A DIVIDED IDENTITY: REPRESENTING RADNORSHIRE AND THE WELSH BORDERS IN FICTION

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Abstract:

This thesis explores the tradition of Radnorshire and Welsh borders writing and shows how my own work has drawn on and departed from this tradition, with particular focus on my 2007 novel *The Claude Glass* and my newly-completed novel *Addlands*, to be published in 2016. Principally it is an analysis of these two books and the relationship of their characters with place.

The first two sections introduce the historic county of Radnorshire and its cultural ambiguity and distinctness from both Wales and England. They consider the literary precedents of the Welsh borders, concentrating on the role played by the border in Raymond Williams’s *Border Country*, the depiction of the hill farmer in the Manafon poetry of R. S. Thomas and the treatment of place in Elizabeth Clarke’s *The Valley*.

The third section situates *The Claude Glass* within this tradition. It identifies the book’s original contribution to Welsh borders fiction but also how in its writing, often unconsciously, I arrived at similar conclusions to earlier writers of the area.

The fourth and fifth sections consider the development of my ideas subsequent to the publication of *The Claude Glass* with reference to my 2002 novel *A,* my 2012 novel *Konstantin* and Arthur Machen’s novel *The Hill of Dreams*, and show how the result, *Addlands*,confronts the paradox of borders writing – that the place described is simultaneously the ‘edge’ and the fictional centre – to forge a new fictional approach to the area. This, the largest part of the thesis, looks closely at the interdependence of character and place in *Addlands* and particularly at its representation through the use of local dialect.

I conclude with a defence of my choice of Radnorshire as a setting for fiction and argue that, by deviating from the borders tradition, I have turned a place largely overlooked in fiction into a place of universal significance – above all, in regard to the fraught relationship between man and the natural world.

1) Neither Wales Nor England: the Singularity of Radnorshire.

In Radnorshire is neither knight nor peer,

Nor park with deer, nor gentleman with five hundred a year,

Except Sir William Fowler of Abbey Cwm Hir (Palmer ix).

This anonymous verse, written in the 17th century, remains perhaps the best-known observation about Radnorshire: the historic Welsh county between the Rivers Wye and Severn, formed by the 1536 Act of Union out of the cantrefs of Maelienydd and Elfael, the commotes of Gwrtheyrnion and Cwmwd Deuddwr and various smaller lordships (Davies *et al* 725). Easily the least populated county in Wales or England, with, in 2011, an average of 55 people per square mile (ONS), Radnorshire is, as the poem suggests, remote and impoverished even relative to its neighbouring Brecknockshire and Montgomeryshire. With 55% of its land above 1000 feet, “this little Cinderella of the West” (Howse 9) retains its traditional agricultural economy – principally sheep and cattle farming. Even today, not one of its towns has a population numbering more than 6000 (ONS).

If Radnorshire is noted for anything, it is firstly the beauty of its landscape – Percy Bysshe Shelley extolled “the solitude of [its] mountains, woods and rivers, silent, solitary and old, far from any town” (Conradi 117) – and secondly the rapidity with which it adopted the English language. As a result of the introduction of English parsons (Howse 304), the missionary preaching of the likes of John Wesley (Burchfield 98) and the county’s historic reliance on the market towns of neighbouring Herefordshire, the Welsh language had largely collapsed in the county by the second half of the 18th century. Welsh continues to be spoken on the more isolated farms of the Elan Valley, to the west of Rhayader, but at the census of 1891 only 6% of the population were recorded as speaking the language (Davies *et al* 725) – as against 54.5% across Wales as a whole (Fishman 248). This has led the county to an ambiguous position – not, like Monmouthshire, in terms of its administrative status but in terms of its cultural allegiance. While visiting Presteigne in 1867, George Borrow asked a local woman whether he was in Wales or England and was told: “‘Neither. We’re Radnorshire’, as if she had meant: ‘And a plague on both your houses’” (Conradi 129).

2) Welsh Borders Literature.

The literary history of Radnorshire is as sparse and, for the most part, as overlooked as its population. Little of its pre-18th century Welsh language poetry survives, although several examples were rediscovered in the 20th century by the writer Ffransis Payne and included in his two-volume travel book/ cultural history, *Crwydro Sir Faesyfed*. Giraldus Cambrensis describes a visit to New Radnor in 1188. The priest Francis Kilvert’s accounts of life at St. Harmon and Clyro in the late 19th century found a wide readership in the 1930s and 1940s (a tradition continued by several 20th-century memoirs), but in terms of fiction, which is the subject of this thesis, the list is short. Besides Sir Walter Scott, whose *The Betrothed* is set in a fictionalised Painscastle during the reign of Henry II, in *At the Bright Hem of God: Radnorshire Pastoral*, Peter J. Conradi identifies only four novelists who have set their work in Radnorshire: Hilda Vaughan, Elizabeth Clarke, Bruce Chatwin and myself.

When writing about Radnorshire, however, a novelist must navigate the literary tradition of the Welsh borders as a whole. That is to say, there are themes common to most Welsh borders writing, and models for their treatment, and it is by cleaving to or deviating from these models that the depiction of a place can be refined. Any novelist is writing to some degree for a postulated reader – an imaginary figure whose supposed knowledge or ignorance of a place or subject guides his choice of vocabulary and information – and while no English-language writer could assume that such a reader would be familiar with, say, the Welsh language or cultural distinctions between Radnorshire and Monmouthshire, he would certainly assume a basic understanding of the conflict that brought Wales into being and a set of associations with Welsh hill farming and pastoralism more generally. Rather than consider these four novelists in turn, then, I would like to consider three key themes of Welsh borders writing through the work of two novelists – Raymond Williams and Elizabeth Clarke – and a poet, R. S. Thomas.

a) The Border

Firstly, Raymond Williams: a native of Monmouthshire, born in the village of Llanfihangel Crucorney, near Abergavenny, in 1921. In his 1960, semi-autobiographical novel *Border Country*, Williams describes a university lecturer named Matthew Price, resident in London, who returns to his home village of Glynmawr, close to the English border, when his father suffers a stroke. This character is introduced as Matthew, and remains Matthew in the present-day narrative, but he is known by his family and old friends as Will, and it is as Will he appears during episodes set in his childhood. As his friend Eira remarks, “The trouble with this man is he’s got two names” (333). The novel, essentially, concerns Matthew’s sense of internal division: between his past and present, between the working class into which he was born (his father is a railway signalman) and the middle class into which, through a university education, he has moved, and between two peoples. The Welsh-English border is the underpinning motif of the book, with its historical conflict between the “Cymri” and “the Saxon hordes” (204) used to represent his own conflicted allegiances: “Glynmawr… was the disputed land, held by neither side, raided by both” (364).

