. 129.

[87] See William T. Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Alchemist in Literature from Dante to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 131.

[88] Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence*, p. 153; Often known as a 'spiritual' alchemist, Thomas Vaughan perceived the world in much the same way as Machen, though his methods were chemical and his intentions more explicitly religious; to 'approach to the Lord', to discover 'his secret path', he writes, we must remove material obstacles using this esoteric, spiritual form of alchemy so that man might '*Enter the Terrestrial Paradise*, that *Hortus Conclusus* ... where God descends to walk'. Quoted in Donald R. Dickson, 'Thomas Vaughan and the Iatrochemical Revolution', *The Seventeenth Century* 15.i (2000), 18-31, p. 19. The original title for *The Hill of Dreams* was *The Garden of Avallaunius*, for here Machen conceived of a similar Edenic paradise to Vaughan, sealed behind the phenomenal world and yet achievable through mystical experience. Vaughan also developed a deep interest in Rosicrucianism and published English translations of their two manifestos in 1652 possibly under the pseudonym 'Eugenius Philatethes'. Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 185.

[89] Arthur Machen, *The Collected Arthur Machen*, ed. Christopher Palmer (London: Duckworth, 1988), p. 174. Hereafter *C* in the text.

wind, passing from deep to deep' (191), buoyed by a desire to translate what he has felt onto the page. While still at school Lucian daydreams about 'a land laid waste, Britain deserted by the legions, the rare pavements riven by frost, Celtic magic still brooding on the wild hills and in the black depths of the forest' (177). The essence of Celtic culture has endured in the unchanging landscape and its inhabitants, a sentiment which echoes the primitivist discourse of many Irish revivalists, first amplified by Arnold. It becomes clear, however, that Lucian is also bewitched by a romantic notion of the Welsh landscape: 'But all the afternoon his eyes had looked on glamour; he had strayed in fairyland' (174). The word 'glamour', related to Scots *gramarye* ('magic', 'spell', knowledge of the occult), had re-emerged in the revival period to describe the enchantment felt by those who read Celtic literature; the term 'Celtic glamour', for example, is used in *Irish Lyrics and Ballads* (1917) to refer to 'the spell of ancient Eire'.[90] In these first few chapters Lucian is blinded by his reveries in a landscape he considers traditionally Celtic: he desires to lose himself in a secret world 'afar and forlorn' (174) as though he were 'the hero of a fairy-book' (175) – a reflection of the reductive descriptions of the Celtic landscape popularised by the revival. In this way the novel can be seen to present two separate formulations of the 'Celt' between which Lucian must navigate: while the alchemical imagery describes Lucian's awakening to the imaginative potential of his Celtic heritage – further suggesting that Machen saw the techniques of Symbolism as a way of more meaningfully addressing Celtic themes than other modes – Lucian's preoccupation with a sentimental Welsh 'glamour' alludes to a romanticised conception of Celtic genius, one which Machen considered an amateurish misrepresentation of his country's spirituality.

Alchemy continues to provide the imagery for Lucian's creative development when an experience on the ruins of the eponymous Roman fort forces him to revaluate his simplistic notion of a romantic Welsh landscape. A common process in alchemy is the combining of certain core elements known as the 'conjunction', often veiled in the image of 'marriage' and symbolised using the sophic forms (philosophical representations) of Mercury and Sulphur, man and woman, or sun and moon.[91] During

[90] Murray, p. 144; James B. Dollard, *Irish Lyrics and Ballads* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & sons, 1917), p. vi.
[91] Read, p. 33.

a summer of intense heat Lucian strips off his clothes in mimicry of the marriage process until, alone on the hill, he becomes in his mind a 'strayed faun' with dark eyes, dark hair and olive skin (182): 'Quick flames now quivered in the substance of his nerves, hints of mysteries, secrets of life passed trembling through his brain, unknown desires stung him' (182). It is evoked also in the very shape of the hill: within the walls of the Roman fort it is 'cool and hollow' and described as 'the bottom of a great cup' (180) in imitation of the alchemist's crucible, a locus for material and spiritual change. Lucian's 'conjunction' is a formative, sensual, and ultimately spiritual version of the alchemical marriage, the combining of core chemical elements, and represents a process of unification, combining the Celtic supernatural with the influence of Classical imagery (a characteristic of Machen's other work during this period). The hillfort is a site of Welsh folklore in Lucian's eyes, a 'fairy hill', 'within the great mounds, within the ring of oaks' (181), and yet its Roman aspects are also foregrounded, the '*vallum*' (the high banks of the camp) and a nettle which stings Lucian during the experience is later identified by his father as 'a Roman nettle – *urtica pilulifera*' (183). This reveals a coherent critical attitude towards the creative pursuits of many revivalists; to present a single aspect of a country's many traditions is disingenuous; imitation or a romanticised reconstruction of Celtic glamour is limiting.

The conjunction ritual is repeated soon after, when Lucian visits Caermaen and takes a short cut back at twilight over the fields. He finds himself in a natural valley, deeply Welsh with the descriptions of mist and the 'dark sweep of the forest' (199), and yet he looks back to see the 'piled mounds' that mark the circle of the town's amphitheatre, and again the setting sun reddens the landscape and Lucian hears the long note of a Roman trumpet. A furnace fire '[shoots] up on the mountain' (200) and he stumbles through 'wet bubbling earth' until, breaking out into a moonlit lane, he happens upon Annie Morgan, the farmer's daughter whom he has loved since he was a boy and whose scarlet lips he thinks he may have kissed during his first experience within the fort. The two kiss once more and Lucian proclaims an almost religious devotion to the girl. These alchemical conjunctions in the Gwent landscape, both artistic and sexual awakenings, treat Celtic 'glamour' or 'natural magic' just as Machen had previously treated fairy belief, reshaping it and reinforcing its

spiritual potential with other occult systems and Roman influence. As Lucian walks home with Annie, he feels himself to be the physical 'realisation' of Caermaen:

> The Celts assailed him, beckoning from the weird wood, and his far-off ancestors, the 'little people', crept out of their caves, muttering charms and incantations in hissing inhuman speech; he was beleaguered by desires that had slept in his race for ages (202).

The ongoing use of the Little People, the race of survivals whose existence, as earlier described, Machen thought explained the origin of Celtic fairy belief, serves to further challenge the 'redemptive ethnography' practised by Yeats and other revivalists.[92] Writers such as J. M. Synge and Yeats himself were engaging in primitivist discourse to salvage what they saw as the inherent spiritual wisdom of the Celt, which for them was exemplified in the figure of the Irish peasant.[93] While in 'Black Seal' and 'The Shining Pyramid' Machen's Little People are literal survivals who inspire terror in characters who encounter them, in *The Hill of Dreams* they are psychological intrusions, leading Lucian 'the Celt' to question the romantic narrative told about his ancestral past.

Whereas many revivalists took pride in their assumed connection to a Celtic fairy faith (as part of a heritage of folk belief), *The Hill of Dreams* presents this connection as both literal and abject, a link to a disturbing and undesirable past. Later in the novel, when Lucian is living in a London garret, he comes to think of himself as a changeling, swapped as he lay sleeping in the Roman fort, and he wonders whether 'there were some drop of the fairy blood' in his veins 'that made him foreign', an image which recalls the fairy hybrid Jervase Craddock in 'Black Seal'. The remains of the old town, 'with mouldering walls beset by the ghostly legion' (202), have instilled in him an awareness of the layered history of pre-Celtic, Celtic and Roman rule in the landscape, each influence residing in the immediate environment of cave, wood and hill, and thus complicating the revivalist assertion of an unbroken line of inherited Celtic culture. Machen's use of alchemy as a symbol for spiritual transformation illuminates the potency of the layered Welsh landscape, mirroring the artistic process

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[92] Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 89.
[93] See Deborah Fleming, *A Man Who Does Not Exist: The Irish Peasant in the Work of W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

of reanimating and combining disparate elements; as he continues to write, Lucian feels past disappointment 'transmuted' into happiness (206) and he sees his written work 'glowing'.

The results of Lucian's initial literary attempts express an implicit criticism of the superficial romanticism employed by those revival writers whom Machen considered 'mediocre'. He begins to write verse and prose articles, sending them to magazines 'in pathetic ignorance of the trade' (191). The resulting manuscript is rejected by a publisher and then appropriated by a better-known author into a 'pretty little volume' (203) titled *The Chorus in Green*. It is the kind of book on Celtic themes which, Machen would write in 'The All-Pervading Celt', affords 'no sort of justification for the rhapsodies' bestowed upon it.[94] The plagiarising author has extracted the 'hints and dreams and … haunting' passages from Lucian's manuscript, sacrificing the original vision for the more fashionable themes of the period. It is published in 'bronze-green cloth' and old-face type (196), foregrounding its aesthetic appeal to disguise its literary ineffectualness. The Celt, in other words, on attempting to articulate a genuine picture of his native land has been rejected by London publishers, his efforts commercialised for a broader audience.

Lucian's rejection by a London literary society infected by the mediocrity of the Celtic 'craze' leads him to abandon his Welsh novel and turn to more decadent pursuits. Although urged by his father to write to the papers to complain Lucian appears dismissive of the affair, already eager to move on to other work. Lucian becomes fixated on isolating himself from society and he turns to modern forms of occultism in order to divert his consciousness from the distractions of everyday life, '[annihilating] the world around him' (225). In these fevered obsessions, Annie is reduced to 'the woman' (224) in Lucian's mind, becoming a symbol through which his art can achieve focus. He begins to compose a more 'secret work' (214), a devotional text inspired by his love for Annie, though occult 'in the true sense of the word' (215), written and decorated in cryptic signs with ink made from red earth and fern juice. He grows thin and ritually wounds himself at night with strips of gorse and thorn, daubing his blood onto the manuscript in a kind of mortification of the flesh which binds him bodily to the text.

[94] Machen, 'The All-Pervading Celt', p. 19.

Kandola views this episode as Lucian's 'slide into Decadence' as he concentrates increasingly on the 'fretted splendour' of the calligraphy and the aesthetics of the page (216).[95] Considered in view of Lucian's initial literary ambitions, this turn to a materialistic obsession over the book suggests that Machen saw the posturing of the decadent movement to be a distraction from the pursuit of great literature. Indeed, Lucian's own reading becomes a conscious act against literary excellence: he reads only what is 'uncouth and useless' (190). This turn toward more decadent pastimes, though mostly imagined, is a diversion from Lucian's earlier work and contributes to his later experiences of delusion.

Alchemical symbolism and the occult, however, develop into codes through which Lucian can transform the 'beggarly matter of existence' (232): while Lucian is still living with his father near Caermaen, the allure of decadence gives way to the conjuration of what he calls 'the Garden of Avallaunius' (Machen's original title for *The Hill of Dreams*), a vision of the Roman town as it once was. He resides in the imagined Avallaunius, 'levelling to the dust the squalid kraals of modern times' (226): 'Life and the world and the laws of the sunlight had passed away, and the resurrection and kingdom of the dead began' (202). His visions are laden with colour, fragrance, and sensation as serving boys pour bright wines and outside vineyards and white marble shimmer in the sun. As Alex Murray notes, Lucian's picture of Roman civilisation is not a veneer for the contemporary decadent movement, 'a synonym for decline and foreign corruption'; rather it is 'British and vital, underscoring Machen's admiration for, and understanding of, Wales's pagan past'.[96] Roman culture, or *romanitas*, provides an extra dimension to Machen's Gwent, an awareness of the complex nature of a landscape which cannot be reduced in the author's eyes to a misleading and unbroken 'Celtic' history. Avallaunius strengthens the continuing pattern of alchemy – he sees glass cups 'specked with the bubbles of the furnace … troubled and clotted red' (233) – thereby offering Lucian a further chance to transform his creative energies into art. Even his Latinate name evokes light, emphasising Lucian's potential for illumination, to rejuvenate the revivalist image of the Celtic landscape with the learning

[95] Kandola, p. 511.
[96] Murray, p. 148.

and culture which Machen saw the Romans as having transported to Britain. The thin veil between the fictional 'Caermaen' and the real Caerleon also reinforces the significance of a Roman past to Machen's childhood memories of Gwent; its role in *The Hill of Dreams* suggests that the polyphonic nature of the landscape figures in Machen's own picture of Wales.

Lucian's relationship with Gwent is tested as he moves to London to become a 'literary man' and takes up residence in a cheap garret. Here he finds himself able to survey his experiences of the Welsh landscape and his time in Avallaunius from a distance, but gradually his obsession with producing his 'great work' and his eventual desperation at being unable to write leaves him melancholic and isolated. His 'pains of desolation' (253), he reflects, might have been cured in Wales by taking 'refuge in the hills' or rushing to the woods 'as if to an anodyne' (253), but the London streets provide no such comfort. As Tomos Owen notes, while London in the 1890s had become a place where the figure of the Celt could be reawakened and reinterpreted, nevertheless the standard portrayal is of the deracinated Celt, 'in exile' from his native country.[97] In London society during this period there were indeed many thriving Welsh communities, and yet as a foreigner the Welshman felt excluded from political and cultural influence. Many Pan-Celticists at the time even used this image to fuel the view that the Celt's heightened spirituality was in danger of being suppressed by English cities: the Irish landowner Lord Castletown declared that London was 'an awful thought … swallowing up the life, the beauty of the world … where men write and sleep, but not the sleep of rest or the writing of joy'.[98] Lucian himself becomes tormented by 'lurid picture[s]' of fiery streets, 'unending circles of vast stones' (292) and the burning naphtha flame of the city's gas lamps, an inversion of the alchemical red glow from the novel's opening. Indeed, the Celtic occult, encounters with which prove fatal in Machen's previous tales, re-emerges in Lucian's experience of London, distorting the harmless 'glamour' of fairyland he had once felt in Wales. Buildings are 'piled up into strange shapes … assuming the appearance of goblin towers, swelling into a vague dome like a fairy rath' and the entire city seems like a temple, every circle 'an initiation, every initiation eternal loss' (260). This

[97] Owen, p. 47.
[98] Quoted in Caoimhín De Barra, *The Coming of the Celts, AD 1860: Celtic Nationalism in Ireland and Wales* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), p. 115.

conception of London as one vast secret society of 'rite' and 'initiation' – much like the Golden Dawn which Machen would join several years later – presents a horrifying vision of a Celtic spirituality far removed from Lucian's own innocent memories of his childhood home. In this way, Machen's depiction of an oppressive and occult London is one which denies the Celt a voice; having first had his work plagiarised while still living in Wales, Lucian is now unable to articulate his individual experience of Gwent amid an unfamiliar and alienating environment. He is unconnected with any of the fashionable literary movements or 'great *littérateurs*' (254) which he reads about in the newspaper, further suggesting that Machen viewed the revival as obscuring or misrepresenting the Celtic imagination, while promoting authors whose work is more commercial and romanticised.

The novel ends with Lucian's death following a growing dependence on laudanum and his manuscript, found by a working-class couple, proves to be gibberish, 'illegible hopeless scribblings' (294). Kirsten Macleod argues that the novel's ending signals the unspoken truth that the Decadent artists were unable to communicate with the reading public, but Lucian's abandonment of decadent themes and the rediscovery of his original book about Wales rather reveals Machen's attitude towards the Celt's troubled position in the London society of the 1890s and indeed his ideas about his own identity as a Welshman.[99] One night before his death memories of Gwent eventually return to comfort Lucian, scenes of 'straying from stile to stile through the scented meadows, and listening to the bright brook that sang to the alders' (272), and he remembers the subject of his first novel and the passages of wild natural description which had first inspired his enthusiasm for literature. These Wordsworthian reveries, however, are soon corrupted as Lucian's imagined Caermaen becomes an 'unearthly city … a dreadful Atlantis' and a trumpet summons the Roman legion 'from the river and the graves' (279). What for Machen made his home county a place of formative and mysterious beauty is disfigured in his protagonist's mind, twisted into a haunted version of itself. Added to this, he learns that his father has died, breaking the last 'strong link' Lucian had to Gwent and his 'past life, the days of his boyhood' (285). The intoxicating dream of producing a great work of literature

[99] Kirsten Macleod, *Fictions of British Decadence*: *High Art, Popular Writing, and the* Fin de Siècle (London: Palgrave, 2006), p. 137.

detaches him from the very place he is trying to write about, transforming Wales into a distant and unrecognisable landscape. Indeed, Machen's autobiography describes the author's own experiences of 'perpetual loneliness' after first moving to London; his father died in 1887 when Machen was just twenty-two, and he would only rarely return to Caerleon and Llanddewi Fach throughout the rest of his life.[100] The novel's ending might therefore reflect Machen's possible ambivalence towards his connection with Wales during this period, but it also suggests a wider comment on the Celt's position in English society at this time. The tainting of Lucian's childhood memories of Gwent, which ultimately '[grow] faint as a dream' (285), mirrors the effects of what Machen saw as the misinformed romanticisation of Celtic identity, which replaced a complex and layered relationship to a Celtic landscape with a more commercial and stereotypical image. For Machen Symbolism remained as the mode best able to communicate what he saw as the genuine spirituality of the Celtic people; a glow can be seen within Lucian's dying eyes 'as if great furnace doors were opened' (294), signalling that the alchemical inspiration of the Welsh landscape is an enduring influence. The revival's threat to Welsh identity, however, which for Machen was bound up in memories of a local landscape, hinders any meaningful expression.

Conclusion: an antidote to 'Celtic irrealities'

'I believe [the Celts] stood more near to ancient forgotten founts of wisdom than others stood,' wrote William Sharp in 1900. 'I believe that they are the offspring of a race who were in a more close communion with the secret powers of the world'.[101] As we have seen, Machen's criticism of the Celtic Revival, which resulted in 'The All-Pervading Celt' in 1898, appeared to be primarily aimed at the mediocrity of contemporary 'Celtic' literature and at the critics who overpraised such authors, thereby 'swell[ing] a chorus of exaggerated eulogy, which is too loud already'.[102] He admitted to admiring the work of the major writers but was contemptuous of the 'craze' which surrounded their status as

[100] Machen, *Things Near and Far*, p. 15.
[101] Fiona Macleod, 'CELTIC', *Contemporary Review* 77 (May 1900), 669-676, p. 671.
[102] Machen, 'The All-Pervading Celt', p. 18.

‘Celts’ and which prominent figures did nothing to discourage. Within this criticism, however, Machen also attacked one of the central claims of the Celtic ‘race-theorists’ and revivalists such as Sharp, that literary genius is traceable to a racial origin – a theory which Malcolm Chapman characterises as ‘the promiscuous summoning of Celtic irrealities into political debate’.[103] This chapter has shown how the question of race and what Machen saw as its false co-option into Celtic nationalism was addressed by the author in his fiction throughout the 1890s, demonstrating that Machen’s dislike of the movement was not simply focused on the lack of literary merit, but on the disingenuous ways in which the ‘Celts’ were being lauded by virtue of their ethnicity. An abiding interest in Western occultism gave Machen the knowledge and the motivation to interrogate the Theosophical theories on which many revivalists were basing the reassessments of their national folklore. Machen’s tales of the supernatural act as a warning corrective to the assertions of a universal ‘ancient wisdom’ in the inherited traditions of Celtic nations, and his interpretation of Allen’s survival theory both emphasizes the inconsistency at the heart of the revival’s racial claims and allowed Machen to comment on the place of the Celt in modern society.

In analysing Machen’s work during this period, it is also evident that the author’s ‘local patriotism’ for the corner of Wales where he spent his childhood became an implicit feature of his criticism of the revival. There is a little evidence for Machen displaying any sentiment of Welsh nationalism – especially not in the same sense that Irish writers were writing about Ireland – or that he had much involvement with the community of Welsh writers in London during his time in the city; rather memories of South Wales act as key settings in most of Machen’s major works in this decade and serve to complicate the popular revivalist constructions of a quaint and untouched Celtic landscape. For Machen, Symbolism represents the ideal mode to describe his version of the Celtic worldview and the only way to capture the locality which figured so strongly across his work. Indeed, this deep attachment to a specific place links Machen to Alan Garner, discussed in Chapter Five, for whom the landscape and geology of Alderley Edge, Cheshire, forms an inseparable part of his identity. Machen’s conception of Gwent in his fiction continued to develop into the twentieth century, as

[103] Chapman, *The Celts*, p. 218.

Chapter Two will show, becoming a location of great spiritual meaning for the author following his rediscovery of his Anglicanism and his fascination with a Celtic form of Christianity. His renunciation of the occult after leaving the Golden Dawn did not diminish his commitment to Symbolism, which would remain an important component of Machen's thinking in his depiction of the grail.

Chapter Two: 'Welsh saints in armour': The Symbol of the Grail and Arthur Machen's Celtic Mysticism

Introduction: Machen, Anglicanism and the Celtic Church

In line with his fiction, which up until the end of the nineteenth century was concerned with characters' alchemical and spiritual transmutations, Machen's personal transformation took place following the death of his first wife Amelia Hogg in 1899. This event, Machen writes in *Things Near and Far* (1923), burned his spirit 'into a dull, insensitive acquiescence', and he endured what he terms a 'horror of soul' – a reaction, it can only be conjectured, to his wife's death and his literary failings (*The Hill of Dreams* had yet to find a publisher).[1] 'I was beside myself with dismay and torment,' he writes: 'I could not endure my own being'. A process then suggested itself, he writes in a letter to a friend, of 'Hypnotism; I can say no more'.[2] Aidan Reynolds and William Charlton characterise this process as an experiment whose method lay somewhere between psychology and magic.[3] As Machen describes it, it appears certainly to have been an 'occult' method, although the resultant effects border on the realm of mysticism: 'what I received was not mere dull lack of painful sensation, but a peace of the spirit that was quite ineffable, a knowledge that all hurts and doles and wounds were healed, that that which was broken was reunited'.[4] In this regard a clear turning point can be identified in Machen's life and work: following this period of grief and later healing his fiction shifted in tone. The grail of Arthurian legend, in his view Celtic in origin, became a prominent symbol in his writing. This chapter addresses how the mysticism which Machen wrote about in the 1890s through a lens of fashionable occultism evolved into a deeper exploration of spirituality through a return to religion and an interest in a specifically Celtic form of Christianity.

[1] Machen, *Things Near and Far*, p. 134.
[2] Letter to Munson Havens, 1 Dec, 1924.
[3] Reynolds and Charlton, *Arthur Machen*, p. 73.
[4] Machen, *Things Near and Far*, p. 137.

A further notable event in Machen's life came in the same year of Amelia's death, on November 21st, when A. E. Waite finally persuaded Machen to enter the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the London-based secret society which had evolved out of a masonic sect in the 1880s.[5] Reynolds and Charlton conjecture that the success of Machen's early experiment in hypnotism led him to believe that he 'might draw some help, or at least some enlightenment' from the society.[6] Its members included Waite himself, W. B. Yeats, the novelist Arnold Bennett and artist Pamela Colman Smith.[7] Aleister Crowley was also an active member and had joined the year before Machen. It is unclear whether the initiation became 'part of the restorative process' for Machen, as D. P. M. Michael claims, or whether it was the Order, either accentuating or redirecting Machen's pain, which almost led to the author 'going frankly Satanist' a year later.[8] In retrospect Machen is generally enigmatic about his time, but he seems to have achieved serious spiritual restoration from this period. This may also have been due to his meeting his future second wife Dorothie Purefoy Hudleston while a 'strolling player' with the Benson Shakespearean Company in 1902. The marriage proved another milestone in his life, and it may have been Purefoy who encouraged Machen to continue the literary pursuits which he had abandoned at the turn of the century.[9] Occultism, as it appeared in his fiction in the 1890s in the form of sinister folklore and Rosicrucian and alchemical symbolism, no longer commanded the same level of Machen's attention. While as argued in Chapter One Machen had earlier criticised what he saw as the superficiality of the Celtic Revival's aims, this new period in Machen's life can be distinguished by his investigation of what he believed to be a genuine Celtic mysticism. This was characterised by a return to his Anglican roots, and his growing interest in the grail, which encapsulated many of his idiosyncratic beliefs.[10] Machen saw the grail of the European

[5] Graf, p. 58.
[6] Reynolds and Charlton, *Arthur Machen*, p. 78.
[7] Smith, in collaboration with Waite, would illustrate the famous Rider-Waite tarot deck in 1909.
[8] Michael, *Arthur Machen*, p. 29.
[9] Reynolds and Charlton, p. 94; '… the atmosphere around him became much gayer and more robust' (*ibid*.).
[10] The spiritual writer Evelyn Underhill (1875 – 1941), a fellow Golden Dawn initiate, also rediscovered her Christian faith and featured the grail in her novel *The Column of Dust* (1909) as the representation of 'absolute reality' (the book was dedicated to Machen and Purefoy). Underhill's conception of the grail was not dissimilar to Machen's; she also presented the vessel as Celtic in origin. See Alison Milbank, *God & The Gothic: Religion, Romance, & Reality in the English Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 278.

romances as being a direct descendant of Celtic folk-legend and that it had been incorporated into beliefs about the Eucharist as a result of the activities of the Welsh Church prior to the Norman invasion. This chapter argues that this theory of the grail's origin shaped Machen's new literary work and provided a basis for exploring alternative routes to a spirituality he considered so far unrealised in modern society and culture.

Although he had never truly renounced his father's Anglicanism it was not until this period in his life that Machen began to grapple seriously with religious issues.[11] He returned to the more orthodox principles of the Christian faith, viewing the Ten Commandments, for example, as '*intus et foris scriptus'* ('written inside and outside'), and it was his sincere belief and conviction, he writes in a letter to Waite, 'that the very highest things are to be had within Holy Church, [and] that it is *very doubtful* whether they are to be had without Holy Church' [Machen's italics].[12] The Welshman 'was never anything but a High Church Tory,' writes Hilary Machen of his father in 1963, and while this generally seems to have been the case, it is obvious from his fiction that Machen never considered the Church of England alone capable of conveying the true majesty of the world's mysteries. Roman Catholicism always seemed to have been on the periphery of his life and writing: his first wife had been Catholic, and Machen's religious journalism for *The Academy* was supposedly all the persuasion its editor Lord Alfred Douglas needed to convert.[13] Indeed, Machen's theology at this time appears to align most fittingly with orthodox Anglo-Catholicism. This movement had grown in popularity throughout the nineteenth century, ultimately reintroducing elements of Catholic liturgy and ritualism into Anglican doctrine and practice, following the Tractarians, among them John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey of the Oxford Movement, who had sought in the 1830s and 40s to bring back more traditional aspects of worship.[14] So while Machen never formally converted to Catholicism, in his

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[11] Reynolds and Charlton, *Arthur Machen*, p. 101.

[12] Letter to Colin Summerfield, 22 Nov 1924; letter to Waite, quoted in Reynold and Charlton, *Arthur Machen*, p. 101. Date unknown.

[13] Hilary Machen, 'Foreword' in Arthur Machen, *Selected Letters: The Private Writings of the Master of the Macabre*, eds. Roger Dobson, Godfrey Brangham and R. A. Gilbert (Chatham: The Aquarium Press, 1988), p. 14. First appeared as 'In My Father's House' in the *Aylesford Review* 5.ii (Spring 1963).

[14] John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press), pp. 3-28.

consideration of religious questions in his journalism and letters he often turned to the doctrine of the Roman Church for answers.

In this sense Machen's views regarding the religious situation in Britain in the first decades of the twentieth century are clear. His prevailing analysis of the general state of spiritual affairs was that the entire nation was one 'plunged in materialism' (*C,* 299), in large part due to modern Protestant denominations such as Methodism, which was experiencing a revival across the country, particularly in Wales. In the introduction to his story 'The Bowmen' published in 1915 he lays the blame at the feet of the clergy of the Church of England. Christianity is the great 'Mystery Religion', he writes:

> Its priests are called to an awful and tremendous hierurgy; its pontiffs are to be the pathfinders, the bridgemakers between the world of sense and the world of spirit. And, in fact, they pass their time in preaching, not the eternal mysteries, but a twopenny morality, in changing the Wine of Angels and the Bread of Heaven into gingerbeer and mixed biscuits: a sorry transubstantiation, a sad alchemy, as it seems to me (*C*, 299).

Elsewhere he accuses Methodists and most of the Anglican clergy for considering abstinence from drink and gambling to be the mark of a good Christian. Machen expressed his dissatisfaction in many of the novels discussed in this chapter: his aim in much of his later fiction, as Eckersley notes, was to describe 'a world reborn', thus providing an antidote to the ineffective spirituality which he felt characterised modern British society.[15]

A further aspect of Machen's theology which had begun to occupy him during the late 1890s, and now rose to influence his new fictional output, was the idea of the 'Celtic Church'. The term is used to describe a historical and distinctive Celtic Christianity which likely developed in Ireland, Wales and Scotland from around the early fifth century until the period following the Synod of Whitby in 644 AD when the English agreed to follow the customs of the Roman Church.[16] There is little evidence to support the popular idea of the existence of a united Celtic Church operating during an 'age of saints':

[15] Eckersley, 'Arthur Machen (3 March 1863 – 15 December 1947)', p. 220.
[16] Sean Duffy, 'Celtic Church', *The Oxford Companion to British History*, eds. Robert Crowcroft and John Cannon (Oxford University Press, 2015) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780199677832.001.0001/acref-9780199677832-e-874> [accessed 27 May 2021].

in Wales, for example, individual churches communicated with each other, but any claim of a connected institution must be treated with a degree of scepticism.[17] Furthermore, the majority of the Welsh saints' *vitae* were composed five hundred years after the legendary figures were supposed to have lived (during the fifth and sixth centuries) and are 'interspersed with so many legends, miraculous stories and hagiographical myths,' writes Glanmor Williams, 'that it becomes extremely difficult to establish the truth concerning [their] genuine deeds'.[18] This formed part of a broader romanticisation of Celtic Christianity from as early as the late seventh century, which Ian Bradley characterises as a succession of constructions and redefinitions.[19] From the beginning a syncretistic blending of pagan and Christian imagery was considered a fundamental trait of the Celtic mission, as well as a resolute exceptionalism in relation to the influence of the Roman Church. As later analysis in this chapter will demonstrate, this concept of syncretism – the amalgamation of two or more distinct spiritual systems – became one of the dominant themes of Machen's fiction, suggesting that for Machen the elimination of these supposed pagan elements had sterilised modern religious practice.

In the wake of the *fin-de-siècle* interest in Celtic literature and Insular art, Celtic Christianity went through a further revival, a period delineated by Bradley as the fifth 'distinct' revival, beginning at the outset of the twentieth century.[20] The misconceptions fostered by Romanticism were strengthened in 1900 with the publishing of Alexander Carmichael's immensely popular *Carmina Gadelica*, a six-volume collection of incantations and charms from rural Scotland. 'If this work does nothing else,' Carmichael's introduction asserts, 'it affords incontestable proof that the Northern Celts were endowed, as [Ernest] Renan justly claims for Celts everywhere, with "profound feeling and adorable delicacy" in their religious instincts'.[21] Similar collections from other parts of the Celtic world

[17] See Kathleen Hughes 'The Celtic Church: is this a valid concept?', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 1 (Summer, 1981), 1–20; also Donald E. Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 2000), p 105.
[18] Glanmor Williams, 'Medieval Wales and the Reformation', *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, ed. James P. Mackey (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 206-236, p. 208.
[19] Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. viii.
[20] *Ibid*.
[21] Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, ed. C. J. Moore (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1994 [1992]), p. 29.

followed, echoing the nineteenth-century romanticisation of the Celt developed by Renan and Arnold. One of the most influential rebukes of this trend was the Breton monk Louis Gougaud's *Les Chrétientés Celtiques* (1911), a work which 'took Renan to task' for his construction of a false picture of the Celtic religion in Britain; the Celts were more likely 'violent and barbarous,' wrote Gougaud, 'with beliefs marked by crude naturalism and utterly devoid of moral character'.[22] The idea, however, of a timeless, unbroken spiritual past in which a relationship with God in nature was immediate and profound would go on to shape the modern reinvention of Celtic Christianity as an 'alternative' to more orthodox Christian denominations.[23] It may have been this twentieth-century revival combined with the research he was carrying out on the grail legend, detailed below, which kindled Machen's own interest in the subject.

'A Celtic legend amplified and glorified': Machen and Waite's grail research

The theory that the Arthurian romances and in particular, the concept of the grail, had Celtic origins was first put forward in the mid-nineteenth century and was quickly accepted as a model for scholarship, remaining broadly undisputed up until the 1960s. Ernest Renan's essays followed Théodore de La Villemarqué (1842), who had first argued for this position, although it took a further forty years for the English folklorist Alfred Nutt to open up discussion about origins in *The Holy Grail with Especial Reference to its Celtic Origin* (1888). Prior to Nutt, English scholars had been less interested in the grail than the French due to its first appearing in English literature in Malory, three centuries after Chrétien.[24] Nutt argued that the origin of the grail was a composite of other-world vessels featured in Irish, Welsh and Scots Gaelic sources and noted the corresponding motifs in romance literature and medieval texts and folklore.[25] Following Nutt, the work of R. S. Loomis (1927;

[22] Meek, p. 166.
[23] Bradley, p. viii; perhaps unsurprisingly the concept was utilised for more nationalistic purposes by advocates of nonconformity in Wales. Meek, p. 170.
[24] Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 241.
[25] Juliette Wood, 'The Holy Grail: From Romance Motif to Modern Genre', *Folklore* 111.ii (October, 2000), 169-190, p. 181.

1956; 1963) marks the peak in twentieth-century enthusiasm for the Celtic grail-origin theory. Loomis at first sides with Nutt in his analysis of the grail's origin, and yet later he settles on a sixth-century dish once belonging to the Welsh king Rhydderch as 'the clearest and the most immediate prototype of the Grail'.[26] There is also sufficient justification, Loomis continues, to conclude that the 'Celtic hypothesis' can be applied to almost every element of the grail quest in Chrétien's poem.[27] While 'hugely diligent and learned,' writes Richard Barber, Loomis's enthusiasm 'outran the material on which he was working, and his arguments rely on a series of assumptions and analogues that scarcely hang together'.[28] Loomis's analysis of the grail was limited to its magic feeding properties and its depiction in some of the romances as a dish – two aspects which do not account for its wider spiritual significance.[29] The theory of a direct Celtic source for the grail, then, has largely been discredited, and a model of similar scale and influence has yet to replace it.

Although Machen never published anything as extensive as Waite or other contemporary grail scholars such as Nutt (1888; 1902) and Sebastian Evans (1898), the conclusions of his research place him firmly within the tradition of early Celtic theorists. Perhaps unique to Machen's theories, however, is his integration of this early pagan relic with British Christianity. Whereas previous schools of thought posit a folkloric version of the grail as the version taken up by Chrétien and later romance writers on the continent and subsequently assimilated to Eucharistic doctrine, Machen held that the vessel's sacramental qualities had already been initiated in the time of the Welsh saints, several hundred years before the Norman Conquest:

Personally, I am of the opinion that the story is of Celtic origin and that the Knights of the Graal

[26] Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (London: Constable, 1992) [1963]), p. 59.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 63.
[28] Barber, p. 27.
[29] John Carey is quick to point out that Loomis was not a Celticist (and neither was Nutt), and so his second-hand knowledge of Irish and Welsh sources was therefore 'capricious and uncritical'. Carey's own contribution to the subject, *Ireland and the Grail*, sought to evaluate the theory of an Irish origin to the grail using his own, deeper knowledge of the Old Irish texts, and proposed that while this theory has always lacked a 'single prototype' for the grail, we should instead look for it in a group of associated tales. John Carey, *Ireland and the Grail* (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2007), pp. xvi-xx.

are Welsh saints in armour. A relic of peculiar sanctity – a portable altar, perhaps – used by St David, and famed for its miraculous properties became confused at a very early period with the magic cauldron of pagan tradition.[30]

The grail, Machen concludes, was subsequently integrated into the legend of St Joseph of Arimathea, who was believed to have been buried beneath Glastonbury Tor with two phials of the blood of Christ, and around 1100 A.D. the story found favour with Norman poets, such as Robert de Boron, 'who added,' according to Machen, 'many things from many sources'.[31]

Machen had been compiling research on the grail with A. E. Waite throughout the eighteen nineties, meeting regularly 'somewhere on the A range of desks' in the British Museum.[32] The friends read and discussed much of the work being published in that period, and while it appears that Waite ultimately rejected many of Machen's arguments, Machen was indispensable for the development and refinement of his friend's first book on the subject: *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal: Its Legends and Symbolism* (1909). The pair also collaborated on the mystery play *The Hidden Sacrament of the Holy Graal*, published in a collection of Waite's poetry in 1906, and they would continue to correspond on the grail until Waite's death in 1942. Machen's review of the seven-hundred-page *Hidden Church* appeared in *T. P.'s Weekly* under the title 'The Holy Graal: A New Theory'.[33] '[So] far as I understand the entrancing but very subtle theory that Mr. Waite propounds, the Celtic elements are mere accidents', he writes. 'A pagan legend survived into the twelfth century, and was then informed with a new design'.[34] This indeed was Waite's thesis, in short, and despite failing to acknowledge his own contribution to the book, Machen ends the review by reaffirming his own thesis, that the grail was an artefact of Celtic folklore and Welsh sacrament.

In his *Hidden Church* Waite presents two aspects of Celtic folklore which he claims might be

[30] *Ibid*., pp. 146-7.
[31] Machen, *The Secret of the Sangraal*, p. 149.
[32] Letter to Waite, 21 Feb. 1906.
[33] Machen, *Selected Letters*, pp. 46-47.
[34] Machen, *The Secret of the Sangraal and Other Writings*, p. 142.

considered as possible antecedents for the grail: the Irish Cauldron of the Dagda and the Cauldron of Brân the Blessed – the king of the Isle of Britain in Welsh mythology.[35] The former is one of the four treasures of the Tuatha Dé Danann, along with the stone, the spear and the sword, and was an item 'from which no company ever went away unsatisfied'.[36] Waite rejects the Irish cauldron as a potential antecedent because it is magical, rather than spiritual. The second, belonging to Brân, is a vessel that would restore to life any man who is 'cast therein' the day after he is killed, except that he will be without speech.[37] The particulars of a possible antecedent, writes Waite, however, are unimportant; the mere existence of a 'Druidic cauldron' 'sometimes that of Ceridwen [the Welsh enchantress] and sometimes of Bendigeid [Brân]' is enough to deduce a specifically Welsh root for the legend.[38] On this point Machen and Waite agreed, but from there on the two diverged in opinion. Machen remained resolute that the grail was 'a glorified version of early Celtic sacramental legends', whereas Waite, conceding the legend's Celtic influence 'in its element and atmosphere', dismisses this as merely '[the] environment in which the spirit of the mystery reposes'.[39] Machen saw the grail as a product of the early Welsh church; Waite did not.

Yet one further point of contention among grail scholars, particularly at the time Machen and Waite were writing, is the Welsh legend of *Peredur vab Efrawg*, which appears in its earliest extant version towards the end of the thirteenth century and is therefore written down comparatively late in the international grail literature sequence.[40] The tale, which Waite refers to as a 'tangled skein' and 'the idlest of all stories' with respect to its plot, is set within the chivalric world of Arthur and his knights.[41] It features many elements common to the preceding grail romances – the wounded king, the bleeding lance – though crucially it does not feature the grail itself. In the scene in which Peredur

[35] A. E. Waite, *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal: Its Legends and Symbolism* (London: Rebman Limited, 1909), pp. 172-3.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] *Ibid*.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] Arthur Machen, 'The Secret of the Sangraal', *The Shining Pyramid* (London: Martin Secker, 1925), p. 90.
[40] Lady Charlotte Guest included the tale in her translation of the *Mabinogion*. See Introduction for further discussion, and Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 65-102 for a modern translation.
[41] Waite, *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal*, p. 53; *ibid*., p. 181.

encounters the lance in his uncle's banquet hall, two girls enter bearing a salver on which has been placed a man's head covered with blood.[42] In which directions do the lines of influence flow, Waite and Machen wondered? In its earlier form, from which the thirteenth-century version derives, the Peredur-legend may either represent 'an intermediate between folk-lore and Graal literature,' writes Waite, 'or otherwise a chaotic reflection from French sources'.[43] Machen claimed that Peredur was indeed the original grail knight, and that when Chrétien was rewriting the original of *Peredur* as *Perceval* the image of the head swimming in blood 'might well [have reminded him] of another strange story that he had heard of a miraculous vessel'.[44] This connection between the grail and the bloody head on the salver has long been a feature of grail criticism, notes Wood, so it is no wonder that Machen fixed upon *Peredur* in his research.[45] There is still little consensus among scholars, however, as to whether an older version could have been indeed the main source for Chrétien's poem – and which direction influence might have travelled.

This 'Celtic hypothesis' was Machen's central conclusion from his research into the grail-legend, and the starting point for his three works of fiction which feature the vessel as their subject: the novella *A Fragment of Life* (1904), the novel *The Secret Glory* (written in 1907, but published in 1922), and the shorter work 'The Great Return', serialized in the *Evening News* in the autumn of 1915 and later published by Faith Press, a religious publisher. Waite's scholarship and breadth of knowledge was a resource Machen was to use on many occasions, and although *The Hidden Church* was not published until two years after *The Secret Glory* was finished, the two men were in correspondence for much of that time.[46] This chapter will show how Machen, for whom the grail was 'in itself a portion of

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[42] Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 226.
[43] Waite, *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal*, p. 181.
[44] Machen, 'The Secret of the Sangraal', p. 94.
[45] Juliette Wood, *Eternal Chalice: The Enduring Legend of the Holy Grail* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), p. 55; *Peredur* also features in Carey's argument for an Irish origin to the grail, suggesting comparisons between the tale and several Irish texts (*Ireland and the Grail*, pp. 109-119).
[46] The work of Arthurian scholarship which provided T. S. Eliot with symbol and metaphor for *The Waste Land*, Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, was not published until 1920 and so would not have played a part in Machen's thinking, although it would command a more far-reaching influence in the later fiction of John Cowper Powys (see Chapter Three). Machen did eventually read Weston's thesis, but branded it 'fallacious' due to her reliance on 'occultists' and 'the "fertility" people', by which he means the school of thought deriving from J. G. Frazer's studies in comparative myth (Letter to Colin Summerford, 13 March, 1924; Letter to Summerford, 11 July, 1924); Weston's book might not have had such an influence in Eliot's writing as many

heaven', considered the vessel to be the perfect sacramental object for conveying the ineffable mysteries of the Christian faith.[47] As a syncretic blend of Celtic myth and early Christianity in Britain, the grail in Machen's fiction retains its pagan magic. His depiction of mystical experience and its association with the grail and an ancestral, numinous Welsh landscape shape a multifaceted and highly individual understanding of the Celtic Church.

critics have thought, and instead Waite's *The Hidden Church* has been suggested as a more probable source. See Tom Gibbons, '"The Waste Land" Tarot Identified', *Journal of Modern Literature* 2.iv (November 1972), 560-565.

[47] Machen, *The Secret of the Sangraal and Other Writings*, p. 143.

‘[Beyond] that desolate world and wilderness of grey Shepherd’s Bush’: visions of Wales in *A Fragment of Life*

In 1902 the American psychologist and pragmatist William James attempted to define the essential nature of the religious experience in a series of lectures delivered at the University of Edinburgh. James refers to the ‘noetic’ quality inherent in all mystical states, a term which denotes the conveyance of knowledge or truth, revelatory in nature and inexpressible to the non-mystic.[48] This, coupled with three other qualities (ineffability, transiency and passivity) are all features of the mystical experience; it occurs without any conscious effort and is impossible to discuss because it represents a state ‘unplumbed by discursive intellect’.[49] Evelyn Underhill develops this point by characterising mysticism as non-individualistic, whereas, she writes, occultism is ‘self-seeking’; the object for the occultist is ‘the exaltation of the will … seeking Reality for its own purposes’.[50] Machen would have recoiled at any attempt to systematise the religious experience, as Nick Freeman notes, but it is clear that following his time in the Golden Dawn, the ways in which he wrote about spirituality and the numinous changed fundamentally in accordance with the kinds of experiences laid out by James and Underhill.[51]

A consideration of Machen’s own spiritual experiences might illustrate why his fictional portrayals of these experiences changed over time. Machen’s process for ridding himself of the ‘horror of soul’ referred to above, although displaying several qualities of mysticism – its ineffable nature, its resultant ‘peace of the spirit’ – may not have been so mystical after all. His alleviating act of magic appears to have been the culminating event of Machen’s experiments with the occult, and indeed resembles many of the self-serving uses of magic displayed in his fiction in the 1890s – the man consumed by a mysterious drug in ‘Novel of the White Powder’, for example, and the techniques

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[48] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 380.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen, 1912), p. 71.
[51] Nick Freeman, ‘Arthur Machen: Ecstasy and Epiphany’, *Literature and Theology* 24.iii (2010), 242-255, p. 248.

employed by Lucian in *The Hill of Dreams* to isolate himself from the distractions of everyday life. Machen recounts several incidents in the second volume of autobiography *Things Near and Far* (1923), which demonstrate the author's proclivity for provoking numinous experience whilst living in London, but these also conform more precisely to the mystical. A realm of sensory perception, smells particular to Catholic mass, would come to Machen as he trod the streets: 'the great gusts of incense that were blown in those days into my nostrils, of the odours of rare gums that seemed to fume before invisible altars in Holborn', and then on a 'bright, keen' November morning when on Rosebery Avenue the pavement became 'not air, certainly, but resilient', and the impact of his feet 'buoyant'.[52] These experiences demonstrate the passivity and transience of James's categorisation of the mystical, and it is clear that the concepts informed Machen's idea of a heightened spirituality in his fiction.