Although, unlike Geraint Goodwin in his 1936 Montgomeryshire novel *The Heyday in the Blood*, Williams cannot depict the border in Monmouthshire as a linguistic division, he describes a “frontier crossed in the breath”, with on one side “the slow, rich, Herefordshire tongue” and on the other “the quick Welsh accent” (35). In the River Honddu the border finds a tangible line, and England on the far side is tangibly, if discreetly different: a place where, for instance, the pubs are open on a Sunday. For all the complexities brought to Matthew’s sense of national identity by his father’s solidarity with the British Union Movement or the dramatic differences between the “gentler country” (191) of “his own landscape” (89) and the “more Welsh” (181) mining valleys to its west, England, as a threat to Welsh culture, both present and historical, is depicted almost as a cultural unity. On the novel’s first page, in London, Matthew finds a momentary sense of comradeship with a West Indian bus conductress who replies to his instinctive greeting. As he then reflects: “you don’t speak to people anywhere in England” (3).

In *Border Country*, the Welsh-English border is the original schism, not merely for Matthew but for the Welsh as a whole: the schism innate to Anglophone Welsh writing. It is for this purpose that Williams emphasizes the border beyond its actual significance to local characters, but also, simply, for purposes of drama. *Border Country* is a story and, as such, it requires a dynamic: a basic opposition or tension to be explored or resolved. This use of the border to underline the dynamic of the story is perhaps the most common theme in Welsh borders fiction – from Margiad Evans’s *Country Dance*, of which Catrin Collier has written, this “story of lovers’ rivalry mirrors the conflict between Welsh and English” (Evans 12), to Bruce Chatwin’s *On the Black Hill*, in which “the border of Radnor and Hereford was said to run right through the middle of the staircase” (Chatwin 10) of the twin protagonists’ farmhouse.

b) The Hill Farmer

Another crucial theme in writing of the Welsh borders, and of rural Wales more generally, is the depiction of hill farmers. In literary terms, the Welsh hill farmer was effectively defined by the poet R. S. Thomas, who was vicar of Manafon in Montgomeryshire from 1942 to 1954:

There is something frightening in the vacancy of his mind.

His clothes, sour with years of sweat

And animal contact, shock the refined,

But affected, sense with their stark naturalness.

Yet this is your prototype… (13-17)

*­*

Here, in the character of Iago Prytherch, is the Welsh hill farmer in literature in miniature: “A Peasant”, as the title dubs him, unwashed, inscrutable, almost bestial. He is human, but barely so: rather a “prototype” for the Welsh, the reader or humanity in general, as ape is prototype for man. Thomas returns repeatedly to Prytherch in his early poetry, although his other, unnamed farmers are similarly enigmatic and contradictory. In “The Hill Farmer Speaks” his character is “stripped of love/ And thought and grace by the land’s hardness” (1-2): a man whose humanity seems, if anything, to be doubted still further by the assertion that “I am a man like you” (5). Even in the first person he remains objectified: a figure subject to “your curious gaze” (14).

Thomas’s depictions are determinedly harsh and modern, but his farmers are original, timeless, archetypal; they have, like “The Labourer”, “been here since life began” (10), and to that extent they belong to the Romantic tradition. In this tradition too they are closer to nature. In “A Peasant” Prytherch is its adversary – he faces the “siege of rain and the wind’s attrition” (18) – while in “Affinity” a similar character “stands bare-headed in the woods’ wide porch/ Morning and evening to hear God’s choir/ Scatter their praises” (14-16) and is repeatedly described in natural terms himself, with frequent comparisons to trees. For all that Prytherch is apparently denigrated – in his later poem “Iago Prytherch” (‘Iago Prytherch, forgive…’) Thomas defends himself against charges that he has “made fun” (5) of him – his authenticity gives him a central significance in Welsh culture. In “Iago Prytherch” (‘Ah, Iago, my friend…’) he writes of his origins in “the age of gold” (3). In “The Dark Well” his heart is “the dark well/ From which to draw, drop after drop,/ The terrible poetry of his kind” (15-17).

Thomas’s hill farmer represents the roots of humanity; he is the original Welshman, a symbol predating Wales’s associations with, for example, coal mining, but he is also an English-speaking Welshman, with all of the division that this implies – marginal to Welsh-speaking Wales, to England and to the civilisation of the 20th century more generally: “the noisy surf/ Of people… far off at the world’s rim” (8-9), as Thomas puts it in “The Labourer”. In this respect too he is a creation of the Welsh border.

c) Place

The third theme I would like to consider is, simply, place – specifically, Elizabeth Clarke’s treatment of place in her 1969 novel, *The Valley*. *The Valley* is set in the far west of Radnorshire where the English border, some twenty-five miles distant, plays a less defining role than in other Radnorshire novels. Tenderly, almost nostalgically written, it is cast as a memoir, less a story than a portrait of a place. It charts changing times through the life of Kate Jonas, a farmer’s daughter who describes the first decades of the 20th century – “the last of the old days” (112) – on the farms of the Cambrian Mountains: the peat-cutting and the summer pasturing of the *hafodau*, the candle making and the weaving of wool, the conservatism and conviviality of a remote and close-knit community. These are a people who “clung to the past” (103), whose farming practices are outmoded even “further down the valley” (34), and who are characterised more by their marginality than by any sense of antipathy to England.

Surprisingly perhaps, given the political context of the 1960s, Clarke describes the English-built reservoirs in neighbouring valleys as compelling “a grudging admiration” (163) and the visiting Lord Mayor of Birmingham (where the water is destined) as inspiring “such reverence” (29) that one child is startled to find that he is merely a man. (Paul Ferris’s *The Dam*, by contrast, published two years earlier, uses the mid-Wales reservoirs as emblems of English oppression: natural targets for terrorist resistance.) *The Valley* describes the travails of hill farming and the terrible pressures of the agricultural depression of the 1920s, but it remains in many ways a window to a bucolic past whose “old photographs encourage the suspicion that summers are not what they were” (44).

The fact that it succeeds so well as a novel is in large part due to the detail with which this vanishing way of life is evoked – in its traditions but also in its language: an English dialect descended, via Herefordshire, from West Saxon with an admixture of Welsh and Welsh constructions. Kate’s grandmother is “the last of the family to be truly Welsh-speaking” (62), but her “compressed kind of English” (15), like that of the shepherds, is frequently in direct translation. This results in various distinctive idioms such as “a meal of food” or “‘The wind will be full the house, all’” (83). But the English dialect is no less remarkable, with its words like “piert”, which, as Kate explains, “in a sober sense, means lively” (20), such phrases as “a lazy wind”, which “goes through you instead of round” (15), or the use of usually intransitive verbs in an active sense, so that characters might “rise” (46) potatoes or “loose the dogs out” (93). One strength of the memoir form is that Clarke is able to ‘tell’ as often as she ‘shows’, stepping back from the scene to explain words and activities, or using the ignorance of children to allow her older characters to explain on her behalf. The result is that *The Valley*’s appeallies less in its characters or their fates within the story than in the intrinsic interest of its place.