It is also evident that Machen's conception of London changed drastically. The capital remained an essentially occluded city in his eyes, but instead of the darker horrors of cult conspiracy and naphtha flames as it appears in 'The Great God Pan', *The Three Impostors*, and the final sections of *The Hill of Dreams*, it began to take on mystical significance, becoming again a site for visionary and numinous experience. In his early years Wales offered a dark contrast to the auspicious city, but in later years Machen's reflections on London are above all nostalgic, conveying a sense of religious awe which did not find expression in his fiction until he had left occultism behind.[53] Nick Freeman has placed Machen's depiction of the city within the Symbolist tradition of writers who viewed the metropolis as a mystery, a labyrinth of images to be interpreted and a 'veil' beyond which the reality of the spirit might be revealed to the artist.[54] 'London in its essence,' writes Machen in 1914, 'is an object of faith, not of science'; throughout much of his fiction and autobiographical writing the simple act of walking

[52] Machen, *Things Near and Far*, pp. 130-1.
[53] Machen recalls his first encounter with the city in an essay 'When I Was Young in London': 'I saw London for the first time under the best auspices; it shone for me bright and haloed in glory against the background of the dark wood and still, wintry fields, and the lonely lane that climbs the long hill to Llanddewi Fach'. *The Secret of the Sangraal and Other Writings*, p. 60.
[54] Nicholas Freeman, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature, and Art 1870 – 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 147-205.

the streets is itself a process of discovery, which eventually emerged as transcendental.[55]

An early intimation of the importance of the grail in Machen's work occurs in the novella *A Fragment of Life*, begun in 1899 and published in 1904 by A. E. Waite in *Horlick's Magazine*; it exemplifies the kind of fiction Machen would begin to produce during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The monotony of the protagonist's middle-class suburban domesticity is penetrated throughout the narrative by instances of mystical experience connected with Wales: 'Edward Darnell awoke from a dream of an ancient wood,' it begins, 'and of a clear well, rising into grey film and vapour beneath a misty, glimmering heat; and as his eyes opened he saw the sunlight bright in the room, sparkling on the varnish of the new furniture' (*C*, 26). These visions contrast with the mundanity of Darnell's life; he lives with his wife Mary and their maid in a comfortable home in Shepherd's Bush, but whenever he is not working at his dull job he is discussing with Mary the best way to furnish the spare room or whether to purchase a new cooking range. They attend the local church, St. Paul's, where the chants are Anglican and the gospel of the day (instead of a sermon) has been translated into 'more modern and graceful English' (37), suggesting that Machen considered this modern form of worship to be as banal as Darnell's domestic life. '[The] spirit of nonsense … assured [Darnell] that the true world was the visible and tangible world' (73). Machen portrays a disenchanted world – of materialism and uninspiring religion, in which meaning is to be found only in office work and an agreeable marriage.

The grail is one of the chief symbols used by Machen in *A Fragment* to denote Darnell's mystical experiences. Darnell vaguely remembers some old tales told to him by his great-grandfather 'of the woods and fields, of the deep sunken lanes, and the forgotten country to the west' (33), language which recalls Machen's early fiction. It becomes clear that Darnell's epiphanies are somehow connected to his Welsh ancestry when he recalls a distant memory from childhood 'before the world

[55] Arthur Machen, 'The Joy of London', *The Evening News* (London, January 1914); indeed, Machen's descriptions of his 'long, prowling walks' through the city place him within the tradition of the literary *flâneur*, during this period, a man who walks and observes urban society (Machen, *Far Off Things,* p. 132). See Isabel Vila-Cabanes, *The Flaneur in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture: The Worlds of London Unknown* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), pp. 189-220.

had overwhelmed him' (74); he remembers a journey to a valley in Wales where every leaf, hill and stream 'spoke of great and ineffable mysteries' (74). Visions of the Welsh landscape, whether recalled or imagined, begin to colour the Darnells' lives; Mary, too, as if by simple association with her husband, begins to experience the same kind of transcendence as she shops in the dismal streets, though she is afraid of succumbing entirely to this spiritual world and clings to 'common things and common thoughts' (78). When Darnell attempts to draw his visions on paper he employs the image of a great church, and above it 'in the air, a cup with rays coming from it' (57). Darnell does not know much about Wales and presumably knows little of the grail, or indeed any other variant of holy vessel, and yet he chooses a cup hovering over a church to represent his experiences of the ineffable, spiritual world beyond the material London. This association echoes Yeats's essay on symbolism, discussed in the previous chapter, in which he declares that all forms, as symbols, 'call down among us certain disembodied powers' whether due to pre-ordained energies or else through particular associations.[56] The grail in this instance is just such a symbol, an emblem of revelation which for Darnell takes him out of the common life.

Machen continues to develop his theory that the grail was a pagan concept made holy by the Celtic Church by also associating Darnell's visions with saints' relics. Darnell recalls a time in his youth when he was walking in the evening through the gardens at Hampton and the dark yews and statues began 'melting into a blue mist … as if veils were dropped, one by one, on a great ceremony' (56), and he heard a bell ring three times from across the water. Among the many relics of the Welsh saints the bell was a symbol of great sanctity with many miraculous qualities assigned to it over the centuries. Every saint had a bell, which they would use 'to take oaths and test for perjury'.[57] Machen himself goes into some detail concerning these bells as relics in his essay 'The Secret of the Sangraal', which expands upon his 'Celtic hypothesis'; some relics cured the ill, whilst others 'detected criminals or restored lost cattle', and there was a bell 'that refused to ring save in the hand of the saint

[56] Yeats, *Ideas of Good & Evil*, p. 243.
[57] Elissa R. Henken, 'Welsh Hagiography and the Nationalist Impulse', *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults*, ed. Jane Cartwright (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 28.

for whom it was destined by God'.[58] The saint's bell is evoked later, too, in Machen's 1924 short story 'The Holy Things' published in the collection *Ornaments in Jade*, in which the jangling of a bicycle bell on a busy Holborn street becomes the sound of a 'silvery bell' which 'tinkled anew; and again, and again' and a poet, who up until that moment had been reflecting upon the meaningless of life, weeps, hearing rapturous choir music in the language of his childhood: 'SANT … SANT ... SANT'.[59] Saints' relics and the liturgical rites of the lost Celtic Church merge with inner-city life, in both cases a remedy for the materialism of the modern world provoking recollection of forgotten Welsh ancestry.

Darnell begins to sort through the papers left to him by his grandfather. Mary, too, looks at these papers, mystified by strings of 'uncouth Welsh names linked together by the word "ap" in a chain that looked endless' (79). They discover Darnell's true heritage, an unbroken line traceable to a period around the fourth or fifth century, and that his surname had been 'assumed by one Iolo ap Taliesin ap Iorweth' in the sixteenth century:

> The family went back and back … far into the dim past, beyond the Normans, beyond the Saxons, far into the Roman days, and for many hundred years they had been petty kings, with a strong fortress high up on the hill, in the heart of the forest (79).

The race had dwindled and almost died out, until all that was left was a grey cottage owned by his great-uncle which Darnell had visited as a child. Welsh ancestry will become more significant in the following chapters, in which John Cowper Powys seeks to build a personal 'mythology' based on an imagined family connection to Wales, but here it is enough to note that a distant Welsh connection allows Darnell to escape from the spiritual waste land of modern England. As seen in the previous chapter Machen considered his early years living in Gwent in the small tract of countryside surrounding Caerleon and Llanddewi Fach to be miraculous.[60] He contends that particular landscapes cry out 'to have tales indited to fit their singular aspects', and that when a particular scene makes 'the soul thrill with an emotion intense but vague' a writer is then compelled to realise this emotion in

[58] Arthur Machen, 'The Secret of the Sangraal', p. 111.
[59] Arthur Machen, 'The Holy Things', *Ornaments in Jade* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924), p. 46.
[60] *Far Off Things*, p. 100.

literature.[61] In *A Fragment of Life* it is the ancient trees of Welsh forests and the mystic waters of the river Usk which elevate characters' visions of ecstasy to the level of transcendence. These visions temporarily remove the Darnells from the spiritually deficient Shepherd's Bush; through Edward's ancestral connection to South Wales and to a time in which the nomadic saints walked the countryside, they experience what is to Machen's mind a purer version of Christian spirituality than that propagated by their local church. The symbol of the grail, and its association in Machen's thinking with a Celtic form of Christianity in Wales, represents a mystical experience unattainable within the current diluted form of Anglicanism.

Machen concludes *A Fragment of Life* in a characteristic open-ended suggestion, declaring it 'impossible' to continue Edward and Mary's story for it seemed 'to put on the semblance of the stories of the Graal' (85). 'It is certain,' he continues, 'that in this world they changed their lives, like King Arthur' (85). Perhaps more so than any other work of this period, the 'loss' that Machen perceived at the heart of Celtic literature is most recognisable in *A Fragment*. The Darnells retreat into their visions and discover spiritual fulfilment, but Machen's final comparison to the grail legend paints their experiences as ultimately mysterious and unrealisable – incongruent, too, with the modern world, a theme also explored by Powys and Garner. In his 1908 article 'Celtic Magic', Machen identifies loss as the underlying emotion found throughout what he calls the 'magic' of the Celts.[62] The 'woeful' mystery of the grail is a perfect symbol of this loss, he writes: 'In the Norman-French legends with which we are more or less familiar, the Graal is withdrawn finally; the Celts, I think, had a vague hope that it would return in the great day of Redemption'.[63] This theme of loss recalls an essay by Yeats written five years previously, 'The Celtic Element in Literature' (1902), in which melancholy is treated not simply as a defining motif in Gaelic poetry, but in all literature of 'ancient peoples' (although 'the Celtic alone' has been a steady source of inspiration for the European). That life was so weighed down 'by the emptiness of the great forests and by the mystery of all things' is for

[61] *Ibid*.
[62] Machen, *The Secret of the Sangraal*, p. 143.
[63] *Ibid*.

Yeats the reason for this melancholy, and in *A Fragment of Life* especially can be found a similar sense of the transience of natural beauty and 'memories of the great deep' (243) which Machen saw reflected in the later legends of Arthur and the grail. The cup is for him an unattainable symbol – along with the house, the woods and the river of the pre-Norman Welsh landscape – of the spiritual world, and a connection to an ancient past when Celtic Christianity was in its prime and the relics of the Welsh saints sanctified the land. In this short work Machen conveys his idiosyncratic version of Renan's romanticisation of the Celtic religion, an idealised communion with the divine through the immediate natural environment, and the purity and simplicity of its liturgy.

'The Holy Bell … [and] the Faery Birds of Rhiannon': religious syncretism in *The Secret Glory*

> … but in my heart I have always doubted whether moderate Anglicanism by Christianity in any sense, whether it even deserves to be called a religion at all … And when the Public School *ethos* is added to this – well, the resultant teaching comes pretty much to the dogma that Heaven and the Head are strict allies.[64]

Modern schooling is a similar waste land of the soul to Shephard's Bush in Machen's next novel-length work *The Secret Glory* (1922). The book is in Machen's own words a 'combining of information', on the one hand a diatribe against 'the great Public School System' of his day (*SG*, 90), and on the other a development of the themes explored in *A Fragment of Life* – the connection between the grail legend and the Celtic Church of the fifth and sixth centuries.[65] The two are kept notably separate throughout the narrative with the setting of Lupton school, and later London, serving as a base line for a material, spiritually deficient world, and the episodes of the grail hidden in the land of the old saints and its transferral to the protagonist Ambrose Meyrick as contrasting antidotes. While reviewers in 1922 declared it 'prosaic and even tedious', and 'little more than an elaborate tract in which Mr Machen champions medievalism', Machen nevertheless succeeds in outlining his evolving attitudes towards modern Christianity in Britain and the great significance he placed on the grail.[66] A further 'combining' element in *The Secret Glory* is indeed the cup itself, which appears as a physical relic guarded by its keeper, an old Welsh farmer. Its association with both Welsh mythological and Christian imagery exemplifies Machen's theory of the grail's origins and suggests that Machen considered the landscape and traditions of Wales to be more suited to his ideal spirituality than what Protestantism currently offered the British public.

In *The Poetry of the Celtic Races* (1854) Ernest Renan argued that the Celts were naturally inclined to the Christian faith; they were in fact, due to their very character and philosophy, 'predestined' for conversion.[67] He employs the now-familiar dualism of 'Celt' and 'Anglo-Saxon' again, arguing that

[64] Arthur Machen, *The Secret Glory* (London: Aziloth Books, 2014 [1922]), p. 90; hereafter '*SG'* in the text.
[65] 'Not, I hasten to add, that I "read up" the subject in order to make a book, but having read to satisfy my curiosity, the topic occurred to me a year afterwards' (Letter to Summerford, 12 Feb, 1924).
[66] Arthur Machen, *Precious Balms* (London: Spurr & Swift, 1924), p. 10-11.
[67] Renan, p. 45.

the ‘Teutonic race’ (the Germanic tribes from which the Anglo-Saxons originated) ‘only received Christianity tardily and in spite of themselves, by scheming or by force’, whereas in Celtic lands Christianity ‘found a virgin soil of a nature analogous to its own, and naturally prepared to receive it’.[68] In this way Renan contends that Celtic paganism offered little resistance to this new religion, and so the Church did equally little towards its eradication. His description of the healing wells in operation before the arrival of Christianity, the shrines of saints built upon pre-existing sites – what David Petts refers to as a ‘landscape of belief’ erected on pre-Christian foundations of elemental power and local spirits – is very much like Machen’s conception of the origins of the grail; indeed, Machen demonstrates his familiarity with the saints’ *vitae* and the accompanying folklore in his essays on the grail.[69] Certain forms of Celtic Christianity retained elements of their pagan roots, Renan suggests, and the miracles and relics of the saints were inseparable from the legends and folklore of regional sites.[70] In much the same way that early Christians in Wales used existing prehistoric sites for their own ritual activity, there is a clear layering of belief in Ambrose’s vision in *The Secret Glory*, the new religion supplanting the old, and yet there are instances in which this boundary is not quite so solid.

Lupton, a minor public school in the Midlands, provides a foil against which Machen presents Celtic Christianity and its relics as emblems of a lost and more genuine spirituality. Although Machen appeared to enjoy his own time at Hereford Cathedral school, he does not hold back in his criticism of the system, even claiming that if a boy were to commit suicide ‘after a year or two of prolonged and exquisite torture of body and mind’ then the Old Boys will rally round and all write in to defend the school, declaring how much it meant to them (*SG*, 11).[71] The housemaster Mr Horbury, an old Luptonian and Ambrose’s uncle by marriage, rules the classroom and the house with the view of

[68] *Ibid*., pp. 45-6.
[69] David Petts, *The Early Medieval Church in Wales* (Stroud: The History Press, 2009), p. 134.
[70] James P. Mackey, ‘Introduction: Is There a Celtic Christianity?’, *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, 1-21, p. 4; Glanmor Williams, ‘Medieval Wales and the Reformation’, p. 216.
[71] The impetus for this attack on public schools appears to have been Machen’s visit to Harrow in 1904 as an actor for the Benson company, when the troupe were ‘insulted and abused by pupils in the High Street’. *Selected Letters*, p. 91; Reynolds and Charlton: ‘Machen handles the weapons of abuse with a really wicked skill. There is nothing left of the school-masters at Lupton when he has finished with them, except a few particles of blood and skin adhering a little disconcertingly to the onlooker’ (pp. 104-5).

maintaining the school's traditional values. Horbury upbraids Ambrose for his coming back after curfew and for his interest in Selden Abbey's Gothic architecture, and the boy is caned in 'the orthodox manner' for his transgressions (13). Meaning at Lupton is not to be found in religion or the study of great literature but in team sports, such as 'Cricket and sticker … rackets and fives' (26) and a variant of football known as 'rocker'; the emphasis in this early section of the novel is on the new areas in which ritual has found a place. On the 'rocker' field the boys' ritual involves the lawful choking or kicking of opponents in certain areas of the pitch reserved solely for these practices (27). The school song is a hymn to the origins of this sport. The modern instruction of Latin and Greek literature is merely a vestige of older, humanist methods, 'a curious and elaborate ritual, from which all sense and spirit have departed' (17). Religious tradition, meanwhile, is purely for show; Lupton is broadly Church of England, yet in several pages written from Horbury's perspective it is clear that while he gives much thought to correct religious education, his true objectives are wealth and status, a vision of '[a] thousand boys at £500 a year' and plans to offer the Archdeacon of Melby the Bishopric of Lupton town and by extension the position of 'titular chaplain' of the school. Horbury also seeks the restoration of Lupton's older-looking buildings, thus giving the place an air of 'genuine' antiquity, and the invention of a school legend, for the real history 'was not quite what he wanted' (28).

The precocious and high-minded Ambrose's dislike of Lupton is not only due to its disciplinary practices, but to his desire to attain an aesthetic ideal based on higher ritual and grandeur (here, as in *The Hill of Dreams*, the novel's young protagonist becomes a mouthpiece for the adult Machen). Ambrose judges low church meeting houses for not aspiring to the same architectural magnificence as a cathedral, and he blames schools and schoolmasters 'for not being what they never pretended to be' (17). He considers Lupton to be failing in its mission to convey the spiritual beauty of classical art and literature, and therefore his breaking curfew to visit the romantic Selden Abbey to be entirely justified. In contrast to the false tradition and disguised violence of Lupton custom are Ambrose's wanderings in the countryside surrounding the school and recollections of home life in Monmouthshire. Machen's prose changes abruptly to a higher – and, as Freeman notes, liturgical – register as Ambrose experiences a vision of the Celtic Church while walking in the surrounding

countryside.[72] He imagines himself a figure of exile who has 'come from a far, far place by a hidden way, and darkness had closed about him', and now, consigned to 'sad fields' and dull ploughland, the sun sets and the rays of a silver star pierce his soul 'and he dwelt within the star' (32). Every aspect of the landscape begins to display revelatory significance, resembling the walking visions of Darnell in *A Fragment* which come to him unbidden. Ambrose drinks from a hidden well, carved with the words 'FONS VITAE IMMORTALIS' (32), and finds himself 'no longer in that weary land' (32) but on a hill overlooking a valley and the wall of a rounded mountain. He hears the birds like 'glad reiterations of choirs … singing the eternal antiphon' and sees a great church upon a high hill before him. Ambrose's vision of the spiritual purity of Celtic Christianity is suffused with natural imagery, the birds mimicking the liturgical chant and the building's pinnacles 'as a place of many springing trees' (33). He then becomes part of a procession passing through strange lands and stopping by 'wayside shrines, giving thanks for unutterable compassions' (33).

This picture of a reverence for landscape and worship not contained solely within the church and churchyard suggests that Machen's research enabled a more historically plausible depiction of what Christianity might have looked like in early medieval Wales. Considering Wales as not simply an agricultural region in the time of Roman occupation, but as a landscape of belief, Petts has noted that most of the rural population expressed their Christian belief either through an interaction with natural features 'such as lakes, rivers and wet places' or in the form of ritual activity 'on the site of prehistoric monuments'.[73] Ritual also took the forms of pilgrimage and of celebration 'attached to the feast of the local saints' days, known later as *gwylmabsantau*'; throughout Ambrose's vision, Machen refers several times to the coming of the 'great feast' and it is clear that the procession is a celebration of the same sort.[74] The creation of local healing wells or fountains were common miracles attributed to the Welsh saints, arising either spontaneously or through conscious effort, and there is evidence of such wells in existence before Christianity which were frequented for their curative powers.[75] As with

[72] Freeman, 'Arthur Machen: Ecstasy and Epiphany', p. 250.
[73] Petts, p. 134.
[74] *Ibid*., p.155.
[75] Elissa R. Henken, *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), p. 54.

Darnell's experiences in *A Fragment of Life* the symbol of the grail is employed, and again it is not identified by name; the well water comes to resemble the 'base tricklings of the great supernal cup' (32). In this instance, however, its appearance is more obviously associated with the Welsh landscape, an environment of pre-Christian and Christian belief.

As the vision continues Ambrose journeys to a chapel, and in the following passage Machen conveys the tangled relationship between his perception of pre-Christian Welsh folklore and legend and the Celtic Church:

> Then, at last, when he had crossed the Old Road, and had gone by the Lightning-struck Land and the Fisherman's Well, he found, between the forest and the mountain, a very ancient and little chapel … And the flesh began to tremble, for all the place was filled with the odours of Paradise, and he heard the ringing of the Holy Bell and the voices of the choir that out-sang the Fairy Birds of Rhiannon (34).

In 'The Secret of the Sangraal' Machen considers the quest motif featured in early Celtic literature as a further pre-Christian influence on the later romances, evidenced particularly in *Preideu Annwfyn*, the Middle Welsh poem ascribed to Taliesin.[76] Ambrose's journey resembles this very motif as he passes through various locations whose names evoke scenes from legend. The vision of the Welsh landscape is represented as Christian, 'the land of the old saints, [and] all the divisions of the land that men had given to them for God' (34), and yet 'the Old Road' and 'Lightning-struck' land (perhaps a version of the Waste Land motif in Arthurian literature) convey a general non-Christian significance. The fairy birds of Rhiannon, too, appears in several Welsh mythological tales, such as *Branwen ferch Llŷr*, the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, in which three birds sing a song to the seven men at Harlech charged with the guarding of the head of Brân the Blessed, 'and all the songs they had heard before were harsh compared to that one'.[77] In *Culhwch ac Olwen* they are said to be able to 'wake the dead and lull the living'.[78] A poem Ambrose composes in his diary later in the novel features a blackbird 'that sings in the valley of the Soar'; its voice is compared to the ringing of the Saints' bells and the

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[76] See Haycock, *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, pp. 433-451.
[77] Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 33.
[78] *Ibid*, p. 196; *Culwch and Olwen* is one of the earliest surviving Arthurian tales. Its composition has been dated to the late twelfth century and was included by Guest in her edition of the *Mabinogion* (see Introduction). See also Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 179-213 for a modern translation.

region is presided over by 'Dewi and Tegfeth and Cybi', three of the Welsh holy men (*SG,* 82). In the above passage the birds are 'out-[sung]' by the ringing of the saint's bell, suggesting too a clear overlap in belief.

The final event in this initial vision is the appearance of an old man in white, who emerges before Ambrose from a door in a screen; he carries before him 'the *Mystery of Mysteries* [Machen's italics]' wrapped in veils of gold 'so that it might not be discerned' (34). In this occult evocation of the grail, Machen presents what he views as one of the fundamental differences between the Roman Catholicism and a Celtic form of Christianity. 'The Romans exhibit their relics as much as possible to excite the devotion of the faithful,' Machen wrote in a letter to his friend Colin Summerfield: 'the Celts kept their relics in secrecy; it was dangerous for the unqualified to look on them'.[79] The grail itself later appears as part of a childhood memory of when Ambrose's father takes his son through unpopulated countryside into the hills overlooking the Soar. It is portrayed as the physical bowl-shaped vessel of 'Teilo sant', kept in secret for thirteen hundred years by the descendants of an old farmer Mr. Cradock, the last in his line of keepers of the holy cup 'of the tribe of Teilo the Saint' (48) (evoking, too, the Fisher King of Arthurian literature). The cup is concealed inside two boxes behind a recess in the wall of Cradock's basement. Here the grail counteracts the loss which it previously figured in *A Fragment of Life*; it is, at least initially, realisable to Ambrose as an object of spiritual transformation, suggesting that Machen might have considered Celtic spirituality to have endured in Wales, a romantic image of the rural Welsh landscape and its people which have retained a connection to this ancient form of Christianity.

As in *A Fragment*, Machen associates the physical grail in *The Secret Glory* with the traditions of Wales. In Machen's depiction of the cup, Juliette Wood sees an echo of both early Welsh saints' lives and the Nanteos Cup; this observation, coupled with the south Monmouthshire setting and the character and language of the farmer, gives the grail a conspicuously Welsh aspect.[80] The Nanteos Cup refers to a wooden vessel housed at the Nant Eos estate in Cardiganshire, and, as the tale goes,

[79] Letter to Summerford, 12 Feb, 1924.
[80] Juliette Wood, *The Holy Grail: History and Legend* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p. 45.

was smuggled out of Glastonbury into Wales by a group of monks to protect it from destruction at the hands of Henry VIII's men.[81] This 'Welsh Holy Grail' is in reality a domestic bowl from fourteenth-century Europe, but its fictive legend appears to have provided Machen with a further framework for connecting the grail to Welsh tradition.[82] The cup is referred to as the 'grail' only after the episode is recalled by Ambrose, and much later in the narrative. As it appears in *The Secret Glory* the grail is not the cracked and damaged wooden bowl of Nanteos, but rather a vessel resembling the grail as it is described in some European romances, 'a veiled and splendid cup':

> … of the most wonderful workmanship, standing on a short stem. All the hues of the world were mingled on it, all the jewels of the regions seemed to shine from it; and the stem and foot were encrusted with work in enamel, of strange and magical colours that shone and dimmed with alternating radiance (45).

Ambrose notes the 'strangeness' and 'enchantment' (46) of the cup; its shifting and 'magical' colours convey a supernatural quality and yet the intricate craftsmanship and extravagance of the jewels suggest an exotic origin. Its association with pre-Christian folklore is established not in the initial uncovering of the cup, but through a vision experienced by Ambrose as his father and Cradock begin an ancient liturgical ceremony in the 'resonant and chanting' Welsh language (46). Resplendent, natural imagery springs out of the enamelled patterns on the cup as Ambrose sees 'Cor-arbennic' (Corbenic, in the Vulgate Cycle, the city which houses the grail; Machen's rendering suggests he though the word meant 'special choir'): 'the interwoven sorcery of the vessel became a ringing wood of golden, and bronze, and silver trees; from every side resounded the clear summons of the holy bells and the exultant song of the faery birds' (46). Just as Ambrose's previous vision of the chapel blends Christian ritual with pre-existing landscape features, here a sacramental relic, a saint's cup from which according to Machen, the later romances took their material, forms part of Welsh Christian

[81] One of the many legends attached to Glastonbury is that Joseph of Arimathea, who had given up his family tomb for Christ's burial, later became a Christian missionary and eventually arrived at Glastonbury, bringing with him the cup from the Last Supper and burying it on Glastonbury Tor. The main piece of evidence for this is the name of the natural spring at the foot of the Tor, 'Chalice Well'. Ronald Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* (London: Hambleton and London, 2003), p. 63.
[82] Machen refers to the Nanteos Cup in his article for *The Academy*: '… at the present day the healing cup of Nant Eos is revered in Wales, not only for its potent cures, but also as "a Venerable Gift of the Almighty"'. *Sangraal*, p. 143.

liturgy and conjures evocations of regional folklore: the 'faery birds' of Rhiannon accompany the 'holy' bells of the saints (rather than one outsinging the other). Finally, Ambrose envisions the image of the figure of Christ alongside the saints of Britain 'afloat on the faery sea' who breathe in the scent of Paradise and 'the apple-garths of Avalon' (47). Ultimately, the association of the grail with Welsh landscape and tradition – particularly Cradock's use of the Welsh language to conduct his liturgy – frames the cup as the symbol of what Machen viewed as an essentially Celtic, and specifically Welsh, spirituality.

For Machen, the grail continued to represent a symbol of the age of saints, the vestige of an ideal Christianity once at work in Wales in the sixth and seventh centuries. There is a sense in *The Secret Glory* that if this notional Golden Age were restored to Wales (a theme also central to John Cowper Powys's philosophy of Welsh myth, explored in Chapters Three and Four) then this would bring about a spiritual redemption or salvation: 'If Teilo should return, if happiness were restored to the Cymri,' runs a poem recalled later by Ambrose, 'Dewi [David] and Dyfrig [Dubricius] should serve his Mass; then a great marvel would be made visible' (*SG*, 49). Borne out of this idea of salvation in Machen's writing in this period is the attempt to depict a unification of the physical world and the spiritual – a fundamental characteristic of the mystical experience, according to spiritual writers such as James and Underhill.[83] Contemplating the essential nature of the grail, Ambrose concludes that society's 'great loss' has been our division of the world into these two aspects and the greater significance we have come to place on the material, to the exclusion of the spiritual. The achieving of the grail is thus for Ambrose the 'final and perfect' (67) rite:

> [His] soul had been caught in the sweet thickets of the woods … it had knelt before the altars of the old saints, till all the earth was become a sanctuary, all life was a rite and ceremony, the end of which was the attainment of the mystic sanctity – the achieving of the Graal (66-7).

That 'all the earth' becomes a sanctuary to Ambrose resembles Renan's construction of a Celtic Christianity: the immediacy of God in our physical surroundings which, in Renan's view, has grown out of the natural animism of the Celtic races. 'Every day of our lives we see the Graal carried before

[83] James, pp. 379-382.

us in a wonderful order', Ambrose writes in his diary, 'and every day we leave the question unasked, the Mystery despised and neglected' (108). In the Perceval-branch of the European romances the grail appears to the questing knight, but because of his failure to ask a certain question the knight is blamed for the continuing suffering of the Fisher King and the unbroken curse on his lands.[84] This particular aspect of the quest remains part of the grail's symbolism for Ambrose and is the reason why it has failed to exhibit its restorative qualities in the material world. Beyond its appearance as a physical relic, the grail in *The Secret Glory* becomes emblematic of the revivifying potential of this version of Christianity, and its capacity to replace the materialistic rituals of the modern world and its institutions, should the seeker pursue its meaning.

More so than in any other work, here Machen employs the grail as a symbol of the surviving traditions of the Celtic Church. '[For] me,' Ambrose writes in his diary, 'the Celtic Mythos was the Perfect Thing … not a moral code … but a great mystical adventure into the unknown sanctity' (90-91). Following his visionary experiences and recollections of his Welsh childhood Ambrose escapes to London with Nelly, a serving girl at Lupton, where they live for a week before Ambrose leaves to pursue a chaste and saintly existence. In the novel's short epilogue, the reader learns from 'stray notes and jottings' (126) of the 'dim and legendary outline' of Ambrose's inheritance of the grail. He journeys to a village somewhere in 'the East' to hand over the 'Celtic Cup' for protection, and on his return he is captured by Turks, and, when he refuses to reject Christ, he is crucified: 'It was in this manner that Ambrose Meyrick gained Red Martyrdom and achieved the most glorious Quest and Adventure of the Sangraal' (127). Ambrose's adherence to a specifically Celtic form of Christianity, in its blend of pagan motif and orthodox liturgy, frees him from the false tradition of modernity and leads him towards what he views as a purer connection to God and the natural Welsh landscape. His fate resembles the conclusion to *The Hill of Dreams*, in which Lucian dies alone after having left his spiritual home of Wales, severed from his inherited traditions. This similarity suggests that while Machen had begun to view the grail as representing the individual quest for personal salvation, its

[84] Wood, *The Holy Grail*, p. 12.

removal from Wales and the practice of Celtic Christianity outside of the context of a Celtic landscape – or more specifically a Welsh landscape – might lessen its power.

'[The] utter peace of that Welsh coast': religious and physical revival in 'The Great Return'

First serialised in the *Evening News* in 1915, Machen's short novella 'The Great Return' further challenges what the author viewed as the materialism and spiritually deficient effects of modern Protestantism. Although the style of Machen's prose is far more journalistic and the language less 'decadent' than his previous work, the grail assumes a more supernatural role than the physical survival of the cup in *The Secret Glory*. The story is narrated by a London reporter (perhaps a version of Machen himself, since his grandfather is 'the vicar of Caerleon-on-Usk' (*WP*, 239)) who returns to his home village of Llantrisant on the coast of south-west Wales following rumours of wondrous changes in the inhabitants.[85] The story is an investigation into the mystery of the village, conducted as a series of conversations or reportage as the narrator begins to piece together events, a concentrated and much more accomplished technique than that previously used for *The Three Impostors*. In the character of the narrator Machen displays a kind of pragmatism likely developed during his time as a journalist, the sort of scientific enquiry that James used to describe the mystical experience. What evidence is there, asks the narrator in the final chapter, to qualify the events at Llantrisant as 'miraculous'? As Freeman notes, this journalistic approach could be seen as an admission that materialism has prevailed, yet, as this section argues, Machen's turn to an investigative style to depict the collective religious transformation of a community allows the author to explore what he saw as the ineffable and healing potential of a traditionally Celtic form of worship beyond the individual mystical experience.[86]

The war affected Machen's writing throughout its duration. He produced such short pieces as 'The Bowmen' (September 1914), which gave rise unintentionally to the 'Angel of Mons' legend (noted above), and 'The Soldier's Rest' (October 1914), a sentimental tale in which a wounded British soldier wakes to find himself at an inn amongst the great fallen warriors of history. Machen was too old to enlist when war broke out, and by this time he had assumed the full time role as a journalist for

[85] 'There are several Llantrisants … in Wales, but the one Machen is probably referring to is a town in the county of Glamorganshire (now Mid Glamorgan) in southern Wales' (*WP*, p. 369) – not far from where he grew up; a possible source for the story may have been the *De mirabilibus Britanniae* section of the 9th century *Historia Brittonum*, which describes thirteen topographical 'wonders' of Britain.
[86] Freeman, 'Arthur Machen: Ecstasy and Epiphany', p. 252.

the *Evening News* to support his wife and new-born son.[87] The effects of the First World War lie heavy on London in 'The Great Return' as the narrator leaves for the Welsh coast; the city wore 'a terrible vesture' as if 'the fury of the war had mounted to the very skies', but at Arfon and Llantrisant the land is fragrant and warm, and seemed to be 'in a holy, happy dream' (236). The central event of 'The Bowmen' is the sighting of an angelic host of archers fighting for the English; the appearance of the grail and the miracles of the three saints might be seen to perform a similar role, a stewardship of the people, in this case the inhabitants of a Welsh village. Karl Petersen even argues that Llantrisant's revival of the obscure Welsh religious traditions comes as a direct result of the shock of war.[88] The grail had departed from the world, but the early Celts hoped for its return in a time of great conflict.

The changes experienced by the Llantrisant villagers throughout 'The Great Return' form part of what the narrator terms a 'transmuted world' (256), one in which the physical senses become open to or aware of the world as it actually exists. Much of this echoes Machen's interpretation of the spiritual plane of Neoplatonism in which the terror and wonder of his early occult tales originated, but in this story the transmutation (see Chapter One for the alchemical roots of this term) is more akin to the miraculous events of Welsh saints' *vitae*. In an attempt to explain the experiences of the villagers the narrator turns to phenomenological analysis: the ordinary man might see a cow and accept the reality of that cow, but that if we conceive of a 'true' reality beyond our senses, then the cow – as it really is – 'would appear utterly incredible, as incredible as the things I am to relate' (250). The miraculous events, then, reported throughout the Welsh village, represent on some level Machen's view of the spiritual world beyond the material, or a paradisical 'reality' experienced through the sanctity of the Celtic Church. Fishermen report seeing a 'rose of fire' that 'swallowed up the skies' over the sea, '[and] in the moment of the vision, every pain and malady and ache in their bodies … passed away' (252): both nausea and a painful toothache are cured, and a great joy is felt on touching their ship's mast. It is not the ship's mast alone that is infused with great joy, however, but the entire 'average' sensory world, which, at the sight of the rose of fire above the sea, becomes for the sailors a world of

[87] 'In general, the Machens' attitude to the war was what one might expect: considerable dislike of it, but sufficient dislike of the Germans for them to think it worth fighting' (Reynolds and Charlton, p. 117).
[88] Petersen, p. 199.

intense pleasure; the creak of their vessel sounds to them like a Bach fugue, and draughts of plain water taste of 'amazing wine' (253).

Neither is this transmuted world a solely individual experience, as in Machen's previous work (or in the case of *A Fragment of Life*, shared by a married couple), but rather a vision of paradise shared by the community. In scenes recalling those from the New Testament gospels and the *vitae*, the villagers are cured of their ailments and report seeing and hearing improbable events. A woman twenty years deaf claims to have heard a bell 'sailing across the sea' and drawing near to land, ringing, she adds, 'Ym Mharadwys' ('in Paradise') (247), and her hearing is fully restored. This healing of the senses, while clearly reminiscent of Jesus curing the blind man, also recalls the miracles performed by St. David, who is said to have healed Proprius, King of Erging, 'by restoring the sight of his eyes', and also St. Teilo, who was known to cure disease with his hands.[89] As in *The Secret Glory* St. Teilo is an important figure not simply as a healer, but for the miraculous qualities of his bell, which is said by the old people of Llantrisant, recalling the tales told to them by their fathers, to have come to Wales across the water from Syon (Zion). The narrator refers directly to the grail legend: an old man relates an incident told to him by his cousin, in which a feuding farmer and lawyer suddenly make up in the market-place, and in the crowd were glimpsed three men never seen before in Llantrisant: 'The people … call them the Fishermen': 'And suddenly there came into my mind the "Rich Fisherman" who in the old legend guards the holy mystery of the Graal' (245). These more obviously supernatural events, whether or not the narrator considers them to be genuine, not only reinforce Machen's conception of the grail as restorative – in the same manner as the miracles of Christian tradition – but also as part of the region's folklore, thereby connecting it to the same ideal of Welsh spirituality as in *The Secret Glory* and *A Fragment*.

Perhaps the most miraculous event reported by the narrator, and one most obviously Biblical in its imagery, is the 'resurrection' of a dying girl, Olwen Phillips, a sixteen-year-old whose 'whole system was a mass of tuberculosis' (256). On her deathbed at night she hears the tinkling of a bell and sees a

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[89] *Rhigyfarch's* Life of St. David, ed. J. W. James (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1967), p. 33; G. H. Doble, *Lives of the Welsh Saints*, ed. D. Simon Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1971), p. 191.

red light that fills the room with a rosy fire. Three men appear before her ‘in blood-coloured robes’: the first holds a bell, the second an altar that changes in ‘quick streams’ of colour, and above this the third holds a burning cup, inside it ‘a dropping of blood’ (258). When Olwen wakes, she is cured, and in an uncharacteristically didactic register Machen’s narrator describes the girl’s vision as a religious experience connected to the grail:

> Students of the Graal legend know that the keeper of the Graal in the romances is the “King Fisherman,” or the “Rich Fisherman”; students of Celtic hagiography know that it was prophesied before the birth of Dewi (or David) that he should be “a man of aquatic life,” … the dream of Olwen Phillips was, in fact, the Vision of the Holy Graal (258-9)

Passages such as this which make explicit the connection of events with aspects of the grail romances, although coloured by Machen’s theories concerning the Celtic Church, make ‘The Great Return’ the most overtly Arthurian of Machen’s grail stories. Olwen’s name even evokes the character in *Culhwch and Olwen* in which Culhwch enlists his cousin Arthur’s help in finding Olwen, the beautiful daughter of the giant Ysbaddaden. The identities of the three Fishermen are never fully revealed, but it is clear that they are three of the Welsh saints perhaps associated with this particular coastal region of South Wales (‘Llantrisant’, incidentally, means ‘Church of the three saints’). They are in possession of holy relics (a bell, an altar, a cup). Possibly one is St. Teilo, for the saints’ curative acts recall to the older citizens tales of Teilo’s Bell and the bell which Olwen hears at the end of her dream rang ‘by Capel Teilo’ (Teilo’s Chapel) (258). Another might be St. Ilar, for Machen points out that he was expressly known as ‘The Fisherman’ (259) and the third St. David. Equating these saints with the keeper of the grail, the Fisher King, Machen suggests that the Celtic holy men were precursors to this aspect of Arthurian legend and establishes an extra dimension to the grail, locating it firmly within ‘the age of saints’.

A further rejuvenating effect of the grail in ‘The Great Return’ is its catalysing of a revival of religious practices, which, in line with Machen’s philosophy, constitutes a challenge to the materialism of modern life. Machen’s grail and associated saintly relics continue to act as sacraments, representations of a higher power which to Machen are downplayed in many modern forms of Christianity. Once the narrator arrives in Llantrisant he notices a curious change in the liturgy

performed by the clergymen and villagers. A friend who had been holidaying in the region writes with a report that Llantrisant church, whose parson was known to be a strict Protestant who 'looked upon coloured stoles as the very robe of Satan' (237), had been 'reeking of incense' (236). The narrator visits the church, and it was 'as if High Mass had just been sung there', and the parson appears younger and happier than in previous years. The narrator recalls an old cross inscribed with Ogham characters in the churchyard which had been brought over from Ireland, linking the site to its Celtic origins and suggesting that the church has reverted to its old ways. In the next episode the narrator overhears two women talking by the harbour, one of whom, visiting from the Midlands, is alarmed by the religious rite recited by her landlady's family:

> "Well, indeed, it sounds like some kind of religious service, but it's not Church of England, I know that. Old Morgan begins it, and the wife and children answer. Something like: "Blessed be God for the messengers of Paradise." "Blessed be His Name for Paradise in the meat and in the drink." "Thanksgiving for the old offering." "Thanksgiving for the appearance of the old altar." "Praise for the joy of the ancient garden." (240)

She concludes that the family are dissenters of 'some new sect' (240), for neither she, nor the local woman, had heard anything like it before. The 'ancient garden,' the 'appearance of the old altar', are phrases which do not appear in orthodox Christian services but speak rather to an older (yet mostly imaginary) Celtic conception of the faith which prioritises the natural world and the relics of its saints. The Sunday after the resurrection of Olwen the narrator witnesses a Mass at Llantrisant church attended by the entire village, and most significantly the congregation includes Methodists, with their minister and deacons, and Nonconformists, and 'not a single chapel of the Dissenters' was open that day (260). The service is a unifying event for which every sect of the Christian Church has come together, or rather has 'returned … to "the old hive"' (260). '[The] Three Holy Fishermen are amongst us,' shouts a Methodist deacon, 'and their net is full' (260). The saints' return not only heals bodily sickness but re-establishes the traditional unified faith. During the service people experience great emotion, and the three Fishermen emerge, holding their relics aloft: 'And then the Mass of the Sangraal was ended, and then began the passing out of that land of the holy persons and holy things that had returned to it after the long years' (261).

As Machen's final significant exploration of the Celtic Church and the grail in this period, 'The Great Return' offers an enquiry into the religious experience as a collective phenomenon and suggests that Machen considered this more traditional form of spirituality to have genuine revivifying potential. The grail's ability to physically heal and resurrect, in contrast with the more spiritual, symbolic effects of Machen's previous work, lends the vessel a more miraculous quality, rather than it working as a feature of the individual mystical experience. It is, however here, less obviously an element of pre-Christian belief, as it is in *The Secret Glory*, but rather a wholly Christian object, the flow of blood provoking association with the Crucifixion and the Joseph of Arimathea legend. Its connection to the folkloric relics of the Welsh saints show that Machen still considered it to belong to pre-Christian, Celtic tradition, yet the mysterious nature of its appearance raises it to the level of a Christian sacramental object.

Conclusion: '…and the fruit was multiplied on the trees': inheritance and rejuvenation

This chapter has shown religious syncretism to be a defining feature of Machen's fiction following the renewal of his interest in Christian spirituality. The elements of Celtic mythology and Welsh folklore which underlie his theory of the grail's origin contribute to what in Machen's view was a more genuine spirituality than that which modern forms of Protestantism provided. With this theory, Machen reconfigures the Welsh landscape in his writing as a place brimming with a potential to inspire both individual religious experiences and community-based revivals. Visions of an ancient Welsh landscape – specifically South Wales – come to Ambrose and the Darnells in *The Secret Glory* and *A Fragment of Life*, and the protagonist of 'The Holy Things', with the symbol of the grail representing the survival of lost religious and folkloric tradition. The grail's composite nature embodies Machen's ideal of a Celtic Church which incorporates both pagan nature mysticism and the ritual of High Anglicanism; in this sense, while Chapter One was hesitant to attribute a nationalist character to Machen's writing, Wales and Welsh tradition take on a more redemptive role than in his tales of the 1890s. The grail appears, however, only to the Welsh people – or those with distant Welsh ancestry – thus suggesting that Machen viewed the Welsh as inherently open to and accepting of

miraculous occurrences; the surviving cup of St Teilo which passes to Ambrose in *The Secret Glory* represents the uniquely Celtic spirituality which has, according to Machen's work, endured in the Welsh people and their natural landscape.[90]

Just as the Agincourt archers come to the aid of the British troops in Machen's story 'The Bowmen', the grail is not directly summoned by characters, but appears to those in spiritual need. In this way the common circumstance which brings about the grail's revival in Machen's work is the spiritual deficiency of a society or the immediate community. Within the confines of the public school system in *The Secret Glory* meaning is channelled into sport, house pride and a dedication to the institution; the city in *A Fragment of Life* is a 'grey phantasmal world, akin to death' (*C*, 44); and in 'The Great Return' it is the spread of Methodist and nonconformist chapels which by the end of the story appear to have caused the grail's revival, coupled with the threat of a World War overseas. Although the theme of the Waste Land in the grail legend is in fact only of minor importance 'in all but the very late romances', it is nevertheless a necessary motif in Machen's fiction for the power of the grail to take effect.[91] Machen places the vision of the vessel and the re-emergence of the Celtic Church within a landscape lacking in spiritual meaning, restoring a communion with the natural world which Renan and other Celtic theorists have claimed to identify in Celtic tradition. The rich description of the Welsh hills and valleys in *The Secret Glory* set against the drab streets of the London cityscape and Lupton's fake antiquity provides a setting for the rejuvenating effects of Machen's form of Celtic Christianity. Indeed, a very literal transformation of the land occurs after the Mass of the Graal in 'The Great Return' when it is reported that during the following season 'the corn shot up, and the grass thickened, and the fruit was multiplied on the trees in a very marvellous manner' (*WP*, 262). In this sense the visual contrast between rural Wales and a cityscape like London serves to complement Machen's religious idealism.

[90] This concept of surviving traits or characteristics in the Welsh people will become central to Powys's 'life-philosophy' in the following two chapters; Powys viewed what he saw as their introversion and ability to withstand invasion as an inheritance from the 'aboriginal' or 'native' Welsh.
[91] Barber, p. 249. '[And] even in these romances it becomes important only because the writer was anxious to tie up the loose ends left by his predecessors'.

The grail did not appear in Machen's fiction again after *The Secret Glory* had been published, yet he continued to correspond with Waite on the subject until his friend's death in 1942. In a letter to Waite in 1930 Machen is still assigning aspects of the grail legend 'to the pre-Christian element', and in a familiar manner dismisses 'heretical sects' as a source of 'Grail doctrine' because their concept of the sacrament is no doubt 'null, dull, and Protestant'.[92] Following *The Secret Glory*, which was poorly received by critics, and his popular tales for the *Evening Standard* ('The Bowman' especially inspired others to write similar tales about the Angel of Mons), Machen wrote three volumes of autobiography (1922-4), which characterise his childhood in Wales as idyllic and formative. A further novel *The Green Round* (1933) and two short story collections were produced in the 1930s. These revisit old themes, and do not present the sustained engagement with Welsh or 'Celtic' material as in the major artistic periods in Machen's life which these two chapters of this thesis have explored. The grail, however, and the residual influence of the Celtic Twilight, continued to inspire one Welsh-identified British novelist. John Cowper Powys, the subject of the following two chapters, had by 1929 begun his own research into the origins of the grail with the intention of writing what would become *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932).

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[92] Letter to A. E. Waite (28 April 1930). The two were discussing Charles Williams's recent novel *War in Heaven* (1930) in which the grail reappears in a country parish.

Chapter Three: 'The old magic of the mind': Welsh Mythology and the Idea of Wales in John Cowper Powys's 'Wessex' Novels

Introduction: Powys, Wales and magical thinking

From the late 1920s into the 1930s the novels of John Cowper Powys (1872 – 1963), set within the very real and detailed landscapes of Dorset and Somerset, begin increasingly to look towards Wales as a place of spiritual meaning. A fixation with Wales and its literature and mythology appears to have grown in Powys before he ever began to write serious fiction. Born in a small village in Derbyshire before the family moved to a vicarage at Montacute, Somerset, Powys was the eldest of eleven prestigious children (including Llewelyn and Theodore Francis, both writers), and was assured by his father, the Reverend C. F. Powys, of the family's distant Welsh ancestry, whom he called the 'Princes of Powysland'.[1] Lack of genealogical evidence did not dissuade Powys from continuing to maintain that he was descended from 'an old Welsh family long ago established in the town of Ludlow in Shropshire in what were formerly called the Welsh "Marches"'.[2] Whether or not the claim contained any truth was immaterial to the effect it had on his world view and subsequent fiction; Powys's fascination with Welsh mythology deepened as he began to write his 'Wessex' novels, providing him with the necessary tools to develop his personal 'magical view of life' as an opposing force to modern-day 'transient scientific theories'.[3]

From a young age, as part of 'a longing to possess supernatural powers', Powys came to conceive of himself as a magician 'like Merlin', a character with the creative capacity to exert control over his surroundings.[4] He constructed his own version of a 'paracosm' as a child, a detailed imaginary world

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[1] John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1934), p. 26.
[2] *Ibid*.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 626.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 64; p. 75.

wherein he was the general of an army named 'the Volentiā Army'; he also imagined fairy-like creatures known as 'Dromonds' who inhabited the line of tumuli to the south of Dorchester, and a tribe of dwarfish men called 'Escrawaldons' were the official enemies of the Volentiā.[5] In his *Autobiography* (1934) Powys describes these juvenile imaginings not as a 'story', but rather as a philosophy; the world of the Volentiā Army existed within the physical landscape of his childhood yet in its 'ideal aspect' it bore no connection to reality – it became a 'multiple Logos, standing midway between the visible and the invisible'.[6] This was a characterisation with profound implications for his later writing, which explored the co-existence of the real and the imaginary, or the mythological. '[The] very *act* of writing stories', writes Morine Krissdóttir, 'constituted a ritual' for the author; in the guise of 'magician', Powys would come to construct a spiritual system for himself wherein Wales and its mythology might be reshaped to serve his own personal philosophy.[7]

After graduating from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and teaching at several girls' schools on the south coast, Powys became an extension lecturer for Oxford University in 1899 and the subject chosen for his second trial lecture was the Arthurian legend.[8] For this task Powys recalls purchasing the single book *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (1891) by the Oxford Professor of Celtic, Sir John Rhŷs (1840-1916). This was the work of scholarship on which Powys would base many of his ideas about Welsh and Celtic mythology, a book he claims to have read nine times on a boat journey to America in 1929.[9] The work was meant, writes Rhŷs, 'to shed light on the Arthurian legend' through an analysis of its origins in Welsh and Irish mythology.[10] Its methods and conclusions would become the basis for Powys's later theories about the *Mabinogi* and the ancient 'native' Welsh people,

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[5] *Ibid*., 65.
[6] In 'several half-penny notebooks' Powys composed a language for the Volentiā 'destined to perplex the wits of future generations of Escrawaldons'. This was less of a scholarly exercise than it was for contemporary writers like J. R. R Tolkien; any satisfaction Powys derived came from 'arbitrarily inventing words that other people – presumably – would subsequently have to use' (*ibid*., p. 65)
[7] Morine Krissdóttir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* (London: Macdonald, 1980), p. 40.
[8] Morine Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory: The Life of John Cowper Powys* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2007), p. 81.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 252.
[10] John Rhŷs, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), p. v.

discussed in Chapter Four.[11] In 1902, following this introduction to contemporary Welsh scholarship, when Powys was living at Burpham, Surrey, he 'suddenly acquired a passion for everything Welsh':

> I bought Welsh grammars, Welsh dictionaries, Welsh modern poetry. I bought an elaborate Welsh Genealogy, called 'Powys-Fadoc', and mightily chagrined was I when I found no mention of my father's ancestors in it! I bought everything I could lay hands on that had to do with Wales and with the Welsh people … [The] *idea* of Wales and the *idea* of Welsh mythology went drumming on like an incantation through my tantalized soul. I had no vision so far – *that* was still to come – of myself as a restorer of the hidden planetary secrets of these mystical introverts of the world, but the gods having made me, instead of a conscientious scholar, an imaginative charlatan, I resolved to realize with my whole spiritual force what it meant to be descended – to the devil with 'Powys-Fadoc' – from those ancient Druidic chieftains![12]

Powys came to the realisation that his family were not the direct descendants of the Princes of 'Powysland' as he had once thought, and yet Wales continued to permeate his view of the world: 'in this matter of Welsh mythology I became besotted!' he wrote in his *Autobiography*.[13] By the mid-1920s Powys had published several early novels, poetry collections, and philosophical works, but it was not until he had moved permanently to America to live with his new partner Phyllis Plater in rural upstate New York that he began a series of four books which would become known as his 'Wessex' novels (1929-1936). Though these novels are set within the boundaries of Dorset and its neighbouring counties, and are constructed through a lens of the author's childhood memories, this chapter will explore how Powys's obsession with Welsh mythology and the 'idea' of Wales gradually entered his fiction as a dominant theme and an essential component of his own life 'mythology'.[14]

As a philosopher and writer of fiction Powys frequently described his personal world view (or 'life-illusion') as a 'mythology', a term which he understood as exceeding the conventional definition of a

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[11] Rhŷs employed the now-discredited 'solar divinity' hypothesis of Indo-European scholar Friedrich Max Müller, to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.
[12] Powys, *Autobiography*, pp. 334-5.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 335.
[14] Powys's repeated use of the

collected body of myths of a particular people, and instead encompassing the way in which he lived and acted.[15] Part of this mythology was a reverence for what Powys would call in *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) ‘the mystic value of the commonplace’, often translating to an obsession with everyday physical objects.[16] For Powys ‘[e]very living organism … has its own peculiar universe, not quite like any other’, and the nonhuman is imbued with the ‘consciousness of sensation’, a sensation which extended even to the inert.[17] Powys remembers the frustration he felt as a child at being unable to pursue his ‘mythological ways’ while at school: ‘Dormitories and school-rooms and cricket fields do not lend themselves to the cult of the inanimate’.[18] Much later while living in New York state he expressed his mythology in a daily ritual (or ‘ritualistic rigmaroles’ (634)) which had gradually taken shape over decades: every morning he would wake and ‘*command* benedictions’ towards a distant graveyard before taking the rubbish out to an apple tree he had named ‘Polutlas’ or ‘the much-enduring’ (635). And at certain seasons he would walk among heaps of rocks, which he hoped were old Mohawk burial mounds, and kneel in front of each, ‘invoking these dead Indians’ (635).

The greater question which occupied Powys throughout much of his intellectual life, and which can be viewed as an extension of his reverence for the commonplace, was whether or not there existed a supernatural force beyond our material world. In one of his earliest published works of philosophy *The Complex Vision* (1920) Powys declares that to achieve what he terms the ‘eternal vision’ (the ultimate reality beyond the material world) we must move from the individual conception of the world as a plurality of ‘separate person universes’ towards a kind of unifying synthesis of ‘souls’ both animate and in-animate.[19] The human soul may attain this eternal vision in certain concentrated moments ‘wherein,’ Powys writes, ‘what is mortal in us merges itself in what is immortal’.[20] Powys rejected both traditional Christianity and Neoplatonism, and was drawn instead to a mythical, pre-religious image of the universe wherein all ‘beings’ – human, animal, plant and the inanimate –

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 100.
[16] John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance* (London: Pan, 1975), p. 491. Hereafter *AGR* in the text.
[17] Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 55; Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, p. 19.
[18] Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 100.
[19] John Cowper Powys, *The Complex Vision* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1920), p. 164.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. xi.

existed on a continuum of consciousness. He subscribed to the pre-Platonic view, in other words, that all nature was an undifferentiated divine 'soul-substance,' but that after early humans developed religious thought and a concept of themselves as individuals in history this soul-substance became externalised as various divinities. Powys's later work *In Defence of Sensuality* (1930) advances the concept of the 'ichthyosaurus-ego', a primitive form of existence which can only be reached by sinking into oneself and which enabled the individual to access a kind of pre-historic, collective version of time.[21]

Powys advocated a return to a 'magical view of life', a non-rational form of consciousness which the author saw as originating in a remote past 'whose … secrets have been almost lost amid the vulgarities of civilization'.[22] Many early twentieth-century writers and artists, D. H. Lawrence and Herman Hesse among them, were expressing a similar longing to return to a previous, primitive state of thought, to distance themselves from what Lawrence called 'our false inorganic connections' and move towards the now-repressed 'spiritual knowledge' sought after by British neo-romantic writers such as Mary Butts.[23] This position, which often expressed itself in a kind of anti-industrialism, was a reaction to the unrelenting progress of technology and disregard for the natural environment, alongside the post-enlightenment dismissal of certain modes of thought – magical, mythical, animistic – as irrational vestiges of a pre-civilised society. Jan Marsh identifies the academic development of anthropology as a product of this cultural reaction, one which promoted the study of isolated, rural societies, as well as the disciplines of folklore and mythology studies.[24] Powys's own conceptions of 'magical thinking' and 'mythopoeic thought', both terms developed in anthropological writings during this period, were indeed partly an expression of his aversion to modern scientific thought and technological advancement. Powys did not seek a literal reversion to any state of primitiveness, or to

[21] John Cowper Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1931), p. 9.
[22] Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 401; Powys, *In Defense of Sensuality*, p. 10.
[23] D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (London: Martin Secker, 1932), p. 224; Andrew Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism*: *The Enchantment of Place* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 84; Modernist in style, Butts positioned mythological, often Arthurian imagery within contemporary settings, best exemplified in *Armed with Madness* (1928), in which the grail is discovered in south England.
[24] Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in British Art* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), p. 246.

what Marsh calls the 'mythical contentment' of the noble savage; rather he desired to access the 'secret' which he considered this world view to offer.[25]

Many of the artists and writers who looked to the subconscious and non-rational as sources of inspiration during the 1920s and 30s were proponents of literary modernism, among them T. S. Eliot and the Welsh poet and artist David Jones.[26] Although Powys resists the label of 'modernist' in the conventional sense, there have been several recent attempts to read the author's novels in the light of this literary movement; Jed Esty and Sam Wiseman, for example, both identify a type of 'rural modernism' in Powys's work which may serve to illuminate his views of this period.[27] Esty posits an 'anthropological turn' in high modernist literature during the post-war contraction of the British Empire, in which later novels by canonical English writers begin to turn inwards, abandoning their once international, metropolitan viewpoints for a distinctly Anglocentric self-reflection, a move from 'British decline to English revival'.[28] Esty reads *A Glastonbury Romance* alongside Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941) in a chapter on the English pageant revival. One of the novel's protagonists, John Crow, is a 'Frenchified and thoroughly modernized (and modernist) artist' who returns from the continent to Glastonbury to be re-educated in the 'rich invisible life of his native soil'; in this way Crow embodies Esty's turn from universalism to an introspective re-examination of rural culture.[29] Wiseman argues that Powys sees rural England as a 'daydream' and that, instead of reading his characters as returning to the countryside to live out idyllic fantasies, their altered perspectives provide greater epistemological depth and give the land the 'openness and strangeness' with which readers of modernist texts would be familiar.[30] This chapter argues, however, that Powys's fiction, which had already taken rural England as one of its central themes, turns instead towards Wales as a personal, and, in Powys's mind, a far deeper act of introspection than his literary peers.

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[25] *Ibid*.
[26] Elizabeth Ward, *David Jones: Mythmaker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 81-2.
[27] Wiseman, *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism*, p. 43.
[28] Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 5
[29] *Ibid*., p. 63.
[30] Wiseman, p. 47.

Certain elements from Welsh mythology as they are explored in his novels supplied Powys with the means, if not to provide a satisfying answer to the question of the supernatural, then to come as near to a conclusion as he was able. As his philosophy developed during the early 1930s and the introspection of the 'ichthyosaurus-ego' became a component of his thinking, medieval Welsh literature also began to take a more prominent place in Powys's fiction. On the one hand the mythology of the Welsh, and the antecedents of the Arthurian legend identified by Rhŷs in mythological texts, are for Powys representative of the secret to life accessed through this 'return' to the pre-individuated mind. On the other they resembled a contradictory whole for Powys and an acknowledgement of the extremes of human nature. It is a mythology that displays an 'ancient wisdom,' writes G. Wilson Knight in his study of Powys's novels, in which 'seeming incompatibles, the opposites, of being and not-being, life and death, were somehow in alliance'.[31]

While it is difficult to know exactly what Powys had read before commencing his Wessex novels, he certainly derived many of the esoteric theories concerning the names and avatars of Welsh mythological figures from Rhŷs's *Arthurian Legend*, and his main source for 'the strange old Mythology of the *Mabinogion*' itself was Lady Charlotte Guest's translation (1838-49), which had been the standard English edition since its publication.[32] Powys was at least aware of the breadth of medieval Welsh literature, which can best be surmised from the list of texts recited by Owen Evans in *A Glastonbury Romance* to justify his theory that the town is the Welsh otherworld Annwn: 'from the Book of Taliessin and from the Triads and from David ap Gwilym and … from the Red Book of Hergest, and from the Vita Gildae and from the Black Book of Carmarthen' (739).[33] These sources, alongside Powys's extensive reading in comparative mythology and the grail legend, provided him

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[31] Knight, *The Saturnian Quest*, p. 40.
[32] John Cowper Powys, *Petrushka and the Dancer: The Diaries of John Cowper Powys 1929-1939*, ed. Morine Krissdóttir (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. 112 (10 October 1932); A new, more 'scientific' translation, was published in 1929 by T. P. Ellis and John Lloyd, but it failed to replace Guest's as the standard edition and reviewers (including Welsh scholar W. J. Gruffydd) reacted unfavorably to its 'unliterary' approach. See Sebastian Rider-Bezerra, 'The Mabinogion Project: A Brief History of the Mabinogion', The Camelot Project, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/rider-bezerra-mabinogion-project> [accessed 9 September 2020].
[33] See Introduction for a summary of the extant manuscripts and translations which comprise 'Welsh mythology'.

with a large pool of reference with which to formulate his theories. Welsh mythology and the Powysian definition of ‘mythology,’ which encapsulates his call for a return to magical thinking, are thus necessarily linked, initially in *Wolf Solent* (1929), but particularly in *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) and *Maiden Castle* (1936), in which the Arthurian grail and a version of Welsh mysticism come to dominate characters’ identities, pursuits, and modes of thinking.

‘I have Wales, Wales, *Wales*, to take refuge in’: ancestry and the ‘idea’ of Wales in *Wolf Solent* and *Maiden Castle*.

> [The] philosophy of the complex vision represents a return to certain revelations of human truth – call them mythological if you please – which modern philosophy seems to have deliberately suppressed.[34]

> The ichthyosaurus-ego – this deep, atavistic, and yet premonitory consciousness in us all – has much in common with the mythological overtones in all the old great poets, from Homer to Goethe … It has much in common with … the Druidic Triads of the Welsh.[35]

As Powys wrote in his *Autobiography*, it was the ‘idea’ of Wales and Welsh mythology which first caught his attention. At this point in his life he had little direct experience with the country’s culture or its people, but after his initial revelation in 1902 he looked to Wales as a place ‘to take refuge in’ (335), a psychological retreat from the modern world. In *The Complex Vision* Powys envisages a return to a primitive, pre-rational way of thinking in order to achieve the singular unity at the heart of his philosophy. The ‘magical view of life [to Powys],’ writes Morine Krissdóttir, ‘is that there is some superior realm of being *behind* the phenomenal world … It was the belief that earlier ages and modes of consciousness had the secret of reaching this world behind that led Powys back into the past’.[36] Psychologists in the first half of the twentieth century had begun to speculate that for human consciousness to have developed, a mental boundary had to have been set up that separated the self from the exterior world, an early division between nature and culture.[37] It is partly this notional early stage of consciousness, before humans evolved a conception of themselves as individuals, which Powys hoped would return us to humanity’s ‘Golden Age’. Towards the end of the 1930s, once he had moved with Phyllis to North Wales, Powys would begin to conceive of the ‘native’ Welsh people (i.e. those who inhabited the country before the first Celtic migration and whose blood, according to Powys, had endured into the present day) as the ‘aboriginals’ of Britain, but even whilst living in New

[34] Powys, *The Complex Vision*, p. 318.
[35] Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 243.
[36] Krissdóttir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, pp. 33-4.
[37] See Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (London: Pantheon, 1954), p. xx.

York state in the late 1920s Powys's concept of Wales began to be integrated into his notion of magical thinking. The 'idea' of an ancient Wales as a place closer to this pre-scientific, undivided mode of thought became increasingly prevalent in Powys's work, and, this section argues, can be traced in his fiction from as early as *Wolf Solent* (1929) to the novel he produced following his departure from America, *Maiden Castle* (1936).

Wolf Solent was Powys's first great attempt at 'psychological realism', a depiction of the individual mind as it tries to define itself in relation to the material world; it represents an initial exploration of what Powys considered a specifically Welsh form of thinking as a way to express his 'magical view of life'.[38] Powys's version of the 'mythology' in this instance is the basis for the protagonist Wolf Solent's own moral structure and world view, one in which he is a character 'taking part in some occult cosmic struggle … between what he liked to think of as "good" and what he liked to think of as "evil"'.[39] Wolf, who has moved from London back to his childhood home of Ramsgard in Dorset, describes this mythology as a process of 'sinking into his soul' (*WS*, 11) – soon to be a fully-developed concept in Powys's philosophy (see Chapter Four for discussion of Powys's view of 'sinking' as a particularly Welsh characteristic) – which he first began as a young boy in Weymouth. Wolf's personal mythology is his way of life, and, as with Powys's paracosmic inventions as a child, a way of ordering and exerting control over his subjective experience. To describe this control Wolf uses the 'earthly metaphor' of a great leaf unfurling over a silent pool (20), which establishes a pattern of imagery linking the primordial with consciousness. A sequence of 'ancient memories' comes to him as he walks alongside the river Lunt, full of 'quagmires of living moss', 'forsaken sea-estuaries' and 'sighing pond-reeds'; the memories are Wolf's 'friends, his gods, his secret religion', connected with his 'mythopoeic fatality' (107). Storing visceral images of an untouched environment is key to Wolf's internal experience, a recreation of an older world more akin to the prehistoric than any modern, human-inhabited place. Wolf describes a particular kind of strength he once derived in his

[38] Denis Lane, 'The Elemental Image in *Wolf Solent*', *In the Spirit of Powys: New Essays*, ed. Lane (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 55-70, p. 55.
[39] John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 20. Hereafter *WS* in the text.

youth 'from certain godlike mythological legends', a power derived 'from the heart of Nature herself' (16).[40] These images rise to a culmination when later in the novel Wolf crashes through hedges and fields to find himself on the 'umbrageous threshold' (403) of Somerset, with Glastonbury Tor in the distance, and his troubles are swallowed up, 'lost in the primal dew of the earth's first twilights … absorbed … in that strange *vegetable flesh* which is so far older than the flesh of man or beast' (404).[41] Powys had not yet written *In Defence of Sensuality*, nor seriously begun the research for *A Glastonbury Romance*, but already the primordial provides psychological solace for his characters, and this 'quarter of the land … soaked with legends as it was with cider-juice' (397) is a suitable access point. Nowhere does Wolf feel more 'drenched through and through with darkness and with peace' than at the magnetic border of Glastonbury, its significance in Welsh folk-legend already well known to Powys.[42]

It is therefore in *Wolf Solent* that Powys first identifies this deep introspective, vegetative perception of the world with a kind of Welshness. Wolf is initially attracted to a local girl, Gerda Torp, whose intimacy with the natural environment and the ancient hill-fort Poll's Camp placates Wolf's internal struggles, but this changes when he meets Christie Malakite, the more philosophical and cerebral of Wolf's two romantic attachments. Her mother, Christie reveals, was Welsh and told her 'the wildest stories' (362) about her ancestors, even claiming to be descended from Merlin. Wolf recognises something of himself in the way that she sits, contemplating memories 'secret and solitary and

[40] C. A. Coates, *John Cowper Powys: In Search of a Landscape* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 47.
[41] This in fact mirrors Powys's own childhood at his father's vicarage at Montacute, 'whose own "mons-acutus" was in full sight of Glastonbury Tor' (*AGR*, xii).
[42] According to Rhŷs there is sufficient evidence to view Glastonbury as a location for the Welsh otherworld. The Celts, he argues, had two lines of thought regarding the otherworld: one conceived of it as an island 'beneath the sea or simply beyond the sea', and the other was that it was a fairy settlement 'entered through a hill or a mound, such as Mider inhabited in some Irish legends, and such as fairies are most commonly believed to inhabit in Wales' (*Arthurian Legend*, p. 329; p. 330). Rhŷs also contends that one of the earliest name for town in Welsh was *Ynys-witrin* ('Isle of Glass') on account of the surrounding waters, and later in the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth as *Insula Avallonis* ('Isle of Apples'), marking the point at which the legend of Arthur retiring to the Isle of Avalon began to be associated with the area. Hutton provides an extensive survey of the various legends which have been attached to Glastonbury up until the late twentieth century in the essay 'Glastonbury: Alternative Histories': he points out that there are no mentions of *Ynys-witrin* in Welsh sources before the thirteenth century. See Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, p. 71.

personal’:

> He felt as if he could share with this elfin creature a thousand feelings that no other person could possibly understand – share with her all those profoundly physical sensations – and yet mystical, too – that made up the real undercurrents of his whole life. (252)

She is also the only character Wolf thinks might understand his ‘mythology’, for he posits a conception of the universe almost identical to Powys’s own multiverse theory, of ‘several “Natures” … several “Universes,” in fact … one inside the other … like Chinese boxes’ (253), with which Christie quickly sympathises; this understanding between them ‘sank so deep into [Wolf’s] being that it invaded regions of which he himself had hardly been aware’ (262).[43] Vestiges of Welshness colour the subconscious of the novel: Christie’s ancestry and the pull of Glastonbury Tor. Succumbing to his desire for Christie has the potential to break the spell of Wolf’s ‘mythology’; her Welsh mother’s mirror seems to Wolf to reflect the ‘mysterious depths’ (458) of an ancient pond in Ramsgard, a source of great fear and anxiety for him. The mirror belonging to Christie’s mother sends him into a mental state of ‘frozen chaos … beyond thought’ (460) and he pulls himself out it, his desire left unconsummated and his ‘mythology’ intact. Eventually his life-illusion is broken by other means – accepting money for writing a vulgarised history of Dorset from a man Wolf regards as evil. Although Wolf’s eventual abandonment of his ‘mythology’ and his possible return to London at the novel’s conclusion display a failure on his part to succumb entirely to the secrets of the Welsh he encounters, the novel represents a tentative step towards Powys’s later ideas about Wales and its people as a centre for psychological change. Powys would later develop this Welsh association with the primitive and a pluralist model of experience, but in *Wolf Solent* it remains only partly explored, the pull of Wales still yet to fully influence his protagonist’s view of life.

[43] The early twentieth-century Irish novelist James Stephens conceived of a similar structure to the universe – though perhaps more precise and intricate – of worlds within worlds, and which came, like George Russell before him, from his reading in Indian scripture and Theosophical texts. While it is not known whether Powys ever read Stephens, it suggests a possible link between Powys’s worldview and contemporary Irish mysticism. See Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*, pp. 424-433.

Following the publication of *A Glastonbury Romance* in 1932 (discussed later in the chapter) Powys wrote his third Wessex novel, originally published as *Weymouth Sands* (1934) in America, and as *Jobber Skald* (1935) in Britain.[44] *Weymouth Sands* reinforces the view that the Wessex novels were in part fuelled by memories of 'childhood felicity' – Powys had visited the beach at Weymouth frequently as a boy – yet here the pull of Wales was not so prominent a theme as in his other books.[45] *Maiden Castle* (1936), however, represents Powys's most sustained engagement with Welsh mythology in this period; its focus on ancestry and an abstract Welsh mysticism filtered through the theories of John Rhŷs shows how Powys continued to see Wales as a conceptual ideal, one that now reifies a primitive, non-rational mode of thought.[46] Powys's Wessex novels explore the porous boundary between the human mind and the natural world, perhaps nowhere more completely than in *Wolf Solent*, but *Maiden Castle* is the first to establish an explicit connection between this boundary and what Powys saw as a uniquely Welsh kind of psychology. It was begun after Powys and Phyllis had returned permanently from America in June 1934 while the couple were living in Dorset, first on the downs near Lulworth, and then in Dorchester, and completed in early 1936 following their move to Corwen, North Wales.[47]

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[44] Powys was successfully sued for libel in 1933 after a local Somerset man Gerald Hodgkinson recognized himself in the character of Philip Crow in *A Glastonbury Romance.* Subsequently John Lane, the British publishers of Powys's Weymouth book, demanded substantial changes to avoid a similar legal suit. Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, pp. 307-8.

[45] Jean Markale identifies several Celtic elements in *Weymouth Sands*, although none is as germane to the larger narrative as those in *A Glastonbury Romance* or *Maiden Castle* – for example the name Dr Mabon corresponds with the Welsh mythological character Mabon son of Modron. See Markale, 'Powys et le celtisme', p. 247.

[46] Markale also considers the events of the novel as continuing Powys's 'secret reference to the Grail legend' begun in *A Glastonbury Romance*: Dud is enacting Peredur's grail quest, from *Peredur vab Efrawg*. Powys made no explicit mention of this quest motif in his journals or letters as he did with *AGR*; nevertheless, Markale provides a reason for considering *Maiden Castle* the most 'Celtic' of Powys's Wessex novels (*ibid*., pp. 257-260).

[47] Arthur Machen may have had some small part in Powys's decision to move to Wales. Machen's niece by marriage, the writer Sylvia Townsend Warner, visited Powys and Phyllis in Dorset and talked 'of St. David's [presumably the church at Llanddewi Fach, Machen's childhood home] & of her uncle Arthur Machen' (20 January 1935) and a month later Powys caught Phyllis immersed in 'Arthur Machen's account of his childhood in Wales – near Caerleon-on-Usk & could not stop till she had done!' (20 February 1935). Powys owned *Things Near and Far*, but what he thought of it, he does not say. See John Cowper Powys, *A Dorset Year: The Diary of John Cowper Powys June 1934 – July 1935*, eds. Morine Krissdóttir and Roger Peers (Kilmerson: The Powys Press, 1998), p. 166; p. 188.

Maiden Castle takes its premise from an inversion of the events in Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886); whereas Hardy's Michael Henchard auctions off his wife and child at a county fair near Casterbridge (Hardy's alias for Dorchester), Powys's protagonist Dud No-man buys a young acrobat, Wizzie Ravelstone, from a squabbling circus owner called Old Funky.[48] Powys sets the novel in the present day just as the initial excavations are starting on Maiden Castle, the vast earthwork overlooking Dorchester. The site was excavated between 1934 and 1937 by Mortimer and Tessa Verney Wheeler, and in March 1935 Powys went one evening to hear one of the Wheelers lecture on the project. The morning after Powys visited the site itself: 'On the top is a temple to Minerva & some Gaulish God who has three horns and three heads!' he noted.[49] Dud arrives in Dorchester to write his next novel, a historical piece based on the trial and execution of Mary Channing in 1705, accused of poisoning her husband, although his true motive, he concludes early on, is 'to solve … the ultimate meaning of death itself'.[50] As with every 'Powys-hero' (protagonists such as Wolf Solent who resemble the author in looks and world views) he considers himself a materialist, and yet he remains open to the existence of supernatural forces, 'part of the interplay of powers within the cosmos who regard *us* as of no more importance than shoals of fish' (*MC*, 153). Dud's desire to uncover the meaning of death provides an initial basis for associating Welsh introspection with Powys's primitive thinking. He moves to Dorchester to grapple with the memories of his dead wife and mother, and in order to overcome mortality, 'to dodge annihilation,' Dud concludes that one must either live with the same intensity as his Welsh mother, or draw power from 'sinking our individuality in others' lives [as with his late wife Mona]' (*MC*, 6). His father's identity is unknown, hence his self-appellation 'No-man'. In his first few days in Dorchester, Dud pays for Wizzie's liberation from the circus and makes the acquaintance of the members of two neighbouring families living at the semi-detached 'Glymes', Teucer Wye and his daughter Thuella, and the Quirms, Nancy and Enoch. *Maiden Castle* is set over

[48] 'The T. T. [Phyllis] says the 'aura' of Durnovaria encourages the sale of ladies!' Powys, *Petrushka*, p. 182, 27 March 1935.
[49] Powys, *Petrushka*, p. 181, 22 March 1935.
[50] John Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle* (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 2001), p. 5. Hereafter *MC* in the text.

the course of a year as Dud attempts to make a life together with Wizzie and discovers that the 'Maiden Castle man' Enoch Quirm is in fact his father.[51]

Through the character of the patriarch Enoch Quirm Powys continues to depict Wales as a place of mythological significance, whose literature and history, albeit presented in vague and proximate terms, contain the 'secret' to the author's complex vision. Quirm, self-styled 'Urien' after the sixth-century northern king Urien Rheged, believes himself to be the reincarnation of an obscure deity from Welsh mythology, an avatar of various figures from *Llyfr Taliesin* ('The Book of Taliesin') and other mythological sources.[52] Quirm justifies his wild claim by referring solely to the theories which he has read in John Rhŷs's *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, and to those texts such as *Llyfr Taliesin* which Rhŷs references. 'If John Rhys were alive', Quirm cries to his daughter:

> 'I'd have left you all, years ago, and gone to tell *him* the whole thing. He'd have understood, for he put me on the track of it. *He* knew how all Taliessin's prophecies were about me … *He* knew the mysterious secret of my race, of *his* race' (459-60).

Part of this 'secret' relates to certain figures which Rhŷs identified in Welsh sources, including Uthr Bendragon, Brân the Blessed, Gwynn ap Nydd, Yspyddaden (the giant father of Olwen in *Culhwch ac Olwen*), and Urien himself, whose disregard for the boundaries of life and death suggested to Rhŷs that they were the many faces of the same 'dark divinity', and that these multiple identities '[serve] to express overlapping aggregates of attributes'.[53] Uthr Bendragon, for example, sings his own elegy in

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[51] In this sense the novel is also a meditation on women, from Powys's perspective, following criticism of his *Autobiography* that it contained no significant female figures. Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, p. 315.
[52] *Llyfr Taliesin* is a Middle Welsh manuscript dating from the early 14th century, containing over sixty poems attributed to Taliesin – although only twelve are considered authentic – including *Cad Goddeu* ('The Battle of the Trees') and *Preideu Annwfyn* ('The Spoils of Annwn'). For modern scholarship and translation see Marged Haycock's *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, referenced above.
[53] Rhŷs, *Arthurian Legend*, pp. 259-60; the name Urien, according to Quirm, is far older than the Celtic languages, but belonged to the group of tribes known as the Durotriges who inhabited what is now Somerset and western Dorset. Quirm cites Rhŷs as his source, although Rhŷs is imprecise on the subject: 'there is nothing to prove that the name of the mythic Urien is related, rather than derived from an early Celtic form Urogenos, of the same origin as the Urogenius and Urogenonertus of Gallo-Roman inscriptions. The latter of these names would seem to have a mythical basis, and it must have meant "one endowed with the strength of an Urogen" or Urien' (*Arthurian Legend*, p. 242). Rhŷs is now thought to be wrong on this point: the meaning of Urien is considered to be 'one born as (his father's) heir', from the Celtic **orbogenos*.

the poem *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* and describes himself as *gorlassar*, denoting a corpse-like 'dark blue or livid colour'.[54] Similarly, the head of Brân the Blessed, when cut off after his death in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, *Branwen ferch Llŷr*, continues to speak for over eighty years.[55] This deity, writes Rhŷs, is the god 'both of beginning and ending, of life and death: as the former he is the god of plenty, and as the latter he is the god of the departed'.[56] It is with this dark divinity of '[c]arnage and slaughter' which Quirm fanatically aligns himself, confirmed by a birthmark on his chest in the shape of a crow, the mark of Brân the Blessed, which Quirm calls 'the seal of Urien' (*MC*, 245).[57]

Through a mysticism derived from Rhŷs's theories Quirm exemplifies the 'magical view of life' in Powys's philosophy. As the reincarnated dark divinity, he claims to experience a kind of mental pain that 'beats … against the wall of the world' (242) and will eventually 'break out' into a mysterious exterior. 'It is the old magic of the mind,' Quirm explains to Dud:

> when, driven to bay by the dogs of reality, it turns upon the mathematical law of life and tears it to bits. It's the old magic of the mind, the secret of which has been so often lost, till the Welsh, alone among the races, *hid* it instead of squandering it [Powys's italics]' (243).

The 'old magic of the mind' appears to be identical with Powys's 'magical view of life', the non-rational, non-scientific way of thinking, a characteristic which Quirm identifies in Rhŷs's death gods due to their dual state of 'death-in-life'. In this way his theories about reincarnation and immortality contradict, for Dud, 'the very rudiments of intellectual reason' (227), they '[move] from the impossible to the impossible … [abolishing] cause and effect' (460). Quirm resembles certain aspects of this figure in his appearance as 'a half-vitalized corpse … a being that "but usurped life", a semi-mortuus, an entity only half there' (*MC*, 33). Indeed 'rex semi-mortuus' is a phrase Dud remembers once coming across 'in some work on the religion of the ancient Celts' (153), further implying that 'Urien' is a product of Quirm's – and indeed Powys's – selective scholarship. His clothes are

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[54] *Ibid*., p. 256.
[55] Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 33-34.
[56] Rhŷs, *Arthurian Legend*, p. 260.
[57] *Ibid*.; the Welsh *brân* is usually translated as 'crow'.

‘ancient’ and frayed and he emits a sickly odour resembling, again, ‘the smell of a corpse’ (34). His past is a combination of rumour and reluctant hints, such that, writes Margaret Moran, ‘he seems to have sprung *ex nihilo* … into the present’.[58] Nancy relates the story to Dud of how Quirm’s adoptive father had ‘taken him from a Welsh tramp’ and given him his name (147), thereby extending Dud’s unknown parentage so as to include an unconfirmed Welsh ancestry. Quirm’s identity as the reincarnated Urien relies on this connection to Wales, just as Powys’s view of Wales as a ‘refuge’ from modern society is supported by his own perceived relation to the Princes of ‘Powysland’.

Moran’s observation that Quirm seems to have appeared ‘*ex nihilo*’ from a previous era characterises him as someone attuned to Powys’s idea of primitive thought, and therefore a figure better equipped to confront what Powys saw as a modern age of rationality and dehumanisation. The ‘ichthyosaurus-ego’, Powys’s invented psychological term first coined in *In Defence of Sensuality*, represents the author’s desire to step sideways ‘out of the human-consciousness groove into the backward-consciousness of animal-vegetable life, and into the forward consciousness of unrealised godlike life’.[59] The ‘animal-vegetable’ is a primordial, collective memory, and the Welsh, to Powys’s mind, possess greater access to the world *behind* because they are the oldest race in Britain and display a natural tendency to revert into themselves. Quirm’s physical appearance throughout the novel, not just as the half-dead ‘rex mortuus’, contributes to his image as something not entirely human, closer perhaps to the primal state of the introverted ichthyosaurus-ego: his black hair is ‘some kind of moss’ (150), his head is as if formed of ‘some massed weight of cloudy mist’ (154) and his body is like an ‘old grasshopper’ (229) in its ritual stance. His physicality further suggests an internal withdrawal from modern life, an antipathy towards the scientific way of thinking to which Powys himself was similarly averse: talking to his neighbour, the communist Claudius Crask, about the proposed excavations on Maiden Castle Dud speculates from Quirm’s expression that he is using a mere ‘tenth of his real consciousness, while the rest of it hangs suspended in some colossal instrument of torture (*MC*, 156). Quirm exists on the boundary between destruction and creation, simultaneously reaching

[58] Margaret Moran, ‘Animating Fictions in *Maiden Castle*’, *In the Spirit of Powys*, 180-192, p. 184.
[59] Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 131.

back into the mythological past, and forward towards resurrection and a mystical 'breaking through' of the material world.

A key site of spiritual significance in the novel is Maiden Castle itself, which for Quirm presides over Dorchester as a symbol of the 'old gods' (243). The hillfort acts a conduit for the mythic past that Quirm has read about in Rhŷs, and its connection to the Durotriges, a pre-Roman Celtic tribe whose territory included modern Dorset, provides him with a cultural link with Wales.[60] Indeed, for Arthur Machen in *The Hill of Dreams*, whose Neolithic mound near Caerleon is the site for his protagonist's spiritual awakening, the ruins of a Roman fort crowning the hill provoke a similar communion (imagined, or otherwise) with the people of a 'Golden Age'. Prehistoric hill-sites such as Maiden Castle figure as psychological symbols in several of Powys's previous novels – Leo's Hill in *Wood & Stone* (1915), Poll's Camp in *Wolf Solent*, and Glastonbury Tor – each of which establishes a link between a contemporary setting and an ancient, collective past. Quirm also reveals to Dud a further aspect of his Welsh hypothesis, one which Powys would expand upon in his later historical novels, that the ancient Welsh people were a civilization already existing in Britain before the Celtic invasions – people who were not 'Aryan', but rather 'possessed of secrets of life that Aryan science had [since] destroyed' (245). This theory, whose intellectual roots can be traced back to nineteenth-century antiquarianism and Indo-European scholarship (see Chapter Four), would become the basis for many of Powys's views of Wales and Welsh literature; here in *Maiden Castle* it creates a connection between the 'aboriginal' Welsh from whom Quirm claims to be descended, and the 'magical view of life'. Whatever prehistoric secrets of life had been suppressed by 'Aryan' science are now reinstated for Quirm by his ability to 'reach the life behind life' (241) and to commune with the old gods of Maiden Castle.

[60] The earliest phase of Maiden Castle's construction is thought to have been carried out around 3,500 BC, followed by a later expansion in 600-500 BC. It is the largest Iron Age hillfort in Britain and lies three miles outside of Dorchester. See John Collis, 'Maiden Castle', *The Oxford Companion to British History, 2nd edition*., eds. Robert Crowcroft and John Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780199677832.001.0001/acref-9780199677832-e-2733> [accessed 31 May 2021].

The association of Maiden Castle with prehistoric cultures also provides Powys with a stage on which his characters can enact the concept of the 'ichthyosaurus-ego'. Dud shares with Wolf Solent the inclination to 'sink into [his] soul' and claims to have inherited from his Welsh mother the 'formidable tendency' (94) to live entirely within his own imagination, a trait identifiable in the Welsh people, whom Powys claimed to be 'born "introverts"' (*OC*, 79).[61] On the hillfort Dud finds himself hating his father while also identifying with this mythic figure of Urien. Although he is initially contemptuous of his father's Welsh theories, Quirm's perceived Welsh ancestry and the 'power' of Maiden Castle establishes a kind of primordial connection between the two men, thus emulating a version of Powys's 'magical thinking'. On hearing the wind on Maiden Castle Dud feels his own voice 'catching [with] the very rhythm of his father's tone' (*MC*, 239) and experiences something 'atavistic' stirring in 'the depths' (248) of his nature; 'like an antediluvian creature confronting its progenitor' he perceives that he and his father are somehow destined to exist 'isolated from all other living creatures' (236). Quirm mutters 'Old Welsh' incantations to himself, which for the most part Powys leaves unquoted, and they sound to Dud like something far older than any other language, recalling early Celtic theorists' romanticised descriptions of the medieval Welsh language (which were then misguidedly used to infer racial characteristics).[62] After experiencing the wind on Maiden Castle Dud comes to the conclusion that his own self-absorption is not a negative pursuit, because he does not live for 'himself' alone but rather 'himself *in a certain relation to the cosmos* [Powys's italics]' (250).

Moran also raises a point that applies to Powys's wider use of Welsh mythology throughout his fiction and autobiographical writing. Due to the 'enigmatic nature of the tradition' of Celtic literature, writes Moran, it is impossible to apply any kind of systematisation to its narratives, themes and characters, a point which echoes scholars such as K. H. Jackson who have noted that because of this very enigmatic nature it has often been the fashion to think of the 'Celtic mind' as 'something

[61] John Cowper Powys, *Obstinate Cymric* (London: Village Press, 1973), p. 79. Hereafter *OC* in the text.
[62] Bromwich, *Matthew Arnold and Celtic Literature*, p. 5.

mysterious, magical, filled with dark broodings over a mighty past'.[63] In the character of Enoch Quirm Powys is guilty of this romanticisation of the Welsh people and their connection to the ancient secrets of life; *Maiden Castle* displays an attitude of imprecision and a tendency to portraying Welsh material using an abstract Celtic mysticism. On several occasions in *Arthurian Literature* Rhŷs himself laments the obscurity of the language of the medieval Welsh sources; Quirm's interpretation of Rhŷs's theories, as represented, too, through Dud's mediation of events, thus removes Powys's mythology from any claim to authenticity.[64] This lack of precision speaks to Powys's initial obsession with the '*idea* of Wales and the *idea* of Welsh mythology', alongside his image of himself as an 'imaginative charlatan' rather than the attentive scholar. In *Wolf Solent* and *Maiden Castle* a creative approach to a Welsh 'magical view of life' is far more important to Powys than any rational, literary or historical analysis of its mythology. Quirm has read the contemporary scholarship and has corresponded 'with some Celtic professor at Aberystwyth' (*MC*, 148) before calling himself Urien, yet his single literary source is Rhŷs, who, while an eminent and celebrated academic in his day, had many of his ideas discredited by the 1930s.[65] Quirm's self-constructed identity is less aligned with what Matthew Arnold characterised as the 'imperfect salvaging' of older material, but rather Quirm claims to have inherited and to comprehend perfectly the secret wisdom of the ancient Welsh people.[66] Quirm therefore represents an invented mysticism largely based on Rhŷs's scholarship, suggesting that, although Powys's thinking about Wales would later develop as he began to incorporate the *Mabinogi* more systematically into his fiction, at this stage of his writing he had not yet departed from the nineteenth-century view of Celtic literature.[67]

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[63] Moran, 'Animating Fictions in *Maiden Castle*', p. 185; K. H. Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany: A Selection of Classic Celtic Literature* (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 19.
[64] See Rhŷs *Arthurian Legend*, p. 156, n. 1., for example.
[65] See Juliette Wood, 'Folk Narrative Research in Wales at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: The Influence of John Rhŷs (1840-1916)', *Folklore* 116.iii (2005), 325-341.
[66] Bromwich, *Matthew Arnold and Celtic Literature*, p. 4.
[67] As Chapter Two has argued, Machen also responded to Welsh tradition using a combination of current scholarship and his own research, and indeed, this will become a recurring pattern in the work of all three authors discussed in this thesis.

‘[Its] crowd of inhabitants of every age and of every type of character’: Powys’s multiverse and the ‘incompatibles’ of Welsh mythology in *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Maiden Castle*

> The ever-mysterious prose-epic of Wales, entitled *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, which relates in its “four branches” the strange story of Pryderi the son of Pwyll … is literally haunted by all manner of magical *mixings* up – I can use no other expression – of life and death and death with life; so that on all sides we grow aware of half-alive things and of half-dead things, of life vanishing as the death-mists rise or fall, of birth appearing even from the lap of death (*OC*, 85-6).

> What I aimed at when I wrote [*A Glastonbury Romance*] a quarter of a century ago … was to convey a jumbled-up and squeezed-together epitome of life’s various dimensions (*AGR*, xiv).