Common threads can, of course, be drawn between these three writers. Each describes an embattled Welsh culture, close to nature but contending with the forces of ‘progress’ – always perceived as deriving from England. This feeds a sense that the Anglophone Welsh are marginalized, both by England and Welsh-speaking Wales – a sense underpinned, particularly in *Border Country*, by the symbol of the border itself. Another, perhaps less obvious thread is that all three writers maintain a distance from their local Welsh characters. Even Clarke, who inhabits her characters and makes little reference to the world beyond Rhayader, distances them continuously by pausing to explain them to the reader. It is the case, of course, that rural mid-Wales has no colleges of higher learning, no major publishers and little by way of an artistic community – all writers, without exception, who have written about the area have either come from elsewhere, normally from England (like Clarke, Chatwin or Evans), or at least have left to study and work there (like Williams, Goodwin or Vaughan) – and, in writing about a Welsh, agricultural, working class culture, are bound to express their own sense of distance. But it is also the case that all of these writers have assumed, quite understandably, that their readership will not primarily be rural Welsh. In all mid-Wales writing the characters are depicted as in some degree strange; their language and activities are not expected to be familiar to a reader and are deemed to be interesting as a result.

This is a literature that has tended persistently to objectify its own people.

3) Placing *The Claude Glass* in the Border Tradition*.*

The two of my novels at the heart of this submission – *The Claude Glass* from 2007 and the newly completed *Addlands* – are set in Radnorshire and deal with the particular history and circumstances of that place. They relate to and deviate from the tradition outlined above in ways I shall now explore.

*The Claude Glass* centres on the friendship between two young boys, Robin and Andrew, living on either side of a Radnorshire hill within a few miles of the English border. Robin is the son of Adam and Tara, who are educated, English immigrants to the area, drawn to “the nakedness of hill farming” (59) and implicitly, as part of the hippie generation – heirs to the Romantic tradition – to the perceived remoteness and Celticness of Wales. Andrew is the son of a local couple, Philip and Dora, who are in their own way alienated from their community – in Dora’s case due to mental illness, in Philip’s due to an extreme perversity. As a father, as Tara puts it, Philip “hasn’t got a clue” (64). As a result, by the age of six, Andrew has yet to go to school or even to speak and spends less time with his parents than he does with the dogs whose outlook, in the way of a feral child, has come to infuse his own. The novel is written largely from the points of view of these two children, but the children themselves have, of course, been influenced strongly by the adults around them: principally by Tara, for whom being “surrounded by nature” (149) is a crucial aspect of childhood, and by the teacher in the village school, Huw Gwynne, an incomer with his own Romantic obsessions – particularly Welsh history and mythology – who, as a Welsh-speaking native of Gwynedd, puts particular emphasis on Radnorshire’s place in Wales.

This outsider’s viewpoint in *The Claude Glass* is characteristic of Welsh borders writing. Although the story never leaves the immediate vicinity of its unnamed village, the book’s depiction of Radnorshire is infused with ideological constructs projected onto the local culture and landscape. For Tara, “Radnorshire proper” is a place of mystery where “there were people who saw omens in the approaching clouds, who refused to cut the hay around standing stones, who insisted that the wood of any tree struck by lightning would never burn, and that the hills were thick with… ghosts” (111). Even Andrew, who at first has experienced few human influences, is not merely depicted as an abused child; he is a child with a passion for the natural world, which, in spring, makes “him want to laugh, to roll in the grass, to slither on his belly and chase the fat lambs across the hillside” (127) , and one, furthermore, who lives in a house once owned by Thomas Hutchinson, William Wordsworth’s brother-in-law. This is a story about the dream and the reality of wildness, of nature and rural life, and if I did not assume in my reader a familiarity with hill farming or Radnorshire dialect, which is used very sparingly, I did assume enough knowledge of Romanticism for Andrew to be recognised, at least in part, as a ‘wild child’: “exquisitely wild” (iii), as the epigraph from Wordsworth expresses it. Here too is a place and a people objectified – partly, of course, for the benefit of the reader, but also because the characters are objectifying them themselves. I do not, I should add, consider this a flaw – this is not, in the main, a story about Radnorshire culture – but still this attitude to the place, this objectivity or even lack of sympathy typical of much Welsh borders writing, must account for the fact that the only passage written from the point of view of a local farmer (as Russell Celyn Jones in *The Times* correctly identified) so closely echoes the depictions of hill farmers in R. S. Thomas’s poetry, which at the time I had not, in fact, read:

There were, of course, circles on the pond, but Philip barely noticed them. He barely noticed the stench of his clothes, or even the heavy sack in his hands. He had, after all, known only these things for the past fifty years. He didn’t need to notice the bloody forestry, or that it was bloody raining again, as it was always bloody raining. On the farm, he knew everything important already. (53)

It is, in this same way, because of the characters’ preoccupations that the border plays such a central role in *The Claude Glass*. When Tara is “staring across the valley towards the invisible mark of the English border” (140) she is looking towards England as a unity, a place of relative ease and safety. The border here may not be delineated by a river, but since England can be seen from their farm, Penllan, it is a constant reminder of the choice she and Adam have made to come to Wales and, as the pressures of their lives accumulate, of the fact that at any time they could simply leave. Among the children in the novel, particularly Robin, the border has a different but no less powerful significance. Robin is, for all of his parentage, a “Welsh hill-farm child” (149); he has rarely left Radnorshire and his associations with England have largely been learnt from his parents and his teacher. His play revolves around Huw’s accounts of Welsh history – the conflict that forged the border in the first place – to the extent that he has developed his own imaginary, semi-Plantagenet army or “enemy”, the Sheenah, which he sees as poised to attack him:

“The Sheenah come from England,” he said. “The other side of Offa’s Dyke, where they cut the ears off Welshmen!” (83)

Robin is only seven years old, but he has inherited a strong sense that England is an existential threat – not least because of the possibility that he may one day, with his grandfather’s help, be sent there for his education. Again, the border reflects the ideals and concerns of the characters in the novel, and again it echoes the ambivalence of books like *Border Country*, which I had also not read at the time. The tensions of the novel can perhaps best be summarized by the mirror in its title, which I first encountered in Juliet Barker’s *Wordsworth: A Life*:

No self-respecting tourist in search of the picturesque travelled without his Claude-glass, a plano-convex mirror of convenient pocket-book size through which he would view the scenes and objects to be admired. It seems wholly appropriate that to do so he had to turn his back on the real living landscape in order to see its image reflected in miniaturized form and neatly contained within the mirror’s frame. In other words, reduced to a picture. (281)

The Claude glass discovered by Andrew in an abandoned room of his once-grand house, Werndunvan, suggests the tension that the border helps to symbolise, between the dream of a place (both Wales and the natural world) and the reality confronted in the day-to-day lives of its people, between the characters’ self-awareness and the detachment from “the real living landscape” that inevitably implies. This then is the subject of *The Claude Glass*. Rather than consider Radnorshire in depth, I use the county to explore more universal issues around the relationship between people and place.

4) The Development of *Addlands*.

To explain the development of my novel *Addlands* fully I must make some reference to my own relationship with the Welsh borders and specifically to Radnorshire, where I grew up on a hill farm in circumstances very much like Robin’s in *The Claude Glass* and which I left for some years to pursue my education. Writing, of course, is an intuitive process – you can never predict the shape or the final purpose of a novel, only recognise and respond to each moment of visceral excitement that comes with a successful idea or image and allow, through persistent, daily application, the book to take its own shape. To this end, you must be conscious of those subjects that excite you as a writer, and in my case these have repeatedly returned me to the Welsh borders. In 2000, when I was writing the second draft of *A*, my first novel, I described a group of students who travel from London in a decommissioned ambulance and pass one morning through the Black Mountains:

There was common land in every direction, the ridges of the Bluff and the Twmpa smaller now and the engine returning to a rumble as the road flattened out. A cattle grid purred beneath the wheels. On the far side of the valley a final farm was clinging to its fields, a great, stirrup-shaped pine plantation stretching down a cirque behind it.

There were screes, gorse bushes, weather-torn hawthorns, the gnarled banks of tiny brooks. There were footpaths resembling cartoon lightning strikes. The tails and manes of fat mountain ponies reached almost to the ground. Then the last piece of stream vanished up its spring. The mountains met in a V of seamless blue. (104)

Although, at the age of 24, I had already written a 70,000-word draft of *A* – as well as a 90,000-word draft of a travel book – it was with this passage that I first felt the thrill of having written successfully, which kept me awake for a full three days. Elsewhere in the novel, too, I found I had a facility to describe the Welsh landscape, even if my characters remained London students with no personal connection to the place. It was this facility I was exploring when I first set to work on *The Claude Glass*, and after its publication I continued to try to write about the area – although the failure of my next manuscript, which concerned a middle-aged gay man who returns to his mid-Wales village on the death of his mother (I had still not read *Border Country*), persuaded me to turn to a different subject.

The ideas in *Addlands*, then, developed over the course of several years, and were the result of numerous influences. One was a remark made by a friend of mine, the novelist James Miller, who, having read *The Claude Glass*, assumed that Radnorshire was a place of my own invention – along the lines of Thomas Hardy’s Wessex. (It is a measure of the assumptions a writer can make about his reader that an Oxford PhD in American Literature has not so much as heard of the county.) The second was my realisation that, much as it signifies in the minds of its people, Radnorshire does not formally exist as a county at all, having been absorbed into Powys in 1974. It is a place of memory but it is also, literally, a place of the imagination. Since part of the problem of writing about somewhere you know well is to mark some division between itself and a setting for drama, such that you can, to some measure, see it as a reader might see it, this thought began fundamentally to change my relationship with the place.

At this time I was writing my third novel, *Konstantin*, which is essentially a fictionalised account of the early life of the pioneering Russian space scientist, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, and, like *The Claude Glass*, explores the relationship between man and the natural world. As a place, 19th-century Russia with its juxtaposition of primeval, “snow-laden” (3) forests and new-built railways leading “all the way to Moscow” (12), is quite distinct from my own experience and is therefore relatively easy to employ as a setting for drama. In the novel I describe the landscape and society of 19th-century Russia quite realistically, but unlike actual Russian novels of that time I am writing in a conscious relationship with a present-day Western perspective. That is to say, the world I depict is so much more extreme in its scale, its climate, its wildness and its extent of wealth and poverty than the world normally experienced either by myself or by my postulated reader that it functions, without recourse to fantasy, as an amplified version of reality. My realisation of this fact, together with my realisation that Radnorshire would, for most readers, be hardly less obscure than Ryazan in 1867, provided the basic dynamic for a new approach to writing about mid-Wales.

Before I come on to write about *Addlands* itself, I must refer to one other novel of the Welsh borders, Arthur Machen’s *The Hill of Dreams*, which I read while I was writing *Konstantin* and which provided the final major influence on my eventual, fictionalised Radnorshire. Completed in 1897, *The Hill of Dreams* is the semi-autobiographical story of Lucian Taylor, the son of an impoverished Monmouthshire clergyman who, in misguided worship of Annie, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer, resolves to “annihilate the world around him and pass into another sphere” (143). Lucian is “entranced by [the] landscape” (157) of his “native Gwent” (71) but deplores its parochial, middle-class society and longs instead for “the splendid and golden city of Siluria” (146), which he begins to recreate imaginatively around him. On an initial reading, there seem to be suggestions that Lucian’s idealised Caermaen (a fictionalised Caerleon) and his obsession with “Britain deserted by the legions” (79) represent, like the Sheenah in *The Claude Glass*, an original, existential threat to Wales, and so to himself, but it soon becomes apparent that, for all of his dreams of “Celtic magic still brooding on the wild hills” (79) Lucian makes no distinction between the Romans and Silurians at all. In his fantasized city “the rolling music of the Latin tongue never ceased” (154). Furthermore, he uses the words “Britons” and “English” (128) as synonyms, and indeed does not use the words Wales or Welsh in the book.

From a present-day perspective, and as a reader familiar with the writing of the Welsh border, this fact is extraordinary. Despite the ambiguous status of Monmouthshire, which was not placed definitively in Wales until 1974, there is no sense in *The Hill of Dreams* of any concerns about national identity. Aside from its descriptions of landscape, the novel is quite unlike any of the books I have so far mentioned and belongs instead to the late 19th-century decadent tradition. In his introduction Machen recognises a debt to Robert Louis Stevenson (70), but *The Hill of Dreams* also resembles, in its project of “annihilation” Joris-Karl Huysman’s *Against Nature*, in its account of a young writer’s physical and mental deterioration Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger*, and in Taylor’s mystical experience in an ancient hill fort Ludwig Tieck’s story “Rune Mountain”. In none of these cases are the comparisons Welsh, and its effect, when I read it, was to throw into relief the political forces now at work on the writers of Wales.

In writing *The Claude Glass*, I was reflecting Radnorshire as I had known it as a child, without appreciating either the political context of the time or how this was enforced by my own ambivalence towards the place. In literary terms, this political context can best be represented through the work of Ffransis Payne who was born, half-Welsh, in Herefordshire in 1900, but learnt Welsh as an adult and wrote extensively in his adopted language. His two-volume *Crwydro Sir Faesyfed* elegises the county’s lost Welsh past, asserts its place in Wales through its historical Welsh-language poetry and laments both its Anglicisation and such corruptions of its place-names as Llys Ifor becoming Llanshiver (Payne, Vol. 1, 120) and Craig Pwll Du becoming Grapple Dee (137). Payne was, as he wrote, “reared and nurtured with my back to England so to speak” (Haycock 27), and in this respect he was a man of his times. After centuries of English cultural, religious and economic dominance, in the 20th century the tide in Radnorshire, as in the rest of Wales, was to some degree reversed – as my childhood experiences attest. Then, as today, children learnt Welsh at school and sang the Welsh national anthem, albeit phonetically, in a community where Welsh had not been spoken natively in over two hundred years. On the road sign the village name “thought of as… English” (Hughes, Robert, 104), Gladestry (possibly, in fact, a corrupted Welsh name comprising “a personal name plus the Welsh ‘tre’” (98)), is set beneath the ‘Welsh’ name Llanfair Llythynwg (a corruption of Llanfair Llwyth Yfynwg (100), meaning St. Mary’s Church in the lands of Yfynwg), although the latter “disappeared from local memory completely” (104) after its last recorded use in 1566 and may be only superficially more Welsh. That there are strong reasons for such a reversal is not in question. What, however, is essential to realise is that, so far as Radnorshire is concerned, this is at root a political initiative derived from people whom the characters of *The Valley* would still have called “foreigners” (Clark 80) – fellow-Welsh as they might be – since any writer must be cognizant of political influence on his work.