G. Wilson Knight characterises Powys’s complex vision as being based, ‘far more than any rival’, on man’s total nature, and aiming at truth as ‘a gesture of our whole being’.[68] To achieve what Powys calls in *The Complex Vision* ‘apex-thought’, the state by which the human mind is able to penetrate a secret state of reality, the author proposed that the soul must use ‘all its attributes in unison’.[69] His conception of the ideal form of the universe as a unified whole stemmed from an early interest in Taoism, the Chinese philosophical tradition whose primary goal is to become ‘one’ with the *tao* or the ‘way’ (the life substance of the universe).[70] To Powys’s mind the achievement of this goal must entail a synthesis of the furthest limits of human experience: the complex vision is therefore a meeting place ‘of desperate and violent extremes …’ Powys writes, ‘not watered down nor modified, nor even “reconciled,” certainly not cancelled by one another’.[71] This section argues that Powys recognised

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[68] G. Wilson Knight, ‘Man’s Total Nature: An Analysis of Powys’s “The Complex Vision”’, *Mosaic* 10.ii (January 1997), 97-107, p. 97; *ibid*., p. 98.
[69] Powys, *The Complex Vision*, p. 1; p. 6.
[70] Krissdóttir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, pp. 27-29; Powys noted many similarities between the Welsh and Chinese Taoism, including the advice to ‘avoid publicity’, which ‘is at the deepest heart of Welsh psychology’ (*OC*, p. 54).
[71] *Ibid*., p. 23; To further the complexity of Powys’s vision he refrains from describing the universe itself as a ‘totality’, because, he writes, this would imply stasis (*The Complex Vision*, p. 90). The revelation of the complex vision is based on our own experience and therefore we have no right to ‘round [the universe] off’ into a finite object (*Ibid*.). Rather, we must think of it as a continuum, always changing and interacting with something else. This aligns with Quirm’s vision of the imaginative universe, one of creation and destruction, and mental, if not physical, reincarnation.

many of these ‘violent extremes’ in Welsh mythology and what he considered the innately polytheistic nature of the Welsh people. The Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* – which Powys considers an ‘ever-mysterious prose-epic’, a description which modern scholarship would no doubt contend – are ‘literally haunted,’ Powys writes, ‘by all manner of magical *mixings* up … of life and death and death with life’ (*OC*, 86). Powys’s view of the Welsh people takes on a further layer of complexity in an essay published in 1943, in which he lists one of their ‘peculiarities’ as their ‘unconquerable *polytheism* … our incurable habit of regarding the system of things as a *Multiverse* rather than as a *Universe*’ (7). The ability of the Welsh to *perceive* the multiverse and to represent it through culture is what makes them unique in Powys’s eyes, and what sets them further along the path to spiritual ‘wholeness’. In the novels *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) and *Maiden Castle* (1936) characters espouse a mysticism based on their own readings of Welsh mythology and the writings of John Rhŷs, and seek to unify their fragmented psychologies by pursuing the ‘totality’ at the heart of the complex vision. This, for Powys, is the only way ‘in which we can really escape from the rigid conceptualism of rational logic’.[72]

Twelve years on from writing *The Complex Vision*, Powys’s essential thesis remained unchanged, that the universe is a multiverse comprised of ‘galaxies of warring minds’ (*AGR*, 373), an idea which most closely resembles the pluralistic world view of pragmatist William James. By ‘follow[ing] William James’s Pluralism’, Powys sees himself as being able to circumvent the intellectual strictures of Christianity, which absorbed the ‘marvels’ of chaotic, ‘heathen-happy hearts’ and ‘rounded off the magic of life into a rational, inescapable and sanctified Circle’ (*OC*, 140).[73] *A Glastonbury Romance* is such a multiverse, a sprawling development of the Victorian novel in which no single perspective dominates.[74] ‘Everyone who came to this spot [Glastonbury] seemed to draw something from it,’ writes Powys, ‘attracted by a magnetism too powerful for anyone to exist, but as different people

[72] Powys, *The Complex Vision*, p. 298
[73] See also William James, *A Pluralistic Universe: Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy* (New York: 1909).
[74] Even the narrative voice is inconsistent. Charles Lock has identified very rare instances in the novel in which Powys deviates from the standard third person: ‘I’ and ‘us’ appear as lone examples. Lock also comments on the structure of chapters in *AGR*, that each one is its own contained narrative with ‘autonomous status’, and that they often appear to be narrated by different voices. See Charles Lock, ‘Diversions and Digressions: What Happens in the Reading of *A Glastonbury Romance*’, *The Powys Journal* 29 (2019), 28-56.

approached it they changed its chemistry, though not its essence, by their own identity' (*AGR*, 125). After publishing *Wolf Solent* Powys began in 1929 to research the grail and he first set pen to paper to write *A Glastonbury Romance* a year later after he and Phyllis had moved to Hillsdale in rural New York State.[75] Beyond *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, Powys's sources now included Alfred Nutt's *Celtic & Medieval Romance* (1899) and *The Holy Grail with Especial Reference to its Celtic Origin* (1888), Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), and Roger Sherman Loomis's recent *Celtic Myth & Arthurian Romance* (1927).[76]

The various theories behind the origin of the grail have been outlined in Chapter Two in connection with Arthur Machen's research; many of these diverge on whether the vessel derives from the magical cauldrons of early pagan Britain (a theory popularised by Nutt and Loomis), or whether it is a symbol of purely Christian design.[77] Most illuminating in Powys's eyes was Weston's book, which applied the method used by J. G. Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1890) to the Arthurian legend.[78] Whereas Frazer traced the evolution of particular religious rites and symbols from ancient fertility cults to the present day, Weston narrows her focus to the grail narrative, claiming many of its symbols (the bleeding lance, the grail, the fisher king, etc.) to have their origins in a pagan ritualism. The grail is not of ecclesiastical origin, Weston argues, but neither is it purely folkloric; it is rather a 'record, more or less distorted, of an ancient Ritual'.[79] This ritual, with its central object as the grail itself, is an initiation into the hidden aspects of life, the secrets both 'physical and spiritual'.[80] While her conclusions have since been discredited, Weston's thesis is very much central to Powys's thinking; he had also read widely in the area subsequently illuminated by Frazer's work.[81] Powys, then, after his

[75] Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, p. 252.
[76] *Ibid*., pp. 252-53.
[77] Juliette Wood, 'The Holy Grail: From Romance Motif to Modern Genre', pp. 181-2.
[78] Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, p. 253.
[79] Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance: An Account of the Holy Grail from Ancient Ritual to Christian Symbol* (Largs: The Banton Press, 1991), p. 203.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] Powys was also familiar with the theories of the Cambridge classical scholars Francis Cornford, Jane Harrison and Gilbert Murray, who argued for the ritualistic origins of Greek religion (Krissdóttir, p. 252). The 'Cambridge Anthropologists,' as they were known, crucially branched out from Frazer's thinking, applying theories of Freud, Bergson and William James, to present a more psychological and spiritual reading which no doubt Powys would have championed. See Martha C. Carpentier, 'Jane Ellen Harrison and the Ritual Theory', *Journal of Ritual Studies* 8.i (1994), 11-26.

early reading of Rhŷs, began to read material on the grail that Machen had already been using, in addition to later-published studies. As shown in Chapter Two, Machen believed the legend to have originated from the relics of the Welsh saints; however, in *A Glastonbury Romance* Powys does not present a single unified theory of the grail's origins, but rather several different interpretations. The multiple natures possessed by the grail; the legendary symbol of an abstract 'Secret Thing' – the secret behind life – does not carry the same meaning for any two individual seekers in the novel. Throughout the novel the 'Mystery of Glastonbury' (*AGR*, 125) is variously the 'First Cause' of the Christian God, the Phrygian goddess Cybele, the Greek titan Cronos, and the Celtic otherworld. A view of the universe as one containing many individual meanings is also one that rejects the absolutism of both Christian theology and the scientific materialism which Powys also contested, and Glastonbury, with its bedrock of Welsh mythology, Christian legend, and evidence of far older inhabitants, was the ideal location to explore his multiverse theory as a workable philosophy.

Owen Evans and Merlin's 'Esplumeoir'

'There is all the way through the book,' Powys writes to a friend many years after *A Glastonbury Romance* was published, 'a constant undercurrent of secret reference to the Grail legends'.[82] It is not the systematised 'pedantry' of Joyce and his mapping of the Odyssey onto *Ulysses*, Powys continues, 'but there is a vague sort of parallel to all that'.[83] Many characters represent certain aspects of the grail narrative and its symbolism, forming a substructure to the novel that combines various interpretations of the legend. The character of Sam Dekker, for example, is in Powys's 'secret reference' the embodiment of the archetypal grail knight of the romances; his spiritual transformation and acceptance of the Christian faith leads him to break off his affair with his lover Nell Zoyland and seek a far simpler existence of celibacy and helping the poor and the sick of Glastonbury. Towards the

[82] Letter to Kenneth Hopkins, date unknown. Quoted in Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, p. 255.
[83] *Ibid*.

novel's conclusion Sam sees his grail, 'a globular chalice … clearer than crystal … [its] dark water streaked with blood' (*AGR*, 940).

The theme of the *Arthurian* wasteland is embodied in Philip Crow, the town's chief industrialist and unfeeling antagonist of the novel. He intends to illuminate the tourist attraction Wookey Hole – a series of limestone caves several miles from Glastonbury – to 'electrify the entrails of the Mendips' and use the River Axe, which flows from entrance of the main cave, to power his dye factory. A symbol of his wealth and modernising spirit is the aeroplane in which he flies over the land between the town and Wookey Hole, longing to 'beat down this pious Glastonbury legend, this piece of monkish mummery, to beat it down and trample it into dust' (230). John Geard, called 'Bloody Johnny' due to his frequent invocations of the 'Blood of Christ', is the newly appointed mayor of Glastonbury. His plan in the first half of the novel is the staging of a Passion play, independently of any church, in the hopes of revitalising the town's tourist industry as a site of pilgrimage. The pageant, a retelling of the crucifixion to be performed on Midsummer's Day in Tor Field, would restore Glastonbury as the 'centre of mystic influence' it once was (159), a New Jerusalem.

It is the character of Owen Evans, however, who most clearly exemplifies the growing strain of Welsh-ness in Powys's earlier Wessex novels. Evans's personal quest throughout *AGR*, to rid himself of his sadistic urges, incorporates new aspects of Welsh mythology which demonstrate the 'extremes' of human nature which the imagination must accept in order to achieve the wholeness of Powys's cosmic philosophy. Evans, who is of proud Pembrokeshire descent, is attempting to compose a new *Vita Merlini* (improving, in his view, on the mid-twelfth century original by Geoffrey of Monmouth), and Powys often uses Evans's research for exposition of esoteric Welsh scholarship, just as he would with Quirm in *Maiden Castle*.[84] Evans is also a descendant, along with his future wife Cordelia, daughter of John Geard, 'of the blood royal' (106) of the ancient South Wales family of Rhys (presumably a reference to the 12th century Welsh ruler Rhys ap Gruffydd, or perhaps a further nod to Powys's enthusiasm for John Rhŷs, whose translated lines from the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* ('The Black

[84] *Vita Merlini* (c. 1149) is a poem composed in Latin by Geoffrey of Monmouth and tells of Merlin's life and deeds beyond the Arthurian world of the earlier *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136). Koch, 'Myrddin', *Celtic Culture*, p. 1324.

Book of Carmarthen') serve as the novel's only epigraph). On the way back to Glastonbury from their initial meeting at Stonehenge John Crow, cousin to the industrialist Philip Crow, asks Evans whether he believes in the struggle for a meaning to life, to which the Welshman responds: 'It's not … it never has been … in my nature … to take life in that way … I find meanings everywhere' (107). Evans's disavowal of a single truth or meaning thus coincides with Powys's characterisation of the 'polytheistic' Welsh people, the multiverse theory of Powys's cosmic vision.

While Evans finds satisfaction in his study of Welsh mythology, he is also plagued by visions of 'sadistic cruelty' from which he derives a kind of erotic excitement (109) coupled with a 'fever of remorse'.[85] His ultimate temptation is to strike someone with an iron bar. Evans's single hope of redemption is a vision of 'the undying grail' (151), which from his research he identifies with a vessel he calls the 'Cauldron of Yr Echwyd'.[86] Of the many supernatural objects of Welsh and Irish mythology which have been claimed as likely antecedents for the grail of medieval romance (as detailed in Chapter Two), Evans's own grail appears to be a combination of the otherworld cauldron sought by Arthur in *Preideu Annwfyn* (due to its association with 'yr Echwyd'), and the cauldron of poetic inspiration belonging to the goddess Ceridwen.[87] Its power is reflected in the colossal silver punch bowl brought out at Mrs Legge's house, at which Evans is present, rumoured to have been made 'afore King Harry's time' and full of 'wondrous witchcraft' (496). It is at this gathering where Evans identifies the 'strikingly ugly' character Mad Bet with the grail messenger, and by extension

[85] Powys himself claims to have suffered throughout his life from a similar inclination to perform acts of sadistic intent, although these were rarely consummated. Only as a child, he describes later in his *Autobiography*, did he take perverse delight in the torture of small animals (Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 2). These urges, combined with the notion that sensual pleasure or 'sex pleasure *as such*' was wrong, became intensely erotic in their nature (p. 10) and would come to feature as part of the psychological struggles of many of his fictional characters, of whom Owen Evans is the chief example.
[86] 'Yr Echwyd' is frequently used by Powys to mean *Annwn* or the Celtic otherworld. In his discussion of Urien in *Arthurian Legend* Rhŷs mentions 'Urien of the Echwyđ' or, his own translation, 'Urien Lord of the Evening', as one of Urien's titles (pp. 248-9). Similarly Rhŷs's translated line 'On the Echwyđ [*yr echwyđ*] evil has fallen' from *Llyfr Coch Hergest*, suggests Echwyd to be the realm of Urien, 'the twilight,' writes Rhŷs, 'which is essential to the illusion and glamour on which this whole cosmos of unreality is founded' (p. 257; p. 259). This is, however, a curious view to take now that *Yr Echwydd* is understood by modern Celtic specialists to have simply been a place name in the Old North. Powys's use of the name to mean *Annwn* would therefore appear nonsensical to current scholarship. See Paul Russell, 'Three Notes on *Canu Urien*', *North American Journal of Celtic Studies* 4.i, pp. 48-78.
[87] Often perceived of as a witch or enchantress, Ceridwen is the keeper of a cauldron of wisdom in Welsh tradition. *Llyfr Taliesin* tells of a boy Gwion Bach who angers Ceridwen by drinking some of the potion she is brewing for her son. Ceridwen hunts the boy in various forms of animal until she swallows him whole and later gives birth to the bard Taliesin. Koch, 'cauldrons', *Celtic Culture*, p. 359.

Ceridwen, who according to Evans 'appeared frequently in an unpleasing shape' (492). Sam Dekker's pregnant lover, Nell Zoyland, drinks from the bowl first, and this is considered to be an omen by the older guests. This version of the grail, decidedly non-Christian and surrounded by superstition, and the image of the guests drinking from it, 'a little group of human consciousnesses' (500), provokes in Evans a kind of possession: he '*became* that terrible craving … *became* the loathing' (500) until he decides, mumbling in Welsh, to rid himself of his 'devil' on Midsummer's day, the day of Geard's pageant.

Evans has a scholarly interest in Merlin – above other figures associated with the town such as Arthur and Joseph of Arimathea – because he represents the 'real hidden force still active in Glastonbury' (120). A particular focus of Evans's research is the untranslatable word 'Esplumeoir' (179): according to the Didot *Perceval*, Merlin retires to his *esplumoir* (Powys's spelling *esplumeoir*), a constructed 'dwelling-place' outside Perceval's palace, and was never seen again.[88] The word's most plausible meaning, argues Anne Berthelot, is an enclosed cage for moulting falcons, suggesting that the wizard goes through a phoenix-like transformation or re-birth.[89] For Powys it is a word denoting psychological escape and adopted as another of his idiosyncratic terms for 'sinking into one's soul'. Powys's narrator interprets 'Esplumeoir' as 'some mystic Fourth Dimension … into which the magician deliberately sank, or rose; thus committing a sort of inspired suicide, a mysterious dying in order to live more fully', and which Ben Jones argues is a representation of the grail itself, or that it might lead to the grail appearing 'wherever Esplumeoir is'.[90] It is because of this transformative potential that Evans believes Glastonbury to hold that he is so enthusiastic about Geard's pageant: 'It only remains', Evans declares in a broken voice to Geard, John Crow, and his wife Cordelia, 'for some event to happen … and a new Religion … different … from any that's ever been … will make a

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[88] Lawrence Eson, 'Odin and Merlin: Threefold Death and the World Tree', *Western Folklore* 69.i (Winter 2010), 85-107, pp. 88-89.

[89] Anne Berthelot, 'Merlin, *Puer Senex* Par Excellence', *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), p. 260.

[90] Ben Jones, 'The "Mysterious Word Esplumeoir"', *In the Spirit of Powys*, 71-85, p. 80.

crack in the world! … Something will break out, through that crack, *that will take away our torment!*' (159).

Evans's initial attempt to find redemption, however, is sought in the figure of Christ, whom Evans views not as the son of the Christian God, but as existing somehow outside of nature, a symbol which has transcended the good and evil of the First Cause. Powys rejected Christianity as a valid spiritual system, but Christ was of extraordinary significance to him as a repository for human meaning; as a symbolic ideal, Christ represented the soul's identification with all other souls, 'living or dead or unborn'.[91] His opinions regarding the Welsh and 'the religion of Jesus' also provide a further parallel with Arthur Machen's view of Celtic Christianity (via Ernest Renan), that the Welsh were predisposed to conversion: 'the New Testament was a literal "god-send" to us Welsh Aboriginals,' wrote Powys in the journal *Wales*, 'for it jumped with our natural instincts, as I think I may say, without "glorying" it has not jumped with the "natural instincts" of any other race on earth!' (*OC*, 14). The Welsh have taken up Christianity and shaped it to their own idiosyncratic life-philosophy: as they embody the 'magic' needed to 'sink into [one's] soul' and thus become introverted and free from malice, in the same way their version of Christ is unimposing and non-dogmatic (68). Evans channels the redemptive suffering of Christ in the climax to Geard's Glastonbury pageant in the hope of ridding himself of his sadistic inclinations, and while he is bound to the cross he cries and faints, blood pouring from his mouth (*AGR*, 602). Instead of healing Evans, the act merely intensifies his suffering, turning 'his pedantic acquisitiveness into a living medium, acutely sensitive, quiveringly receptive, through which the whole history of Glastonbury began to pour' (615).

It is in Welsh mythology, however, where Evans discovers particular images which resonate with his sadism and which speak to him 'in the needed terms' to potentially cure him of his vice.[92] As he reaches the point in his *Vita Merlini* where Merlin passes into his mysterious 'Esplumeoir', Evans

[91] Powys, *The Complex Vision*, p. xvii; Powys devotes an entire chapter to the figure of Christ in *The Complex Vision*, describing him as 'that great Intermediary between mortality and immortality whom we have come to name Christ' (p. 225). He goes on to suggest, given the existence of beliefs in otherworld saviours like the Buddha, that perhaps a new symbol altogether should be invented to represent the eternal vision. The doctrines of Christianity specifically were of little importance.
[92] Knight, *The Saturnian Quest*, p. 39.

recalls an incident in Merlin's youth mentioned in Geoffrey of Monmouth's original in which the magician rips off the horns of a stag and flings them at the chieftain who had stolen his wife.[93] The 'dark and bloody violence' of Merlin's action prompts Evans to read again a mysterious passage in a book in his collection called 'The Unpardonable Sin,' and this in turn leads him to seek out Mad Bet and her murderous accomplice Codfin (1003). Though the text is not strictly Welsh, Geoffrey's Merlin is an amalgamation of the prophet Ambrosius Aurelianus in Nennius's *Historia Brittonum* and the Merlin or 'Myrddin Wylt' of early Welsh poetry, and the *Vita* demonstrates obvious familiarity with the earliest poems about Merlin in the *Llyfr Du Caerfyddin*.[94] Merlin himself is a figure of contradictions, said in various sources to have been born of a demon and a nun, encapsulating the essential evil and good in the world. Evans's fixation on Merlin, whose renouncing of the world through his retreat into the 'Esplumeoir' is potentially transformative, 'a mysterious dying in order to live more fully,' becomes his new hope for redemption after his Christ experiment fails (179). His study of Welsh mythology leads him to expand his initial admission that he '[finds] meanings everywhere' into a cohesive reflection of Powys's multiverse:

> [The Fisher Kings] sought for more than a fish … they sought for the knot of opposites, for the clasping of the Two Twilights, for the mingling place of the waters … for the copulation-cry of the Yes and No, for the amalgam of the Is and Is Not … that which exists in the moment of timeless time when these two are one! (740)

As discussed in the previous section, Rhŷs identifies several figures in the *Mabinogion* and *Llyfr Taliesin* who are analogues for the same 'dark divinity', a deity both alive and dead who embodies the 'knot of opposites' which Powys found in Welsh mythology. Evans himself, like Enoch Quirm in *Maiden Castle*, displays similar physical characteristics throughout the novel. While speaking to two lovers Ned Athling and Lady Rachel about his research his 'bare hanging wrists' and feet appear motionless, and his whole body seems 'to grow more and more corpse-like' (740). Similarly, as Evans

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[93] 'But when the prophet saw him and understood who he was, at once he wrenched the horns from the stag he was riding and shook them and threw them at the man and completely smashed his head in, and killed him and drove out his life into the air'. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*, trans. John Jay Parry (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1925), p. 57 (lines 464-470).
[94] Alan Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 329-331.

later anticipates the incident with the iron bar his vice takes the form of a mental 'forked-tongued worm-snake' which appears to operate the Welshman's body, described by Powys as a '*homo mortuus*' or '*rex mortuus*,' and a kind of puppet (1020-21). Towards the end of the novel, Evans has therefore been primed by certain elements of Welsh myth to construct his own 'Esplumeoir', the unification, in Powys's philosophy, of all extremes of human nature. The Mr Evans who emerges from his lodgings to meet with Mad Bet (his own Grail Messenger), however, 'is a Mr Evans whose will, for that crisis in his life, was entirely evil and whose cunning craftiness in the achievement of his outrageous intention was supernatural in its flexibility' (1005). Powys's narrator declares that the individual will holds the potential to 'produce good out of evil', suggesting that Evans, balanced at this point between finding his redemptive grail-like 'Esplumeoir' and descending into 'evil', has unwittingly chosen the latter path.

The anticipated incident with the iron bar, the 'Dolorous Blow' (1024) of Evans's now-perverted grail quest, is eventually realised on Glastonbury Tor. Evans hides himself in order to witness the act of murder, but concludes that by *saving* John Crow, the intended victim, instead of watching him die he might ultimately free himself from his torment. When Crow is pushed aside at the last minute, but another man dies in his place, Evans is violently sick on seeing the bloody iron bar and is transformed 'visibly and palpably and in every physical respect … [into] an elderly man' (1055). He continues slowly to write his *Vita Merlini* and takes to walking the streets of Glastonbury reading a copy of Malory, searching for 'the real meaning' of Merlin's 'Esplumeoir' (1056). Evans's change mirrors Merlin's own fate in the original *Vita* – the wizard disappears into a different plane of existence, thereby losing touch with reality – and suggests that the Welshman has misunderstood the word 'Esplumeoir'. He looks for an escape from his violent tendencies in a mythical transformation instead of addressing the problem at its psychological root. Considered also in terms of Powys's complex vision and the striving for a unified whole, Evans's quest for healing through Welsh material is more realisable than his first attempt to remove himself entirely from good and evil by playing Christ in the passion play. As a *rex mortuus* figure, an embodiment of opposites, he lives precariously between the 'wilful horror' of committing sadistic violence on the one hand and resisting the act but subjecting

himself to an eternity of ‘arid futility’ (251) on the other. Although Evans ultimately fails, Powys develops the idea first established in *Wolf Solent*, that there might be some form of potential in Welsh tradition to enable the recognition of the totality behind a fragmented multiverse.

Beast symbolism and the totality of experience in *Maiden Castle*

Just as Powys’s Glastonbury is a palimpsest of legend and evidence of ancient civilisations, the Dorchester of *Maiden Castle* is similarly compressed by ‘layers upon layers of human memories, semi-historic and pre-historic’ (*MC*, 91), from the hillfort’s Iron Age and Roman remains to the Neolithic site of Maumbury Rings where Mary Channing, the focus of Dud’s historical novel, was executed in the nineteenth century. Yet while multiple perspectives are voiced and debated, the pluralist model of perceiving the universe is not as central as it is in *A Glastonbury Romance*; Powys’s final Wessex novel instead strives towards a state of totality comprising the limits of human experience, comparable to Owen Evans’s ‘Yr Echwyd’. Through Enoch Quirm’s philosophy of reincarnation Powys develops his understanding of a Welsh mysticism of ‘desperate and violent extremes’, while also offering a critique of the modern scientific materialism which he hoped to overcome. The various mythological images of beasts throughout the narrative explore the theme of suffering which Powys viewed as inherent in human nature and necessary to achieving his personal vision. Once again, however, as in *A Glastonbury Romance*, the quest to replace scientific thinking with a philosophy partly derived from Welsh mythology proves unrealisable.

One of the central debates which surrounds the hillfort in *Maiden Castle*, and which serves to foreground the anti-materialism in Powys’s magical philosophy, is the practical purpose behind the Wheeler excavations. Claudius Crask, the voice of social progress in the novel, views the digs as a positive attempt ‘to overcome Nature by science’ (153), and considers any evidence of past civilisations made at the site of interest only as a tool with which we might better our knowledge, in ‘getting rid of all the old romantic nonsense, and studying the way our ancestors obtained their food

supply and their water supply' (151). Crask's scientific view of history stems from a critique of romantic values, in which he includes the 'English mania for Nature', for preserving parks and primroses: humankind must not dwell poetically on the past, Crask declares, but rather strive toward evolution – 'the will of the only god *we* shall ever know' (84). Quirm dismisses the excavations as mere 'scratchings' and contends that an imaginative view of history contains the 'truth of life'; his version of evolution is a process of creation and destruction in the mind. 'All's vision,' he tells Dud, and '[certain] masks of life *ought* to be destroyed … to make room ... for those that have lain beneath them for ten thousand years' (241). This, according to Powys, is a trait fundamental to the Welsh sensibility and indeed the most ancient of human wisdom, 'namely that it is within the power of the will and the imagination,' he writes in his *Autobiography*, 'to destroy and recreate the world'.[95] This view of history reflects Powys's own 'imaginative charlatanism', that the past in this instance is best used as a way into mythology and to a creative, but ultimately truthful interpretation of what has gone before, and which allows humans to envisage a more holistic future.

Dud often finds himself between the two world views espoused by Crask and his father, which when considered together embody two opposing cosmologies: modern, progressive thought on the one hand, and Powys's 'magical thinking' on the other – the pursuit and recovery of a lost Golden Age. Dud's own philosophy leans towards his father's in this regard, that history is '*at one remove*' from reality, held at arm's length through the prism of subjectivity (185). Through history life is 'seen under a certain light', and this, for Dud, means seeking patterns in the world's 'magical overtones and undertones' (185). His quest to discover the 'ultimate meaning' of death at the outset of the novel is triggered by an animal's head carved into a bedpost which once belonged to his Welsh mother, its twin presumed lost (although, in transpires, kept by Quirm):

> The Woman from Wales … must have found in this mysterious head some token, some symbol of her concealed past; and the head itself, whatever it carried of old, dark, heraldic, or even mythological significance, had been the object round which, more than round anything

[95] Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 26.

else, the brooding imagination of his childhood, playing with the notions of both good and evil, had constantly hovered (3).

Dud's magical view of history leads him to associate this 'demonic' bedpost carving with the Questing Beast of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, a chimera-like creature with the head of a serpent, the body of a leopard, the buttocks of a lion and the feet of a hart, and the questing knights Palomides and Pellinore, who, Dud considers, 'might have been father and son' (93). Dud also struggles to recall a theory he had once read in John Rhŷs (again, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, which most of Powys's characters connected to Wales seem to have read) which links, through a 'gnomic allusion of Taliesin's' (93), the Questing Beast with the word 'Dormarth'. Rhŷs translates this as 'Marth [death] at the door of Annwn or Hades, or … the Marth which was the door of Annwn'.[96] Rhŷs thus identifies the motif with the dog of Gwyn ap Nudd, 'king of the other world, hunting with his fierce hound', who, according to a line in *Llyfr Du Caerfyddin*, is named Dormarth.[97] For Dud, the bedpost is representative of the entrance to the otherworld, and perhaps more specifically, to the Welsh Annwn. Jeremy Hooker interprets the beast symbols in the novel as representations of the totality of experience.[98] For Dud its significance, wrapped up in questions of his unknown parentage, is existential, and in his contemplation of the possibility of life after death he comes to the 'raw, and entirely unmystical' conclusion that other dimensions exist and that if anything survives death then the Dormarth 'of his mind' was open to that survival (*MC*, 103). When its twin is finally presented to Dud as proof of his true paternity the revelation produces a change in Dud's mind 'like some vast dim slippery beast out of the lake of his soul' (158).

Among the votive offerings unearthed at the Maiden Castle excavations is a three-horned bull, alongside a headless torso and the bust of a woman thought by many to depict the Roman goddess

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[96] Rhŷs, *Arthurian Legend*, p. 157; 'Dormarth,' according to Rhŷs, is a compound of the Welsh *dôr*, meaning 'door', and *marth*, 'death', a word which appears in a 'curious passage' from *Llyfr Taliesin* (*Arthurian Legend*, pp. 156-7); in Haycock's translation (2007), however, *marth* is not 'death', but rather 'sorrow' or 'shame', suggesting a mistranslation on Rhŷs's part. Haycock, p. 317; p. 326.
[97] *Ibid*., p. 155.
[98] Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, p. 72.

Minerva. A body is impaled on each of the bull's horns and a third is 'transfixed on its up-curving tail' (154). The bull means little to Crask, but to Quirm the emergence of the animal stands for the dormant power of imaginative reincarnation, a symbol with access to the depths of human suffering which goes 'deeper into life than anything in … Plato' (154), referring to the volumes of *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* which the family friend Teucer Wye keeps in the pockets of his coat. Alongside Dud's 'Dormath', this second beast of *Maiden Castle* represents the necessary acceptance of the whole of human nature, its bestial side 'no less than its god-like attributes'.[99] In order to access the ultimate reality of magical thought, Powys writes in *The Complex Vision*, the soul must engage in a 'desperate and savage struggle with itself'; only when the imagination has accepted both the 'highest' and the 'lowest', will Quirm's 'old magic of the mind' be able to disclose that there is nothing separating us from the *real reality*'.[100] The wooden carving of Dormarth on 'the Welsh woman['s]' bedpost and the three-horned bull are both emblems of the 'lowest' side of human experience which comprises one of the extremes in the mystical union at the centre of Powys's life-philosophy. Dormarth, in its role in Dud's mind as the Arthurian 'Questing Beast', but in Rhŷs as the hound of Gwyn ap Nudd, is a representation of the 'magical mixings up' at the heart of Welsh mythology, and the bull, though never specifically identified, is an emblem of an older era, a chthonic figure which serves to demonstrate the outer limits of human suffering.

Quirm describes to Dud what he calls a 'hurt of the soul' which he believes from a very young age he was born to endure: 'All extreme emotions reach a point where you can't distinguish between pain and pleasure' (239) and through a 'terrible' suffering both love and hate become one, and the magician is able to break through. 'The suffering is intense; but something in you rushes towards the suffering, opens its arms to the suffering' (239). The emotion of love, Powys continues in *The Complex Vision*, 'craves for the real existence of … "invisible companions"', by which he means 'actual living gods', and the emotion of malice resists this.[101] The struggle to achieve the eternal

[99] *Ibid*.
[100] Powys, *The Complex Vision*, p. 134; Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, p. 73.
[101] *Ibid*.

vision is in part the fusion of these two emotions, or energies.[102] The kind of mental anguish experienced by Quirm 'that loses itself in death-in-life' is an essential aspect of Welsh mythology in Powys's view and 'the key to Urien's country' (243): this 'country' is 'the land of Mureif and Rheged and Catraeth and "yr Echwydd"' (243).[103] Quirm's struggle is in line with Powys's conception of the Welsh, his attempt to 'break through' is a death in itself and confirms his role as corpse god in the narrative. These mythological, primal images of the bestial and destructive side of human nature recall some of the more horrific elements of Arthur Machen's early fiction (see Chapter One): Machen's depictions of the folkloric *tylwyth teg* and the maddening influence of the Greek god Pan (which Machen associates with the Celtic deity Nodens and whose appearance engenders a similar 'breaking through' to a reality beyond the material world) suggest that this darker element of spirituality is vital to both authors' reception of Celtic material.

Quirm is also the prime example in Powys's fiction in this period of the impossibility of the re-alignment of the cosmic – that is, his hypothesised ability to 'break through' into a reality beyond through intense mental suffering – within the constrictions of modern society.[104] Throughout *Maiden Castle* Quirm and his wife Nancy live on the edge of poverty, and by the end Quirm must resort to writing articles for local newspapers in order to support himself; the articles, about the discoveries from the archaeological digs, expose his mythological identity of Urien, along with his theories, to public scrutiny. By presenting this aspect of himself through the medium of scientific journalism he '[shakes] his own faith' (429) and becomes 'more vulnerable and human' (393). He regrets telling even those closest to him of his identity as a reincarnated 'dark divinity', for none of them understands that the power of 'Yr Echwydd', the otherworld, is the power of the Golden Age; his talk of death and Dud's impression of him as the 'rex mortuus' has been misunderstood, he says, and have

[102] Krissdóttir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, p. 15.
[103] The historical Urien's kingdom was said to have extended to Moreif (present day Moray in Scotland); Catraeth is probably Catterick in North Yorkshire, thought to be the site of 'The Battle of Catraeth' mentioned in *Y Gododdin*. Koch, 'Catraeth', pp. 353-356.
[104] Hooker makes a similar point: '[for Powys] there was no way of relating cosmic forces to ordinary human interests that did not involve both a socially unrealistic forcing together of these now disparate elements and an act of imaginative archaeology, whereby he sought to uncover and recreate a mythology consonant with his own mythological awareness' (*John Cowper Powys*, p. 64).

‘[turned] the dew of darkness into evil, and Brân the Blessed into a demon’ (460), suggesting that Quirm’s personal brand of Welsh mysticism cannot maintain itself in the face of material poverty. Publishing his theories of reincarnation and imaginative destruction to the scientific community as a way to earn a meagre living leaves him open to the kind of scrutiny which his previous introspection and solitary life would never have admitted.

Quirm is thus a further example, alongside Wolf and Owen Evans, of Powys’s attempt to put into practice his emergent philosophy based on aspects of Welsh mythology and its subsequent failure to evoke spiritual healing or transformation. The various beast-symbols of the novel represent the opposing extremes of human experience – fundamental to Powys’s view of the universe as a contradictory whole – and yet they are disregarded by Crask and the archaeological community, and Quirm’s vision of life is held up for the public to see. Holed up in Glymes, his health worsening, Quirm’s attempts to leave the house represent a pitiable version of the previous beast-symbols, groping for the door handle ‘as a beast might do who was standing on his hind legs’ (473), wearing slippers with the backs trodden down, and Thuella follows to find him moving slowly towards the kitchen on all fours. The animal nature of humankind has been reduced to impotency through misinterpretation and exploitation. Just before he dies Quirm renounces the name Urien, ordering his wife to call him Enoch, and his final words ‘*I am … what I am*. So it’s alright. It doesn’t matter’ (473) convey his acceptance that this fundamentally ancient force is unable to exist in a modern era in which a scientific view of history operates. The darker, more violent elements of Welsh and Celtic tradition which feature in *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Maiden Castle* are made sterile in twentieth-century Wessex, setting the stage for Powys to turn his full attention to Wales in the following period of his writing.

Conclusion: Towards Wales and 'the source of the dream'

Whereas previous critical studies of Powys's novels, such as Knight (1964) and Krissdóttir (1980), have traced Powys's attempt to advocate in his fiction, through various mythological and occult systems, a return to a spiritual Golden Age, this chapter has sought a clearer line of development in Powys's thinking, particularly with regard to Wales and its mythology. The differences which have been described between the novels *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Maiden Castle* chart an increasingly greater engagement with Wales as it began to provide Powys with a literature and a world view (albeit invented) that offered the potential for a unified conception of the universe. Sequentially the novels move from hinting at the wider significance of Powys's Welsh ancestry to a more sustained exploration of what it might mean to embody a particular aspect of Welsh mythology; although both Evans and Enoch Quirm are well-read in Welsh material and its criticism (mostly John Rhŷs), it is the mythology's imaginative and spiritual elements which speak to them and go some way to embodying the essence of Powys's complex vision. The struggle for a unified, mystical conception of the universe beyond William James's pluralistic model entails both an acceptance of the multiverse, and a profound introspection in order to access a pre-individuated, 'primitive', and therefore more magical way of thinking.

Powys's method of 'imaginative archaeology', what he calls his 'charlatanism', is present throughout his Wessex novels, in *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Maiden Castle* in particular, as the author began to shape his understanding of Welsh mythology into an expression of his own philosophy.[105] His attempt to reconstruct separate mythological sources using Rhŷs's scholarship, demonstrates that, like Quirm's interpretation of his Celtic roots, Powys's excavation of the past was as selective as it was primarily an undertaking of the creative imagination. He had expressed an early devotion to the '*idea*' of Wales and its literature twenty years prior to writing *The Complex Vision*, although, as this chapter has shown, this devotion only influenced his novels incrementally. While Wolf Solent is not Welsh,

[105] Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, p. 64.

he is attracted to a woman whose mother claimed to be a descendant of Merlin, and the abstract 'idea' of Wales contributes to the shattering of Wolf's life-illusion. Owen Evans seeks redemption through an antiquarian interest in Welsh literature, specifically its violent and 'incompatible' elements, while for Dud No-man and Enoch Quirm in *Maiden Castle* Welsh ancestry becomes fundamental, not simply to their relationship as father and son, but to experiencing the 'old magic of the mind' through their very idiosyncratic interpretation of Welsh mythology. Indeed, the pre-Christian grail, which for Evans is the symbol of the primordial, mythical power centred on Glastonbury, is in many respects a symbol for the unifying process of Powys's early philosophy and his concurrent theories surrounding the ichthyosaurus-ego. 'It refers us to things beyond itself,' he writes in the introduction to *A Glastonbury Romance*, 'and to things beyond words' (*AGR*, xv). As an iteration in Powys's mind of both the cauldron of the Welsh 'Yr Echwyd' and the Arimathean sacramental chalice, the grail is the symbol of the multiverse and the pursuit of the eternal vision. In this regard Powys's concept of 'Welsh mythology' similarly becomes a collection of images which describe the various grand theories behind the author's 'magical view of life'.

Hooker summarises Powys's evolution in this period as 'always recessive, towards the source of the dream', a comment which gains even greater significance when considered alongside Powys's final major novels.[106] *Maiden Castle* was finished in Corwen, North Wales, where Powys would live for the final decades of his life (1935 – 1963), and it represents a final attempt to access his vision within the landscapes of Wessex. His next three novels – *Morwyn, or the Vengeance of God* (1937), *Owen Glendower* (1940) and *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* (1951) – demonstrate a more complete engagement with the history and mythology of Wales and suggest that, like the author's conception of its introverted people, it is a country and landscape which allowed Powys to realise more fully in his novels his unique understanding of reality.

[106] *Ibid*., p. 66.

Chapter Four: 'mythological pseudo-quasi-pre-historic history!': John Cowper Powys in Wales and the Influence of the *Mabinogi*

Introduction: Powys, myth, and modern Wales

As the previous chapter has argued, John Cowper Powys's 'Welsh mythology' was born out of the early philosophy of *The Complex Vision* (1920) and comprised not simply allusions and reformulations of early Welsh narratives, but a romantic idea of the Welsh people, their landscape and their history, which Powys saw as a natural extension to his own thinking. An anti-modern 'magical view of life' necessary to achieve a new spiritual 'Golden Age' is, Powys claims, already inherent in the natural introversion and submissiveness of the Welsh psyche. Following his move to Corwen, North Wales, in 1935 Powys intensified his focus on Welsh mythological material, in particular the *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi*. This chapter argues that in the three novels *Morwyn* (1937), *Owen Glendower* (1940) and *Porius* (1951), Powys writes his idiosyncratic theory about the Four Branches into the national history and landscape of Wales as an expression of his own philosophy and a justification for his own 'escape' from aspects of modern culture.

Powys's reverence for the people and literature of Wales was apparent relatively early in life, as Chapter Three has detailed, but it was not until he arrived in Corwen that he felt he could truly immerse himself in the culture and history of the nation. He came to see himself as an intermediary, an outsider accepted by both the populace of Corwen (later, too, of the mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog, where he and Phyllis moved in 1955) and the bards of the local *eisteddfodau* and *gorsedd*.[1] In this way he resembles several of his own characters, men such as Rhisiart ab Owen from *Owen Glendower* and even Glyndŵr himself who claim Welsh lineage but were raised and educated in an

[1] A *gorsedd* is a gathering of bards first established in the late eighteenth century and differs from an *eisteddfod* in its smaller size and poetic aims. While Corwen had only once hosted the National Eisteddfod in 1919, its more localised *eisteddfodau* and *gorseddau* were regular occurrences by the time Powys arrived. He seemed to integrate himself into the area's cultural life so well that in May of 1936 he was initiated as a bard at one of these *gorseddau* and was given the ceremonial name 'Ioan'. Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, p. 330.

English milieu. No matter how assimilated Powys might have felt, however, or how amicably he and Phyllis were treated by the Corwen locals, he was nevertheless most likely to have been perceived as an outsider: he remained an eccentric, upper-class English gentleman, 'well-meaning and courteous,' writes Herbert Williams, '[but] a stranger nonetheless'.[2] His own claims of Welsh ancestry remained unsubstantiated. Powys was certainly aware of the economic hardships experienced by many of the Welsh people and suggested that their native language might offer a symbolic focus to rally around, the task at hand to keep burning 'the traditional flame of national life' (*OC*, 80). Like Arthur Machen, Powys would never learn to speak fluent Welsh, though he seemed to have achieved some proficiency in reading it (60). To exercise any influence in the political realm, Powys felt that the Welsh spirit must 'bank itself up' (134) in the language and express itself in the written word. Welsh-language writers such as Kate Roberts and other local writers from North Wales were indeed attempting to encapsulate the struggles of working-class life during this period, though Powys may not have been fluent enough in Welsh to be able to read them.[3] His emphasis on cultural stability, however, was not so dissimilar to the aims of *Plaid Cymru* when it was formed in 1925 and was a rallying counterargument to Matthew Arnold's assertion in the 1860s, that the eradication of the Welsh language was the only practical way for the Welsh people to participate in British politics.[4]

While Williams suggests that Powys's 'assiduous analysis' of the Welsh character might be considered 'patronizing or irritating' by some, there is something distinctly unappealing about it given the ideologies being espoused in Germany at that time; what Powys calls the 'difficult and delicate art of sinking into native soul and your native *soil*' [Powys's italics] (*OC*, 61) is not so far from *Blut und Boden*, the almost mystical doctrine adopted by the Nazi party which established a kind of 'primordiality', an uncorrupted connection between a land and its people.[5] Powys detested Nazi

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[2] Herbert Williams, *John Cowper Powys* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1997), p. 138.
[3] See Michelle Deininger, 'The Short Story in the Twentieth Century', *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, 428-445, pp. 432-434.
[4] In his lectures on Celtic literature, Arnold declared that the continued promotion of the Welsh language was a 'mischief-making delusion' that prevents Britain from becoming a homogeneous political whole and is 'a necessity of what is called modern civilisation'. 'For all modern purposes, I repeat, let us all as soon as possible be one people; let the Welshman speak English, and, if he is an author, let him write in English'. Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, pp. 12-13.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 138; Greg Garrard, 'Heidegger, Nazism, Ecocriticism', *ISLE* 17.ii (2010), 251-271, p. 251.

ideology, however, particularly 'that Devil Hitler', and Nicholas Birn contends that such a focus on the Celtic peoples represented a radical stand against the Nazi Teutonism.[6] It is certainly true that Powys never conceives of any racial hierarchy as existing between the ancient Welsh and the Anglo-Saxons, for example, or between the Welsh and the invading Celts, but when in 'Welsh Aboriginals' he calls for 'an Ethnological-Psychological-Historical Branch' of the Herald's Office in Aberystwyth to examine the claims to 'true Non-Aryan Berber blood' (8), it becomes difficult to ignore the almost manic racial obsession in his outlook.

At the time Powys moved to Corwen, Wales was on the verge of experiencing a partial rejuvenation, following a period of severe unemployment immediately after the First World War. The old Welsh industries of coal and iron, which had relied on steam and rail power, had supported the war effort up until 1918 but were now outdated; newer amenities such as electricity and the motor car were taking their place in England.[7] The situation had been worsening throughout the 1920s and the unemployed were encouraged to move to more populous areas in England in a strategy known as 'transference'.[8] Conditions were particularly dire in the south of Wales: in 1934 over 60 per cent of men living in the Rhondda Valleys declared themselves to be out of work, and in Merthyr Tydfil and the Dowlais steelworks, areas which had prospered throughout the nineteenth century, it was over 70 per cent.[9] Indeed, much of the country quickly became the primary example in the British press for 'industrial stagnation'.[10] Parts of North Wales, including the area of Denbighshire where Powys settled, were becoming increasingly anglicised: the ability to speak Welsh in more industrialised regions fell to below fifty percent in the 1920s and 30s.[11]

Although Powys continued to maintain that he was descended from Welsh princes, his engagement with the country's floundering national spirit in the interwar period was limited. By the time Britain had entered the Second World War Powys and Phyllis were living in comparative poverty, at that

[6] Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, p. 346; Nicholas Birns, '*Porius* and *Owen Glendower*: John Cowper Powys's Radical Medievalism', *The Powys Journal* 26 (2016), 32-56, p. 38.
[7] John Davies, p. 578.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880-1980*, p. 229.
[10] Stephanie Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain*, p. 46.
[11] Morgan, p. 245.

stage surviving on the meagre royalties received from Powys's earlier novels. During the winters of 1940 and 1941 they were barely able to keep a fire going, and consequently the water pipes froze.[12] Although relatively isolated from threats of bombing, the effects of the Second World War were certainly felt in Corwen; no aircraft ever flew over the town, and yet Powys was afraid that he could meet parachutists 'on my lonely walks with Nature' and he worried for his brothers still living on the Dorset coast, only seventy miles from the Germans after they had invaded France.[13]

Powys and contemporary *Mabinogi* scholarship

Chapter Three has demonstrated how Powys had already begun to develop his theories about the *Mabinogi* and Welsh literature some years before moving to Wales. Many of these do not seem so unorthodox when considered in the light of early twentieth-century scholarship. By the time Powys had begun to write *Owen Glendower* several major assessments of the Four Branches had been published, all of which argued to varying degrees that the tales contained vestiges of a far older mythology. The writings of John Rhŷs on this subject (whose *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (1891) had already influenced Powys's Wessex novels) were guided in part by the theories of German philologist Max Müller (1823-1900). Müller's 'solar mythology' hypothesis contended that the mythologies of certain ancient cultures, whose languages are descended from the common parent language 'Indo-European' (languages which include Indic, Iranian, Greek, Germanic and Celtic), contained natural metaphors which describe the movement of the sun.[14] Thus the Greek myth of Daphne and Apollo, for example, represents the sun being chased by the dawn.[15] Although Rhŷs acknowledged the obsolescence of Müller's theory in his preface to *Arthurian Legend*, both *Arthurian*

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[12] Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, p. 346.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 348.
[14] Michael P. Carrol, 'Some Third Thoughts on Max Müller and Solar Mythology', *European Journal of Sociology* 26.ii (1985), 263-281; it is generally accepted that certain European language patterns and mythological themes are derived from a collective Indo-European migratory people whose culture emphasised hierarchy, patriarchy and war. Müller's 'solar deity' theory, however, had been discarded by the end of the nineteenth century. See 'Indo-European Mythology', *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, ed. David Leeming (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156690.001.0001/acref-9780195156690-e-776> [accessed 27 May 2021].
[15] *Ibid*., p. 269.