As the Marches writer Alan Garner notes in his essay “Achilles in Altjira”:

A prime material of art is paradox, in that paradox links two valid yet mutually exclusive systems that we need if we are to comprehend any reality; paradox links intuition and analytical thought. Paradox, the integration of the non-rational and logic, engages both emotion and intellect without committing outrage on either; and, for me, literature is justified only so long as it keeps a sense of paradox central to its form. Therefore I speak for imaginative writing, not for the didactic. When language serves dogma, then literature, denied the paradox, is lost. (Garner, *The Voice That Thunders*, 27)

To write successfully about Radnorshire, these reflections suggested, I would need to accept its central paradox that, marginal as it might be to Wales and England, for its people it is its own place with its own landscape, its own language and its own traditions. This is, of course, no more recognition than any writer would accord any other place, but to judge by the bulk of Welsh borders writing I am not alone in having struggled to escape the polarizing, even paralyzing issues surrounding the history of Wales and England. My many conversations with Radnorshire hill farmers in preparation for writing *Addlands* confirmed me in this view. For one thing, it was invariably me who raised the subject of Wales and England. Matthew Price of Hundred House reflected that Radnorshire was “more English than Welsh”, but that the subject was “never mentioned”. Walter Price of Rhulen “didn’t bother much about it”. Robert Tyler of Llandeilo Graban felt that “It was all a bloody laugh”. Raymond Williams himself has written of the Black Mountains that “I have heard both groups [Welsh and English] talked about as if they were other than the people here” (Conradi 129), which was another refrain in these conversations.

My one certainty, when I began to write the novel, was that in order to define Radnorshire – or, more specifically, my fictional village of Rhyscog – as a place of its own, and to reflect accurately the role that the border plays in the minds of Radnorshire people, given its prominence within the literary tradition, I could neither mention it nor Wales nor England, nor even use the words Welsh or English, anywhere in the text.

5) *Addlands*.

*Addlands* is a novel of about 80,000 words set over seventy years, from 1941 to 2011, in a village based loosely on Rhulen in Radnorshire’s Edw Valley. It is the story of Etty: in the opening chapter a young woman of eighteen who has fallen pregnant out of wedlock and, rather than give up her child for adoption, married forty-year-old Idris Hamer and moved to the Funnon: his “unkind farm pushed back into the open hills” (14). It is also, centrally, the story of her son, Oliver, whose life the book follows from his birth to his final departure from the farm. The title, *Addlands*, is a Radnorshire dialect term meaning “the border of ploughland which is ploughed last of all” (2), which suggests both the major themes of the book and its attitude to its place. Repeatedly, during my interviews with Radnorshire farmers, the most important issues of the period subsequent to the Second World War were identified as the coming of tractors, electricity and silage, which removed at a stroke the inveterate fear that the hay would fail and that the animals would not survive the winter. As John Davies writes in *A History of Wales*, “There is substance to the claim that Welsh rural communities experienced greater changes in the thirty years following the Second World War than they had in the previous three hundred years. The key to change was mechanization” (629).

These are the changes that Oliver experiences during the course of his life, and which the Funnon, due to its remote location and the character of Idris, whom I will come on to discuss, is the last in the area, and by implication the country, to undergo. In the epigraph to the book, from his poem “Borderland”, Christopher Meredith writes that “You’ll find a *ffin* [border] inside each definition./ We see what is when we see what it’s not:/ Edges are where meanings happen” (*Addlands* 3), and invariably writers working this close to the border (in the case of the Funnon, about four miles) have used its ‘edge’ in order to situate, distinguish and define their setting. Twenty or more miles to the west, Elizabeth Clarke in *The Valley* draws instead on the marginality of such farms as Gwynant to set them apart, and although my treatment in *Addlands* is very different here too I am drawing on this tradition in order to define the Funnon not by the border but by its extreme marginality. The Funnon, as the title suggests, is the place affected “last of all” by the cultural and technological changes of the 20th and 21st centuries, but its name is a corruption of *ffynnon*, meaning ‘spring’ or ‘well’. It is the ‘source’ but, conversely, it has been Anglicised. Here again is the paradoxical nature of the border. By showing these changes at the farm where they are experienced last, where they can be seen most starkly against their surroundings, the place becomes, in a sense, ‘original’: central by definition.

In any fiction the setting, of course, is a crucial consideration, but usually it is one of secondary importance. Any story must begin with and must always be mediated through its characters. In the case of *Addlands*, however, the line between character and setting is blurred. The characters in the novel are, for the most part, farmers and as integral to their landscape as the animals around them. They are not merely kings of their “miniature kingdoms” (281), they are identified wholly with their farms, with neighbours referring to one another as “Funnon”, “Panty” or “Llanedw” as the case may be. When Cefin, Oliver’s son by the estranged Naomi, visits the Funnon, he considers it to belong “so completely to his father that he could hardly tell the two of them apart” (210). Oliver, as he comes to learn himself, “could no more crawl out of this valley and live than he could have crawled out of his own skin” (236). This is a book about a total identification of people with place – presuming, true, a largely urban readership for whom such a relationship might have some interest, but also, as I will discuss, outlining a traditional sense of identification with and responsibility for the natural world.

a) The Major Characters and Their Relationship With Place: Idris.

The first character introduced in *Addlands* is Idris Hamer whose family have farmed the Funnon “these seven generations, and more besides I shouldna wonder” (116). In the opening scene he is, under the instruction of the War Agricultural Committee, ploughing the common land on his neighbouring Llanbedr Hill when he breaks his ploughshare on a fallen standing stone. Idris is depicted as original, in conscious reference to the archetypal qualities proposed by R. S. Thomas for Iago Prytherch: “Short, round-shouldered, he toiled behind [his horse] up the shallowing slope” (5). At first glance he, or his kind at least, have also “been here since life began”, but from the start he has an internal life. He reflects on the merits of his “contrary” (5) horse, Buster, and on the companionship he feels from having “thirteen different species of bird in his field” (6); and with the blow he receives when his plough hits the stone there is another indication that this is a character inhabited, not simply observed, and that he has a complex history: “In the naked pain his lungs might have been blistering all over again” (6).

Idris is both an absorption and a rejection of Iago Prytherch. He is a rough-speaking, deeply conservative hill farmer – to Etty he can seem “ancient beyond human reckoning” (29) – but he has chosen to become so, or rather the condition has been forced upon him. Throughout the book he is contradictory. He is a dogmatic Methodist, but he seeks out the services of a ‘charmer’ whose practices shade into Catholicism and even paganism. He is sworn to “resist such temptations as were advertised in the newspaper” (48), but he is then seen using a “Radox soak” (75) he has learnt about from that very source. He identifies with Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* due to his refusal to work on the Sabbath, but he sets the book down, although it is a Sunday, to attend to the birthing of a calf. As the story progresses, the reason for this conflicted identity slowly becomes apparent – namely that he was once an independent young man, a promising singer who has done his “bit of boying” (116), but having been gassed and shell-shocked in the First World War he has taken refuge in his father’s religion and an extreme resistance to change.

The late arrival of machinery to the Funnon, then, is both a result of the farm’s remoteness and of Idris’s devastating experiences of what machinery can do.

b) The Major Characters: Etty.

The second major character in *Addlands* is Etty whose life at the Funnon is, for much of the book, “a year-round cycle of washing and cleaning, churning and baking, with a few, fevered hours of conversation at the market and chapel” (241). Trapped by her husband, her rejection by her father, her responsibility towards Oliver and the unremitting demands of the farm, she is, initially at least, a defeated figure, sustained only by her mother, Molly, and her absolute love for her son. She too, however, has not always been like this. Formerly a nurse for the St. John’s Ambulance, she was, as a girl, a favourite of “the boys… back in Erwood” (21) where she also had an affair with a soldier who, although neither he nor his race is ever identified, was evidently ‘dark’ like their child. Etty’s story in some ways traces the arrival of feminist concepts to Rhyscog. For all of the frustrations and disappointments of her life, slowly she begins to assert herself on Idris, on his farm and (the only passion that the two of them share) on his music – “depart[ing] from her organ scores” (112) in the Methodist chapel in a manner that challenges both his authority as the precentor and the defensive structures he has built around himself. By the time that Idris dies, in 1970, she has imposed a business sense on the farm. It is she, not her son, who instigates mechanisation, who keeps abreast of changing technologies through her subscription to the *Farmers’ Weekly* and “drag[s] the Funnon into some distant quarter of the twentieth century” (203).

Etty’s feelings for the farm itself are more nuanced, more conditional than those of her son, but still, through its flowers, its birds and, particularly, the abandoned church which adjoins their yard, she too has a passionate love for the place. From the church, she notes, “the valley appeared to be landscaped; the hillsides harmonised in such a way that the first ancient person to worship here… might have chosen the place because it was here that he saw God” (204). It is Etty through whom the sacred in the landscape – a vital component in writing fully about rural Wales – is most plainly seen, although, in time, Oliver too comes to understand why she is “drawn to the church” (236): that “All life [passes] through this place: these closing rings of wall and trees within this hoop in the hills” (237).

In his introduction to *Wales’s Best One Hundred Churches*, T. J. Hughes writes:

…something extraordinary happened to create the map of community in Wales. Unlike elsewhere, the people did not build churches at the places where they lived, chosen for safety or comfort or farmable land. Frequently instead, they built them at places chosen for reclusive prayer or for their sacred power, often wild, remote, uncompromising. And then, over time, they came to live there. It is an upturning of the order of things – a pattern of settlement in reverse, where the sacred has a generative role. (8)

It is, it can be inferred, this kind of ‘upturning’ which led to the Funnon becoming a farm – its name, after all, refers to its holy well, while the yew trees in the churchyard, which are “probably two thousand years old” (*Addlands* 250), suggest that this is a sacred place predating even Christianity. Etty, who remains a church organist long after the collapse in church and chapel attendance (another of the major cultural shifts in *Addlands*), who at eighty-eight years old has “prayed every night of her life” (293), feels a duty towards her son and towards the Funnon’s viability, but she also feels a duty to the natural environment, to the farm’s “watercress and ragged robins, its nests for the peewit and the curlew” (198), drawn from her religious belief.

c) The Major Characters: Oliver.

The last major character, and the most important to the structure of the novel, is Oliver. That is, *Addlands* is built around Oliver’s development into, ultimately, “this vast, grizzled man with his sovereign rings, his garish waistcoat peeping from his coat and a raven on his shoulder like some pagan sentinel” (298) in much the same way that *Konstantin* is built around Konstantin Tsiolkovsky’s development into the first space scientist. Oliver, at seventy, is a local legend “whom stories followed in… dizzying multitudes” (298). Although he is depicted at every stage of his life, he has become “one of the old type” (298): an original, like Idris in the opening chapter, and in his strength and scale suggestive of a regressive tradition in opposition to the ‘progress’ that has characterised his life.

Oliver embodies the Welsh borders paradox. He is both the central character who, as the “warlike” (281), “grand and swarthy” (123) son of an unknown father, attracts archetypal associations, and ultimately marginal: a man from a “forgotten valley” (124) who is “awkward, conspicuous” (185) and disorientated on his one trip to the ‘city’ and has “only so much as seen the sea twice, and that as a glint through the trees round a motorway” (285). He is famous in his corner of Radnorshire, but elsewhere he is entirely insignificant.

For Oliver the problem is twofold. Despite his appearance, he is not a confident man. When he meets Naomi, the love of his life, he is able to speak comfortably only once he has placed her in his “geography” (153) as the daughter of his tenant, Professor Chance. As Idris’s adoptive son, he is a “cuckoo” (277) at the Funnon and his fighting prowess in the local pubs is as much born of insecurity, of his need to assert himself and of an awareness of his own obscurity, as physical strength. But equally, Oliver is a natural farmer. He has a profound sympathy with his animals and the natural world, so that he is able to locate sheep under the snow “by some means he did not pause or think to explain” (27), and seems to feel rain falling on flowers “as if they were hairs on his body” (146).

His depiction, indeed, is tinged with mythology, reinforcing his archetypal qualities. His character is drawn deliberately, if obliquely, from the “man-god of the magical sort” (Frazer 60) described by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* who “draws his extraordinary power from a certain physical sympathy with nature” (61). Having left the ‘city’ and arrived again in his own landscape, he feels “the strength returning to his body” (*Addlands* 188). When Naomi finds him “lying on his back in the wash-pool, so that his ears were submerged and his golden head with its black, spilling hair appeared to be floating on the water” (173), this reflects his immersion in the natural world: a relationship accounting for the structure of *Addlands*, which maps Oliver’s life onto the changing seasons, from January 1941 to December 2011.

d) Place and Dialect in Addlands.

All three of these characters are integral to my depiction of Radnorshire in *Addlands*, but they do not, of course, exist in isolation. With the exception of Christopher Meredith’s footnote to the epigraph (one of the few places in a novel where it is possible to ‘tell’, or indicate your intentions directly), there is no reference to the border, nor to Wales and England anywhere in the book, but still the fact of the border is ever-present – through the literary tradition, as I have explained, but also through the landscape, the place-names, the history and, above all, the dialect used both in dialogue and, to a lesser extent, in the narrative itself.

A few miles distant, England can be seen quite clearly from the hilltops surrounding the Funnon; it is a “far-off plain” (54) known in terms of some Herefordshire farms, but otherwise perceived as an irrelevance, an otherness not just in English but in continental terms “where there was, they said, no hill worth the name before Siberia” (251) . The “jumbling hills” (161) of Radnorshire are evidently Welsh, but beyond “the Epynt where nobody knew the names any more” (177) Wales too becomes an irrelevance. The ‘city’ where Naomi and her father live is, by implication of journey times and their knowledge of the Welsh language, Cardiff, but it too is entirely other and is referred to directly only in Oliver’s reflection that a former girlfriend lives “in Cardiff or Birmingham or some city of that sort” (241).