Legend and *Celtic Heathendom* (based on his Hibbert lectures from 1886) were nevertheless influenced by many of his claims: Rhŷs identifies the Welsh hero Lleu Llaw Gyffes as a sun god, his narrative in *Math fab Mathonwy* as 'a nature myth about light', and contends that many events in the Four Branches demonstrate vestiges of diurnal metaphors (indeed, Rhŷs's 'dark divinity', discussed in Chapter Three, is part of this very framework).[16] Pwyll is also considered a lesser sun god, or solar deity.[17] While Müller's theories were accepted in academia during his lifetime, most of them have since been discredited, although modern scholars of what is known now as 'proto-Indo-European' linguistics still consider Greek, Roman and Norse (and other) mythologies to have descended from this far older parent culture.[18] Thus, while Rhŷs's writings on this subject were quickly superseded, this chapter will show that his application of the solar myth to Welsh material in tern influenced Powys, particularly in his depiction of the revolutionary Owain Glyndŵr.[19]

During the early twentieth century the Welsh scholar W. J. Gruffydd (1881-1954) sought to identify original sources for the Four Branches and concluded that much of its mythological content was borrowed from Irish tradition and subsequently 'improved' upon, making the *Mabinogion* 'a perfect masterpiece of colour and form'.[20] He would later apply this method to individual studies of the tales in his *Math vab Mathonwy* (1928) and *Rhiannon* (1953). Most striking, and most applicable to Powys's view, however, is Gruffydd's assertion that the Four Branches contain evidence of 'extreme' antiquity and hint at an older, more 'primitive' mythology beneath the surface, an idea which Matthew Arnold first put forward in his Oxford lectures during the late 1860s.[21] Powys read Gruffydd, but had no interest in the *Mabinogi*'s possible Irish roots: 'I am rather disappointed with Gruffydd's book on Math fab Mathonwy,' he writes in a diary entry. 'Oh! none of them have the

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[16] Rhŷs, *Arthurian Legend*, p. v; John Rhŷs, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1888), p. 383.
[17] Andrew Breeze, 'Some Critics of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *Constructing Nations. Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of Tom Shippey*, ed. Andrew Wawn (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 155-166, p. 159.
[18] Carrol, p. 271.
[19] Juliette Wood, 'Folk Narrative Research in Wales at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century', p. 335; Arthur Machen was also aware of Müller's theory and its application to the grail legend, but he declared it 'frankly nonsensical', an explanation which 'has now gone that way of all such rubbish'. Arthur Machen, 'The Sangraal', *The Academy* 73 (August 1907), 797-799, p. 797.
[20] W. J. Gruffydd, 'The Mabinogion', *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1914), 14-80, p. 24.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 42; Arnold, p. 55.

Imagination of old John Rhys [sic]! he was the one! he was the "God Discoverer" of Welsh Mythology'.[22] This theory that the *Mabinogi* was a 'corrupt' version of something purer was also developed by Edward Anwyl (1866-1914) – a former pupil of Rhŷs at Jesus College – who assumed that each of the Four Branches represented a stage in the life cycle of a heroic Celt, an idea possibly derived from Müller's solar cycle. Anwyl saw the Branches as narrating the birth, youthful feats, disappearance, and death of the hero Pryderi, an idea which modern critics now consider a preconception made to fit Anwyl's own invented pattern (Pryderi is rarely at the centre of the action, and is often entirely absent).[23] Anwyl points out, too, that the antagonists of the Four Branches are either from Gwynedd, the Dee Valley, or North Britain, while Pryderi and the characters from the south are portrayed in a far more sympathetic light.[24] This divide between the north and the south, since noted by Jeffrey Gantz and Alwyn and Brinley Rees, constitutes the basis for one of Powys's wilder claims – which, this chapter argues, went on to inform *Owen Glendower* and *Porius* – that the *Mabinogi* is a record of an earlier conquered race, namely the native Welsh people, who, in Powys's view, were subjugated by successive invasions of Celts.[25] For Powys the Four Branches, obscured by thousands of years of mythology, contain 'hints and glimpses and suggestions' of 'what life was like' (*OC*, 13) for this race.

Rhŷs continued to affect Powys's thinking about Wales, specifically in his theory of a pre-Celtic, aboriginal Welsh people, variations of which had previously influenced Machen's depiction of the *tylwyth teg* in Chapter One. Rhŷs and David Brynmor-Jones speculated about the origins of the Welsh in the opening chapter of *The Welsh People* (1900), concluding that there may have been native non-Indo-Europeans living in this area of Britain before the successive invasions of the 'Goidelic' and 'Brythonic' Celts.[26] They based this claim on the hypothesis that the 'Goidelic' language (one branch of the two groups of Insular Celtic languages comprising modern day Irish, Scots Gaelic and Manx)

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[22] Powys, *Petrushka and the Dancer*, p. 234, 28 Feb 1937.
[23] Breeze, p. 159.
[24] Breeze, p. 160.
[25] Alwyn and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), pp. 176-8; Jeffrey Gantz, 'Thematic Structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *The* Mabinogi*: A Book of Essays*, ed. C. W. Sullivan (London: Garland, 1996), 265-76, p. 247.
[26] John Rhŷs and David Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), pp. 11-13.

shows evidence of a 'non-Aryan' influence (i.e. non-Indo-European), suggesting, they continue, that the Goidels subjugated the natives and that the two cultures integrated before the coming of the Brythons, when the same process then re-occurred.[27] '[It] would be unsafe to assume that the later elements predominate,' they write, 'for the Celtic invaders, both Goidels and Brythons, may have come in comparatively small numbers, not to mention the fact that the Aboriginal race, having been here possibly thousands of years before the first Aryan arrived, may have had such an advantage in the matter of acclimatisation, that it alone survives in force'.[28] This aboriginal theory had its roots in earlier, now mostly discredited antiquarian writings about the Picts, much of which conjectured that this group of tribes were far older than any other inhabitants of Iron Age Britain, and that they had developed a separate language and a culture based on matrilinear inheritance.[29] While Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones similarly suggested the Picts to be the 'Aborigines' of Britain, this was based on a wilful reading of insubstantial sources.[30]

The absurdity of Powys's theory lies not in the idea that people existed in the area of land now known as Wales before the earliest Celtic migrations; this is neither controversial now, nor at the time Powys was writing. Evidence was scant and radiocarbon dating had not yet been invented, but the discovery of the remains of a human skeleton nicknamed 'The Red Lady of Paviland' (due to a misidentification of the sex on its discovery in 1823) on the Gower coast was, after re-examination in 1912, thought to date from the early Palaeolithic.[31] It is now generally accepted, as it was when Powys wrote his short essay 'Welsh Aboriginals (*or* the real Welsh)', that communities of humans have existed in 'unbroken sequence' in Wales since the end of the Ice Age.[32] Powys's claim, however, is that these people were an identifiable whole and that they displayed emotional characteristics which have survived into the present day in the blood of the Welsh people: '[we] are the proudest people in the world,' he writes. 'We are also the humblest … Both qualities are peculiar to us as a race and have

[27] *Ibid*.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 13.
[29] Ronald Hutton, *Pagan Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 288.
[30] Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People*, p. 14; Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, p. 288.
[31] Stephanie Swainston and Alison Brookes, 'Paviland Cave and the "Red Lady": The History of Collection and Investigation', *Paviland Cave and the 'Red Lady': A Definitive Report*, ed. Stephen Aldhouse-Green (Bristol: Western Academic & Specialist Press, 2000), 19-46, p. 31.
[32] John Davies, p. 2.

been so for at least ten thousand years' (*OC*, 7). The Celts had the greatest cultural impact upon the Welsh, Powys contends, and since then the succeeding invasions of Romans and Normans have merely tempered them, imposing on them their laws, religions and dictionaries – an idea which echoes Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones.

The idea of 'submissive' and 'patient' southerners in the *Mabinogi* further aligns with Powys's view of Wales's pre-Celtic inhabitants; the conflict between these peaceable people and the northern invaders and their 'violent deeds' and deception plays out in his fiction as though it were historical truth and had real implications for understanding the modern psychology of the Welsh.[33] Ultimately Powys's idea of the *Mabinogi* is that it contains in symbol, form and mystery the secrets of the universe: all its stages 'are within us', he writes, suggesting an essentially Jungian conception of mythology through which we live out the same primordial narratives, an idea which Garner develops in his later fiction, discussed in Chapter Five.[34] 'It unearths and re-embodies [legends] so monstrous, so mysterious, so gigantic, that we shrink from them with a sort of pre-natal terror … These are the everlasting fairy-tales of all the most ancient tribes of men'.[35] In this way Powys's incorporation of the *Mabinogi* into his later works, whether structurally or in passing reference, is emblematic of his advocation to return to the primitive, magical way of thinking outlined in the previous chapter. Informed primarily by a reading of Rhŷs's published Hibbert Lectures (*Celtic Heathendom* and *Arthurian Legend*) Powys's first three Welsh novels re-enact what he viewed as the 'aboriginal' pattern of submission and escape that unifies the Four Branches.

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[33] Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, pp. 176-8.
[34] John Cowper Powys, introduction to his poetry collection *Lucifer*, quoted in *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* (New York: Overlook Ducksworth, 2007), p. 9. Hereafter *P* in the text.
[35] *Ibid*.

Owain Glyndŵr: solar divinity and national redeemer

The intention to write a historical novel, one which would cover the final two decades of the life of the Welsh revolutionary Owain Glyndŵr, began to form in Powys's mind almost as soon as he and Phyllis moved to Corwen, before he had even started his anti-vivisection novel *Morwyn*.[36] It was Phyllis who suggested the idea for the book, and urged her partner to turn to this 'dominant subject', that he ought to 'bring in Reality in the more stirring & historic form of large national movements, both political & religious' (1 Sep 1935).[37] Powys began the novel in the Valle Crucis Chapter House and wrote the final sentences on Mynydd-y-Gaer (the local name for the hillfort Caer Drewyn, outside Corwen).[38] Glyndŵr has long been a figure whom Elissa R. Henken has termed a 'national redeemer' for Wales, a historical or legendary personage who, it is believed, will one day return in a time of crisis to save the British, or often more specifically the Welsh.[39] Applying his own theories about the *Mabinogi* to the story of Glyndŵr, Powys establishes an atmosphere of Welsh myth around Glendower's campaign, thereby rejecting the 'Reality' suggested to him by Phyllis in favour of his own romanticised conception of Welsh national history. He transforms the redeemer narrative to reflect his own idea about the introverted Welsh psyche; while Powys's Glendower (Powys uses the anglicised name) initially conforms to Müller's solar mythology hypothesis, he eventually develops to fit the pattern which the author identifies as recurring throughout the history of the 'aboriginal' Welsh, one of submission and continued survival. Powys therefore aligns the historical Glyndŵr and the historical Wales with the pursuit of his own spiritual 'Golden Age'.

The historical Glyndŵr was a member of the Anglo-Welsh gentry of the Welsh marches, descended on his father's side from the Princes of Powys, who led a revolt against the rule of Henry IV between

[36] Krissdóttir, *Descents of Memory*, p. 327.
[37] Powys, *Petrushka*, p. 193.
[38] John Cowper Powys, *Letters to Nicholas Ross*, ed. Arthur Uphill (London: Bertram Rota, 1971), p. 31, 14 January 1940.
[39] Henken identifies eight separate 'national redeemer' figures associated with Wales: Hiriell, Cynan, Cadwaladr, Arthur, Owain, Owain Lawgoch, Owain Glyndŵr and Henry Tudor. The fundamental concept behind the redeemer, writes Henken, is the 'unity of Britain, according to which the whole island was once, and should be again, under one governance, by the Britons, the proper rulers of the island'. Elissa R. Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), p. 25.

1400 and 1415. The initial motivation for the uprising is uncertain, but following a dispute with a local lord and friend of the king in 1400 Glyndŵr declared himself Prince of Wales at his estate at Glyn Dyfrdwy.[40] It is clear that Powys intended at first to shape *Owen Glendower* using as many of the available historical details as possible, and the titles of the books Powys borrowed from the University Library of Bangor convey his initial commitment to accuracy. *Owen Glendower: Owain Glyn Dŵr* (1931) by J. E. Lloyd and A. G. Bradley's *Owen Glyndŵr and the Last Struggle for Welsh Independence* (1902) provided biographical detail, while books such as J. H. Wylie's four-volume *History of England under Henry IV* (1884-98) and R. E. M. Wheeler's *Prehistoric and Roman Wales* (1925) supplied the political and historic backdrop.[41] Yet while Powys had chosen Glyndŵr's rise and fall as the subject of his historical romance, he nevertheless became fixated on the supernatural and occult qualities of the Welshman which have emerged out of rumour and legend to colour his character. Powys alludes in an essay to 'some mysterious indefinable quality' of Glyndŵr, 'some occult personal power which exalted him even while it often betrayed him' (*OC*, 81). Indeed, Robin Wood notes that while the main events of the novel closely follow recorded history, Glendower himself 'is very much the creation of [Powys's] imagination', one who turns his back on the battlefield to focus on his own crisis of the spirit.[42] The rumours of occultism and supernatural prophecy surrounding Glyndŵr's campaign allow Powys to cast his own version of Glyndŵr in a similar role to his previous 'magician' characters John Geard in *A Glastonbury Romance* and Enoch 'Urien' Quirm in *Maiden Castle*. It is this reconstruction of the essential mythological attributes of the Welsh people within a historical Wales which led Jeremy Hooker to conclude that Powys had '[imposed] his own consciousness' onto the country.[43] *Owen Glendower* is not entirely a realist novel, as various critics, such as Knight, have labelled it, due to Powys's appropriation of the period as a scene on which to lay out his singular philosophical views surrounding the native Welsh.

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[40] J. E. Lloyd, *Owen Glendower: Owen Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), pp. 30-31.
[41] W. J. Keith, *Aspects of John Cowper Powys's Owen Glendower* (London: The Powys Society, 2008), p. 16.
[42] Robin Wood, 'Owen Glendower: Powys's Faustian Prince', *The Powys Journal* v (1995), 92-107, p. 94.
[43] Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, pp. 77-8.

Glyndŵr has become as much a figure of Welsh legend as he is a genuine historical person. Over the centuries he has gained the reputation of national hero almost at the level of Arthur, Cynan (legendary founder of Brittany) or Cadwaladr (king of Gwynedd in the mid-seventh century). Just as the prophecy is attached to Arthur, so too Glyndŵr has become a symbol to rally around as 'a focal point for legendary and nationalist sentiment'.[44] His symbolic status has little to do with his portrayal in literature, for in the centuries following his death he is written about as a 'most profligate rebel' with a 'swelling mind', but, notes J. E. Lloyd, there are periods when his legend 'seems to travel underground, neglected by men of letters and enshrined only in the hearts of the people'.[45] Lloyd's final comment in his biography of Glyndŵr underscores this point:

> He stands alone among the great figures of Welsh history in that no bard attempted to sing his elegy; this we must attribute, not merely to the mystery which shrouded his end, but also to the belief that he had but disappeared, and would rise again in his wrath in the hour of his country's sorest need.[46]

Like those about Arthur, legends surrounding Glyndŵr's actions in life and eventual mysterious death have contributed to the inseparability of his history from mythology. Modern historians recognise that the full story of Glyndŵr's revolt may never be told, as the evidence is 'skewed, inaccurate or simply missing'.[47] This uncertainty gave Powys the freedom to invent his own Glyndŵr who would fit into the author's pattern of 'impulsiveness' and eventual submission.

The first section of *Owen Glendower* establishes a clear distinction between an empirical, materialistic England and an intuitive, passionate and numinous Wales, thereby conveying the same stereotypical 'othering' of the Welsh which Powys expresses in his essays in this period – and which Alan Garner would also depict in his novel *The Owl Service* (see Chapter Five). At the opening of the novel Rhisiart ab Owen, a scholar of law and a distant cousin of Glendower's, is travelling from the University of Oxford to the castle of Dinas Bran in North Wales to join the rebellion. As with many 'Powys heroes' – characters whose physical appearance and general 'life-illusion', or outlook, can be

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[44] Henken, *National Redeemer*, p. 2.
[45] Lloyd, *Owen Glendower: Owen Glyn Dŵr*, p. 1.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 161.
[47] Gideon Brough, *The Rise and Fall of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), p. 1.

identified with the author himself – Rhisiart is returning to his ancestral homeland, and though he is half-Norman in blood with an educated, 'rational' mind, he is driven by idealism to participate in the restoration of the 'lost glories of the old chiefs of Powys'.[48] Having been taught the language and legends of Wales by his nurse Modry as a child, Rhisiart frequently relates events or characters to those of the *Mabinogi*, and to other tales in the *Mabinogion*, acting as a lens through which Powys is able to depict the landscape and actions of Glendower's campaign as repeating patterns set by the original myths. As Rhisiart fastens his horse to a block outside Glendower's *llys* (a small court), for example, his mind turns to 'that other horse-block' at the gates of another Welsh court upon which 'the great goddess Rhiannon … had to sit for penance' (*OG*, 115), a reference to events in *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed*, and on being held up at the door he thinks of Culhwch being refused admission at Arthur's gate in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.[49]

By crossing the border into North Wales Rhisiart has left behind what Powys calls 'the heavy rubble of objective truth' (43) which England represents. Powys uses the Welsh term *tynged* ('fate', 'destiny') in his essay 'Welsh Culture' to describe what he identifies as a certain psychological 'peculiarity' (or *cynneddf*) of the Welsh which takes the form of a wayward impulsiveness and a 'whimsical acceptance' of the consequences (*OC*, 44). This *tynged* implies a distinction from the English way of living, where every action is considered and reasoned; in Powys's version of Wales people are ruled by the same fate that rules the characters from Dyfed in the *Mabinogi*. In a scene in *Pwyll*, for example, Powys sees the same 'vital' trait in the character of Pwyll, when, out of a kind of 'arbitrariness' (44), he decides to sit on the *gorsedd* of Arberth and await either a wounding blow or a sight of wonder.[50] It is this same spontaneity and acceptance of whatever comes next which Rhisiart inevitably adopts: he finds himself more compelled to place himself in dangerous situations and his actions are rarely rationalised, but rather described using phrases from the *Mabinogi*. These include the cessation of time which descends upon Rhisiart 'like a clap of thunder and fall of mist' (*OG*, 45)

[48] John Cowper Powys, *Owen Glendower* (London: Pan, 1978), p. 8. Hereafter *OG* in the text.
[49] In *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* Rhiannon is falsely accused of murdering her son (later named as Pyrderi) and her punishment is to wait outside the court at Arberth for seven years 'and offer to carry guests and strangers on her back to the court if they permitted it'. Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 17.
[50] See Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 8.

as he draws his sword against a band of Chirk bowmen intent on burning the maiden Tegolin and Mad Huw the friar.[51] The phrase, likely Powys's own translation, signals the sudden enchantment put upon the land in the Third Branch, *Manawydan fab Llŷr*, suggesting that Rhisiart's riding into combat is an unmeditated, yet pre-determined act, one which recalls the particular magic of the *Mabinogi*. The psychological 'destiny' which Powys sees as inherent in the Welsh is similarly invoked when Tegolin watches Rhisiart draw his sword and compares him to Pwyll 'riding against Hafgan, crowned King of Annwn' (53).[52] On hearing Tegolin's comparison Rhisiart admits to experiencing a mental shock: 'I was thinking so hard … that everything seemed only half-real, everything swayed and heaved and melted' (54). 'I don't think it's ever *we* who are brave,' replies Tegolin, 'I think it's something inside us'. This irrational compulsion to act unpredictably is for Powys one of the fundamental 'peculiarities' of the Welsh; Rhisiart's return to his homeland thus brings out his inherited 'aboriginal' characteristics which Powys derived from the *Mabinogi*.

The physical descriptions of Powys's Glendower and his narrative arc over the course of the novel imply a close reading of John Rhŷs's theories about the *Mabinogi*. Müller, and later Rhŷs, often relied on descriptions of colour when establishing a character's role in what they argued were solar metaphors, and Glendower's clothing appears to resemble the stages of the sun's path across the sky.[53] Rhisiart's first encounter with Glendower, for example, emphasises features which suggest the image of the sun rising from the dawn: his 'dark tunic' is fitted with 'a broad purple belt' and 'purple mantle', and laid on top of these is a 'massive gold brooch' with a twisted golden thread resting on his brow (120). Later when Glendower has disguised himself as a monk in order to rescue Rhisiart and Walter Brut, who are hostages at Valle Crucis, he reveals his forked beard 'of shining gold' (378) and

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[51] 'As they were sitting there they heard a tumultuous noise, and with the intensity of the noise there fell a blanket of mist so that they could not see each other'. Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 36.

[52] In the First Branch Pywll is transformed into the likeness of Arawn, one of the kings of Annwn, to live in his place for a year and to fight Hafgan, another of Annwn's kings. Pwyll is not only a strong fighter and proves victorious, but he resists the temptation to sleep with Arawn's wife each night in the castle. Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 3-7.

[53] One of the characteristics identified by Rhŷs which suggested the legendary Irish king Cormac mac Airt's status as a solar deity is his radiance, his 'hair of a golden-yellow colour … fairer than the men of the world' (Rhŷs, *Celtic Heathendom*, p. 567). Another solar deity, the Irish god Lug, is said by Rhŷs to have had the epithet 'half crimson … on account, as it is there explained, of Lug's colour being red from sun-set till morn' (p. 618).

gold breast plate, and it seems to Rhisiart that ‘from the man’s figure emanated a supernatural light’ (379). As the novel progresses and Glendower’s campaign begins to fail and his periods of introspection lengthen, the solar metaphor develops as Glendower’s clothes become darker until he is ‘attired … completely in black’ (694).

As a solar deity in Powys’s formulation Glendower’s character is further tempered by the ‘dark divinity’ of the novel, the nobleman’s friend and confidant Broch-o’-Meifod. As Chapter Three has elaborated, the ‘dark divinity’ or *rex mortuus* (in Rhŷs’s terminology), though less obviously associated with Müller’s theory of natural metaphors when Powys first refers to it in *A Glastonbury Romance*, is a figure who physically resembles a corpse and whose philosophy involves a kind of death mysticism. According to Rhŷs the dark divinity is usually the sun hero’s ‘task-master’ or advisor, and is the god of both beginnings and endings (symbolising the rising and setting of the sun); Rhŷs identifies Uryen Rheged, Brân the Blessed, and Uthr Bendragon as avatars of this divinity.[54] Following Rhŷs’s scheme, Powys’s ‘gigantic’, ‘striking[ly]’ bald Broch is frequently said to resemble Brân in physical size and in his ‘corpse’-like appearance.[55] His excursions to the shore and rock pools at Harlech recall Brân striding across the Irish Sea in the Second Branch, *Branwen ferch Llŷr*, as big as a mountain, his eyes and nose like ‘two lakes on either side of [a] ridge’, and at the appearance of the comet which is believed to signal Glendower’s victory Broch speaks out of the darkness ‘like the Head of Brân’ (472), proclaiming that the portent ‘has nothing to do with [Glendower]’.[56] It is, however, Broch’s philosophy, that holds death as the ultimate good and life as simply a ‘distorted mirage of reality’ (611), which provides the antithesis to Glendower’s revolutionary spirit of the first half of the novel, and ultimately leads Glendower to his defeat and to seek refuge in the wilderness until his death.

A further aspect of Glendower’s emerging ‘aboriginal’ nature which challenges his heroic Celtic exterior is his ‘occult’ mental projections, intended by Glendower to remove his mind from his body. He initiates these attacks which often take the form of seizures and appear to Rhisiart as if

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[54] Rhŷs, *Arthurian Legend*, p. 233; *ibid*., 260.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 418; p. 420.
[56] Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 29.

Glendower's soul 'had left his body altogether' (121). Although Powys does not make the specifics clear – Glendower is able to sink into himself by projecting his consciousness, thereby enacting a kind of out-of-body experience – this process is part of what the author calls Glendower's 'mythology of escape', a way of thinking which he regards as essential to the psychology of the pre-Celtic Welsh people. 'Other races love and hate, conquer and are conquered,' he writes towards the end of *Owen Glendower*'s final chapter: 'This race [the native Welsh] avoids and evades, pursues and is pursued. Its soul is forever making a double flight. It flees into a circuitous *Inward*. It retreats into a circuitous *Outward*' (889). This capacity for continual mental retreat is the reason for the Welsh people's survival, and the psychological space into which Glendower would 'fling his soul' during his 'attacks' or escapes is often characterised as 'an ethereal twilight of being' (562). This 'twilight of being' is for Powys the primitive mind, a state of enchantment which suggests the 'magical thinking' of his early philosophy.

Glendower's role as a national redeemer, both in the immediate campaign of Powys's novel and in the later folklore and legends surrounding his death and fabled return, represents the final subversion of the Celtic solar divinity as laid out by Rhŷs. According to Rhŷs, whose theories now appear absurd in the light of modern scholarship, the actions and characteristics of Lleu Llaw Gyffes in the second half of *Math* resemble the movements of the sun: the name of his horse can be translated as 'Steed of Yellow-White Footsteps'; he marries the woman made of flowers Blodeuwedd who for Rhŷs is a metaphor for the sun following the dawn; and he dies with his foot placed on the edge of a bath – the sun, in other words, setting over the sea.[57] Finally Lleu's rebirth is brought about by Gwydion, 'that is,' writes Rhŷs, '[Gwydion] fetches the sun back to illumine the world once more'.[58] In the final chapter of the novel Glendower enacts a similar return from the dead after hiding as a hermit on the summit of Mynydd-y-Gaer. Already a folkloric belief has developed, recounted at the chapter's opening, that Glendower is said to be playing chess with King Arthur in the heart of the mountain (871), and for Glendower this kind of tale serves to preserve his 'spirit', his secret sinking back into

[57] Rhŷs, *Celtic Heathendom*, p. 385.
[58] *Ibid*.

his native landscape, which ‘will be the secret of all *entire Welshmen*’ (919). He dies just before Rhisiart is about to offer him Henry V’s pardon, yet before the moment of death Glendower proclaims that he has escaped ‘into Annwn’ and his voice shakes just as ‘Lleu-Llaw-Gyffes shook the rotting flesh from the eagle-bones’ (916-7).

With this final scene *Owen Glendower* confirms the reincorporation of the Celtic aspects of the *Mabinogi* into what Powys considered the older vestiges of an ‘aboriginal’ culture. Powys acknowledges Rhŷs’s *Mabinogi* theory at the very end with his reference to Lleu, but he ultimately eschews the solar rebirth myth in favour of his own fiction of Welsh withdrawal and resulting endurance. The persistent comparisons of characters and events with those in the Four Branches, especially seen through the eyes of the outsider Rhisiart, demonstrate Powys’s desire to project upon Wales and its native people the same innate mythological qualities he had identified in its medieval literature. Glendower accepts the role of national redeemer, explaining to Broch that his soul would blend with the land so that every Welshman ‘shall feel me in my bones’ (914), an act far more powerful than the winning of ‘external victories’ (914) and which recasts the historical Glyndŵr as Powys’s own philosophical ideal.

'[The] world *outside the world!*': Annwn in *Morwyn* and *Owen Glendower*

> … for there is no doubt that a 'difficult country' such as Wales undoubtedly is, lends itself better than anything else to the preservation, through thousands and thousands of ages, of the aboriginal blood. Think of the forests when the Celts first harassed us! I have long had the notion that the expression *Touch Wood*! is not a bad symbol for the harmless, patient, unfathomable, evasive soul which serves the Age of Iron and yet is never caught by it; but always can escape. (*OC*, 9)

One particular aspect of Welsh mythology which represented a significant part of Powys's personal vision in this period was Annwn or Annwfn, the Welsh otherworld.[59] Depicted in various guises throughout Welsh literature, and more broadly in Celtic literature, the otherworld was 'located on this earth' and often took the form of an island or a land beneath the waves or 'beyond the mist'.[60] For Powys it was a state of mind expressed through landscape or allegory, a realm in which life and death could exist simultaneously, as discussed in Chapter Three, and the point of access for a 'concealed past' (*MC*, 3). Part of the 'essence' of Annwn is what Powys viewed as a particular quality of the Welsh mind, its 'airy detachment from pedestrian reality' (*OC*, 43); the 'difficult' terrain of the country symbolises the mental space into which Powys's 'aboriginals' had withdrawn since the first Celtic invasion and allows for an imagining of multiple otherworlds accessible only to the 'true' Welsh. The concept of Annwn is developed in *Owen Glendower* and the short novel *Morwyn* (1937) both as part of the psychological core of Powys's 'mythology' and as the physical landscape of Wales, coming to resemble the 'ichthyosaurus ego' of the author's early philosophy, part of the human psyche which can be reached by sinking into a primitive reptilian and vegetative form of consciousness – thus reclaiming the 'Golden Age' of the spirit. In *Owen Glendower* Annwn exists as a spiritual parallel to the landscape, whereas in *Morwyn* it is characterised as a principle which is

[59] *Annw(f)n* has several possible etymologies: intensive prefix *an-* + *dwfn* 'deep' – 'the very deep' or 'abyss'; negative prefix *an-* + *dwfn* (homonym) 'world' – the 'not-[this]-world', the 'Unworld'; and *an-* (here meaning 'in') + *dwfn* 'world' – the 'in-world' or the world within this one. See Patrick Simms-Willams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 57.
[60] Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World: According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (New York: Octagon Books, 1980), p. 27.

universal to Indo-European cultures, a location below hell which can be accessed through certain local Welsh mythological sites.[61]

The idea that the topography and land formation of Wales had influenced the mindset of its population was very appealing to Powys. The relationship between physical landscape and psychology is a consistent feature across Powys's earlier novels, but in the case of both *Morwyn* and *Owen Glendower* the setting is not influenced by personal recollection. His previous Wessex novels, from *Wolf Solent* to *Weymouth Sands*, were written in upstate New York and were effectively versions of remembered landscapes. In this way the Dorchester-set *Maiden Castle*, most of which Powys wrote when he was living in the town itself, caused tremendous difficulty; whereas he had earlier relied on childhood memories of South England, here he was confronted with the reality of a contemporary landscape.[62] Wales, however, whose topography was completely fresh to Powys and remained in his eyes mostly unchanged from at least the fifteenth century, provided a canvas unmediated by personal recollection, and yet the author imposed a temporal (and, in the case of *Morwyn*, mythical) distance on the novels produced in this period: while the Wessex novels look towards Wales, once Powys finally arrived he turned instead to the country's past in order to explore his concept of Annwn – one which was antithetical to a scientific world view. His idea of Wales was inspired not by its modern reality (his discarded attempts to write about contemporary Wales following *Owen Glendower* are discussed later in this chapter), but on a version of its mythology which corresponded with his own views.

[61] It is possible that Powys's conception of Annwn as occupying a mental or metaphysical space (as well as in the physical landscape) is derived in part from Iolo Morganwg's writings. In a letter to Gerard Casey in 1938, Powys reports having purchased *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*: 'It's a huge heavy book as big as a family bible & it's got *all* in it!', but it is not known whether he read anything else of Iolo's. See 'Letters to Gerard Casey, 1937-40', *Powys Journal* 5 (1995), 153-75, pp. 169-70. T. W. Rolleston, whom Garner read (see Chapter Five), took much of Iolo's ideas about Annwn and incorporated them into his *Myths & Legends of the Celtic Race* (1911). The totality of being, according to Iolo's bardic system, is represented 'by three concentric circles', all of which were created by God in Annwn (T. W. Rolleston, *Celtic* (London: Senate, 1994), p. 333). Iolo also envisioned a series of spiritual gradations, although this does not seem to have influenced Powys: all beings 'originate in the lowest point of existence, (*Annwn*, extreme depth; Hell in the vulgar acceptation), wrote Iolo, from whence they are in regular progression 'moving towards good'. See Iolo Morganwg, 'The History of the Bards', *Bardic Circles: National, Regional and Personal Identity in the Bardic Vision of Iolo Morganwg*, ed. Cathryn A. Charnell-White (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 169-251, p. 177.
[62] Powys, *The Dorset Year*, p. xvii.

The town of Corwen is situated within the area of North Wales most associated with Glyndŵr: the ruins of the Norman castle at Glyn Dyfrdwy, part of Glyndŵr's paternal inheritance, is three miles from the centre of Corwen, and several miles further along the river Dee the thirteenth-century Castell Dinas Bran is built on the site of an Iron Age hillfort. Powys and Phyllis spent much of their time visiting these and other locations of 'Glendower country', including Valle Crucis Abbey, where the bard Iolo Goch is buried, and in 1937 Powys's brother Littleton drove them to Meifod and Mathrafal, both important sites of kings and princes of the historic Kingdom of Powys.[63] Not content with the abundance of real historic sites Powys even created several of his own while on his daily walks, the 'RHISIART ROCK', for example, which he finds in a nearby forest, and a sheep-fold which he names 'Dafad Golchfa Broch o' Meifod' ('the sheep-fold of Broch o' Meifod').[64] Powys might be seen to weave his own fiction into the contemporary landscape, not simply looking back in his writing to Welsh history, but here foregrounding and imposing it on existing topography. This naming of the landscape also speaks to what Powys saw as one of the further peculiarities of Wales, that the space between the distant past and modern times is often contracted in the minds of its people – an idea which would also be adopted by Garner, as we shall see in the following chapter. It suggests that the reason Powys turned to the past as the setting for a novel such as *Owen Glendower* is that he felt history in Wales to be more immediate than in England.[65] '[The] eighteenth century remains extremely in evidence,' he writes of his home country, '[with] its decorous shrinking from emotional excess' (*OC*, 63), and yet in Wales – part of its peoples' '*cynneddf*' or 'peculiarity' (45-6) – the last four centuries appear not to have taken place. Powys's version of the otherworld in *Owen Glendower* is based on a similar awareness of the past, a sinking into a collective 'aboriginal' consciousness often accessed through an unchanging, mythical landscape. His Annwn is not so clearly differentiated from this world but exists as a parallel psychological reality, underpinned by the timelessness which Powys saw in modern Wales.

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[63] Krissdóttir, p. 325; *Ibid.*, p. 330.
[64] John Cowper Powys, *Letters to Nicholas Ross*, p. 36 ('The longest day of 1941').
[65] As Hooker has noted this dualistic divide between England and Wales echoes that of Arnold's analysis in *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, that in Wales 'the past still lives' and the 'genuine people, still knows this past', while the Saxon-blooded Englishman has forgotten his. Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, pp. 93-4; Arnold, p. 2.

The location in *Owen Glendower* that most closely resembles the Welsh psyche as imagined by Powys is the Forests of Tywyn, home to the landowner Rhys the Black, 'six miles from Cardigan-town' (*OG*, 562) in Mid-Wales. From Powys's description the forests appear to extend from the mid-West coast down into the area known as Deheubarth, a regional name for the group of realms which included Dyfed. Powys writes that they 'seemed, and perhaps *were*, the primeval woods of Wales, from which aboriginal herdsman had had to flee for safety to the hills' (563); while connected in some sense to genuine Welsh mythological material, the forests feature in a single, long chapter of the novel as a symbol of Powys's developing personal mythology surrounding Annwn:

> Strange and prehistoric were the legends that lingered among the woodmen of Tywyn. Wild tales had been handed down from the remote ancestors of the dwellers here, tales that told of ancient wrongs suffered by the mythical powers of this land, where there still lingered remnants of some great, long-lost, peaceful civilization that had been destroyed by force and enchantment (563).

The forests are a memorial for the central mythical conflict which Powys identified in the Four Branches, the place in which the 'peaceful' native Welsh took refuge from the invading Celts – the Goidels or the later waves of Brythons. Powys describes the 'aggressors', the initial wave of Celtic invaders, as the 'cruel "magicians" of the Bronze Age' (which suggests they were the Goidels, or Gauls, of the first Celtic migration) (563) and refers to the Milky Way above the forests as 'Caer Gwydion' ('Castle of Gwydion') (564).[66] In *Math* it is Gwydion who initiates the conflict between Math in Gwynedd and Pryderi in Dyfed in order to enable his brother Gilfaethwy to sleep with Math's foot-holder.[67] Under Gwydion's contrivance, then, the war between the 'violent' north and 'patient' south which Powys viewed as a reflection of historical truth, is played out, and it is these ancient forests which provided sanctuary for the aboriginal southerners.[68]

Indeed, the folklore of the region confirms it as a place of retreat, linked not only with the oppressive northern magicians, but also with the heroic but 'unlucky Pryderi' (563) and his family. The forests'

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[66] The most obvious source for this is a note to Guest's translation of the Fourth Branch, in which she describes the enchanter as 'a great astronomer … [the] Milky Way is after him termed Caer Gwydion'. *The Mabinogion*, vol. III, trans. Lady Charlotte Guest (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1849), p. 255.

[67] Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 47-48.

[68] Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, p. 176.

gorsedd is associated with Pryderi, 'the much-enduring tutelary genius of the whole district' (563), who is said to have been lord of 'all this land' before the Roman invasion and now, according to Luned, Glendower's lady-in-waiting, his ghost is said to ride on the rain (581).[69] The landscape enshrouds characters in mist, and its watery element allows for the apparent sinking of trunks and sap and 'rain-drenched vegetation' to correspond with characters' emotion: when Glendower's daughter Catherine, for example, is contemplating marriage to Rhisiart (before deciding on Mortimer, thereby securing another ally for Glendower), the 'sinking vapour' of the forest 'drooped about her waist and hung heavier and heavier upon her bosom' and encourages her to 'Yield to [Rhisiart]! … Sink down and give up!' (591). The very landscapes of the southern region lend themselves to the submissive introversion which in Powys's view characterises its natives.

While Rhisiart's own view of the south is as romanticised as Powys's, drawing upon the tales told to him by his nurse Modry 'full of glamour and of its peaceful twilight illusions' (564), the character most affected by Tywyn is Glendower himself. Glendower's mother came from Deheubarth, and it was in this land that 'he had first seen *the two twilights*' [Powys's italics], the earthly twilight and the twilight of Annwn. The sinking, elemental nature of the forest appears to intensify Glendower's 'attacks' or premeditated escapes, a projection of the soul in order to sink further inward. A tree stump five feet high known as 'the Pryderi Tree' rises out of the centre of the *gorsedd*, and it is here that Glendower goes after agreeing to give his daughter to Mortimer. Rhisiart finds him inside the hollow stump in a deep trance, his neck wounded by his own hand, and on waking he speaks to Rhisiart in a voice 'like bubbles from a tree-root bole' (610). When the miller Broch-o'-Meifod arrives and assures Rhisiart that Glendower is only 'play-acting for conscience-sake' (610) it becomes clear that Glendower is simulating a state close to death for the sake of his mental experiments, sinking as far as it is possible to go. This action prefigures his death at the end of the novel: after he has cast off his Celtic and Norman heritage and accepted 'the blood – of the ancient people – in [his] veins' (917), Glendower gives himself the title 'Prince of Annwn' (934). This scene comes sixteen years after his

[69] As is the *gorsedd* at Arberth in Dyfed (or Narberth as it is now known, in Pembrokeshire), featured in *Pwyll* and *Manawydan*. Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 8; p. 36.

self-crowning as 'Prince of Wales' at Glyndyfrdwy, and both are titles which reflect his interiority at different stages in his mental and spiritual progression: one a political declaration, the other signifying a mythological reversion. By turning his back on what Powys views as the more aggressive, warring, and fundamentally Celtic aspects of his character, Glendower eventually arrives at an Annwn that is a psychological and mythical space where the 'magical thinking' of the 'aboriginal mindset' resides. Seeking refuge in the Welsh landscape, which through the country's folklore retains the supposed historical memories contained in the *Mabinogi*, is for Glendower a way to preserve his own 'spirit' (919) which will be the secret of 'all *entire Welshmen*' [Powys's italics].

Morwyn, published three years before *Owen Glendower*, engages with the Welsh otherworld as allegory, conceiving of it as a space in opposition to aspects of modern scientific rationality – namely the dissection of live animals: the 'magic of the *Mabinogion*', Powys writes, is 'a nearer approach to the secret of Nature than anything you could learn by vivisecting dogs'.[70] Powys wrote *Morwyn* for explicit anti-vivisectionist purposes soon after arriving in Wales in response to the stories of tortured animals in *The Abolitionist* (the newspaper of the British Society for Anti-vivisection), such as the experiments carried out to prove the necessity of sleep by keeping dogs awake.[71] The novel's central conceit is the positioning of the vivisectionist beside, and at times below, the cruellest sadists in history – and this is accomplished through a descent into hell, whose entrance is at the Eglwyseg Rocks near Corwen. Once there the characters are guided to Annwn, the space 'beyond' hell, by an ethereal Taliesin, 'the old Welshman of a thousand incarnations', as he searches for the lost Merlin.[72] It is the most uncharacteristic of Powys's mature works due to its supernatural setting and obvious polemical nature. G. Wilson Knight has called the book 'Powys's most dense metaphysical work', and on its completion Powys himself considered it 'the most valuable & the best thing' he had ever written.[73] Experiments on animals in Europe had increased exponentially during Powys's lifetime, and

[70] Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 287.
[71] Powys, *Petrushka*, p. 250, 2 July 1937. For more on Powys's involvement and his anti-vivisectionist writings, see Felix Taylor, 'John Cowper Powys and the Anti-vivisection Movement', *The Powys Journal* xxiv (2019), 57-76.
[72] John Cowper Powys, *Morwyn, or the Vengeance of God* (London: Cassell, 1937), p. 120. Hereafter *M* in the text.
[73] Knight, *The Saturnian Quest*, p. 67; Powys, *Petrushka* p. 231 (6 January 1937).

while the practice was certainly not new, Powys considered it an 'evil' and a symptom of scientific thought. The descent of *Morwyn*'s narrator into Annwn suggests that for Powys Welsh mythology and the corresponding psychological 'retreat' of the 'aboriginal' Welsh people are antithetical to the suffering produced by modern materialism and scientific rationalism.

The dramatic Eglwyseg Rocks are the appropriate entry point to the underworld due to the giant folklore surrounding its caves. 'It is a retreat for the old gods,' he writes: 'The Gorge above is full of Caves & one terrifying Hole, probably bottomless, whose peculiarity is … that it goes down to Hell' (17 Sept 1936).[74] *Morwyn* begins with the narrator walking up to the rocks with his spaniel Black Peter, the romantic interest Morwyn, and her vivisectionist father, a figure referred to only as 'Mr. –' or 'the Vivisector'. As they approach the rocks an 'illumination' or 'diabolical search-light' suddenly descends on the narrator and he finds himself able to read the emotional condition of his companions, a premonition of the event to come (*M*, 27). An electrical charge is felt, and a 'meteoric body' collides with a large rock which then shoots down into the bowels of the earth 'with ourselves on it' (30), killing Morwyn's father, who is subsequently resurrected and rejoins the group in spirit form. The allegorical nature of the novel allows for this literal sinking into the Welsh landscape in search of the psychological centre of the native aboriginal mind: 'I suspect that the planetary resting-place to which this descent leads,' declares Taliesin once they reach Annwn, 'can be reached from the interior of many a Gorsedd Mound in my country' (157). Powys establishes here a connection between the ancient landscape in the form of the Eglwyseg Rocks and the *gorsedd* – a mound significant to the events in *Pwyll* and *Manawydan* – and the metaphorical Annwn of the novel, linking, as in *Owen Glendower*, landscape and mind.[75]

Pervading *Morwyn* is an antipathy towards a particular modern intellectual attitude, the 'new tyranny' which reveres the scientific process in an almost devotional sense, and Powys considered animal experimentation its worst expression.[76] Powys's anti-vivisectionist views amount to an accusation of

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[74] *Ibid*.
[75] Pwyll catches sight of Rhiannon on her white horse from the *gorsedd* mound in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*. Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 8.
[76] Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 640.