This book is both an attempt to assert and define Radnorshire as a place of its own – a fictional centrality – but it is also, without contradiction, an attempt to depict it realistically and employ its difference from the postulated reader to create ‘an amplified version of reality’. It is situated in Wales, close to the English border, simply by means of its appearance and by its distinctive place-names: Builth Wells, Hay-on-Wye and Hereford, of course, but more evocatively the Anglicized names of farms such as Llangodee (once Llancoed-du), hills such as Cefn Wylfre (with the farm on its side, the Welfrey, a corruption again) and villages such as Erwood (originally Y Rhyd, ‘the ford’). These names suggest the historic struggles of the border just as Oliver’s self-consciously heroic and rule-bound fighting suggests a long tradition of local, often internecine conflict, such that he can think of his arrival at a dance in Painscastle in terms of the arrival of a 12th-century army, or “a gang of boys” (99) can provoke a fight in the Awlman’s Arms by referring to the locals as ‘traitors’: a reference to the supposed betrayal of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd by the people of Aberedw in 1282.

It is the use of Radnorshire dialect, though, that most intricately defines the place and characters in *Addlands*. For all of its many influences, this language of pre-mechanized hill farming belongs entirely to its landscape, but from the point of view of writing for a readership speaking standard English it also represents a difficult balance. There is little to be gained, for example, from using a phrase like “ardy straw” (Howse 291) in place of ‘field mouse’, or “oonty tump” (Erwood 271) in place of ‘molehill’, if the meaning is not easily apparent – whether or not the characters would be likely to have used them themselves. There are, within Radnorshire fiction, models for the use of dialect, but neither the explanations and glossaries provided by Clarke and other, non-fictional memoirs nor such techniques as the use of phonetic spelling to suggest the manner of speech seemed to be applicable here.

In *The Battle to the Weak*, for instance, Hilda Vaughan uses such abbreviations as ‘woman’ to “’oman” (154), which can become irritating, even patronising, and evoke unfortunate ‘yokel’ stereotypes. This is a danger that Alan Garner identifies in “Achilles in Altjira” when he warns against “render[ing] quaint, at best, the people we should serve” (Garner, *The Voice That Thunders*, 53). “The art,” he writes, “is to create the illusion of demotic rather than to reproduce it” (54). There are, however, examples that could be used to contradict this view – among them Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting*, which renders the differences between working-class Edinburgh speech and mainstream English defiantly, even aggressively – and, ultimately, my ambition in *Addlands* was an assertive but delicate use of language best suited to this particular story.

In *Addlands*, broadly speaking, I use Radnorshire dialect words whose meaning is either readily comprehensible (as in “a heavy-timbered Cregrina girl” (116)) or at least readily intelligible from the context (“the lashes tabbering on his big black eyes” (27)), but my treatment is perhaps more distinctive for the exceptions to this rule. For one thing, many words represent objects or practices that have no counterpart in standard English: the ‘whilcar’, for example, on the opening page of *Addlands*, which is a “long, low, shaftless vehicle with two wheels in centre and runners in front” (Howse 299). The whilcar I include in the novel partly because it is historically accurate, but also because it shows the distinctiveness of Radnorshire farming culture, the pre-mechanised nature of that culture and, due to its runners or “iron snout” (*Addlands* 7) which take the weight of the vehicle from the horse while descending hills, the nature of the landscape as well.

My objective in *Addlands* is to define Radnorshire as a separate fictional realm: a place remote from the postulated reader. Of course, it is essential that the reader remains engaged with the story, but still, by the careful use of dialect words and constructions which the reader will either not understand at all or else might be obliged to unravel (“his bettermost accent” (134), for example), it is possible to give a sense of the difference of this place and to reinforce the independence and integrity of the characters and their particular sympathy with the landscape around them.

Such local words as ‘pitch’ (“steep bit of road” (Howse 296)) or ‘gieland’ (“face of a precipice” (294)) both describe the landscape and suggest the outlook of its inhabitants who see differences between slopes that an outsider might not appreciate. A word like ‘scratting’ in the phrase “scratting on” (*Addlands* 50), which means something like ‘surviving’, is elsewhere used for ‘scratching’ by chickens (292) – emphasizing the characters’ affiliation with animals and the hardship of survival on a farm. Words like “pwning” (24) and “bwgan” (61) are clearly derived from Welsh and help to situate Radnorshire in Wales while, through their scarcity, underlining its distinction from the rest of the country.

It would, of course, be possible to give many more examples of this sort, but the important point here is to account for the effect of dialect on *Addlands* as a whole. One influence is tonal – particularly through the repeated use of negative constructions such as “not so bad” (140) and “not so much” (114), which, although their meaning is frequently positive, compound to give the novel the down-beat, ‘minor key’ quality characteristic of local speech. Another relates to the number of Radnorshire words and idioms that are or have been widespread in demotic English across Britain. The word “afore” (211) for ‘before’, for instance, is used by D. H. Lawrence in his story “Odour of Chrysanthemums” (106), set in Nottinghamshire. The phrase “going down” (Cordell 172) to describe a ruinous house is used by Alexander Cordell in *Rape of the Fair Country*, set in 19th-century Monmouthshire. The phrase “I doubt” (Grassic Gibbon 34), meaning ‘no doubt’, is used by Lewis Grassic Gibbon in *Sunset Song*,set in rural Scotland in the 1910s, as is the word “claik” (76), meaning ‘gossip’, which shares its origins with “cleck” (*Addlands* 41). The word “urchin” (58), meaning ‘hedgehog’, is an archaic survival from Middle English (Brown 3528). The instruction “Get you…” (*Addlands* 77) is recorded in Suffolk dialect by Ronald Blythe in *Akenfield* (35) – as is, among other relevant examples, the word “bait” (111), meaning “as a noun, snack between meals (elevens’s)” (Howse 291).

My treatment of dialect in *Addlands*, then, serves the paradoxical purpose of the book. That is to say, the same vocabulary that sets Radnorshire apart – from Wales, England and the reader – is also, in many ways, characteristic of all demotic English in Britain. It defines the place specifically, but it also places it within wider British culture and allows it to be representative of the whole.

6) *Addlands* within the Welsh and British context.

Finally, I would like to explain and defend the principal choices in my depiction of Radnorshire in *Addlands* and, given the overwhelmingly urban character of fiction in Britain, defend its choice as a setting at all. To begin with the issue of Wales and the novel’s place within Welsh fiction. My contention is that the overwhelming preoccupation of the Welsh border literary tradition with the history of Wales and England has rendered it specific but frequently parochial – bound by a polarity which most people of the area consider to be of minimal importance and which obscures the border’s actual historical complexity.