'scientism', a pejorative term which was popularised in the 1920s and 30s to mean the worship of science as 'an idol that will magically cure the evils of existence and transform the nature of man'.[77] Even modern technology is implicated in *Morwyn* as a facilitator of this rational form of cruelty: the characters enter hell and encounter hordes of vivisectors rushing towards large television screens which broadcast the worst experiments from around the world, and a band of historical sadists including the Marquis de Sade and Nero bear the group away in a kind of hovercraft. Intercepted by Taliesin, they descend further towards the centre of the Earth and see two hideous giants by the shore of an underground sea, the twin 'gods' of Religion and Science, in the process of 'becoming one' (180), embodiments of those principles of scientism which worship material thinking. In direct contrast to these entwined creatures, the group led by Taliesin break into a chamber below hell itself 'without any dimension that Science could measure' (215). Here they find the sleeping figures of Merlin, and, buried under two mounds of earth, Saturn, the goddess Ceridwen with her 'Cauldron of Annwn' (231) who will not wake 'till the Golden Age returns' (219) and Rhadamanthus, a judge from Greek mythology. Taliesin names the cavernous space 'Caer Sidi', another term for Annwn in Welsh texts; for these mythological figures this is a resting place and a sanctuary from the scientific evils and disenchantment of modern society: indeed, the vivisectors in pursuit from the hell above are forbidden by Taliesin from entering.[78]

Although there is little to connect the scene with Müller's solar divinity theory, Powys's version of Annwn in *Morwyn* is an example of the author's early engagement with the Indo-European hypothesis. The combination of Classical and Celtic mythical figures and a Greek inscription on the rock wall written in the Ogham alphabet depicts a blend of two cultures stretching 'from Crete to Carbonek' (187), as Taliesin claims. In this regard Ceridwen is here an analogue of the 'Great Mother' (*OC*, 60) of the utopian Golden Age, the 'great Fertility-Goddess', 'the Welsh Demeter',

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[77] Eric Voegelin, 'The Origins of Scientism', *Social Research* 15.iv (December 1948), 462-494, p. 487.

[78] Caer Sidi is mentioned in Taliesin's *Preideu Annwfyn* as one of the seven fortresses in Annwn (Haycock, p. 435). Patrick Sims-Williams argues that *sidi* derives from the Old Irish *side*, which came to mean 'abode of divinities' and later tumulus or 'fairy mound', see Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, p. 56.

embodying the ideal spiritual state of Powys's complex vision.[79] While the presence of her cauldron might tie her to Welsh tradition, Ceridwen signifies more than her Welsh identity, suggesting that Powys considered her an older, Indo-European archetype from which the Celtic and Greek daughter cultures have been influenced. Powys believed that the ways and customs of the Welsh people 'still retain memories of the Golden Age when Saturn … ruled in Crete, and the Great Mother was worshipped without the shedding of blood' (*OC*, 83); it was in fact in the baskets used for offerings to the goddess, Taliesin continues, where 'the cult of the Holy Grail originated' (*M*, 184) and this was brought to Britain long before the Celts even arrived. By acknowledging a hypothetically wider cultural influence Powys appears to dilute the image of a unique Welsh spirituality: while Annwn is accessed through the *gorsedd* of the Welsh landscape it lies far beneath the surface and represents more a universal refuge of 'magical thinking' from a kind of global scientism than a particularly Welsh form of spirituality.

Richard Maxwell has argued that, particularly in his Wessex novels, Powys conveys a 'spirit of place' which induces forgetfulness and escape from the modern world, and yet the actions of 'autochthons', or indigenous inhabitants, disrupt characters' amnesia and bring them back to the 'mainstream … of history'.[80] As the otherworld of Welsh mythology, or 'planetary resting place' as Powys describes it in *Morwyn*, Annwn comes to encapsulate this escape from reality in Powys's first two novels written in Wales, and yet only at an allegorical level can the mythical space offer redemption. *Morwyn* concludes with Taliesin, Black Peter, Morwyn, the spirit of her father and the titan Tityos venturing forth to America to preach anti-vivisection, while the narrator, now bereft of his companions, returns to rural Wales. They have performed a similar *katabasis* or voyage to the underworld as in *Preideu Annwfyn* – from which Taliesin recites at various points in the novel – and have emerged to combat what Powys saw as the great evil of modern scientific thought; their encounter with the mythical archetypes of the Welsh consciousness and its Greek counterparts is

[79] For Taliesin, Ceridwen is equated with various Greek, Roman and Phrygian goddesses, 'Rhea, Bona Dea, Cybele, Dindymene, Magna Mater, Titæa, Ops' (*M*, 218) and was worshipped 'in our part of the world under a Welsh name' (219).
[80] Richard Maxwell, 'The Lie of the Land, or, Plot and Autochthony in John Cowper Powys', *In the Spirit of Powys*, 193-213, p. 194.

brief, but it represents a continuation in Powys's thinking regarding the 'totality' of human nature (see Chapter Three for further discussion). Glendower's sinking into Annwn is a method of psychological escape and endurance, whereas characters in *Morwyn*, equipped with the wisdom of older cultures, return to the surface world to change it.

‘Pryderi’s as much a god as Jesus or Jehovah’: Powys’s ‘Romance of the Dark Ages’

> [This] was started as a Book of Marvels and Wonders for much in my own attitude in my life still – in defiance of this narrowing down in these days of all the unknown things in the world to the dogmatic positivism advocated today…[81]

Powys’s next fictional project after completing *Owen Glendower* was a novel, provisionally named *Edeyrnion,* which was abandoned twice. In both efforts the novel’s setting is modern day Corwen. When he ‘chucked’ the first version of the novel in August 1941 he wrote: ‘I expect it is harder for me to write of what is here & now & under my ear, eye, nose, hand, palate, than of the *Remote*! I am profoundly relieved to be turning away from Modern Realism to the Remote Past’.[82] *Ederynion* represents a further example of the difficulty Powys faced in writing contemporary fiction following his return from America; even though he considered the mythological past to be more immediate in Wales than in any other country he still floundered when it came to depicting the town of Corwen against the backdrop of the Second World War. In his first attempt he speaks in familiar terms of the ‘dominant influence’ of aboriginal blood, and yet in both manuscripts the landmarks which were so central to events in *Owen Glendower* become in *Edeyrnion* oppressive locations.[83] To one protagonist, Joram Orcus, the ‘curst’ Mynydd-y-Gaer makes him recall the Blitz, ‘the worst of the horrors he had witnessed in London’.[84] For the second protagonist John Gaunt, Dinas Bran is tainted by rumours of human sacrifice. There also followed another book of philosophy, *Mortal Strife* (1942), in which Powys addressed the British public on the subject of a potential continental invasion. His message was a reiteration of his earlier thinking surrounding the ‘unity’ of the human condition, in which we must ‘include death as well as life in our inmost being’.[85]

With *Porius* Powys could write as close to the source of his mythical inspiration – the stories of ancient Welsh literature – as he wished. Considered by the author to be his crowning artistic achievement, one which suited ‘all [his] superstition, prejudices, blasphemies and blissphemies [sic]’,

81 ‘Letters on the Publication of *Porius*’, ed. Michael Ballin, *Powys Notes* 7.ii (1992), 25-37, p. 30, 7 Dec 1949.
82 Quoted in Peter J. Foss, ‘John Cowper Powys’s Unfinished Welsh Novel: An Introduction to “Edeyrnion”’, *The Powys Journal* (1991), 45-50, p. 46.
83 John Cowper Powys, ‘Ederynion’, *The Powys Journal* (1991), 51-70, p. 51.
84 *Ibid*., p. 59.
85 John Cowper Powys, *Mortal Strife* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), p. 78.

the initial draft of *Porius* ran to 2,811 pages in long-hand, and 1,589 in typescript.[86] Due to post-war paper shortages and the off-putting length of the project Powys struggled to find a publisher, either with any American houses or even with The Bodley Head, at whose behest Powys cut the typescript by 500 pages. Eventually the novel in its abridged form was taken up by Macdonalds and published in 1951.[87] The whole process took seven years and by that time Powys was seventy-eight years old. The novel was an act of self-definition for Powys, notes Michael Ballin, 'and a determined spiritual defiance against the political circumstances of World War II'.[88] As we have seen Powys could not write directly about modern Wales, but, as this chapter argues, in *Porius* he was better able to portray a time in which his ideas about the nature of the aboriginal mind and the *Mabinogi* could be expressed without the constraints of a contemporary social setting. Powys ultimately reshapes the narratives of the Four Branches to emphasise the north/south conflict between Pryderi and the Children of Dôn, thereby confirming his own theory of the submissive, introverted Welsh.

A letter to the Bodley Head in 1949 reveals the extent of Powys's research before writing *Porius*, a combination of 'our old Welsh authorities & their old editions of the Mabinogion & the Histories' and new scholarly commentaries on the mythology, such as Sir Ifor Williams's introduction to *Canu Aneirin* ('The Poetry of Aneirin') (1938).[89] 'I have been casually & carelessly (though very intensely) addicted,' continues Powys, 'for the last ten years that is before as well as after I started my own Inventions and Imaginary Constructions of the Chaotic Confusion of mixed legends & exciting demi-semi-quaver mythological pseudo-quasi-pre-historic history!'.[90] To trace Powys's engagement with the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* in *Porius*, often in oral form or on the verge of being written down by the 'state chronicler' (the Henog), provides an unexplored insight into the development of Powys's

[86] John Cowper Powys, *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956*, ed., Louis Wilkinson (London: Macdonald, 1958), p. 143, 12 March 1944; Wilbur T. Albrecht, 'Editing *Porius*', *Powys Notes* (Fall and Winter, 1992), 4-10, p. 4.
[87] Two further editions of the novel have since been published: the first in 1994 by Colgate University Press, edited by Wilbur T. Albrecht – a composite of the Macdonald text, the original typescript, and Powys's cut pages – and the second by Overlook Duckworth in 2007, essentially a version of the original typescript edited for inconsistencies by Morine Krissdóttir and Judith Bond.
[88] Michael Ballin, '"A Certain Combination of Realism and Magic": Notes on the Publishing History of *Porius*', *Powys Notes* (Fall and Winter, 1992), 11-24, p. 12.
[89] 'Letters on the Publication of *Porius*', p. 34, 27 Dec 1950.
[90] *Ibid*.

life philosophy in this period and his views about the people and ancient literature of Wales. Throughout *Porius* Powys continues to interweave the *Mabinogi* stories into a broad conception of ancient British history – as he did in *Owen Glendower* – but his Dark Ages setting enables a creative expansion of the 'original' mythology and a far deeper exploration of the wisdom he saw as inherent to the aboriginal Welsh psychology.

Magical thinking and human consciousness in *Porius*

'Magical thinking' and the 'magical view of life' were terms in Powys's lexicon from his early philosophical writings (defined previously in Chapter Three), advocating a profound change in our view of the world which he hoped would combat the prevailing scientific mode of thought, attacked in *Morwyn*. *Porius*'s Dark Ages setting is foremost a stage on which to present the author's conception of the mythical mind, the pre-individuated, pre-rational consciousness into which many of his earlier protagonists have attempted to recede. It embodies what Powys calls 'that perilous borderland between history & mythology'; its geography and topography are his own invention, 'very craftily and very cunningly … adjusted to certain known spots and places & persons with a good deal of imaginative straining'.[91] In this way *Porius*, in its subjectivity and intermingling of consciences, depicts a volatile period in human development, a syncretic cauldron of religious and supernatural belief in which mythology, symbol, and historical fact are rarely distinct. It resembles Arthur Machen's later writings on the Celtic Church, which, while not set in the prehistoric past, combine Christian imagery with Welsh folk belief aiming to instil a more direct and potent spirit into modern British liturgy.

Porius is set in Edeyrnion, a valley of the Dee surrounding Corwen, North Wales, over a week in mid-October, 499 AD. Porius is the son of Einion, the Prince of Edeyrnion and descendant of the Cunedda – the Brythonic leader who first settled in the region on Roman orders after defending it from Irish invaders. Porius's great-grandmother was one of the mythical Cewri, the race of aboriginal

[91] *Ibid*.

giants who are said to still be 'lingering in the mountains of Eryri (Snowdonia) and Cader Idris' (*P*, 20). Also active in these parts are three distinct groups of 'natives': the Ffichtiaid, a version of the Picts, though of unknown origin; the Gwyddylaid, a branch of the Celtic peoples who arrived before the Brythons (the Ffichtiaid and the Gwyddylaid form an alliance known as the Gwyddyl-Ffichti); and the 'forest people', descended from Iberians who are supposed to have come to Britain from North Africa. Among these natives the Ffichtiaid appear to hold the claim to being the first to have settled in Edeyrnion, a claim which aligns with Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones's theory in *The Welsh People*, that the Picts were in some sense the 'Aborigines' of Wales, and suggests that Powys had now identified his aboriginal native Welsh with a particular group.[92] All of these people, including the later Brythons, are grouped under the nebulous term '*Cymry*', meaning, in Powys's view, the 'unclassified' men and women of Britain, 'such as were neither Romanized rulers nor privileged Brythonic princes' (*P*, 444-5). Einion is devoted to the Modrybedd, the 'Three Aunties', Pictish seeresses who rule the wilder parts of the region. Porius receives word that the 'Saxeons' are planning to attack from the east and that the emperor Arthur (*Amherawdr*) is riding from the north to head them off. Arthur sends his counsellor Myrddin Wyllt (Merlin), along with Nineue ('Tennyson's Vivien, the enchantress'), to prepare for his arrival.

Powys's magical thinking is elaborated in the many different belief systems which are represented throughout the novel, struggling for dominance in contested territory, including the enduring worship of the 'aboriginal' gods (those who appear as characters in the *Mabinogi*). Porius's foster-brother Rhun ap Gwrnach is a follower of Mithraism, a Roman mystery religion centred around the god Mithras; in opposition to Mithraism is an early form of Christianity, and also one of its heretical offshoots, Pelagianism, that rejected original sin and stressed the freedom of the human will.[93] At several instances, however, it is suggested that the older religion of the forest people, assumed by

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[92] Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People*, p. 14.

[93] 'Mithraism', *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, eds. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford Reference online, 2009) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780192802903.001.0001/acref-9780192802903-e-4587> [accessed 27 May 2021]; 'Pelagianism', *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780192802903.001.0001/acref-9780192802903-e-5248> [accessed 27 May 2021].

many to have been eradicated, continues to hold influence. This is an idea Powys first explored in *Owen Glendower*, yet in *Porius* belief and historical fact are even less distinguishable. Porius's father Einion ab Iddawc is said to have found solace in the old goddess Ceridwen (38), and Essylt, one of the Modrybedd, sees Ceridwen to be as worthy of worship 'as any Catholic saint' and claims that she was '*the original* of the Blessed Mary' (45). 'Thrice-blessed' Brân, often referred to as 'Bendigeitfran', is also a figure who has continued to be revered: he was both a saint and a giant, according to Essylt, and later another of the Modrybedd, Erdudd, prays to him 'that he'd let [her] see the watchtower of his Mount [Dinas Bran] before [she] went down' (172). The three 'Aunties', who claim to be able to trace their ancestry to a time before the Roman invasion and the Gwyddyl-Ffichti came to Wales, are the main preservers of this old religion, and yet the state chronicler known as the 'Henog' appears also to act as their source for the actual mythical narratives: Erdudd can only recount the story of the guarding of Brân's severed head after the Henog tells it to Essylt (172). The gamut of conflicting religions in *Porius* expresses the continuing struggle for spiritual meaning throughout the narrative, which for Powys serves as a contrasting way of life to 'our present pseudo-scientific & narrowly exact scientific attitude to life & the cosmos' – to the modern thought which has constrained his personal philosophy.[94]

The world of *Porius* is the 'mass of floating impressions' central to Powys's multiverse theory (discussed in Chapter Three), but recounted on a scale greater than that of *A Glastonbury Romance*.[95] His reversion to a pre-historic Wales also allows for the unhindered exploration of a second theory set out in *In Defence of Sensuality*, that the suffering which is a symptom of the modern, scientific mind is due to the erasure of two extremities of human nature: its 'primordial passivity' on one hand (the passivity of stones and vegetation, for example, but also animals) and its connection to mysterious 'super-human' forces on the other – both of which Powys believes we have lost.[96] Chapter Three has argued that Powys's previous novels struggle to reconcile the 'ordinary human interests' of modern,

[94] 'Letters on the Publication of *Porius*', p. 30, 7 Dec 1949.
[95] Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 6.
[96] *Ibid*., p. 8.

scientific thinking, with the 'magical view of life' inherent to the author's philosophy.[97] If, according to Jeremy Hooker, Powys's shift in subject matter across his fiction 'is always recessive, towards the source of the dream', *Porius* represents a last attempt to reinstate these extremes of consciousness through a greater engagement with Welsh mythology than in his previous novels.[98] Much of this is encapsulated in the prophetic figures of the novel. The poetic vision of Taliesin, no longer the kindly sage of *Morwyn* but a young man and accomplished cook, is to reveal a secret life of sensation that would 'lift the elements to the level of vegetation, vegetation to the level of animals, animals to the level of men, and men not only the level of one another but to the level of immortal gods' (*P*, 375-6). His mythological verses transcend divisions between life forms into what Powys calls 'indiscriminate proximity'.[99] Myrddin Wyllt, too, is a 'fungus-reeking' (110) wild man with the ability to burrow into the minds of all animals, while also claiming to be the mouthpiece, or human reincarnation, of the god Cronos who lies sleeping in *yr Wyddfa*, the peak of Snowdon. Through characters who identify with both the 'primordial' and the immortal aspects of humanity, Powys is therefore able to produce a simulation of his philosophy of reversion, the mingling of higher and lower forms of consciousness which comprise the 'ichthyosaurus ego'.[100]

Powys often achieves this blend of consciousnesses by using imagery from the *Mabinogi*, further emphasising how, in Powys's view, Welsh mythology replicates magical thought. Towards the end of the novel Porius, entering the druid's chamber in Mynydd-y-Gaer, he comes across a small child sitting on a chest and holding a terracotta wolf cub. The child invokes 'Bleiddyn', the name of the wolf cub in *Math fab Mathonwy*, saying cryptically that when Bleiddyn is 'obeyed … there'll be no difference between Brython and Gwyddyl or between Ffichtiaid and Coranian' (675).[101] Porius becomes suddenly aware of the interconnectedness of the scene, 'the child … with the wolf cub … and the lamp with the chessboard … and himself with the child' (675). Might his thoughts be 'drifting

[97] His unfinished *Edeyrnion* is a further example.
[98] Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, p. 66.
[99] Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 11.
[100] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[101] In *Math fab Mathonwy*, Math punishes his nephews Gwydion and Gilfaethwy for killing Pryderi and raping the virgin Goewin by turning them into a wolf and a she-wolf. Over the following year the wolves mate and have a cub, whom Math names Bleiddwyn. Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 54.

swarms of selves [Powys's italics]', he considers, 'like so many gnats or midges?'. This realisation that consciousness is not simply a single entity among many, but is itself divided into smaller entities, aligns with Powys's thinking, and that the scene employs imagery from *Math* – the wolf cub, the last of the three sons of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, and the chest, in which Llew is first discovered – suggests a connection in Powys's mind between the *Mabinogi* and the faculties of the aboriginal Welsh psyche.[102] As detailed in Chapter Three the 'primitive mind' to Powys was a continuum of undifferentiated consciousnesses: '[on] the apparent surface of the beginning of things,' he writes in *Sensuality*, 'there is no individuality and no loneliness'.[103] Powys's pursuit of a Golden Age demanded 'an extinction of the conscious self', and *Porius* allows characters to recede into the 'mass' of impressions.[104]

'It was Annwn I sought': the Henog's 'Life of Pryderi' and the second Annwn

In both *Owen Glendower* and *Porius* Powys establishes an immediate connection to a mythical past by referring to the stories of the *Mabinogi*, but in the author's construction of North Wales, 499AD, the tales which will eventually become the Four Branches are still circulating as oral narratives. They are only just being recorded by the state chronicler, the 'Henog of Dyfed' (453), an 'imaginary official position in South Wales' which Powys admitted to taking from the work of Welsh scholar Timothy Lewis.[105] Indeed, Powys depicts Edeyrnion as the ideal creative epicentre for the production of ancient Welsh texts, a multi-vocal storm of evocations and references to what we now know as the *Mabinogion* and, among others, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*. Taliesin, too, who refers to himself as 'Pen Beirdd' (Chief of the Poets), wanders around the camps composing new work and bandying insults with the Henog in verse. By imagining a milieu in which Welsh mythology is still in the process of

[102] The chessboard also evokes the chess-like game known as *gwyddbwll* which features in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* ('The Dream of Rhonabwy'), a Welsh prose tale included by Guest in her translation of the *Mabinogion*. See Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 220-24.
[103] Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 10.
[104] Krissdóttir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, p. 32.
[105] Most likely Lewis's now-discredited *Mabinogi Cymru* (Aberystwyth: Gwasg y Fwynant, 1931).

being formed, Powys asserts an authorial control over the material to better fit it to his own philosophy.

Many characters from the *Mabinogion* represent what J. K. Bollard terms ‘intermediate figures’, that is figures who might have once been considered gods, and, conversely, legendary figures who have gained divine status.[106] In *Porius* these kinds of figures offer Powys the opportunity to present a literal version of his conception of the Four Branches, that the tales contain evidence of historical conflict. ‘In the earliest days there *were* gods in Ynys Prydein,’ proclaims a servant of the Derwydd, the Druid of the forest people, summarising the antagonism which Powys foregrounds between the north and the south in the *Mabinogi*: ‘There were bad gods and good gods … Pwyl and Pryderi were good gods. Llwyd ap Cil-Coed and Gwawl ap Clud were bad ones; but the worst ones of all were the sons and daughters of Don’ (*P*, 464). According to the Derwydd it was Pwyll who first brought the Ffichtiaid to Britain. He ‘lured them and coaxed them … from the depths of Annwn’ (466), he continues, although it is the opinion the Derwydd’s servant that it was Gwydion, not Pwyll, who brought them. Auntie Erddud believes that Brân was killed by the Gwyddylaid (the Goidelic Celts, who were thought to have first settled in Ireland), thereby incorporating Brân into a kind of historical reality and providing a factual basis for the events of the Second Branch, *Branwen ferch Llŷr*, in which Brân dies in Ireland battling the forces of the Irish king Matholwch. Powys is again responding to early twentieth-century theories which posit a possible historical basis for certain elements in the *Mabinogi* by obscuring characters’ mythological statuses: Brân is both deity and mortal saint to the forest people, a historical personage who holds the potential to defend the wisdom inherent in the native way of thinking.

Powys casts the Henog not simply as the compiler of the future *Mabinogi* tales, his ‘prose poem concerning Pryderi’ (705), but often as their author. It is generally accepted that the tales found in the earliest extant Welsh manuscripts are based on oral tradition, though the extent to which the author, or authors, is indebted to that tradition is still debated.[107] The state chronicler embellishes and adds to the

[106] J. K. Bollard, ‘The Role of Myth and Tradition in *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*’, The Mabinogi: *A Book of Essays*, 277-302, p. 277.
[107] Glyn E. Jones, ‘Early Prose: The Mabinogi’, *A Guide to Welsh Literature, Volume One*, ed. A. O. H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 189-202, p. 193.

'old' tales, well known among the Brythons and the forest people; here Powys is able to assume the role of the 'single author' himself and construct what he imagined as the original oral versions of the tales as they took shape, in his own way taking part in an important stage of their continuing evolution. Even in this final year of the fifth century the *Mabinogi* tales are considered ancient, and to embody some kind of essential meaning: the Henog's role, as Porius sees it, is to collect 'and [sift] out their truth from their falsehood' (453). One of Porius's pages, Tegvan, reports to his master that the Henog is reading to Brother John 'from his tablets', and proceeds to relate what might have constituted a section of *Manawydan fab Llŷr*, but one which does not appear in any extant version of the tale: 'It was about Llwyd the son of Cil-Coed and Gwawl the son of Clud, how they plotted with Gwrgwst the son of Hafgan against Pryderi. It was wonderful; they were the wickedest magicians in the world, and Gwydion the son of Don joined in their plot' (453).[108] By inventing part of the backstory to the Third Branch Powys is refining his *Mabinogi* theory that he first put forward in *Owen Glendower*. The magician Gwydion does not appear in what contemporary scholars were calling the life cycle of Pryderi until the very end, in *Math*, but here Powys is suggesting that the Children of Dôn had a hand in the Prince's death from the start, thereby bolstering his own theory of a historical north/south conflict.

A later version of the story told by the Henog, reported in almost two pages of dialogue following a disagreement with Taliesin, reveals that this antagonism between the characters from Dyfed and the northern magicians Llwyd ap Cil Coed, Gwydion, and Gwawl, underpins all the Four Branches. Gwawl ap Clud appears in the First Branch at Pwyll's feast demanding the entire banquet and Rhiannon's hand in marriage; he is eventually tricked and forced to swear that he will never seek revenge for Pwyll's actions. According to Powys's Henog, however, Gwawl then travels north (presumably during the events of the Second Branch) with the enchanter Llwyd, who reveals to Gwawl the existence of a second version of Annwn:

[108] At the beginning of *Manawydan* an enchantment is cast over Dyfed by the magician Llwyd ap Cil Coed to avenge the humiliation of Gwawl in the First Branch. The Henog's addition describes the conspiracy between Llwyd, Gwawl, Gwrgwst and Gwydion.

> Between me and my God there is an Annwn of Illusion and Enchantment that is richer and easier to reach than the real one which Arawn, its ruler, shares with Pwyll. Into this Second Annwn … created by Math the son of Mathonwy and by Gwydion the son of Don, there is a way that leads under land and water from Caer Dathyl (498).

In Powys's imagined reconstruction of the backstory of the First and Third Branches, which the Henog discovered 'among the aboriginal legends' (500), Llwyd's scheme is to create a second Annwn 'made out of sedge and seaweed' and to convince people that the 'real' Annwn ruled by Arawn and Pwyll is in fact an illusion. This second Annwn created by the northern magicians contains within it chains of enchantment that 'descend into the lowest chamber of Caer Sidi' (498) designed to entrap the southerners in this underground fortress.[109] Powys's invented narrative suggests that the Welsh otherworld which we know from the mythology is in fact 'real', but through the deceptions of Llwyd we have confused it with an illusory realm and have been prevented from learning its secrets. It constitutes a further layer of meaning to the various concepts of Annwn previously developed in *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Maiden Castle* and *Owen Glendower*, and strengthens Powys's view that the otherworld, the psychological state as it is presented in *Glendower*, contains genuine aboriginal truths.

In *Porius*, Powys's furthest reversion into Wales's past, with its blend of history, mythology and a creative addition to Welsh material, the author sought to reinforce his theory of the *Mabinogi* – that it contains evidence of the suppression of the 'aboriginal' natives and their enduring wisdom. Powys's reinvented Annwn is not quite the introverted mindset of *Owen Glendower* or the subterranean space below Hell in *Morwyn*; indeed, Powys does not make it clear whether it is a physical location or, as Taliesin's poetry describes it, a mystical state of existence. Its true form has been obscured by the false 'second' Annwn and somehow left out of subsequent retellings. Powys here suggests that the *Mabinogi* merely hints at a wider, undiscovered aboriginal mythology, echoing the contemporary theories of scholars such as W. J. Gruffydd who claimed that the Four Branches contained evidence from extreme antiquity. The secret of the 'real' Annwn has managed so far to withstand the rational 'sciences of Greece and Rome' which the Romans brought to Britain – to Powys an earlier version of

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[109] It is not clear whether Caer Sidi is located within Annwn, as Taliesin's poem suggests, but Powys tends to equate the two. It also suggests that in the poem Arthur and his men in fact descended into this illusory Annwn created by Math and Gwydion.

twentieth-century materialism – without losing 'a drop of its original mystery' (707). Taliesin, whose poetic aims reflects the 'totality' of consciousnesses and human experience which Powys viewed as being at the centre of his philosophy, might hold the key to the Henog's 'real Caer Sidi' (500). What Taliesin calls the 'secret of Nature' is, according to the poet, to be found in Annwn and 'includes every creature that Nature can summon / It excludes from Annwfn nor man, beast, nor woman' (379). Powys applies his early philosophy of the multiverse to his redefined Welsh otherworld, suggesting that for Powys Annwn is ultimately the kind of Golden Age he first advocated for in his Wessex novels, an older, magical way of living and thinking which strives for a unified whole.

Conclusion: The 'perfect pattern of an ideal myth'

This chapter has demonstrated how Powys's engagement with the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* provided evidence for his complex vision. Across the three novels which Powys completed in Wales, and which take Welsh history and mythology as their theme to various extents, Powys set down and expanded his theory of the 'aboriginal' mind. The novels' unifying impulse, one which reflects the motivation behind the author's own relocation to Corwen, is the desire to retreat into an imagined, mythological Wales and resist the scientific era of modernity. This psychological retreat from reality, viewed by Powys as a characteristic that has enabled the Welsh people to survive ever since the first Celtic invasion, is enacted in the novels of this period as an eventuality for those who are descendants of the 'true' Welsh people. Powys has claimed not to 'believe' in the 'accurst *Unconscious* [Powys's italics]' (*OC*, 144); his professed tendency to 'run away' or to 'sink inwards' (*OC*, 145), however, into a collective, primitive mindset, inherent in the very nature of the native Welsh, is to penetrate a deeper form of consciousness. Just as elements of Jungian thought, explored in relation to Garner in the following chapter, posit a collection of shared narratives and archetypes in the human mind, for Powys the stories of the Four Branches and the world of Annwn are inherent modes of life for the Welsh people.

Alongside the many physical transformations in *Porius*, Powys, true to his 'multiverse' philosophy, continues to make use of the religious and political instability of his pre-historic setting, suggesting that he too was perhaps grappling with the absolute meaning behind his beloved Welsh material. 'Everybody who listens to the Henog,' considers Porius after witnessing the chronicler's spat with Taliesin, 'is resolved into this paradigm or perfect pattern of an ideal myth': his audience is 'irresistibly compelled' (*P*, 501). So too Powys, who had developed his own theories by reading already outdated authors of myth criticism, chief among them the 'God Discoverer' John Rhŷs, was well aware of the infectious nature of 'pattern' identification. Powys himself had created out of the *Mabinogi* his own 'ideal myth', which helped to explain and support his anti-scientific life philosophy, but even in 1947, with his final major novel almost complete, he remained insistent that he should be 'perpetually at work … destroying and re-moulding … this eternally plastic multiverse' (*OC*, 139).

In a letter to Norman Denny at the Bodley Head, who had urged Powys to cut out the more fantastical elements of *Porius* (including the 'Cewri', Powys's giants), Powys defends the magical elements in the novel: 'I know that the Mysterious Boundless Universe or Multiverse Full of Marvels and Wonders and of occurrences completely unexplicable [sic] by any modern science … will come back again … & be again <u>much more like</u> what I have found (as a medium) in 499 round the Gaer'.[110] Powys was convinced that his magical view of life would one day return to the modern world and that civilisation would once more enjoy a Golden Age. The fates of characters in his Wessex novels, such as Owen Evans and Enoch Quirm, indicate that Powys considered his philosophy unworkable in the current scientific world; Powys's Welsh novels, however, hint at the possibility of redemption, and suggest that while Powys constructed a philosophical vision to accord with his personal view of the world, its magical thinking might evolve to become a universal antidote to modernity.

[110] 'Letters on the Publication of *Porius*', p. 31 (7 Dec 1949).

Chapter Five: The *Mabinogion* 'is less a text than a state of mind': Alan Garner, Wales, and the Psychology of Myth

Introduction: 'a slow and painful reknitting': Alderley Edge and the tension in Garner's writing

> What happened was that I was educated to understand what it was I had lost. Whereas the rest of my family and my cousins of the same age, who were not educated, do not have a feeling for their roots and do not feel strongly about the place where they live … The difference is we all grew up on Alderley Edge, but only I came to know what Triassic and keuper and bunter sand-stones are.[1]

Alan Garner (*b*. 1934) has spoken often about a particular anxiety in his writing, the tension he feels between his rural, working-class background and his grammar-school and Oxford education. Garner comes from a long line of craftsmen who have lived and worked in the village of Alderley Edge, East Cheshire since the sixteenth century, but at the age of eleven Garner passed the entrance exam to Manchester Grammar School. Garner was what Richard Hoggart, in his *Uses of Literacy*, termed a 'scholarship boy', British working-class boys who were accepted into grammar schools for their academic ability.[2] He won a place to study Classics at Magdalen College, Oxford, before dropping out in 1956 after four terms and returning to East Cheshire, having already begun his first novel, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), subtitled 'A Tale of Alderley'. For Garner this personal history was crucial to how he came to view his creative work. Education was an 'alienation', he admits in an interview: 'I was seen as someone who was trying to make a fool of the rest of the family … I was intelligent, my family was intelligent, but I was the one who had gone the other way'.[3] Neil Philip has previously characterised Garner's early novels as 'a slow and painful reknitting of the bonds severed

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[1] Justin Wintle and Emma Fisher, *The Pied Pipers: Interviews with the Influential Creators of Children's Literature* (New York: Paddington Press, 1974), p. 225-6.

[2] Haru Takiuchi has argued that this was not a unique set of circumstances during the 1950s and 60s: writers such as Raymond Williams and Hoggart himself, and the children's authors Aiden Chambers and Robert Westall were also uprooted from their class background. See Haru Takiuchi, *British Working-class Writing for Children: Scholarship Boys in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[3] Alison Flood, 'Alan Garner: A Life in Books', *Guardian* (17 August 2012), <www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/17/alan-garner-life-in-books-interview> [accessed 1 March 2021].

by Manchester Grammar School and Oxford'; this chapter develops Philip's argument by suggesting that integral to Garner's 'reknitting' was his evolving of an idiosyncratic idea of Wales. Wales and Welsh mythology came to represent the non-rational part of his identity, rooted in landscape, which he considered himself to have lost.[4] Garner began to identify many aspects of the local landscape as Celtic or specifically Welsh, and the wooded escarpment known as 'the Edge' is figured as an alternative space to the spiritually deficient modern world. In his later novels, informed by a reading of Carl Jung and research into Australian Aborigines' spirituality, this chapter will show how, in distinction to Machen and Powys, Garner expanded his understanding of Welsh mythology into a wider conception of a universal mythic consciousness; in books such as *Strandloper* (1996) and *Boneland* (2012) the author sought to portray what he saw as the psychologically restorative powers of mythological narratives and imagery.

Elements of British, Irish and Norse mythology initially entered Garner's work as part of a process which he calls a '[coming] to terms' with reality, his attempt to express his relationship with Alderley Edge through the genre of fantasy.[5] In interviews Garner has been open about his use of myth as a narrative structure in his novels and stresses its importance as a tool for imparting meaning: 'I begin to suspect that I use fantasy and mythology because I am not good enough to do without it,' he admits. 'I need some kind of crutch, some kind of framework… myth is not an attempt to entertain, it is an attempt to explain something'.[6] It is partly because of this that Garner has often resisted being classified as a writer of children's fantasy. He has spoken about his deep dislike for escapism in fiction, especially the allegorical methods of writers such as C. S. Lewis, but above all he views fantasy and mythology (often indistinguishably) as methods of 'clarification' – to better understand the real world.[7] Mythology and legend have indeed provided the structures for many of his books: the opening of his third novel *Elidor* (1965), for example, is a rendering of the British fairy tale of Childe

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[4] Neil Philip, *A Fine Anger*, p. 16.
[5] Alan Garner, 'Coming to Terms', *Children's Literature in Education* 1.iii (1970), 15-29, p. 16.
[6] *Ibid*.
7 *Ibid*., p. 17; Garner's comments recall J. R. R Tolkien's essay 'On Fairy-Stories' (first delivered 1939), in which Tolkien posits that fairy stories 'deal largely … with simple or fundamental things, untouched by Fantasy, but these simplicities are made all the more luminous by their setting'. J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tolkien on Fairy-stories*, eds. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2008), pp. 68-9.

Roland; *The Owl Service* (1967) reinterprets the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*, and *Red Shift* (1973) is said by Garner to have been inspired by the Scottish legendary ballad of Tam Lin.[8] His later novels, however, rather than adapting mythology through standard fantasy genre tropes, examine the psychological significance of mythology in characters who often resemble the author himself.

Critics frequently place Garner alongside other post-war British children's fantasy writers such as Susan Cooper, Penelope Lively and Diana Wynne Jones, all of whom attended Oxford in the 1950s and were participants in what is referred to as the 'second Golden Age' of children's literature.[9] Beyond the Oxford connection, their work in many ways follows writers like J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis in their use of medievalism, myth and a commitment to what Maria Sachiko Cecire terms 're-enchantment', although a more complex relationship with the contemporary world defines them as a group of writers apart from Tolkien and Lewis.[10] Asked in 1972 what he thought of the popularity surrounding the contemporary fantasy market, however, Garner is dismissive and claims to be stubbornly naïve: 'I'm not aware of it – I don't read [fiction]. I'm sorry, the fantasy market, I know it exists but I don't know what it is … [Because] critics start to be rather ignorant people, they start to say Tolkien, Tolkien, Tolkien'.[11] Neither does he seem comfortable with defining the audience for whom he writes. He is at once defensive and dismissive often in a single answer and refuses to identify himself with this, or any, literary community – 'Why write for children? Why not? Are children not human beings? The people who publish my books publish them for children'.[12] His books are for him research projects which can span several years and are the product of reading in history, archaeology, folk customs, and astronomy, among other disciplines. The only instance in which Garner has considered himself part of any group of writers is when speaking of himself as a child of the Second World War. He acknowledges a shift in the way he and other writers for children perceived the world around them: 'daily life [in Alderley Edge] was lived on a mythic plane: of

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[8] Catherine Butler, *Four British Fantasists*, p. 199; Catherine Butler, 'Alan Garner's Red Shift and the Shifting Ballad of "Tam Lin"', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 26.ii (2001), 74-83.
[9] Butler, *Four British Fantasists*, p. 8.
[10] See Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century*.
[11] Charles Partington, 'Carnegie Medal Winner Alan Garner Interviewed by Charles Partington', *Bognor Regis* 3 (1972), 18-24, p. 23.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 18.

absolute Good against absolute Evil … Those children [who became fantasy authors] … would not be able to avoid concerning themselves with the issues; and so their books, however clad, were written on profound themes, and were literature'.[13] Mythology was in this sense a natural tool for Garner to explore his own his identity. Indeed, for Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn the children's fantasy literature of the fifties and sixties was powerfully 'marked by the war' and took on the hard themes of the nature of evil, destiny, and the salvation of the world, whereas before the Second World War the material and spiritual stakes in the plots of children's fantasy were comparatively low.[14]

The same tension of displacement in Garner's writing is not present in the work of Arthur Machen and John Cowper Powys. Both authors grew up in rural environments which became dominating presences in their fiction, but both came from highly educated families. Machen moved to London and remained there into later life, turning to memories of his childhood in the Welsh countryside to evoke a heightened autobiographical element to his fiction, and while Powys found great personal and philosophical meaning in the natural environment surrounding Dorset and Somerset, there is little sense that he specifically valued these places for his family roots. It appears partly due to class and family occupation that neither writer had the same connection to local landscape as Garner did; their ancestors were not labourers whose lives were rooted on the same small piece of land, and both authors' fathers were educated vicars and thus to some extent itinerant. While Machen found deep personal meaning in his childhood landscape surrounding Caerleon, his father's side of the family came from Carmarthenshire, and Powys's family lived in Shirley and Dorchester before finally settling in Montacute, Somerset. Garner, however, claims to be descended from Cheshire's earliest settlers: 'I think we have always been here,' he divulges in an interview, '… you can go and pick up flint … [and] I know the DNA of whoever dropped that is shared by me. And I feel at one with the land'.[15] Garner's 'uprooting' to the grammar school and subsequent departure to Oxford provided the necessary perspective needed to write about his native Alderley, returning to the square mile in which

[13] Alan Garner, *The Voice That Thunders: Essays and Lectures* (London: The Harvill Press, 1997), p. 17. Hereafter *VT* in the text.
[14] Levy and Mendlesohn, *Children's Fantasy Literature: An Introduction*, p. 104; *ibid*., p. 106.
[15] Quoted in David Clarke and Andy Roberts, *Twilight of the Celtic Gods* (London: Blandford, Cassell, 1996), p. 31.

he was raised. Many of his novels combine his own deeply felt experience of a landscape, rooted in his childhood, with an academic, self-taught knowledge of the geology of Cheshire. It is no coincidence that highly educated characters in Garner's writing appear almost pathologically invested in the landscape around the Edge, to the extent that their relationship with it becomes almost reverential.

'It is so completely a part of my psyche': discovering Welsh mythology

Speaking at a conference of Children's Literature New England in 1995 Garner listed four 'personal master[s]' to whom, using his characteristic vocabulary of tools and craft, he has been 'apprenticed' (*VT*, 158). 'I shall draw on three of these masters only [all of them local men, among them Joshua Birtles, who became Gowther Mossock in *Weirdstone*], because with them I share a communality of place and of culture that I do not with the fourth. That fourth is Welsh, and the bond between us, though adamantine, is not so clearly visible' (158). A year later Garner delivered a lecture to the Conference of the Welsh Academy on the theme of 'The Influence of *The Mabinogion* on Contemporary Authors':

> What I owe to the Celtic mind is the realisation that language is music, and it is that which I must write. It is so completely a part of my psyche, that the theme of this conference … could be answered by this author simply as, "Total", and we could all have an early night … [The *Mabinogion*] is less a text than a state of mind (158).

Garner claims to have come privately to what he calls 'the Celtic element in British mythology'.[16] As a child he had been familiar with retellings of the *Mabinogion* tales from reading T. W. Rolleston's *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race* (1911), but it was not until he was writing his first two novels, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963), that Garner first made use of the English translations in William Skene's English language *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*.[17] While

[16] Raymond H. Thompson, 'Interview with Alan Garner, for "The Camelot Project"', <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/interview-with-alan-garner> [accessed 25 April 2020].
[17] William Forbes Skene compiled and translated *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* (Skene's term for *The Black Book of Carmarthen*, *The Red Book of Hergest*, *The Book of Taliesin* and *The Book of Aneirin*) into a two-part

Garner was pleased to have found the Welsh names in Skene, he also describes the anger he had felt at discovering Welsh mythology:

> Why had I been filled with so many alien tongues and made especially proficient in Latin and Greek, whose sounds were wondrous, but whose tales were, for me, then, as bloodless and as cold as their marble? Why had I been kept from a language that not only sounded to be 'mine', but also told its stories as I dreamed my dreams? I read that the material was obscure. But, even in translation, it was not obscure to me. Why should something be called 'obscure' because it spoke fact as poetry, history as legend, sound as sense? The boon list in 'Culhwch ac Olwen' changed me for ever in my heart. When I read *Preuiddeu Annwfn*, the hairs of my neck rose, as they do to this day (*VT*, 196).

Garner's claim that the Welsh told their stories 'as [he] dreamed [his] dreams' represents a profound psychological identification with Wales. The possessive 'mine' echoes Powys's inclusive 'our' in his essays on the Welsh people, and here too Garner felt a similar connection to the mythology. He was angered because he felt in some sense to have been 'kept' from the language, though not, perhaps, in the same way he was 'taught … to suppress' his native dialect (what Garner calls his 'primary tongue' or 'North-West Mercian', the language of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a text which also had a significant influence on his fiction (*VT*, 51)). He had not encountered the Welsh language until after he began attending Manchester Grammar. In his essay 'The Beauty Things' he relates an episode from his final year at the school when his class visited the site of Tomen-y-Mur and he heard Welsh spoken for the first time, in a corner shop: the customers were speaking English when the boys entered, 'but, at the moment the Saxons entered, everybody switched to Welsh' (195).[18] It was those 'few seconds of music' which caused the young Garner to rush home and tune the radio to a Welsh station: 'It was as if I were hearing the knights, who lay in the cave with their king under the hill behind our house, talking in their sleep' (196).[19] His exposure to the Welsh language prompts an

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edition in 1868; Rolleston was an Irish writer, who, incidentally, belonged to the Rhymer's Club founded by W. B. Yeats and Ernest Rhys.

[18] Tomen-y-Mur is a Roman fort in Snowdonia National Park which has been identified as Mur Castell, or Ardudwy, the seat of Lleu Llaw Gyffes in *Math fab Mathonwy* where Blodeuwedd first meets Gronw Pebyr. It is surprising Garner does not mention this.

[19] Garner's attraction to Welsh mirrors Tolkien's first encounter with the language as a child: seeing the words on the back of Welsh coal-trucks 'pierced [his] linguistic heart' and later led him to develop his theory of 'linguistic predilection', by which some people are naturally drawn to particular languages. See Carl Phelpstead, *Tolkien and Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 7; *ibid*., pp. 21-25; see also Dimitra Fimi,

immediate connection with the sleeping knights of the 'Legend of Alderley' – a local legend associated with the Edge, discussed below – thereby assigning the language a supernatural and mythical quality. He goes on to describe how he 'felt that [he] understood this language without knowing what it was saying' and that this sensation was 'more of remembering' (196). Elsewhere Garner has written about the epistemological concept put forward by Plato, and later developed by the psychoanalyst Carl Jung, known by the Greek word *anamnesis*, the idea that the acquiring of knowledge is a process of remembering what one already knows (57).[20] Garner uses the term in reference to his understanding of the initiation rites of Aboriginal Australians which require a boy to 'recall the primordial time [of his ancestors] and his own most remote deeds' (57). This is not to suggest that Garner's exposure to Welsh provoked a similar 'primordial' remembrance, but he appears to have conceived of the experience as a kind of rediscovery. Considered in the light of Garner's own biographical narrative – that his education distanced him from his family's traditions – the Welsh language, and by extension its myths, represent a point of re-entry which for him could be accessed via the sleeping knights. Coming to Welsh material was an awakening for Garner, which, like the stories told to him by his grandfather, he considered '[his] inheritance and truth' (199).

Garner does not overtly claim at this point, unlike Powys, any direct Welsh ancestry; to him his inheritance is primarily cultural and linguistic. He taught himself the Welsh language 'in order not to use it' while researching for his fourth novel *The Owl Service* (1967), achieving a speaking fluency neither Machen – the only genuine Welshman in this group of writers – nor Powys ever attained.[21] Like Powys, Garner does, however, enjoy appearing Welsh without actually being Welsh: he relates with pride in 'The Beauty Things' how, following a lecture he gave in Aberystwyth on linguistics Professor Gwyn Jones (co-translator of the 1949 Everyman edition of the *Mabinogion*) declared him to be 'an old Welsh mystic' (201). While researching *The Owl Service* at Llanymawddwy Garner asked a young harpist whether she knew the traditional Welsh song 'Gosteg yr Halen' and afterwards,

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Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 80-82.

[20] 'Anamnesis', *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Simon Blackburn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780198735304.001.0001/acref-9780198735304-e-160> [accessed 27 May 2021]; Jung's influence on Garner is discussed in detail below.

[21] Ronald Bryden, 'The Man who Created "The Owl Service"', *Observer* (25 January 1970), 30-33, p. 31.

Garner claims, he was no longer treated as an outsider in the valley (204). In this way Wales and its mythology have exerted a pervasive influence over Garner's writing, a fact that is rarely acknowledged in criticism of his work, other than in analyses of *The Owl Service*, a reimagining of the Fourth Branch, *Math fab Mathonwy*. A recent monograph by Dimitra Fimi has traced some uses of Celtic mythology in contemporary children's fantasy; her section on Welsh mythology includes analyses of works by Jenny Nimmo, Catherine Fisher, Susan Cooper (whose *The Dark is Rising* sequence is replete with Welsh, Arthurian, and English folkloric images) and American author Lloyd Alexander, as well as Garner's *The Owl Service*. Fimi demonstrates that Garner did not only respond to *Math fab Mathonwy* (as he found it in the Jones and Jones translation), but incorporated aspects of twentieth-century Celtic scholarship such as Rolleston and Graves into his interpretation.[22] As the following sections will argue, Garner's engagement with Welsh material represents an effort to address the tension brought about by his formal education. As the fantasy genre became less of a 'crutch', however, Garner abandoned the overt references to Welsh and Celtic mythology, but continued to explore the psychological potential of myth first developed in his early fiction.

[22] Fimi, *Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children's Fantasy*, pp. 159-177. Fimi's work develops Donna R. White's survey of Welsh myth in children's literature, in which White claims that Garner, and simultaneously 'on the other side of the Atlantic' Lloyd Alexander, were 'resonating to the music of Robert Graves' – that Garner's entire creative response to the *Mabinogion* was filtered through his reading of *The White Goddess*. White, *A Century of Welsh Myth in Children's Literature*, p. 74.

‘[The] Celts are still here and have always been here’: Wales, the Edge and the Sleeping Hero

> The questions, so often asked, are: Is the Edge alive? Is it sentient? Does it, too, know? My human reaction is ‘Yes’ to all. But I would not explain much further, if I could. The frustration is that Western Europe embraced one of the world’s few great cultures that would find it necessary to ask the questions when the answers were so evident. Such is the downside of our inheritance of Humanism: William Blake called it ‘the Spectre of Reason’.[23]

While Garner’s initial attraction to Wales and the *Mabinogion* was language and narrative-based, he subsequently perceived a far deeper, geological and archaeological continuity between North Wales and the border county of Cheshire. Both regions share a complicated history, a fact which Garner, a self-professed ancient historian, is acutely aware of. The territory of a Celtic-speaking people known as the Cornovii extended from parts of what are now Flintshire, Powys and Wrexham in North Wales, to northern Shropshire and almost all of modern-day Cheshire.[24] They are known to have occupied several places in East Cheshire, notably Kinderton, not far from Garner’s birthplace of Congleton. Examination of the mining sites on the Edge by the Alderley Edge Landscape Project (1995-2005) led to the conclusion that local Bronze Age activity was part of a migratory pattern of exploitation which may have begun in Mid-Wales, moving to sites like the Great Orme in North Wales, and then into Cheshire and beyond.[25] Indeed, there has always been a bleed of Welsh language and culture across the Cheshire border, as its unofficial status as a county of the Welsh Marches at various points in history.[26] The name Lindow, for example, a common and peat bog north of Alderley, derives from the Welsh *llyn-ddu* (‘black lake’), and appears in *Weirdstone* as ‘Llyn-dhu’. On a boundary ridge which runs up the Edge Garner himself has identified carved names which ‘may be translations from Welsh and earlier’.[27] The most prominent legend associated with the Edge, ‘The Legend of Alderley’, becomes a symbol in Garner’s fiction of the landscape’s resistance to disenchantment: Welsh in its

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[23] Alan Garner, ‘Approach to the Edge: A Personal View’, *The Story of Alderley: Living with the Edge*, ed. A. J. N. W. Prag (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 24-48, p. 40.
[24] A. J. N. W. Prag and Simon Timberlake, ‘The Archaeology of Alderley Edge’, *The Story of Alderley: Living with the Edge*, 303-341, p. 330.
[25] *Ibid*., pp. 317-8.
[26] Alan Crosby, *A History of Cheshire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1996), pp. 37-8.
[27] Garner, ‘Approach to the Edge: A Personal View’, *The Story of Alderley*, p. 317.

associations, the legend also preserves for Garner his connection to ancestral tradition, and, by extension, his perceived 'Celtic' roots.

The geographical proximity of North Wales to the Edge is a constant feature in Garner's life and fiction. He reports walking in a valley of the Pennines, the subject of his seventh novel *Thursbitch* (2003), and looking back to see that he 'inhabited a mythic landscape, at the far side of which rose Moel Fammau' (*VT*, 202), the highest peak in the Clwydian mountain range – little different from Powys's view that a location such as Glastonbury Tor carried layers of Arthurian and Welsh mythological association. The only thing about the stretch of land that was English, Garner writes, an area comprising Alderley Edge itself, 'was the language of its present occupants' (202). In Garner's work the mountain in the distance appears first in *The Moon of Gomrath* when Colin is seeking the magical healing plant *mothan*: Shuttlingslow, a hill to the south of Macclesfield Forest, is described as 'a watchtower to the plain which lay like a sea from Rivington Pike to the surge of Moel Fammaw'.[28] It appears, too, in many of Garner's later novels, in *The Stone Book Quartet*, *Strandloper* and *Boneland*, mirroring the Edge as a symbol of the fantastic, but also a topographical reminder of the significance of Wales in Garner's thinking. A later comment by Garner, however, complicates his view that Cheshire shares in some sense a cultural and historical connection with Wales:

> I suspect the truth is that the Celts are still here and have always been here … [For] me, the professional Celts who go out to the fringes and moan and wear tartans rather objectionably are really not Celtic. Because the true Celts, the ones who cared, stayed where they were and we're still here.[29]

While Garner has not constructed an entire philosophy of life and art based on his conception of Wales and 'the idealizing "notion of the Celt"', several aspects of this comment place him on a similar footing to Powys at his most fanatical.[30] As the introduction to this thesis has laid out, 'Celtic' has in recent decades become itself a contested term as the culturally dominant idea of the Celts as a

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[28] Alan Garner, *The Moon of Gomrath* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 [1963]), p. 66. Hereafter *MG* in the text.
[29] Clarke and Roberts, *Twilight of the Celtic Gods*, p. 30.
[30] Butler, *Four British Fantasists*, p. 153.

homogeneous people began to lose validity. Certainly Garner's early attachment to the Welsh was primarily linguistic, but that is not his focus in the above comment. By the 'true Celts' (a term also employed by Rolleston in *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*) he seems to be referring to the Cornovii, but whatever evidence he has for their remaining 'here' – and, indeed, what makes them 'true' – is not at all obvious. Garner has traced his family at Alderley Edge back to the late sixteenth century and so his own descent from a Celtic people is equally unsubstantiated, but here his idea of the Celt can be read as a particular commitment to landscape and the continuity of its associated myths and traditions. He appears to suggest, as Butler also notes, that his ancestors 'are as Celtic as the Welsh or Scots, and perhaps more so', a claim which recalls the primitive aboriginal theories espoused by Machen and Powys, though better grounded in an archaeological understanding of settlement patterns following the Ice Age.[31] Garner does not use Powys's vocabulary of 'race' and 'blood' to suggest genetic inheritance (not until *The Owl Service* does a character, the Welshman Huw Halfbacon, declare that he '[has] the blood', discussed later in this chapter), terms which had disturbing connotations following the Second World War, but there is a pride and a romanticism to Garner's provocative claim which echoes Powys's view of the Welsh people as an enduring race able to preserve its individuality: 'What this land has the ability to do,' Garner continues in the same interview, 'is not to be invaded, but to assume and consume the [*sic*] take unto itself and make its own'.[32] Whether Garner developed these views early in his career, or if he came to them later, it is clear that the boundaries in Garner's mind between Wales and Cheshire and their respective 'Celtic' identities remained fluid.

The red sandstone escarpment known locally as the Edge is central to Garner's work as an 'alternative space' due in part to the vestiges of Celtic and Welsh folk-legend that survive there, which Garner encountered as a child and fed into his writing. For Garner, the popular folklore of the Edge is bound up with his ancestry and his interpretation of local tradition as somehow Celtic. Many of the distinguishing features of the hill were in fact created or discovered by a member of the Garner

[31] *Ibid*.
[32] Alan Garner, *The Owl Service* (London: Collins, 1987 [1967]), p. 81. Hereafter *OS* in the text; Clarke and Roberts, p. 30.

family: the face of an old man, for example, is said to have been carved by Robert Garner, the author's 'grandad's grandad', and can still be seen above a stone trough known as the Wizard's Well. Robert also erected a ring of standing stones at the behest of a landowner in the nineteenth century.[33] Certain elements of the folklore of the Edge later came to be understood as 'Celtic' by Garner. Indeed, after writing *Weirdstone* Garner read Máire MacNeill's book *The Festival Of Lughnasa* (1962), and noticed many of the same elements in Irish custom as those that appeared in the folklore of the Edge, among them white horses, beacons, boundaries, buried heroes, fertility wells and elves, which led to his conclusion that Alderley 'is in its present manifestation a Celtic cosmos, not an English one' (*VT*, 79). One story told of a large boulder by the Wizard's Well which had fallen from a cliff and landed on an old woman and her cow, which, claims Garner, denotes 'a very ancient Celtic tradition … [of the] washer of the shirts of the dead'.[34] This is in reference to a figure known as the 'washer at the ford', an omen of death common to Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh folklore.[35] Garner sees the cow as a 'horned animal' associated with violent death because the bull was a symbol of strength and virility and was a common sacrificial animal for various Celtic-speaking peoples.[36] This view of the Edge as Celtic in its associations is, in large part, a wilful romanticisation which for Garner confirm the idea of his ancestors having contributed in some way to this Celtic 'cosmos'.

The narrative most central to the folklore of the Edge is 'The Legend of Alderley' or 'The Wizard of Alderley', a retelling of which prefaces Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. It is 'deeply embedded in [Garner's] psyche' and integral to his conception of the Edge, providing a structural basis of Welsh folk-legend and landscape to his early work.[37] The legend is for Garner both 'the showpiece of Houghite oral tradition' (The Hough, pronounced 'th'uff', is a small village at the foot of the Edge), and a version of the myth of the Sleeping Hero, for which there are many analogues around the world.[38] The legend, as it was 'absorbed' (*VT*, 65) by Garner from his paternal grandfather

[33] Alan Garner, *Where Shall We Run To?: A Memoir* (London: Fourth Estate, 2019), p. 110.
[34] Thompson, Interview with Alan Garner, for 'The Camelot Project'.
[35] Koch, '*bean sí* / banshee', *Celtic Culture*, p. 189.
[36] *Ibid*., 'bull', pp. 57-58.
[37] Thompson, Interview with Alan Garner, for 'The Camelot Project'.
[38] Alan Garner, *By Seven Firs and Goldenstone: An Account of the Legend of Alderley* (London: Temenos Academy, 2010), p. 76.

at some point before 1939, begins with a farmer from the village of Mobberley riding across the Edge to Macclesfield to sell his milk-white mare. He is stopped at Thieves' Hole by a man 'with long hair and beard' who asks to buy the mare.[39] The farmer refuses, and on returning from Macclesfield, his horse unsold, he comes across the man for a second time and follows him to 'a great rock embedded in the hillside' known as the Iron Gates (*WB*, 10). The rock splits apart and they descend into the hill itself. There he finds a sleeping king and 'a hundred and forty knights in silver armour, and by the side of all but one a milk-white mare' (11). As payment for the horse the farmer takes what he can of the old man's treasure. The version of the legend collected by William Axon in 1884 is broadly similar, although the old man is more explicitly a wizard, who uses a 'wand' to open the Iron Gates.[40] Its effect as a preface to *Weirdstone* is to highlight the fantastical elements of the legend, for the old man in the 'original' becomes the wizard Cadellin and the sleeping knights protect Britain against the villainous Nastrond in the dwarf-halls of Fundindelve. The king himself in the Alderley legend is often thought to be Arthur, although in *Weirdstone* – and the tale as it was told to Garner by his grandfather – it is only an unnamed king. The fantasy elements which evolved out of the tale are continued in the sequel *The Moon of Gomrath*, and most recently in the concluding book of the trilogy, *Boneland*. A version of the legend from Richmond Castle, North Yorkshire, also forms the basis for *Potter Thompson*, an opera composed by Gordon Crosse for which Garner wrote the libretto in 1972; this story, more in line with the wider British analogues of the Sleeping Hero myth, tells of a craftsman who enters into the cavern under a hill, and begins the process of waking the hero – in this case he is named as King Arthur.

Garner's remark that his exposure to the Welsh language was 'as if I were hearing the knights … talking in their sleep' was confirmed for him in 1965 following the publication of *Weirdstone* when he received a letter from Professor Thomas Jones in Aberystwyth. Jones had been editing a sixteenth-century Welsh version of the Arthurian Cave legend, and he claimed that Garner's version of the tale of the sleeping knights (itself based on Joseph Garner's oral version) was the 'purest' that he had yet

[39] Alan Garner, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (London: Collins, 1971 [1960]), p. 9. Hereafter *WB* in the text.
[40] William E. A. Axon, *Cheshire Gleanings* (Manchester: Tubbs, Brook and Chrystal, 1884), p. 56.

come across (*VT*, 199). This meant that the oldest folk-legend that Garner knew, and which formed a basis for his fantasy, to Jones's mind, and to Garner's, shared an origin with a Welsh analogue. Indeed Axon lists variants from all over Europe, including a Welsh legend of Arthur and his knights who lie sleeping in a cave on Craig y Ddinas, South Wales: 'the Black Eagle and the Golden Eagle shall go to war, and make the earth tremble with their affray, so that the cavern shall be shaken and the bell ring and the sleepers be awakened'.[41] As discussed in Chapter Four Wales has many distinct 'national redeemers' of this kind, including Owain Glyndŵr, Owain Lawgoch ('of the red hand'), and Henry Tudor, who await a time of crisis to return.[42] Garner recalls that as a child during the Second World War he would overhear his parents hoping 'more than half-serious[ly]' that the knights would wake up, which was confirmation to him that the legend was still 'living'.[43] 'The Legend of Alderley' is clearly of the same type as these Welsh analogues, though less explicitly associated with Arthur; the knights, too, will rise in defence of 'England' in the legend, yet in *Weirdstone* the danger comes from the nation-less 'evil' and 'malice' of Nastrond.

While Garner identifies many 'Celtic' elements in the folklore of Alderley Edge, 'The Legend of Alderley' is thus understood by Garner as particularly Welsh in tone and comes to represent 'the whole of that rural, working-class part of [his] background'.[44] The legend is not, however, simply tied to the Edge through oral tradition and an association with place names, but for Garner its very toponymic structure retains evidence of ancient civilisation at the Edge. In a lecture delivered at Manchester University in 1977, Garner uses aspects of the legend to make several claims about the history and topography of Alderley Edge. Confining himself to the study of the collected written accounts of the local tale he infers that there was once a Bronze Age settlement on Alderley itself, and that a structure existed on the Edge for the measurement of time and the observance of certain calendrical events, including the later Celtic festival of Samhain (hence why the legend takes place at dawn 'on a day at the end of October') (*VT*, 75-6).[45] The route by which the old man takes the farmer

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[41] *Ibid*., p. 63.
[42] Elissa R. Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition*, p. 25.
[43] Thompson, Interview with Alan Garner, for 'The Camelot Project'.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] Excavations carried out by the Alderley Edge Landscape Project confirmed Garner's suspicions, that Bronze Age people were drawn to the Edge for its copper (Prag and Timberlake, 'The Archaeology of Alderley Edge',

guides the reader (or, indeed, the listener) along a trail which Garner himself set out to identify before moving to Oxford. The farmer and the old man begin at Thieves' Hole, and then 'By Seven Firs to Goldenstone … to Stormy Point and Saddlebole' (*WB,* 10), a phrasing which appears unaltered in every extant version of the legend, and, Garner suggests, must have its origin as an oral fragment. In 1954 Garner excavated the 'Golden Stone' mentioned in the tale, and on identifying at each remaining location evidence of a primitive dwelling, he concluded that 'The Legend of Alderley' was likely over 4,000 years old.

By prefacing his first novel with a version of the Sleeping Hero legend which Garner believes originated in an ancient, localised oral culture, the Edge becomes an alternative space to the modern metropolitan, an opposition clearly evoked in a scene in *Weirdstone* where the children Colin and Susan, who are staying in Alderley Edge with the Mossock family, come across a family of tourists 'sprawled in front of the iron gates' listening to the 'blare' of a portable radio (76). The incongruity of their presence before the entrance to the series of tunnels where Cadellin guards the sleeping knights figures the Edge, part of a landscape inflected with Welsh and 'Celtic' history and myth, as a refuge from modern life, preserving a magical view of the world. The route described in 'The Legend of Alderley' marks the farmer's journey into the numinous: 'with each step,' writes Garner, 'he moves out of his reality into that of the other'.[46] This is reflected not only in the details of the legend itself, but in the old magic which animates the Edge and its surroundings: as the children walk alongside a quarry near the Holywell the sheer rocks and bare stone give the place a 'primitive atmosphere' (*MG*, 20), and a small tumulus above the crossroads on Monk's Heath '*knew* more than the fields in which it had its roots [Garner's italics]' (*WB*, 173). The Edge is where the numinous interacts with the physical world, and often these experiences are psychologically transformative, no more so than in *Boneland*, discussed later in this chapter. Gradually in Garner's later fiction the underground spaces of the Edge begin to function as metaphors for the mind. It is into a 'crack in the hill' that Mary

p. 317). As to his second claim 'there is very little hard archaeological evidence for either date or function for the earthworks on the Edge itself' (*ibid*., p. 319). The detail which places events at 'the end of October' presumably comes from Joseph Garner's telling; Axon's version does not mention it.
[46] Garner, *By Seven Firs*, p. 15.

crawls in *The Stone Book Quartet*, urged on by her father: ‘At the bottom of the wall she saw the beginning of a band of clay, the Tough Tom red marl that never let water through. She went forward slowly into the wet’ (28).[47] She finds her father’s mark cut into the wall of a cave alongside an image of a bull and ‘the footprints of people, bare and shod … [she] was in a crowd that could never have been, thronging, as real as she was’ (31). Mary’s mystical experience in the crack in the Edge is a continuation of Garner’s ideas about ancestral myth and her own version of the Sleeping Hero; she is shown the magic in the hill and given the task ‘to create the world’ (133). Garner’s archaeological and folkloric investigations into the Edge have thus revealed what he believes to be generally Celtic and often specifically Welsh associations, facts which confirm and shape his understanding of his ancestry and its integral connection to a local landscape.

[47] Alan Garner, *The Stone Book Quartet* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p. 28.

‘We sacrificed the numinous’: the Age of Reason and Wales as an ‘alternative space’

One element of Garner’s thinking with clear parallels to Machen and Powys’s philosophies is his view that modern society has, to its detriment, turned towards more scientific, materialist modes of thought. Machen’s dislike of modernity was mainly expressed in his criticism of modern Christianity, accusing Protestantism of diluting and sterilising the public’s relationship with the divine, whereas Powys focused on the psychological implications of failing to approach the world from a ‘magical’ standpoint. Garner’s criticisms appear to have emerged alongside the tension, discussed above, between his rural, working-class roots and the educated world he is unable to leave behind. Like Powys, he is concerned with the psychological impact of society’s underlying turn from the emotional and irrational, but more immediate is his focus on social and literary-stylistic change. An explicit use of Welsh mythology in Garner’s fiction – beyond the Welsh and Celtic associations of the previous section – represents a correction to, or reaction against, this change. Garner’s attitude is characterized in his early work by a distinction between magic and the effects of what the author terms the intellectual ‘Age of Reason’ – the period in Western culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, proponents of which championed rationality and the scientific process over superstition and religious thought.

In a talk given in 1983 Garner describes, in his view, how in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the English began to split ‘heart from head’ and constructed a culture based on Classical modes of thought: ‘It was an aspect of the Age of Reason that had committed the nuisance,’ he writes, ‘and the nuisance was not only linguistic but social’ (*VT*, 49). According to Garner, who does not ‘feel at home with anything after The Tempest’ (49), the English literary style which developed following this period and continues to this day ‘came from the library’ and not from inherited culture and landscape. In this way the academic world represented a suppression of individual style, which Garner witnessed first-hand when at Oxford. The heart and the head, emotion and intellect, ‘just did not meet’ he writes, ‘[and the] English graduates I have met … admit that they wanted to write, but they admit that because they were aware of the course behind them they daren’t: there was nothing

else to say'.[48] His criticism of modern rationality also extends to its effects on the landscape, which, he writes in an article for the *New Statesman*, was 'Capability Browned into parkland, where … Enlightenment Man could take pleasure in his command of nature'.[49] Garner's opposition to the effects of the Enlightenment thus reflects both his own internal tension and a reaction to the values of the wider society. His work represents a desire for a connection to tradition rooted in landscape, something which Garner perceived as now lacking in modernity. Even in his early fiction his characters detail the effects of the Enlightenment: '"Why do you think men know us only in legend?"' the wizard Cadellin asks Susan in *The Moon of Gomrath*. '"Once we were close; but some little time before the elves were driven away, a change came over you. You found the world easier to master by hands alone: things became more than thoughts with you, and you called it an Age of Reason"' (*MG*, 33). As this period continued, Cadellin and his kind, creatures like the elves and the dwarfs, withdrew from humans and became beings of superstition.

Though Garner did not consciously participate in the countercultural movement of the 1960s, his early fantasy novels can be seen to occupy an adjacent space precisely by their opposition to certain kinds of modern thought. As Malcolm Chapman has argued, during the sixties the Celtic nations were considered 'an alternative space from the conventionalities of England', and in a sense Garner's fantasies also constitute such a space.[50] This decade, in which Garner, and several other authors of the second 'Golden Age' of children's literature began writing, represented a period of 'New Age' thinking which synthesised myth, history, and mysticism in the quest for alternative systems. Celtic mythology was 'ransacked' for modes of thinking which were seen to share the values of the counterculture.[51] Although Garner professes to have been 'too busy to notice the 60s, or indeed any other decade', he was reading and engaging with texts such as Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* (1948), which employs large amounts of Welsh (and Irish) material: while it was not in itself a

[48] Wintle and Fisher, *The Pied Pipers*, pp. 229-30.
[49] Alan Garner, 'Alan Garner: Revelations from a Life of Storytelling', *New Statesman* (2 April 2015), <www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/03/bronze-age-axe-space-telescope-and-art-story-alan-garner-being-made-myths> [accessed 6 March 2021].
[50] Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth*, p. 242.
[51] Alan M. Kent, 'Celtic Nirvanas: Constructions of Celtic in Contemporary British Youth Culture', *Celtic Geographies: Old Culture, New Times*, eds. David Harvey, Rhys Jones, Christine Milligan and Neil McInroy (London: Routledge, 2002), 208-226, p. 212.

countercultural text, its paperback release in 1961 coincided with a resurgence of certain kinds of paganism and feminism which were naturally attracted to the book's central theory.[52] The thesis of Graves's 'Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth' – rejected by most scholars of myth for its imprecision and 'wildly inaccurate philological speculation' – identifies a triple goddess figure as the source for all poetic inspiration.[53] The goddess takes the forms of Maiden, Mother and Crone, each representing a particular phase of the moon.[54] While it is too much of a stretch to claim that Garner came entirely under the sway of Graves's argument, his reaction to discovering Welsh literature (quoted above) bears a resemblance to a passage in *The White Goddess*: 'Despite the deep sensory satisfaction to be derived from Classical poetry, it never makes the hair rise and the heart leap'.[55] Garner also cites it as an influence in the appendix to *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963), along with several other texts which became popular to New Age thinking, such as Alfred Watkins' *The Old Straight Track* (1925) and *The God of the Witches* (1952) by Margaret Murray. Thus, while Garner claims not to have been aware of the cultural change of the 1960s and the resurgence of interest in non-English tradition, he was nevertheless reading and responding to many of its most prominent texts, suggesting that his own turn to the non-rational and mythical – particularly Celtic mythology – might not have developed in isolation.

Neil Philip sees Garner's use of myth throughout his body of work as 'a diagnostic tool in the examination of contemporary ills'; in narrower terms Garner was working against a culture which he saw as having turned to materialism, to the 'banal and shoddy', in place of rooted tradition (*VT*, 37).[56] '[We] sacrificed the numinous for other greatness,' Garner writes: 'the intellect' (124). He is not a practising Christian (his view that Christ is not 'mythical' enough in Christianity is again similar to a comment made by Graves) but there are parallels in this view to Machen's reasons for turning to

[52] 'Reading Group: Alan Garner Answers your Questions', *Guardian* 31 Aug 2012 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/31/reading-group-alan-garner> [accessed 5 May 2020]; Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, ed. Grevel Lindop (London: Faber & Faber, 1999 [1948]), p. xvii.
[53] Juliette Wood, 'The Concept of the Goddess', *The Concept of the Goddess*, ed. Sandra Billington and Miranda Green (London: Routledge, 1996), 8-25, p. 11.
[54] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 41.
[55] Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 21.
[56] Neil Philip, *A Fine Anger*, p. 21.

mystical experience in his own fiction, as a counteraction to the spiritual waste land he viewed modern life to represent, as evidenced in his portrayal a dull, middle-class existence in *A Fragment of Life*.[57] Both *Weirdstone* and *Gomrath* are 'intrusion fantasies', in which a fantastical world impinges the fictional 'real' world; at the opening of *Gomrath* Colin and Susan have been shut out from the Iron Gates of Fundindelve; they yearn for 'enchantment' (*MG*, 19) and spend time searching for 'the world of Magic' (23) they had once experienced.[58] The barren land of Elidor in Garner's third novel, reachable only through 'Wasteland and boundaries', exists alongside contemporary Manchester; the depiction of the suburban middle class, notes Philip, is of the inhabitants of a spiritual waste land 'dominated by television'.[59] As in Tolkien's Middle-earth, the magic of these first three novels is on the wane, either in the process of being attacked or already in ruin, a common trope in fantasy literature identified by John Clute and John Grant as 'thinning'.[60] In this way Garner's fantasies, constructed from British myth and folklore, are presented as bastions against a modern world of progress and technology, of 'dirt and ugliness and unclean air' (*MG*, 27).

Gomrath is the first of Garner's novels to make extensive reference to Welsh mythology, although these references are all, according to Garner, a product of his 'grasshopper research' (*MG*, 169), the skipping about from text to text with no particular scheme in mind. When discussing his creative process Garner has always been adamant that he does not make things up, rather he 'finds' things, a revealing concept which will be discussed later in this chapter. 'A made-up name feels wrong,' he writes, 'but in Celtic literature there are frequent catalogues of people who may have been the subject of lost stories, and here it is possible to find names that are authentic, yet free from other associations' (169). Garner cites the *Mabinogion* (the 1949 Gwyn and Thomas Jones translation) and Skene, mentioned above, in the appendix as his sources for the Welsh material. Much of his research in this regard appears to demonstrate merely a surface-level 'pillaging' of Welsh and other mythologies,

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[57] '[The Church] isolates Christianity from amongst the mythical, yet … myth adds, not detracts from things like Christ's divinity'. Rupert Loydell, 'Rupert Loydell interviews Alan Garner', *Stride magazine* no. 8 (1983) <http://alangarner.atspace.org/rl.html> [accessed 12 May 2020]; *cf.*, Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 9.
[58] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 2008), pp. 114-181.
[59] Alan Garner, *Elidor* (London: Collins, 1983 [1965]), p. 43; Philip, p. 46.
[60] John Clute and John Grant, 'Thinning', *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) <www.sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=thinning> [accessed 15 March 2021].

contributing to an authentic atmosphere rather than a coherent philosophy or group of theories, unlike Powys's systematic construction of a personal mythology (see Chapters Three and Four). While the inclusion of dwarfs, 'svart-alfar', and the word 'Brisingamen' itself (the name of the goddess Freyja's necklace) appear to ground *Weirdstone* in a particularly Norse atmosphere, *Gomrath* is the more generally 'Celtic' of the two. The malevolent 'Brollachan', for example, is a creature from Scottish Gaelic legend, and Fohla (the 'Mark of Fohla', Susan's magical bracelet) is one of the Irish Tuatha Dé Dannan. Welsh mythological names include the man Albanac's horse Melynlas, 'the foal of Caswallawn, and one of the Three High-mettled Horses of Prydein' (132), a name which Garner appears to have taken from *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*; he has also retained the name's Triadic structure, a common feature of Welsh and Irish medieval texts used to order tradition and lore. An example of the lack of system in Garner's pillaging can be found in the name of the perilous and barren land to the north in *Gomrath* known as 'Prydein' (28), beyond the mountain 'Minith Bannawg' (30). It would have made better geographical sense for 'Prydein' to be 'Prydyn', the Welsh name for the land of the Picts: 'Prydein' was the name for Britain in Middle Welsh and was often used to refer to the lands inhabited by the Brittonic Celts.[61]

Counter to Philip's claim that Garner simply 'plundered willy-nilly' from mythological texts, however, Garner assigns regions to different races, suggesting more regularity than critics have previously identified.[62] The elves, or 'lios-alfar' (from the Old Norse, meaning 'elves of light'), who seek refuge in Fundindelve at the novel's opening are Welsh in everything but name. They are said to come from 'Sinadon', an old name for Snowdon (Middle English 'Synadowne'), and from 'Talebolion', once an area of land on Anglesey (27).[63] The names of the elves briefly mentioned are also of Welsh mythological origin, the majority of which come from the boon list in *Culhwch ac Olwen*: Atlendor son of Naf, Ermid son of Erbin, Riogan son of Moren, and Anwas the Winged (*Anwas Edeiniog*) (27, 23).[64] Cadellin and Angharad Goldenhand, who both appear first in

[61] Koch, 'Prydain', *Celtic Culture*, p. 1469.
[62] Philip, p. 21.
[63] See *MG*'s appendix, p. 171.
[64] Apart from 'Riogan', who is mentioned in the verse catalogue *Englynion y Beddau* in *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*.

Weirdstone, are also from *Culhwch*. In line with Garner's own antipathy towards the 'Age of Reason', the elves in *Gomrath* are portrayed as the victims of humankind's intrusive technological developments. They have fled their lands in Wales due to a 'smoke-sickness' caused by the 'unclean air that men have worshipped these two hundred years' (27), a reference to the pollution caused by the Industrial Revolution. Welsh mythology, and by extension Welsh culture in general, is here presented by Garner as incompatible with Enlightenment values: the elves of Sinadon have been displaced by reason and materialism, and by humans who 'found the world easier to master by hands alone' (quoted above). It is clear also that to Garner's mind, the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution are largely indistinguishable as stages or products of the materialistic worldview.

Garner's attitude to Welsh, and more generally Celtic myth, is further expressed in *Gomrath*'s system of magic, the intellectual 'High Magic' used by the wizard Cadellin and a level of non-rational magic, the 'Old Magic', a kind of emotional force which is 'of the heart, not of the head' (76). A woman named Celemon, whose name is also taken from the *Culhwch* boon list, is one of the nine 'Shining Ones' who command the Old Magic; this is the only means by which the malevolent Brollachan can be defeated and is at its strongest during the week following the 'moon of Gomrath' (111). Indeed, Philip identifies Gomrath as reflecting one of the four Celtic festivals of the year, possibly Samhain, since the novel opens at the start of winter.[65] While Cadellin and the elves suffer the effects of the human 'Age of Reason', Cadellin's High Magic of 'thoughts and spells' is itself contrasted with the Old Magic: the Old Magic is 'more natural' (97) and associated with women, but was deemed too powerful to control and so it was suppressed by the High Magic. There are many details which might ground this non-rational magic in Welsh-ness: the names Celemon and Angharad, whose power also derives from the Old Magic, and Susan's confusion about whether Angharad's path has led Susan to Wales or the Pennines (115), but extensive allusions also to Irish mythology and a clear indebtedness to Robert Graves give the Old Magic a broadly 'Celtic' tone. In the same interview Garner links the nine Shining Ones to the 'triple goddess', the central figure of *The White Goddess* thesis ('Usually it's

[65] Philip, p. 37.

three, but if it's particularly magical it's nine').[66] The Old Magic also invokes the Wild Hunt, whose chief rider Garner identifies as Cernunnos, the horned god of Celtic tradition (or 'Garanhir' as Garner calls him in *Gomrath*, a Welsh ruler mentioned in *Hanes Taliesin*).

Garner's brief allusion to Annwn, the otherworld in Welsh mythology, casts the Old Magic in a more spiritual light than the High Magic, or indeed than any aspect of modern society. In a dream-like sequence Susan is almost spirited away by Celemon to a place referred to as 'Caer Rigor' (75). She is taken down into a land which Cadellin calls 'Abred' (the innermost circle of Annwn, according to Rolleston) and then up to the 'Threshold of the Summer Stars' (75).[67] Caer Rigor is another name for Caer Sidi, or Annwn, mentioned in *Preideu Annwfyn*.[68] Cadellin quotes from it directly: 'Three times the fulness of Prydwen we went into it: / Except seven, none returned from Caer Rigor' (74).[69] Caer Rigor is thus a version of the afterlife or Welsh otherworld, and the other 'dimension' referred to by Garner. Annwn was also a prominent feature of Powys's vision, detailed in Chapters Three and Four. For Powys, Annwn is a space of psychological introversion characteristic of the Welsh people: 'sinking' into Annwn is a way of enduring the historic battles and suppressing forces of contemporary society. Garner's otherworld appears to constitute a similar removal of oneself from the world, a state closer to death, but its association with the Old Magic suggests spiritual transcendence: it is beyond 'the present scale of good and ill', Susan is told (97). Susan asks if she might see Celemon again, and Cadellin replies that they will one day meet again and return to Caer Rigor 'and there will be no bitterness to draw you back' (74). Celemon 'exists on another dimension beyond this world,' Garner explains: 'Her function there is entirely mystical'.[70] A clear gender distinction between the High and Old Magic again reflects the influence of *The White Goddess*; Garner's fantasy of an intuitive female brand of spiritual magic restrained by the more rational and patriarchal High Magic draws upon ideas

[66] Thompson, Interview with Alan Garner.
[67] Garner would have come across 'Abred', the supposed innermost circle of Annwn, in Rolleston. Rolleston's own source was *Barddas*, compiled and written by Iolo Morganwg (see Introduction and p. 153, fn 61) who envisioned three layers of existence in the Celtic worldview.
[68] *Gaer Rigor*, 'the Petrification Fort' in Haycock's translation of *Preideu Annwfyn*, possibly from the Latin *rigor* ('stiffness, rigidity'). Haycock, p. 436.
[69] Prydwen, the name of Arthur's ship in *Preideu Annwfyn*. Haycock, p. 435.
[70] Thompson, Interview with Alan Garner.

that had helped shape the modern feminist blend of paganism and witchcraft in Britain since the 1950s.[71]

As the 1960s progressed Garner's exploration of Celtic mythology developed in complexity. His third novel *Elidor* (1965) is a 'portal-quest' fantasy, not unlike Lewis's Narnia in structure, although rather than using the fantasy world as Christian allegory, Garner is interested in Elidor 'as an idea … a point of reference by which we may understand the emptiness and futility of our own world'.[72] The title references the Welsh fairy tale 'Elidor, or the Golden Ball' recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis in *Itinerarium Cambriae* (1188) in which a young boy is led into fairyland by two little men; the novel is a blend of Welsh and Irish motifs, and, as Fimi notes, mystical symbolism from various occult and mythical traditions.[73] Elidor's four castles and the four treasures which the children are tasked with retrieving from under the mound of Vandwy, for example, correspond to the treasures of the Tuatha Dé Danann and the cities built to guard them, while 'Caer Vandwy' is the name of one of the castles mentioned in *Preideu Annwfyn* (along with Caer Rigor).[74]

Not until Garner's fourth novel, however, does Welsh mythology influence the central structure of the narrative, and a cultural and psychological division between the English and the Welsh becomes one of the driving forces of the book. *The Owl Service* (1967) depicts rural Wales as a place whose inhabitants are isolated, close-knit, and intimately attuned to the natural landscape and its mythological associations. The story brings together three teenagers – half-siblings Alison and Roger, whose parents have recently married, and Gwyn, whose mother has been employed at the family's house in Llanymawddwy. After finding a stack of plates in the attic and reading pages from the *Mabinogion* they discover the valley to be a reservoir of power and that the three of them are destined to repeat the tragedy of Blodeuwedd, the woman made out of flowers by the magician Gwydion as a

[71] Gerald Gardner, one of the main proponents of modern witchcraft in Britain, was active many years before the publication of *The White Goddess* in 1947, yet Graves's book nevertheless provided the movement with its most popular image. Graves later wrote an essay praising Gardnerian witchcraft, and Gardner visited Graves just before the former's death in 1961. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, p. 188; *ibid*., p. 252.
[72] Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, pp. 1-58; Philip, p. 46.
[73] Fimi, p. 159.
[74] Tony Watkins, 'Alan Garner's "Elidor"', *Children's Literature in Education* 3 (1972), 56-63, p. 59.

wife for his son Lleu Llaw Gyffes in *Mab fab Mathonwy*.[75] Blodeuwedd, whose original name (Blodeuedd) means 'flower-aspect', instead falls in love with the landowner Gronw Pebyr. Gronw attempts to kill Lleu, but Lleu is transformed into an eagle and in turn manages to kill Gronw. As a punishment for her infidelity Blodeuwedd is turned into an owl, changing her name. The novel loosely casts Alison, Gwyn and Roger as Blodeuwedd, Lleu and Gronw, with the groundskeeper Huw Halfbacon in the role of Gwydion.[76] Through the reinterpretation of the myth in a contemporary setting, Garner continues to explore ideas about inherited tradition and landscape while developing his image of Wales as a non-rational space.

The process which led to the eventual writing of *The Owl Service* has become a legend in itself, and in essays and interviews Garner appears eager to enumerate as many strange coincidences associated with that time as he can. When Garner first read *Mab fab Mathonwy* (the Jones & Jones translation, as listed in *Gomrath*'s appendix) he says that he considered the Blodeuwedd tale a 'modern story', but it was not until years later when Garner's mother-in-law showed him an old dinner service decorated with a floral pattern did the concept of the novel begin to form in his mind. When traced and put together by his wife Griselda, the flowers became owls, emulating the transformation endured by Blodeuwedd in *Math*.[77] Garner found the setting for his modern interpretation when the family holidayed at Bryn Hall in Llanymawddwy (not far, incidentally, from Powys's Corwen): 'The lie of the land fitted the descriptions in the legend,' writes Garner: 'Everything was where it ought to be … The legend could have happened here. As I stood on the doorstep at night, thinking these things, an owl brushed its wings in my face'.[78] Similarly, Garner says he tried on one occasion to discover 'whether any memory of the legend had survived' by asking the caretaker Dafydd Rees, on whom he based the character of Huw, if anyone had died in the valley.[79] Someone had, according to Rees: a

[75] See *The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies, pp. 47-64.
[76] 'Halfbacon' is also a clear reference to events in *Math* when Gwydion cheats Pryderi out of a herd of pigs (*hobeu*): 'and to this day the name survives in the term for a side of pork: half a *hob*' (Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 48). Huw relates this tale to Roger as though he himself (as Gwydion) had once tricked a neighbouring farmer.
[77] The service was eventually identified as being the work of nineteenth-century designer Christopher Dresser; see 'Reading Group: Alan Garner Answers your Questions', *Guardian*.
[78] Ellen, Adam and Katharine Garner, *Filming The Owl Service*: *A Children's Diary* with Contributions from Alan Garner and Peter Plummer (London: Collins, Armada Books, 1970), p. 8.
[79] *Ibid*., p. 10.

‘Red Indian’ had shot a man ‘and the arrow went right through a stone and him’ (in *Math* Lleu kills Gronw by throwing a spear through a stone) (205). These incidents and many more reflect Garner’s romantic opinion of the *Mabinogion*, which he deems ‘a masterpiece, mesmeric in its cultural imagination, its gods euhemerised, yet, since it is composed of archetype and metaphor, it is universal and timeless’ (198). They suggest the ‘state of mind’ Garner was in when he began to research *The Owl Service*, his only novel set in Wales itself: Garner’s anecdote shows him actively seeking for connections, trying to bring out the mystery and ‘timeless’ quality he attributed to the country and its mythology.

Indeed, the ways in which time is experienced in *The Owl Service* is at odds with standard linear time and contributes to Garner’s idea that Wales represents a space outside of ordered, conventional thought. For the Welsh caretaker Huw Halfbacon – a prophetic fool, treated with reverence by the local villagers – there is no clear separation between the present day, his ancestral history, and the folk-legend of the valley: ‘My uncle painted that’ he replies when Gwyn asks about a sixteenth-century painting of Blodeuwedd which had been uncovered in the billiard room (*OS*, 81). Huw also claims to have tricked a man in the neighbouring valley for his pigs by trading them for horses made out of toadstools – a ploy in fact used by Gwydion at the start of *Math*. Garner has written about this particular experience of time, maintaining that those who have not been formally educated ‘are not trapped in linear time’; as the oral memory travels further back it enters what Garner calls ‘mythic time’ in which everything is present simultaneously (205). Powys shares this idea of the elasticity of time in Wales, discussed briefly in Chapter Four in reference to *Owen Glendower*; for Powys ‘the Middle Ages … seems much nearer to us in Wales than in England’ (*OC*, 63): he reports that a resident of Corwen told him of a battle between two ‘generals’ in ‘Dyfed’ which to Powys sounded exactly like the combat between Gwydion and Pryderi in *Math* (46). Much of Machen’s fiction set in rural Wales also collapses conventional time, Gwent with its ‘hills and valleys … buried temples and mouldering Roman walls’, and Lucien’s occult reveries of Roman society in *The Hill of Dreams*.[80] In *The Owl Service* Alison experiences a similar dissociation when she begins to feel the power of

[80] Machen, *Far Off Things*, p. 97.

Blodeuwedd and individual days lose their meaning: ‘I feel like they’re here at the same time,’ she admits to Gwyn (*OS*, 76). That Garner associates ‘mythic time’ with oral culture and a lack of education suggests a romantic view of ‘peasant’ life, or the rural working class who have never left their birthplace, much like Garner’s own family at Alderley Edge. Huw’s blending of a distant collective memory with episodes from Welsh mythology see him perform a kind of *anamnesis*, a remembering of ancestral knowledge: ‘we of the blood must meet it in our time’ (149), he says to Gwyn, who, it is revealed, is Huw’s son. For Garner, as with Powys, the Welsh possess a ‘primordial’ connection to their land and its stories.

This division between classes in *The Owl Service* and their varying attunements to the supernatural is condensed in the character of Gwyn. Gwyn is trapped between two worlds, the Welsh and the English, which in Garner’s novel is mapped onto a distinction between working class and middle class, and uneducated and the formally schooled. He aspires to break free from his social background, buying elocution records in order to learn how to ‘speak properly’ (114) because he is embarrassed by his Welsh accent (‘But I’m a Taff, aren’t I?’). He must, however, have ‘the background’, as Roger’s father Clive puts it, if he wants to progress in an English-dominated society. Fimi points out that Gwyn is in some sense representative of Garner himself, an intelligent working-class boy who still maintains an intimate understanding of the landscape.[81] Gwyn has never been to the area before and yet knows details of its history and folklore within a week of arriving at the house: ‘I know every cow-clap in this valley … I know where to look for sheep after a snowstorm … I even know what Mrs Harvey knows!’ (56). Gwyn ‘belongs’ to the place in a way that Alison and Roger, both of them English, cannot. Gwyn and Alison respond with open minds to the supernatural occurrences in the valley, whereas Roger, the unemotional public schoolboy, treats them as a ‘put up job’ and ‘hogwash’ (125). As he does in *Gomrath*, Garner again figures the intuitive and non-rational as both Welsh and feminine, but the issue of class amplified by Gwyn’s feelings of alienation serves to foreground Garner’s own autobiographical anxieties.

[81] Fimi, p. 171.

Several instances in *The Owl Service* show scientific reasoning and technology being used to combat or interpret the unexplainable, thereby further emphasising the novel's tension between rationality and the mythical. When seemingly trapped by strange fire in the marsh, Gwyn identifies the fire as a production of methane gas and stamps on it, shouting 'CH_4 … One atom of carbon and four atoms of hydrogen … CH-piddling-Four!' (71). This rational explanation, however, is not enough to overcome the supernatural forces of the original myth: '"It may be marsh gas,' said Alison. 'It doesn't matter what it is. Can't you see? It's being used!"' (77). Elements of the *Math* story even interfere with modern technology. Roger takes several photographs of a hill through the hole in the Stone of Gronw, but when he develops them one of the photos shows a man 'on a horse … lifting a pole up' (91) and in the second the image of a motorcyclist. The first image resembles Lleu (who has long hair like '[one] of those beatnik types', remarks Clive) about to throw the spear through the stone at Gronw, and it is revealed later in the novel that in the most recent iteration of the myth a man was killed in a motorcycle accident coming down from that hill. The supernatural cannot be suppressed by reason in Gwyn's case, and yet the ancient memory of the spear-throwing imprinted onto the landscape is able to be picked up by Roger's camera, thereby complicating the simple Age of Reason/Welsh myth opposition. Indeed, one of the novel's overarching metaphors, suggested by Gwyn, is of electrical wiring, with the plates serving as 'batteries' and the three teenagers as individual 'wires' (98) plugged into the valley's mythic reservoir.