Here again Arthur Machen’s *The Hill of Dreams* has been instructive. By giving less emphasis to the Welsh-English conflict it has been possible in *Addlands* to situate Radnorshire in an older and wider network of influences, and to foreground instead a dynamic between the past and the present: the parallel, for example, between Sagranus, the sixth-century “eminent chief or warrior” (271) whose memorial incorporates Irish, Brythonic and Roman influences, as well as the influences of Christianity, and the belligerent Oliver, an English-speaking Welshman whose father, it is variously suggested, may have been a gypsy (53), Jewish (256), Mediterranean (303) or African-American (185).

This does not, I must emphasize, constitute a rejection of Wales or of its literary tradition. It is rather a rejection of the idea that it, or Radnorshire at least, can only be understood in simple, relative terms, as a place divided and perennially under threat. My decision that the ‘city’ in the book, home to Martin and Naomi Chance, should be Cardiff and not the perhaps more obvious London makes a similar presumption: namely, that Wales can be used a setting for drama just as effectively as anywhere else. Similarly, my use of the many non-Welsh influences in the book presumes a culture confident enough to digest and adopt them for Welsh purposes: for instance,the elliptical, multi-generational structure of Alan Garner’s *The Stone Book Quartet*, or Cormac McCarthy’s depictions of violence in *All the Pretty Horses* as an intrinsic element of a brutal farming society, or the non-specific ‘empires’ of J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting For the Barbarians* and Ismail Kadare’s *The Palace of Dreams*, which allow two writers of relatively marginal literary cultures to achieve a universal significance and played into my ideas for the ‘city’. In sum, far from a rejection, these constitute an absolute assertion of Wales and Welsh literature.

The question then is the purpose to which the place in *Addlands* is put and how, since rural Radnorshire could hardly be used to chart the latest evolutions in British society, it could have any relevance to a wider readership. *Addlands* depicts a culture undergoing changes common to the rest of British society but changes which, for the most part, took place over a far longer period of time, so that the principal differences between the 19th and 21st centuries can be seen here within seventy years of one man’s life: not just rural depopulation, farm amalgamation, the closure of village schools, an influx of people from outside the area and the coming of the various technologies, but the demise of religion and local dialect, sexual liberation, the changing roles of women and men and the changing relationship between people and the natural world.

As, in “A Peasant”, R. S. Thomas saw Iago Prytherch as “your prototype” (17), so *Addlands* sees Radnorshire as prototypical to a universal readership: an ur-place in and against which wider changes can be seen and measured. These involve improvements in terms of physical comfort, sexual equality and economic competitiveness, but they also involve a corollary loss – particularly a distancing from the surrounding landscape. As Oliver reflects in the final chapter, “They had… done everything they could to be rid of the night” (303-304). *Addlands* rarely sets an elegiac tone – as Etty acknowledges, “The silage, the combine, these things were like blessings” (214) – but still it remains the new “herbicides and reversible ploughs” (165) which destroy the wealth of flowers once seen in the fields, and the use of organophosphate sheep dip is at least one factor in the demise of the salmon and crayfish in the streams. Radnorshire in *Addlands* is always depicted in relative terms. Its meaning is not to be found in its literal authenticity, but rather in its difference either from its former incarnations or, crucially, from the postulated readership: between the ‘edge’ and the ‘whole’ where these changes have already taken place.

Perhaps the best example of these twin differences comes in 2001 when the Foot and Mouth epidemic has emptied the hills of their sheep, and so their human influence:

For months now there had been saplings on the abandoned hills, rising from the fern, the heather and the feg with leaves like flags – declaring their species while still not an inch in height. There were wittans and hawthorns, but there were ash trees too, and oaks and hazels. They might have been lurking since the days of the forest, waiting for the sheep at last to depart before, tentatively, they began to remake the wilderness. The television reported that farming was dying, that it had ceased to be an industry and had become instead a life support system, in which these Less Favoured Areas were an intolerable expense. For those who were looking for the root of things, well, here it was: these scrawny trees on Llanbedr Hill, riffling as far as Oliver could see, divesting the last of their withered leaves in their first successful autumn for five thousand years.

Somebody had to defend the margins, to keep the past in its place. (273-274)

The ‘edge’ in *Addlands* is the limit of the cultivated ground. The “hills beyond the walls and the fences” (56) are “separate, unknowable” (203) – the “Proper wilds” (174) – and while these too are hardly authentic (they “would all have been forested, of course, once upon a time” (125)) to the characters they represent their fears and threats, and specifically a wildness in nature against which they stand as a bastion. Nor is this a conceit on my part. As the farmer Matthew Williams warned in *Where We Belong*, “without financial aid the hill sheep industry and the way of life that accompanies it would disappear, and [the village of] Cantref would no longer be economically viable. It would become a wilderness” (Brook 41). If the edge defines the whole, as Christopher Meredith’s “Borderland” suggests, then this fundamental purpose of a marginal community must be shared by society at large; it must be inherent to the character of our society to keep nature as tightly under control as possible – for which, as the snows, droughts, floods and diseases endured in *Addlands* go to show, there is very good reason. Nevertheless, as the novel describes, a corner in the relationship has now been turned – *Addlands* charts the demise of species from elms to twayblades, red squirrels to honeybees, nightjars to corncrakes – and if, as a society, we are effectively to remake that relationship then it is crucial to understand the reasons for our behaviour.

This is, I propose, one way in which the writing of rural mid-Wales can become not merely relevant but centrally important. It is at the same time an argument of some consequence to regional writing in Britain and elsewhere: a liberating principle that marginal, overlooked cultures should be depicted through their particularity, not simply their relationship to larger cultures on either side. The novels included in this submission, *The Claude Glass* and *Addlands*, are successive, original and (I hope I have established) developing contributions to that process.

Appendix: Selected Critical Reception to *The Claude Glass*.

"Written with a poet's sensibility and eye for telling detail, this novel about the difficulties of comprehending otherness has a lyrical intensity. The Claude Glass, discovered by the boys, is a convex mirror that distorts one's perception of the landscape – a perfect metaphor for this exquisitely written slice of rural 'dirty realism'. (4/5)"   
*Mail on Sunday.*  
  
"This is a novel of compelling complexity of thought and feeling, sustained by the authenticity of its rich detail. A sheep's agony in labour, a moribund tractor - Bullough endows the components of his scene with a poet's sense of their quiddity and a novelist's appreciation of their human significance."

*Independent*.  
  
"This often unnerving tale of romanticism suffocating beneath the weight of flinty pragmatism shows Bullough to be a very gifted writer indeed. In Andrew, he's created a truly memorable fictional character, but a word of warning: books rarely end as heartbreakingly as this one. (5/5)"

*Independent on Sunday*.

"It's a bold move for anyone to write pastorals in an age of the urban novel. And Tom Bullough seems quite clear, in this consummately well-written book, how dangerous rural enchantment can be."  
*The Times*.

"The still young author beautifully suggests the cultural heritage and encumbrances of each while setting them against an intimately evoked landscape and a subtly complex rural community."  
Books of the Year, *Independent on Sunday*.

“This novel, at once charged with poetry and realism, shows the human inability to see the world as it is and the need to tell stories… Enchanting.”

*Le Figaro*.

"It went straight into my bloodstream and I started dreaming it that very night. Magic!"   
Gwyneth Lewis. 

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