The tension in Garner's early fantasy novels between modern rationality and the mythic therefore exists in a complicated balance, reflecting the anxiety brought about by Garner's own deracination. Wales and Welsh mythology, as well as Irish in *Gomrath* and *Elidor*, enable the romantic construction of an emotional, intuitive and non-rational way of thinking which Garner associates with local landscape. While the inescapable 'timeless' power of the *Math* story is preserved in the Welsh valley and the mythic mind of the uneducated Huw, the rational mind can nevertheless attempt to comprehend the myth at work. As Fimi notes, 'Garner may be allowing his "educated" self to *understand* the importance of the supernatural, *engage* with it, and resolve its threat' [Fimi's italics].[82]

[82] Fimi, p. 172.

Gwyn comprehends the supernatural not through an appreciation for the complicated love triangle in *Math* but by using scientific metaphor; he calls the *Mabinogion* his 'National Heritage' (44) and yet he has scant knowledge of the stories themselves. He is both able to intuit the power of the myth and explain it in intellectual terminology, thus bringing the two sides of Garner's divided self into contact. The novel's cathartic ending appears to release the characters from the myth's narrative: having been given a carved stone by Huw, Alison becomes possessed by an invisible force, but it is Roger, not Gwyn, who succeeds in comforting her.[83] The falling owl feathers turn into flowers, symbolising Alison's release from Blodeuwedd's power. Roger, the more materialistic and sceptical of the three, is ultimately the one to control the supernatural threat, suggesting that Garner had begun to see rationality as being able and necessary to restrain the potential destructive influence of myth, an idea developed in Garner's later novels as he begins to explore the collective unconscious.

[83] Garner was also aware of Graves's interpretation of the *Math* story in *The White Goddess*: 'There is an ambivalence between [Lleu and Gronw]. They are opposite sides of each other, in other words Gronw is Lleu and Lleu is Gronw … But if you follow the text closely, in fact Gwyn equals Lleu, Gronw equals Roger. If you see it the other way round that is fine, because that is how the myth works'. 'Coming to Terms', pp. 28-29.

‘Inside the hill has come to mean inside the head’: Garner, Jung and individuation

> To become a whole, mature human being, I had to integrate my divided self. I am making the story too simple. But, unless you are English, and aware of the subtle cruelties of the English class system, you will not understand the complexity of my distress…[84]

The previous sections have argued that Welsh mythology and ‘Wales’ as both an idea and a physical space represented two distinct elements in Garner’s thinking: an antidote to an intellectual ‘Age of Reason’ which Garner identifies as the prevalent mode of thought in modern society, and the part of his ‘self’ which he had left behind by getting a formal education. Graves’s *The White Goddess* was certainly an influence on Garner from the beginning, as noted by White and Fimi, but Garner’s engagement with Jungian psychology is a relatively unexplored area in the author’s treatment of mythology. The rise in popularity in the counterculture of the 1960s of Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung (1875 – 1961) has been mentioned earlier in this chapter; Jung’s theories began to attract greater cultural interest during this decade due to a rising curiosity about myth, non-Western religions, and ‘feminine-orientated’ psychology.[85] Just as Celtic material was ‘plundered’ for its supposed countercultural values, Jungian psychology was considered by young intellectuals of the sixties as one of many alternative ways of thinking.[86] Jung posited a universal system of mythology: that human psychology shares a collective base of symbols (or ‘archetypes’) and narratives which both guide and structure the unconscious mind. The practical goal in the Jungian school of psychoanalysis is a process known as ‘individuation’, whereby the unconscious is acknowledged by the conscious mind and its darker aspects (known as the ‘shadow’) confronted: it is a demanding ‘self-discipline’ and a personal journey towards a ‘unified whole’.[87] While public interest in his ideas has never truly waned, Jung has since been ‘banished comprehensively’ from academia, due to his outmoded attitudes

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[84] Quoted in White, *A Century of Welsh Myth in Children’s Literature*, pp. 76-7.
[85] Jos van Meurs, ‘A Survey of Jungian Literary Criticism in English’, *Carl Gustav Jung: Critical Assessments*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London: Routledge, 1992), 292-303, p. 297.
[86] Christopher Hauke, *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 26.
[87] David L. Hart, ‘The Classical Jungian School’, *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, eds. Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 89-100, p. 91.

towards women and 'primitive' cultures, and, writes Andrew Samuels, his translation of his perception of 'what was current into something supposed to be eternally valid'.[88]

Garner appears to have first read Jung when researching *Elidor* and has later stated that the psychiatrist's body of work represents 'the most impressive *modern* thought that [he has] come across [Garner's italics]'.[89] He describes *Weirdstone* and *Gomrath* as 'a kind of scream about landscape and an almost Jungian sense of personality. All the characters that have any vitality are archetypes'.[90] Several critics have since identified specific Jungian influences in Garner's fiction: for Butler, Garner's view of the universality of mythology across cultures is a distinctly Jungian concept (which may be problematic, as this section will later discuss), and Jacqueline Rose in her study of children's literature and child psychology categorises Garner as a Jungian 'who builds Jung's philosophy quite openly into his writing for children'.[91] This section argues that after *The Owl Service*, Garner incorporated Welsh mythology into a broader, essentially Jungian psychology of myth. In this regard he differs from Machen and Powys, both of whom sought truth through a deeper understanding of certain aspects of Welsh mythology and Christian religion. Garner's constant efforts in his fiction to reconcile the two parts of his 'divided self' – his rural background and his formal education – in many respects resemble Jung's process of individuation. To be educated 'to understand what it was [he] had lost' is, in a sense, to become conscious: his family, Garner writes, were 'unaware', or unconscious, of their roots. His later fiction such as *Strandloper* and *Boneland*, less explicitly composed in the fantasy genre and intended for an adult audience, employs a wider and more universal approach to myth in order to depict his characters striving to 'become … whole, mature human being[s]', through this assimilation of the conscious and unconscious. In this way, Garner's previous explorations of

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[88] Andrew Samuels, 'Introduction: Jung and the Post-Jungians', *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, 1-13, p. 2; Samuels *et al* are now seen as slightly dated given that Jung's *Red Book: Liber Novus* – an illustrated manuscript recounting his psychological experiments between 1913 and 1916 – was published for the first time in 2009: while the *Red Book* has had a remarkable effect on the reception of Jung's theories, the essentials remain broadly the same. New research into Jung's work is being led in part by Sonu Shamadasani, who prepared and edited the *Red Book*. For more on the implications of the *Red Book* see James Hillman, Sonu Shamadasani, *Lament of the Dead: Psychology after Jung's Red Book* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013).
[89] Alan Garner, 'A Bit More Practice', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 June 1968; quoted in Butler, *Four British Fantasists*, p. 144.
90 Wintle and Fisher, p. 226.
[91] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan: or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 18.

Welsh myth provide him with the means to develop a broadly Jungian conception of shared myth and its psychological implications.

Garner's creative process is also distinctly Jungian. Garner has written that he never decides what his next novel will be about: 'Nor do I consciously go looking for stories. It feels as though they come looking for me'.[92] Images appear to him 'unbidden', suggesting areas of research; only after the research stage and a period of 'soak[ing]' does he begin to write.[93] These 'images' resemble the archetypes of the unconscious, 'inherited pattern[s] … linked to instinct': as he describes it, Garner's process is non-rational. 'It is an hallucination,' writes Garner, 'but there is always the sense that the book exists already, has always existed, and the task is not invention but clarification'.[94] While writing *The Owl Service* Garner recalls that it felt to him that he was discovering, rather than creating, the story: 'it was all there, waiting, and I was like an archaeologist picking away the sand to reveal the bones'.[95] Critics such as Northrop Frye who have been inspired by Jung's thinking have characterised the creative process in much the same way, emphasising the artist less as an individual creator, more as a 'medium' to whom archetypes present themselves: 'below the threshold of consciousness'.[96] Jungian thought has thus influenced Garner both directly and indirectly, as his novels move slowly towards the harmonious process of individuation. Philip has argued, albeit in 1981, that Garner's first five novels represent the 'painful reknitting' of his divided self, and that *The Stone Book Quartet* 'celebrates that mending', but this chapter identifies a further progression in Garner's thinking in his later work, an amplification of this attempt to 'reknit' the two halves of the author's mind.[97] While in *The Stone Book Quartet* Garner addresses his own family history and inherited oral culture, later novels such as *Strandloper* and *Boneland* re-examine these ideas within the context of a more universal approach to myth.

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[92] Nigel Stephenson, 'Fifty Years on, Alan Garner Concludes Weirdstone Trilogy', *Independent* (28 August 2012)
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] Garner, 'A Bit More Practice'.
[95] Garner, *Filming The Owl Service*, p. 9.
[96] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1957), p. 271.
[97] Philip, p. 16.

Strandloper (1996) is Garner's only true 'historical' novel, but in a prefatory note he claims to have taken some liberties with the details 'to make clear the pattern'.[98] Read literally, the pattern is the *churinga*, the tribal markings on the sacred objects of the Australian Wathaurong people, and the hallucinatory shapes seen by a rural Cheshire labourer William Buckley in dreams and epileptic episodes. The pattern also symbolises the spiritual and mythical concordance between both cultures which Garner claims to identify in this work. The novel begins in 1803 with Buckley's arrest in the village of Marton after being falsely accused of trespass by the landowner Lord Stanley, and follows his transportation to New South Wales, Australia. Here he escapes and goes to live with an Aboriginal tribe for thirty-two years as 'Murrangurk', eventually becoming their shamanic leader. Garner had previously been interested in Aboriginal philosophy and what he calls 'pan-Australian' myth because it seemed to him to accord with his own world view (*VT*, 57). For the Aborigine, the spirit of 'the Ancestor' lives in symbiosis with the landscape, and initiation rituals for a young boy involve the remembering of 'primordial time and his own remote deeds' (a similar spiritual process to the Greek *anamnesis*, discussed above).[99] Spiritual communion with this collective ancestor is known as 'Dreaming' (or 'Altjira'), and more generally it is a celebration of the living world.[100] The cross-cultural patterns and corresponding traditions which Garner claimed to identify in both Aboriginal mythology and Cheshire folk-custom reflect Jung's theory of a collective unconscious comprised of universally shared archetypal symbols and stories. In *Strandloper* Aborigines live their myths and sing stories into being, and for Garner they therefore represent an unconscious, instinctual way of living with which Garner 'as a child of my family on Alderley Edge in Cheshire' professes to identify. They exist in a similar 'mythic time' to Dafydd Rees and Huw Halfbacon, recognising little distinction between past and present. Their creation myth, which describes how 'the waters parted and the Ancestors Dreamed all that is, and woke the life that slept' (*S*, 142), is told by the shaman Nullamboin in *Strandloper* as though it is happening as he speaks.

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[98] Alan Garner, *Strandloper* (London: The Harvill Press, 1997), p. 1. Hereafter *S* in the text.
[99] *Ibid*.
[100] 'Aboriginal Dreaming (Australia)', *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (Continuum, 2006) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780199754670.001.0001/acref-9780199754670-e-3> [accessed 27 May 2021].

Garner took twelve years to research *Strandloper* and at one point almost abandoned the project for fear of invading the privacy and 'sacred' philosophy of the Aboriginal people (*VT*, 105). Indeed, Garner set himself an 'awesomely difficult literary-cultural-religious task', one that has led critics such as Heather Scutter to decry the novel, along with several others published in the eighties and nineties which feature a white person discovering an aboriginal culture while wandering in the desert, as neocolonial in outlook or effect: Buckley's quest, for example, ends in his appropriating and transporting the secrets of the Dreaming back to Western civilisation (the historical Buckley never returned to England, but remained in Australia until his death).[101] A similar criticism might also be levelled at Garner's drive towards universal myth which, with particular regard to the Aborigines as depicted in *Strandloper*, could be seen to erase their historical reality and reduce their beliefs to a kind of generic 'primitive' spirituality. As Butler notes, postcolonial theorists are often suspicious of universalist claims, for too often they are used as 'a stalking horse to introduce what turns out, on closer inspection, to be a distinctively Western viewpoint'.[102] Garner's autodidacticism and isolation from the academic world suggests that he might not have encountered such criticisms during the research of *Strandloper*, yet the fact that Buckley is able to adopt and understand many of the Aborigines' cultural practices could be viewed as hypocritical given how protective Garner is of his own traditions. His presentation of the dialects and rituals of life in rural Cheshire often feels deliberately impenetrable to the outsider – his language leaves readers 'on the edge of comprehension', writes M. John Harrison in a review of *Thursbitch*; nonetheless, the Aboriginal culture depicted in *Strandloper* exists for Buckley's own spiritual nourishment and, at the end of his time in Australia, for the Dreaming to be taken back to England with him.[103]

In an essay on the writing process of *Strandloper*, Garner discusses a phenomenon known as 'entoptic lines'. Anthropologists in 1988 had noticed 'that the same abstract patterns tended to appear in all preliterate art and iconography, in all places and at all times, from the Upper Palaeolithic cave

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[101] Butler, *Four British Fantasists*, p. 125; Heather Scutter, 'The Power and the Glory', unpublished paper derived from 'Hit and Myth: Children's Literature and the Culture of Forgetting', paper delivered at the combined IRSCL/ChLA conference, York, 1997.
[102] Butler, *Four British Fantasists*, p. 160.
[103] M. John Harrison, 'Rubbing Salt in the Wounds', *Guardian* (18 October 2003)

paintings of France and Spain to the modern religious art of the Kalahari bushmen' (*VT*, 239). Entoptic lines are not repeating patterns found in nature, but they occur in the eye itself and are projected externally, and, writes Garner, often occur during epileptic seizures or the trance-like states of shamans.[104] Many of these patterns appear throughout *Strandloper*, both in Buckley's hallucinations and in the *churinga* designs of the Wathaurong people, suggesting that Garner sees a commonality in how both groups of people experience the world. This is also exemplified in the first section of the novel, which depicts a village fertility ritual in which Buckley is chosen as the annual 'Shick-Shack' figure (a tradition invented by Garner but based on his research into English folk customs), the first in a series of transformations which Buckley undergoes. As the part of the selection process, he is bundled up in a net and thrown into the mere. Later among the Aborigines, the net is an important symbol in the ritual that brings the old shaman Murrangurk back to the tribe in the form of Buckley. The net is a kind of spiritual vessel for the Dreaming: 'I sent the Kal Dreaming into his kal, and it took him, says Nullamboin. 'And the dead people wrapped him in the net of Death and Life, and washed him in the Spirit Hole' (126).

Welsh and earlier Celtic myth in Garner's earlier fantasy novels were harnessed as alternatives to a rational, scientific empiricism, and Garner associated them with the tradition and archaeology of Alderley Edge. His previous novels which trace patterns through layers of history (*Red Shift*, *The Stone Book Quartet*) remain fixed in local, rural tradition, but *Strandloper* represents a broadening of this thesis: localised traditions are universalised through a Jungian reading of a collective mythology. Whereas Powys promotes a notional 'Welsh Aboriginal' people to reinforce his views of a unique Welsh psychology, *Strandloper* recurs to an idea of an 'original' culture, to a specific and historic Aboriginal people who are in touch with a mythic subconsciousness; this allows Garner to identify a similar connectedness to landscape and ancestry in his own relationship with Alderley Edge. Buckley returns to Marton in the final section of the novel to find that village life has been eroded by modernity. The mere has been drained and replaced by 'a hollow field' (185). '"You've buggered

[104] See Jeremy Dronfield, 'Subjective vision and the source of Irish megalithic art', *Antiquity* 69, issue 264 (September 1995) 539-549; and David Lewis-Williams and David Pearce, *Inside the Neolithic Mind: Consciousness, Cosmos and the Realm of the Gods* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005).

Spirit Hole!"' Buckley shouts to his friend. His home has been replaced by a school house where children chant moral virtues to each letter of the alphabet ('Q. Quietly bear your daily annoyances' (187)), and he meets his friend Edward Stanley, son of the landowner, who has fathered a child with Esther, Buckley's old sweetheart, out of wedlock. There is a marked contrast between Stanley's scientific questioning and Buckley's now gnomic answers. Buckley's time with the Aborigines has brought him closer to the 'Ancestor' of the land which the inhabitants of a partly industrialised Marton have begun to forget; he has left and come back to his birthplace with an understanding of the Aboriginal Dreaming and its connection to his own vanishing cultural traditions. The same year *Strandloper* was published Garner himself spoke about dreaming as a method of communication with the Edge: 'for me when I am sleeping I come [to the Edge] and try to share Arthur's dreams because … whoever is under Arthur's mantle can see all, but cannot himself be seen'.[105]

A similarly 'primitive' mythology functions more clearly as a psychological tool in *Boneland,* the final novel in the trilogy which began with *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, although the Welsh and Arthurian aspects of the Sleeping Hero legend are retained at least on the surface level. Colin, now Professor Whisterfield, lives on the slopes of the Edge and works at the Jodrell Bank Observatory as an astrophysicist; its telescope is part of the network across England known as Multi-Element Radio Linked Interferometer Network (MERLIN).[106] Its main computer is nicknamed 'Arthur' and Colin's fellow astrophysicists are given the Arthurian (and, more specifically, Welsh) names Owen and Gwen. While Colin's IQ is 'off the clock' (*B*, 35) and he demonstrates an almost perfect autobiographical memory, he suffers from a form of amnesia whereby he cannot remember anything before his thirteenth birthday. Since the events of *Gomrath* he has become anxious, self-interested, a 'hysterical depressive Asperger's' (35) and his self-appointed task is to 'look after the Edge' (46): 'There always is someone. Always has been'. His sister Susan (now his twin, although in *Weirdstone* Colin is said to be the elder) disappeared after the events at the end of *Gomrath* when she blew Angharad's horn and the Old Magic swept her away; now she is just a voice in Colin's head, though

[105] Quoted in Clarke and Roberts, *Twilight of the Celtic Gods*, p. 35.
[106] Alan Garner, *Boneland* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 5. Hereafter *B* in the text.

he searches for her in the constellations, in a cluster known as the Pleiades (containing nine bright stars, which match the number of the Shining Ones in *Gomrath*). Colin is assigned a psychotherapist, Meg, and the two of them develop a personal relationship. Running parallel to Colin's story is the narrative of 'the Watcher', a pre-historic man in 'Ludcruck' (Lud's Church or Ludchurch, a deep chasm on the Staffordshire/Cheshire border 100 metres in length, thought by some, including Garner, to be the 'Green Chapel' of the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*).[107] He, too, looks after the Edge and is seeking a female figure to keep the stars alive and the 'sun turn[ing]' (44).

The parallel narrative of the Watcher in *Boneland* allows Garner to explore the idea of 'mythic time' first developed in *The Owl Service* but also to create his own indigenous version of the Dreaming featured in *Strandloper*, the uneducated, 'primitive' consciousness in which myth is 'experienced' rather than 'invented'. Garner attempts to represent the consciousness of a man who existed long before the Celts, before the concept of 'Britain' or 'England', although Wales remains a distinct presence: the sun sinks below 'Moel, the Hill of Night' (15), the Welsh mountain Moel Fammau, the highest point in Flintshire, mentioned above, thereby tying the narrative loosely to his native landscape. The Watcher encounters the physical world through the metaphorical language of myth, but one which is stripped of cultural associations – in so far as it can be – to become a 'purer' form in which there is no distinction between imagination and reality. The constellations which Colin studies in twenty-first-century Jodrell Bank are to the Watcher the literal animals they resemble. The scenes he carves onto the rock face in Ludcruck are acts of creation: '[he] watched as the Stone Spirit, riding on the Bull's back, the Bull that he had made new with the blade and with his hand, climbed the wall of the cave … [He] watched until the Bull dropped below the hills' (14). It is not so simple, however, to translate the Watcher's language of myth into an empirical picture of the world. The 'Crane', for example, might be the dawn, 'pulling the day up from below the hills' (19), but the 'Grey Wolf' is more of a spiritual force of nature which can be summoned by the Watcher and whose each leap 'measured a mile': 'from his feet flint flew, spring sprouted, lake surged and mixed with gravel dirt'

[107] Erica Wagner, 'A Walk to Ludchurch with Alan, Griselda and Gawain', *Unbound* website (12 April 2015) <www.unbound.com/books/alangarner/updates/a-walk-to-ludchurch-with-alan-griselda-and-sir-gawain> [accessed 15 March 2021]; '[The] directions, Alan said, are in the poem, if you know where to look'.

(32). The idea of the Watcher representing a form of the collective unconscious or ‘ancestor’ is also exemplified in what Colin calls the ‘ex Africa’ hypothesis, the theory that *Homo sapiens* originated from a single continent, as an explanation for universal astrological symbols: ‘Allowing for cultural change, wherever we go in the world people tend to see the same things in the sky, even though they seldom look like what they’re called’ (96).

The intersecting narratives of Colin and the Watcher suggest profound psychological connections, uniting the scientific and non-scientific mind. For Jung, myths are ‘original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious happenings’ (154); read in this way Garner’s positioning and mirroring of the two narratives suggest an entire mental picture, a synthesis of the conscious mind, rational and material, and the unconscious mind, comprised of myth and archetype.[108] Colin is in therapy for the entirety of *Boneland*, a process Meg describes as ‘[scraping] off the crud’ (35), and his fear of his childhood past is often expressed using images of fantasy and fairy tales: listening in the waiting room to a mother tell her son a story about a witch, Colin shouts ‘Do not go into the witch’s house … He must not go upstairs! I have been upstairs! They are not hens’ legs!’ (16-7). The moments when the myths of the Watcher break through to Colin’s narrative see Colin attempt to understand its intrusion using scientific terminology, similar to Gwyn’s encounter with the will-o’-the-wisp in *The Owl Service*: Colin hears the call of a crane during an MRI scan – ‘The call rang in the tunnel and became him, so he could not tell which was him … Time was still’ – and his rationalising response is to identify the crane using the Latin identification *grus grus* (43). When Colin walks on the Edge he feels compelled to dress himself in academic regalia, and each time Garner’s language is almost identical, suggesting that this is a ritual: ‘Colin slipped the green silk hood with the gold edge over his shoulders and set the bonnet on his head, and adjusted the tassel’ (25). As Colin ascends the hill in his costume he goes ‘by Seven Firs and Goldenstone to the barren sand and rocks on Stormy point and Saddlebole’, retracing the exact route taken by the farmer and the old man in The Legend of Alderley. The ritual further connects him to the Edge and to a narrative

[108] C. G. Jung, ‘The Psychology of the Child Archetype’, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 1): Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, eds. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton University Press, 1969), 151-181, p. 154.

which, as discussed above, Garner believed to have its origins in local prehistoric society; the legend as it appears in *Boneland* thus takes on more of an archetypal quality than in *Weirdstone* as Colin, whether consciously or not, repeats its toponymical pattern.

This psychological aspect of myth, which Garner first identifies in Welsh material, is brought to a thematic culmination in the symbol of the grail as it appears in *Boneland*. Chapters Two and Three have shown the grail to be an important symbol in both Machen and Powys's fiction: for Machen it is a relic of an older, Celtic form of Christianity, and for Powys it represents the plurality of philosophical and spiritual ideals in the world. Garner's grail (or grails), however, is not the physical chalice. It is neither ascribed any specific origin nor drawn from a particular body of legend (Celtic, Christian, or otherwise); rather it is an emblem of Colin's self-realisation and his capacity to ask the 'Grail Question'. When passing the Jodrell Bank Observatory Meg points out that from a distance the telescope resembles a goblet, 'or even a chalice. It could be the Grail' (73). 'It's certainly a Questing tool', is Colin's response. Later Colin identifies the black stone paperweight given to him by the observatory's director as an axe head 'half a million' years old (114). 'This asks the Grail Question,' says Meg: 'And, come to think of it, the Grail can be a stone, too' (115) – a reference to Wolfram van Eschenbach's thirteenth-century romance *Parzifal* where the grail is described as a stone: *lapis exilis*.[109] After being shown the hand axe by Colin, Meg quotes a translation of a Latin verse written by the alchemist Arnaldus de Villa Nova (d. 1313): '"This stone is poor, and cheap in price; spurned by fools, loved more by the wise"' (115); the lines are also inscribed on Jung's 'Bollingen Stone', which Jung erected on his seventieth birthday at his home in Switzerland.[110] This allusive association between the grail and the philosopher's stone in *Boneland* is further evidence to suggest that Garner considers myth to be a tool for psychological transformation. Jung wrote extensively on the symbolism of medieval alchemy and believed it to be applicable to the psychoanalytic process;

[109] Lupack, *Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*, p. 236.
[110] The verse is from de Villa Nova's *Rosarius Philosophum*, published in the sixteenth century; C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), p. 253.

indeed, the grail quest has been read as representing this very purpose, wherein finding the grail is to achieve the fully-individuated mind.[111]

The quest for the grail in the Arthurian romances usually involves the asking of a question, either relating to the elements of the grail procession, or, as in Wolfram's *Parzival*, a simple 'declaration of human sympathy'.[112] Asking the question is more important than the answer. The first two *Weirdstone* books each involves the search for a grail-like object (the Weirdstone itself and the Mark of the Fohla), but in *Boneland* the grail is Colin's confrontation with his childhood fears: the 'blacker than black' (116) stone prompts memories of the Morrigan's crows, and in the novel's final pages Colin remembers being struck by lightning when he was thirteen, how he had lost Susan and banged on the Iron Gates demanding that the sleeping knights awake. Cadellin is not named, but becomes a figure for psychological trauma: in the clouds the young Colin sees an old man, supposedly the wizard: 'He curses me … Always dreams! Always him! He puts his fate on me! To guard! To dream! For all Time!' (135). 'You're down in the collective now,' says Meg, a reference to Jung's collective unconscious where the Sleeping Hero is a universal archetype and not simply Alderley's local analogue. Garner's grail, a stone cut in the Lower Palaeolithic period, is a object which connects Colin to the timeless world of the Watcher, the pre-historic guardian of the Edge. The ghost of Susan, 'black, without feature' (146), confronts Colin in his cellar, a stone crevice dug into the hill, and appears to tell him he has been haunted by himself.[113] Colin emerges from this interaction with the unconscious having 'stopped the hurt' (147).

In *Boneland* Garner writes about psychological healing through an integration of the various meanings which the Edge has come to embody in his fiction. The fantastic events of *Weirdstone* and

[111] See C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1968 [1944]); Juliette Wood, 'The Holy Grail: From Romance Motif to Modern Genre', p. 184; see also Emma Jung and Marie-Luise Franz, *The Grail Legend* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), a psychological reading of the grail and the grail quest using, primarily, Chrétien de Troyes and Robert de Boron.
[112] Barber, *The Holy Grail*, p. 109.
[113] The archetype of the shadow is an important component of Jungian theory, 'a dissociated secondary personality' which represents the darker, unconscious side of the psyche. This is presumably why in *Boneland* Susan becomes Colin's twin, rather than his younger sister, so that Garner is better able to explore the Jungian process. Sherry Salmon, 'The Creative Psyche: Jung's Major Contributions', *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, 52-70, p. 67.

Gomrath, comprised of older, part-Welsh inspired mythological associations, have been forgotten by Colin at the start of the novel, compressed into a version of the archetypal unconscious – the shadow which he eventually confronts in order to heal his childhood trauma. Garner implicitly reconfigures the previous books in the trilogy as obscuring or replacing real-world events; Colin's encounters with svart-alfar, Cadellin and the Morrigan are now simply archetypal projections of the unconscious mind, thereby confirming Garner's earlier comment that the characters were expressions of 'an almost Jungian sense of personality'.[114] Combining this reading of Jung with what he had learned from researching the Aboriginal 'Dreaming' – the communion with a collective ancestor through an experiential 'living' of myth – Garner employs the narrative of the Watcher to depict a native version of a universal, primitive consciousness.

Conclusion: The repetition of a myth

'It explains the need for the onomastic element in folktale, legend and myth', writes Garner on the strange coincidences he claims happened during his research for *The Owl Service*, 'to focus the content of the collective unconscious in the conscious, so that the story becomes actual for the people and their place' (*VT*, 205-6). As this chapter has argued, the concept of 'mythic time' was an idea which Garner translated and refined from the period in which he wrote *The Owl Service*, the romanticised view of working-class Welshmen for whom myth and history exist simultaneously with the present. For Garner, oral culture collapses time, emphasised by Huw Halfbacon relating the events of *Math* in the present tense: 'There is a man being killed at that place … old time' (*OS*, 31), and the 'onomastic element', the element which refers to names, roots the universal power of myth to a specific place. As Philip has noted, place-names in Garner's fiction 'exert an almost hypnotic

[114] Wintle and Fisher, p. 226.

fascination on Garner … as though they form part of a spell of charm'.[115] Garner identified this oral collapsing of time in the local iteration of the Sleeping Hero, through his own onomastic research into the toponymy of the Edge, and later in customs and traditions of the historical Australian Aborigines. Related to this concept is the repetition of myth over time, a theme across Garner's fiction which ties characters to a particular location. Timothy Jones argues that *Boneland* performs a 'haunting' of the previous books in the trilogy, whereby Colin repeats and relives certain actions, and the narrative, as with *The Owl Service*, is recycled and resolved.[116] In this way Garner explores the potential psychological implications of living in a landscape rooted in tradition and myth, which for him also leads to a profound ancestral relationship with place.

As part of his own idiosyncratic worldview, Powys considered the Welsh people to be more introverted and submissive than the English, able to endure as a 'race' over thousands of years. Garner's treatment of the Welsh and the idea of Wales, while less fanatical and absurd than Powys's, has nevertheless run along familiar lines. As this chapter has argued, Welsh mythology was an initially formative element to Garner's thinking about the psychological aspects of myth and his quest to reconcile his divided self. After abandoning his elite education Welsh material was an attractive alternative for Garner because it represented an idea of enchantment and tradition in opposition to modern rationality and the 'Age of Reason'. His interest in myth continued to develop throughout his adult novels and his reading of Jung strengthened his idea that a more 'primitive', archetypal mythology – narratives which characters in *Strandloper* and *Boneland* live rather than invent – might be psychologically restorative at the individual level.

Powys and Garner more obviously share this distinctively Jungian conception of mythology, although Powys is less explicit and does not use the same psychoanalytic terminology as Garner. Their views of the *Mabinogion*, for example, make claims for profound psychological identification: for Powys it 'unearths and re-embodies [legends] so monstrous, so mysterious, so gigantic, that we

[115] Philip, p. 27.
[116] Timothy Jones, 'THIS HILL IS STILL DANGEROUS: Alan Garner's *Weirdstone* Trilogy – A Haunting', *New Directions in Children's Gothic: Debatable Lands*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: Routledge, 2015), 176-188, p. 185.

shrink from them with a sort of pre-natal terror', suggesting that its stories reflect universal, primitive truths about our existence. For Garner the *Mabinogion* is a 'state of mind'; it told its stories as he 'dreamed [his] dreams'. Garner's relationship with myth evolved in a different trajectory to Powys's, for while Powys attempted in his later novels to penetrate what he saw as the ancient Welsh psyche, Garner moves outwards to the archetypal narrative of the Watcher; admittedly both authors saw patterns across cultures, an idea discussed further in the conclusion, but for Garner Wales represents an experience of myth which is universally applicable.

Conclusion: 'a two-edged sword': Primitive Wales and the Golden Age.

> This deep psychological mingling of the Anglo- and the Welsh is something much more subtle and spiritual than writing about Welsh things. (*OC*, 135)

Just as the remediation of medieval tradition in English culture during the nineteenth century promised a return to vanishing social ideals of community and craftsmanship, the preceding chapters have shown how Machen, Powys and Garner similarly turn to separate constructions of Wales and its mythology as a means to revive or reinvent aspects of life in Britain which they considered lost or in the process of disappearing. To varying extents, all three writers negotiate a relationship to Wales and Welshness in their fiction and within this explore their own questions of ancestry, personal identity and what they view as the wider spiritual crises of an increasingly rational and industrialised society. Their conceptions of Wales as an alternative imaginative space in which their individual spiritualities and philosophies could more easily take shape than in England suggests that for these writers Wales exists as a place of transformation, liminality and magic, intimately connected to its mythological past. Although issues of class, language and religion are often engaged with, Machen, Powys and Garner's reception of Welsh tradition is not a means to write about 'Welsh things'; as the quote above suggests, it is rather a way for these writers to reshape their own identities while forming a critical response to the materialism of modern life.

Chapter One proposed that Machen's early fiction (produced in the 1890s) represents a criticism of the nationalist ideals of the Celtic Revival. His supernatural tales, more cautionary than the recuperative or celebratory literature of the Irish writers, suggest that Machen considered the popular romanticisation and politicisation of the 'Celtic' identity – in particular its landscapes and inherited traditions – to be a threat to his own deeply personal relationship with Wales. Chapter Two argued that in the period following Machen's rediscovery of his Anglican faith, the revitalizing symbol of the grail became a healing force in his fiction, working against the materialistic spirituality he saw in early twentieth-century Protestantism; for Machen, the grail was of Celtic origin and therefore emblematic of a romantic form of Celtic Christianity. At roughly the same time Powys was beginning

to incorporate certain elements from Welsh mythology into a personal vision or 'life philosophy' that ultimately expressed an anti-rational 'magical view of life', laid out in Chapter Three. Powys's theories about the psychology of the Welsh people and their connection to an aboriginal Welsh race, inspired in part by his reading of John Rhŷs's Hibbert Lectures, underpinned his idea of Wales in *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) and *Maiden Castle* (1936) as an idealised place of spiritual refuge. In Chapter Four I argued that Powys intensified his engagement with Welsh mythological material following his move to Corwen in 1935; his theory that the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* are the record of a conquered race provided the framework for his next three novels, all of which rewrite national history and legend to accord with his idiosyncratic philosophy. In the final chapter I explored how, in contrast to Powys, Garner sought to address the central tension of his life – which arose from the displacement he felt after his education uprooted him from his working-class background – by using Welsh and Celtic tradition to reconnect with an idea of the ancestral and non-rational which he considered lost. A clear conception of Wales as an alternative site to modernity and what Alan Garner refers to as the 'Age of Reason' can be found in the author's early novels. As the fantasy genre became less of a 'crutch', however, he shed the overt references to Welsh tradition but continued to explore the psychological potential of myth through a primarily Jungian framework that ranges more widely through world mythologies beyond the local.

Looking back at this thesis as a whole, it has become evident that Machen, Powys and Garner's individual engagements with a romanticised idea of Wales and medieval Welsh tradition share certain characteristics and themes. Chief among these is a negotiation with the concept of Welshness, and indeed 'Celticness', in particular the writers' fixation on Wales as a place which might provide alternative ways of thinking to more orthodox spiritual and philosophical systems. While Machen is the only Welsh writer among the three, each author nevertheless claims a connection to Wales and Welshness which informs their fictional output and evolves alongside it. As shown in Chapter One, Machen's relationship with his native country was limited to a nostalgic attachment to the local landscape surrounding Caerleon; he was fascinated by English culture from a young age and rarely returned to Monmouthshire after moving to London. I have argued that the depiction of Wales in his

early fiction is an attempt to preserve an image of the layered and multifaceted childhood landscapes which he considered at risk of being trivialised by the popular literature of the Celtic Revival. Welshness remained a changing part of Machen's identity after leaving Wales and developed into a source of religious solace and idealism following the death of his first wife. Unlike Machen, Powys became fascinated with Wales due to his father's insistence that the family were descended from the princes of North Wales, yet when he failed to find genealogical evidence to support this, he appears to have redoubled his efforts 'to realise with [his] whole spiritual force what it meant to be descended … from those ancient Druidic chieftains'.[1] The essence of a writer's imaginary world, Powys writes, is the 'mythologizing of one's own identity and its projection upon reality'.[2] In his 'Wessex' novels Powys subsequently created his own kind of Welshness in Glastonbury's connection to Arthurian legend and in the Iron Age hillfort Maiden Castle, thereby building an identity for himself using the toponymy of his childhood landscapes and suggesting that Welshness in Powys's mind is not confined to Wales. Garner's interpretations of his archaeological and toponymic research of the Edge provide similar – although to Garner's mind more scientific – evidence of Welsh or broadly Celtic associations. He makes the claim that the Celtic tribes which had once settled in what is now modern-day Cheshire are the 'true Celts', whereas those he calls the 'professional Celts' who 'wear tartans rather objectionably' are not Celtic at all.[3] In this way his attempt to resolve the biographical tension in his writing involves a projection of Wales onto Alderley Edge, and, in his later fiction, the depiction of a landscape before Wales had become a distinct nation. All three writers therefore turn to Wales as a place whose adjacency to their original sense of identity, whether in geographic or ancestral terms, provided them with a plausible space in which they could establish or reinvent personal philosophies and belief systems.

This thesis has also demonstrated that as part of this romanticisation of Wales a common theme in Machen, Powys and Garner's remediation of Welsh mythology and folklore is the idea of a 'Golden Age' in Wales's past, a supposedly utopian period in the nation's history which represents different

[1] Powys, *Autobiography*, p. 335.
[2] John Cowper Powys, *The Meaning of Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1929), p. 24.
[3] Clarke and Roberts, p. 30.

ideal spiritual or psychological states for these authors. Although they looked back to very different periods, both Machen and Powys regarded the Welsh people as somehow retaining the characteristics of their particular Golden Age through unbroken inheritance, in their bloodlines and in their relationships to landscape. In Machen's work from the early decades of the twentieth century, the grail symbolised a lost Celtic Christianity and recalled the fifth and sixth centuries in Wales as a time when the Welsh saints travelled the land on foot and performed the miracles described in their *vitae*. The grail, as Machen saw it, was a pre-Christian relic sanctified during this Age of Saints and the embodiment of revitalisation in a spiritually deficient modern world, a syncretic blend of High Church ritual and specifically Welsh pre-Christian nature mysticism which might reaffirm a faith that had since 'fallen into the wrong hands'.[4] In *A Fragment of Life* Darnell discovers he is able to trace his Welsh ancestry back 'far into the dim past' (*C*, 79) and in *The Secret Glory* the grail is the cup which 'Teilo sant' originally used to perform Mass (*SG*, 48), suggesting that Machen saw the possibility of an authentic Christianity having survived in the traditions of early medieval Wales and being recoverable in the contemporary world. For Powys the retreat into a mythical Golden Age was bound up in ideas of a magical view of life which had been preserved in the blood of the 'Welsh Aboriginals', a people who supposedly inhabited Wales before the earliest Celtic migrations. As with Machen, Welsh ancestry is a means to connect with a more spiritual state of existence, although as *Morwyn* demonstrates, Powys also drew from other Indo-European mythologies, particularly in the sleeping figure of Cronos or Saturn. The return to magical thinking, which would develop into Powys's reinvention of the other-world Annwn as a state of mind, entailed the extinction of the individual consciousness and the accessing of the primordial 'ichthyosaurus-ego', discussed in Chapter Three. In later novels this is reflected in the ancient Welsh landscape: the isolated nature of the North Wales forests and mountains mean that Powys's Glendower is better able to practise his 'mythology of escape' which he has inherited from the 'true' or 'native' Welsh. Powys described this process as his 'mabinog-henog' (*OC*, 158) trick (another of Powys's invented portmanteaus) of

[4] Arthur Machen, 'By The Way', *The Academy* (11 May 1912).

detaching the self from the world of everyday consciousness, a further example of how aspects of Welsh mythology were harnessed to his philosophy.

Further to Powys's theory of the existence of a homogenous pre-Celtic Welsh people, the notion of the primitive or 'aboriginal', whether invented or genuine, was important for all of these writers' formulations of Welshness. It is a view of Wales not so different from the nineteenth-century coding of Wales as 'set aside from modernity', the Welsh people unaltered by the developments of its neighbouring countries.[5] Machen responded to contemporary theories of a surviving prehistoric race in ways that complicated the notion of an ancient and redemptive Celtic wisdom, while for Garner, Welsh mythology and the idea of the aboriginal offered a route to humanity's lost mythical consciousness which had been overwritten by what Garner calls the 'Age of Reason' and Powys the 'vulgarities of civilization'. In this regard, both Garner and Powys came to similar conclusions about the universality of myth via primitive cultures, Garner in his interpretation of Jungian thought, and Powys in his reading of earlier scholarship on Indo-European cultures. Powys's interpretation of Welshness in his fiction, particularly in *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*, involves a fanatical reverence for the country's past and supposed 'native' people, and his belief that he himself was descended from them strengthened his image of Welsh tradition as 'a deep vase of precious odours' (*OC*, 95) from which he could extract his own theories about its myths. His response to medieval Welsh literature and history was to realign them with his philosophy of magical thinking and the creative imagination as representing a primitive psychology which has endured into the modern age. The unique psychological characteristics of the Welsh people connected them to a mythic version of time, and this gave them, for both Powys and Garner, access to a cross-cultural otherworld of the unconscious. Indeed, this thesis has shown that Garner's depiction of aboriginal cultures, first in Australia in *Strandloper* and then back in Cheshire in *Boneland*, develops ideas of rootedness in a local landscape which also connects him to the spirit of his ancestors. The prehistoric figure of the Watcher represents a rendering of the Jungian collective unconscious which experiences rather than invents its myths; the

[5] Aronstein, p. 620.

Watcher’s interaction with Colin’s present-day narrative therefore suggests that Garner regards the primordial to be an essential, non-rational component of the individuated mind.

This thesis has also shown how in Machen, Powys and Garner’s fiction, both folklore and mythology serve distinct but often connected purposes. Machen rarely, if at all, used or reimagined the narratives from the *Mabinogion* to the same extent as Powys or Garner; rather he remediated local folklore and legendary tales which he associated with South Wales to explore inherited tradition and spirituality. Characters and motifs from the Four Branches are briefly referenced in *The Secret Glory* to symbolise the syncretic nature of the grail, but Machen’s response to Welsh tradition was mostly focussed on local traditions often remembered from his childhood – the *tylwyth teg*, for example, or some of the tales used in ‘The White People’ – rather than with a wider mythology which, as in Powys and Garner’s work, represents ‘Wales’ as a concept. The *Mabinogion* and translations of other Welsh mythological narratives were, however, an important source of inspiration for Powys and Garner, both of whom felt an imaginative connection to its stories. In *Owen Glendower* and *Porius* Powys portrays romanticised periods in Welsh history in which narratives and characters from the *Mabinogi* are either part of existing belief systems, or, in the case of *Porius*, in the process of being recorded for the first time by the ‘Henog’. Welsh mythology is preserved in a developing oral culture which pervades medieval society and is in this regard fundamental to Powys’s conception of Wales: his view of the Four Branches as the record of a pre-Celtic ‘conquered race’ is key to his philosophy of introversion and endurance and provide the structures for the two novels. As discussed in the final chapter, Garner was drawn to the tales he had read in Skene and later the Everyman translation of the *Mabinogion* because the Welsh ‘told their stories as [he] dreamed [his] dreams’, highlighting what he considered to be his own ingrained and unconscious affinity with a specifically Welsh way of thinking. While his reading of the mythology developed his understanding of Wales which would inform his later fiction, Garner subsequently looked for Welsh or Celtic origins to local folklore and ‘The Legend of Alderley’ – the underlying narrative of the *Weirdstone* books – to confirm his distant ancestors’, and his own, connection to Wales. Myth and folklore therefore play interconnecting roles in both Powys

and Garner's thinking and allow both writers to apply universal theories to local or historical examples.

While all three writers turn to Welsh mythology and folklore as part of their critical reaction to modern society, Machen is something of an exception due to his focus on the redemptive potential of a Celtic form of Christianity. Powys and Garner found refuge in their ideas of Wales as a search for personal identity and the individual development of creative theories about myth and the imagination, while Machen envisioned the wider, transformative possibilities of Welsh medieval tradition for both individuals and communities. His portrayal of the self-serving occultist in his supernatural tales of the 1890s gave way to a spirituality based on his theories about the grail in Welsh tradition. The appearance of the cup and the relics of the Welsh saints in 'The Great Return', for example, inspire a religious revival of in the village of Llantrisant of an ideal Christianity. In this he resembles nineteenth-century thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle, discussed in the Introduction, who looked to the Middle Ages in the hope that examples of pre-industrial attitudes to work might bring about lasting social change. For Powys and Garner, the grail is partly a symbol of personal redemption: brief references to the grail in Garner's *Boneland* serve to represent the Jungian quest for psychological wholeness, while in Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*, the grail illustrates the author's view of the polyphonic nature of the universe and its many appearances symbolise separate characters' desires, spiritual or otherwise. Alongside various other motifs from Arthurian literature, Powys positions the grail, in both Christian and Celtic guises, against the materialism of Glastonbury's growing industrialism and tourism; the novel ends with a great flood and the grail, 'that fragment of the Absolute' (*AGR*, 1115), is glimpsed on Chalice Hill, but ultimately the town can achieve no salvation on the same community-wide level of Machen's Llantrisant.

Susan Aronstein, in her assessment of Wales and fantasy literature, characterises the nineteenth- and twentieth-century view of Wales as an alternative to the rational and industrialised as a 'two-edged sword': for some, Wales preserves a past 'of wonder, spiritual and transcendental truths', and for others it is a primitive world 'opposed to progress, rationality … whose grotesque inhabitants [erupt]

into an unsuspecting present'.[6] Throughout their work Machen, Powys and Garner continuously redefine Wales; in this thesis I have shown how these three writers move variously between constructions of the transcendental and the primitive, often navigating a complex interweaving of the two. In their reshaping of Welsh medieval myths they represent part of a long history of literary medievalism, romanticisation and self-identification with an often nostalgic idea of Wales and 'the Celt' that sets them apart from what they saw as an increasingly modernised and disenchanted society. In Wales they sought both a refuge from scientific thought and the ideal of a Golden Age which they hoped might reconnect them with rootedness, inherited tradition and the old magic of the mind.

6 Aronstein, p. 620.

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